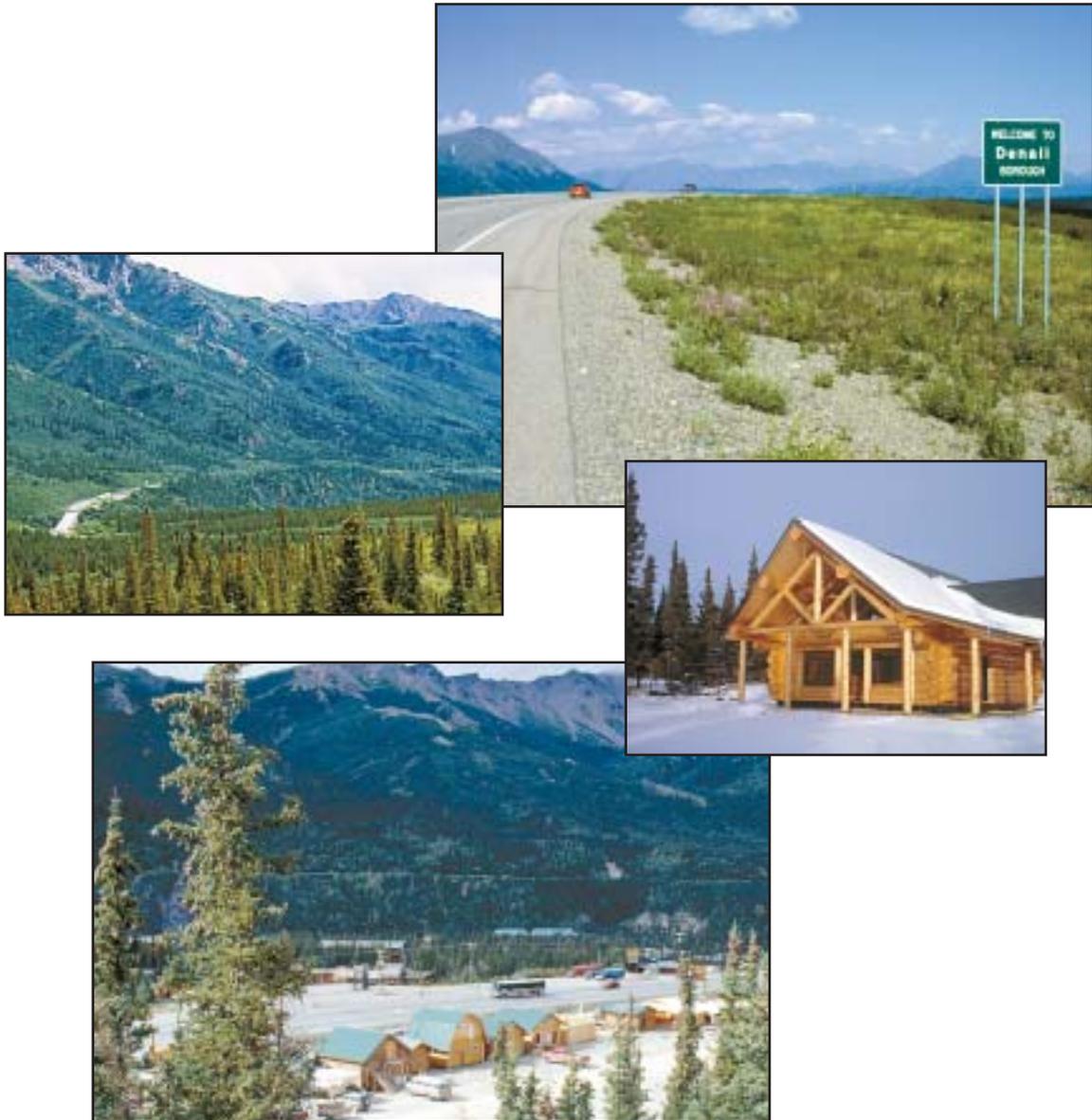


DESIGNING FOR COMMUNITY

A WORKBOOK FOR THE DENALI BOROUGH COMMUNITY



How to Build Communities That are
Great Places to Live, Work and Visit

March, 2000

DESIGNING FOR COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

You are holding a work in progress. We want your ideas to help make this a more useful and complete document.

Background: A Good Start

In the fall of 1998, over 100 people gathered for a three day workshop at the Princess Hotel at Denali. Participants included local businesses and property owners, Denali Borough residents, representatives from Denali Borough and other governments, and a set of presenters from Alaska and around the United States. The goal of the conference was to share ideas about the questions below:

- **What do we most value about the communities in the Denali Borough? What do we want to change?**
- **What type of development helps a community be a more successful place to live, work and visit?**
- **What lessons can be learned from other places where tourism is growing rapidly, particularly communities that serve as gateways to destinations like Denali?**
- **What do we agree on? Where is the common ground among ideas about the future of our communities?**



Area Covered

The workshop and this workbook focus on the Parks Highway area of the Denali Borough, including the communities of Healy, Nenana Canyon, Cantwell and Anderson.

Authors

This workbook was prepared by the Designing For Community Steering Committee working with land use/tourism consulting firm Christopher Beck & Associates. Much of the work has been done by local volunteers. The Designing for Community Steering Committee was formed in 1998 to spur discussion and action about the future of Denali Borough. The last page of this workbook includes more information regarding this committee, and how to reach and be part of this group.

Why This Workbook?

The Fall 98 workshop was very well attended, but 100 people is still only a small part of the Borough population. This workbook, therefore, is designed to do two things:

- **to share with a wider group the most important ideas coming from the Fall workshop**
- **to get community views on these topics, to hear what you think of these ideas**

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Denali Workshop flipchart

"No place in the world today remains special by accident."

Ed McMahon (Workshop Presenter)

CHANGE IS COMING

A. Growth and Change in the Rural West

In Colorado, Montana, Idaho, New Mexico and other western states, previously quiet valleys, ranches and meadows are becoming golf courses, shopping centers and second homes. Small towns, particularly towns at the gateways to National Parks, have experienced exponential growth in the past 20 years.

Forces behind growth in small towns in rural settings:

- the shift in the nation's economy, from manufacturing and resource extraction towards an economy based on information
- new communication technologies, which allow businesses to stay in or relocate to small towns
- the inheritance of billions of dollars (saved by their frugal parents) by the footloose baby boom generation
- the remarkable growth in tourism, now the world's largest industry

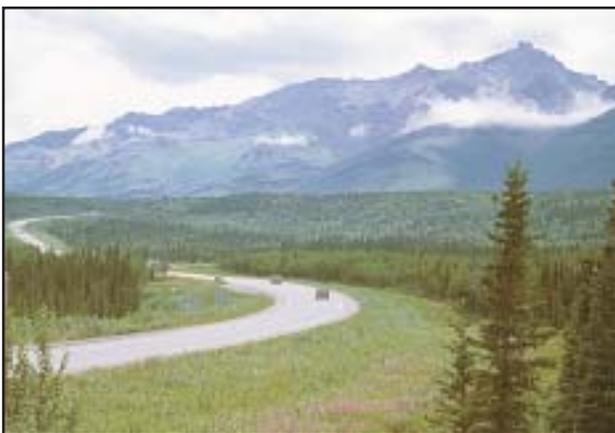


1970's: Mountain Ranch Fields And Meadows



1990's: Shopping, Gas Stations, Parking, Motels...

The message? Today and into the future, these same forces will bring change to places like the Denali Borough.



Roadside Vistas, Denali Borough



Generic Alaska Roadside Development

"In the last 10 years, the fastest rates of growth in the United States were in small communities in the Western United States—places like Bozeman, Montana; Boise and Stanley, Idaho. More and more people (and businesses) are deciding to leave behind big city traffic and pollution, and move to small towns with great quality of life, economic opportunity, and wilderness out the back door."

B. Growth and Change in Alaska and the Denali Borough

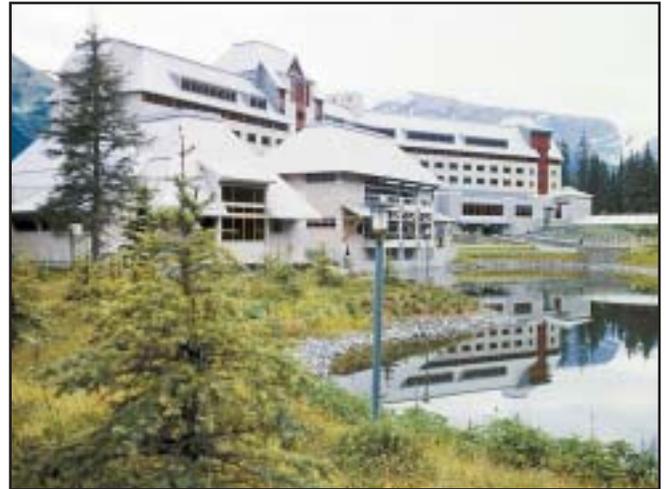
Some local examples of the character of recent and likely future change:

Growth and Change Statewide

- **Growth in Tourists**—Over the last 20 years, annual out-of-state visitors to Alaska increased by almost 1million, from below 500,000 to nearly 1,400,000 in 1999.
- **Dramatic Increase in Cruise Travel** —Alaska is the 3rd most visited cruise ship destination in the world, and cruise travel is the strongest segment of Alaska tourism. In the last 10 years, cruise visitors grew from 25% to 50% of all out-of-state summer visitors. The cruise industry is investing \$20 billion worldwide to meet anticipated future demand.
- **Growth in “Amenity Migrants”**—Real estate prices are increasing in places like Haines, Sitka and Girdwood as retirees and others who can live anywhere pick these small towns for their attractive quality of life and recreation amenities.

Growth and Change in Denali

- Over 350,000 annual visitors to Denali National Park; 2500 lodging rooms in the Borough.
- Steady increases in Denali Borough bed tax revenues (from \$1.2 million in 1996 to 1.5 million in 1999).
- Growth in Railroad capacity—23% total increase over last 4 years.
- Growing interest by Native Corporations in business partnerships and tourism investment
- Change in visitor interests: historically most visitors were older, retired, passive; today’s visitors are younger, and want more adventure and activity; tomorrow’s visitors?
- Global competition for visitors and residents is steadily increasing. Communities and businesses are investing billions to make their communities better places to live and visit.



Alyeska Prince Hotel, a \$200 million investment that dramatically changed the Girdwood community

What Will These Changes Mean for Denali?

Put these trends together and it’s clear that the Denali Borough has both great opportunities and challenges ahead. The remainder of this workbook outlines ways the community might respond, focusing on the questions below.

- **How best to retain and improve the qualities that make the Denali Borough a great place to live?**
- **How best to strengthen and diversify the local economy?**
- **How to meet growing travel demand, how to become an even better, more competitive destination?**

“The issue is not whether we want change —growth and change are likely inevitable. The real issue is whether and how residents, businesses and communities might guide this growth to benefit their communities.”

A BIG IDEA

Communities that Protect and Improve their Unique Sense of Place Reap Rewards of Economic Growth and Quality of Life

EXAMPLES & STRATEGIES FROM THE WORKSHOP

Workshop presenters emphasized the importance of “sense of place”. Environments with a strong sense of place are distinctive. They’ve got personality. They connect residents and visitors with what is unique about their settings and history. These places “tell you stories—they invite you to linger and learn about soil and climate, about what good food is produced locally. They tell you about the people that live there, what they’ve done with their lives, and what they think is important...”

SENSE OF PLACE —WHAT IS IT?

Places that have it

- Connected to local history and natural setting
- Authentic, memorable
- Interesting to explore, offer lots of choices
- Reward curiosity, reveal stories
- Reflect & celebrate what is special about a place

Places that don't

- Rootless, “could be anywhere”
- Predictable, forgettable
- No history, decisions made for short term
- Boring, one dimensional, often ugly
- Offer generic experiences, products



Taxco, Mexico—where a sense of place grew organically over hundreds of years



Whistler, BC—A community that designed and built a sense of place over less than a decade
photo by Eldon Beck



Anywhere USA, suburban sprawl (Anchorage, Alaska)

“Communities with a sense of place are places worth caring about.”

SENSE OF PLACE—WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The message at the workshop was clear—communities that maintain and enhance their unique sense of place offer better quality of life for residents, and are more attractive for visitors. As the examples below illustrate, maintaining and improving sense of place can create substantial, tangible economic benefits.

San Antonio's Riverwalk is the most visited destination in Texas, with over 5,000,000 visitors each year.

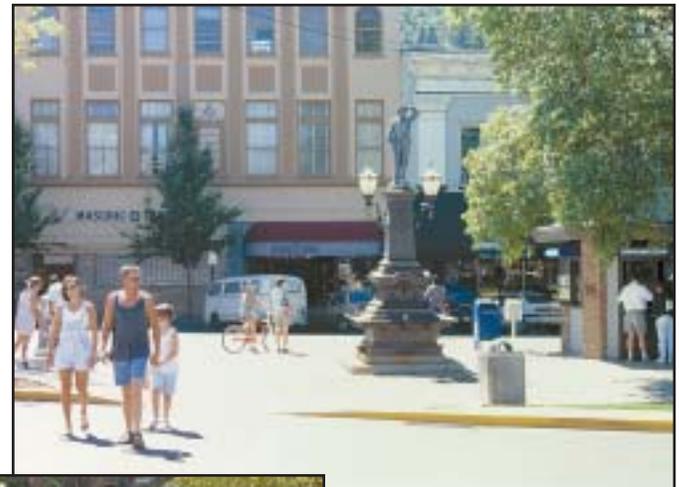
The Riverwalk serves up a distinctive blend of what defines San Antonio: a meandering river lined by pathways, shops, restaurants and lush vegetation and a sense of diverse cultures, all just a flight of stairs from the bustling city above. In the early 1970's, this economic powerhouse was nearly put into a pipe and buried, but a handful of visionary individuals persevered and convinced the community to turn the river into an amenity.



San Antonio Riverwalk

Ashland, Oregon is a great place to live, to retire and to visit.

Ashland has done many basic things right that have eluded other less forward-thinking communities. In addition to the community's well known theater productions, Ashland has great parks, plazas and trails. Design standards and historical preservation have helped maintain and improve the community's busy, pedestrian-oriented commercial core. Oregon's statewide land use planning rules encourage development to concentrate in the center of town, supporting downtown merchants, and helping to maintain a pleasing sense of a small town set into a rural landscape.



Ashland Central Plaza



ALASKAN COMMUNITIES

FINDING AND KEEPING A SENSE OF PLACE

Alaska is a young state, with a frontier enthusiasm for wild places, individual rights, and unregulated development. As the state begins to mature, more residents, businesses and communities are awakening to the economic and quality of life benefits of protecting and improving sense of place. Anchorage, Girdwood, Seward, Haines, Homer, Talkeetna, McCarthy and others are making the deliberate effort to define what they want to be in the future, and to find ways to get there.

In Cordova, good quality of life goes hand in hand with a strong sense of place.

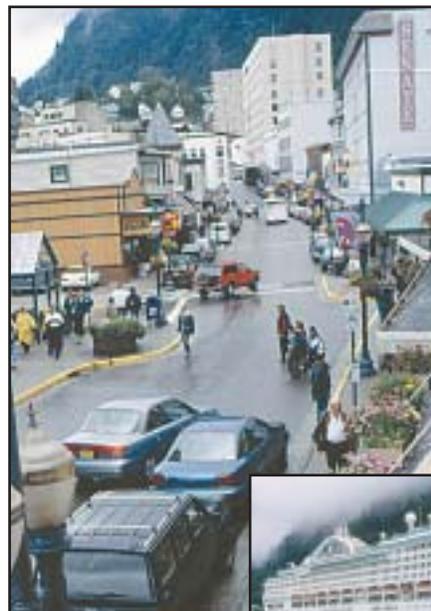
Cordova is a small, walkable town where “it takes an hour to get down main street because you just keep meeting people you have to talk to.” Cordova is a safe community (“no one ever locks their cars”), and a great place to raise kids. A compact settlement pattern means wilderness “is right out the back door.” In a recent University of Alaska survey, Cordovans gave their community the highest marks for quality of life of any Alaska town surveyed. Cordova is working to guide tourism growth to both benefit from and maintain this sense of place.



Cordova

Juneau is one of several Southeast communities working to balance growing tourism with maintenance of quality of place.

Too much or the wrong kind of development can undermine what makes a community a good place to live or visit. The photo shows one of the pleasant, walkable main streets in downtown—part of the reason tourists spend over \$95 million dollars each year in Juneau. Rapid tourism growth in Juneau also creates congestion, noise and changes in the character of familiar streets and trails.



Juneau



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What communities anywhere in the world have you most enjoyed living in or visiting? Did these communities have a strong sense of place?

EIGHT STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY SUCCESS

1. GREAT PLACES TO LIVE, WORK & VISIT RARELY HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT: SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES GUIDE GROWTH THROUGH A SHARED VISION

EXAMPLES & STRATEGIES FROM THE WORKSHOP

Whether you're a family taking a vacation, a business, or a community, it pays to have a clear, shared sense of where you want to be in the future, and how you're going to get there. Communities with a vision can achieve remarkable things.

Seward Sea Life Center—Money flows to good ideas.

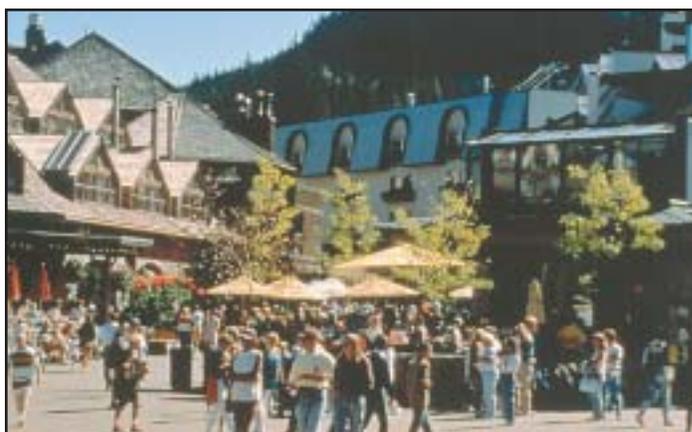
The Sea Life Center began with a handful of people talking around a kitchen table about the kind of place Seward could become. People close to the project say the key to success wasn't getting big funds from the Oil Spill Trustee Council, instead it was the years of hard work that pulled the community together around a shared vision.



Seward Sealife Center

Whistler, British Columbia—Inspired village design provides the foundation for North America's favorite ski resort

In contrast to communities that grew as fishing, farming or mining towns, the ski resort town of Whistler was essentially built from scratch to be a great place to visit. Unlike many master-planned communities, Whistler has a comfortable, "real" feeling. Elements that explain the village's strong sense of place include pedestrian areas carefully sized and oriented for views and sunshine, a superb trail and recreation system, retention of streams and forest areas, covered outdoor walks for shopping and dining, and plazas that stay lively year round.



Whistler Plaza
photo by Eldon Beck

"Do you want new development to shape the character of your community, or the character of your community to shape new development?"

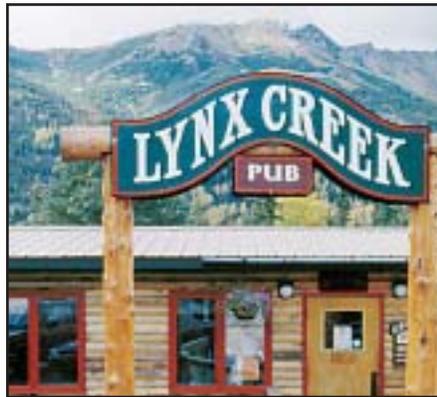
LOCAL VIEWS: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK & SUGGESTIONS

People attending the workshop were asked what they most value about the Denali Borough, and what type of community they want in the future. Responses are summarized below. Even among groups of people who imagined they saw the world quite differently, there was a surprising amount of common ground.



Healthy Natural World

- environmental grandeur: clean air, clean water, great scenery
- healthy wildlife, healthy river
- "proximity to vast, intact ecosystem, to wilderness"
- peace and quiet
- no light pollution
- ease of getting out to hike, hunt, ski, snowmachine, run dogs



Character of Development

- businesses connected to place, "no Walmarts/McDonalds"
- good employers/employment opportunities
- relative lack of traffic and sign clutter (with a few exceptions)
- local design style? "Sourdough-esque"
- "homestead with a computer and an outhouse"



Sense of Community

- small town, safe
- good place to raise kids
- privacy, diversity of people
- seasonal employment, seasonal lifestyles
- sense of community and knowing your neighbors

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What do you most value about living, working or visiting this community? What picture would you show to illustrate what makes this a special place to you?
- How do you think the community will change in the next 20 years?



"The odds are good that growth is coming. Either we plan our future or someone from outside the area will decide it for us"

Eight Strategies for Community Success

2. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES: MINIMIZE REGULATIONS, EMPHASIZE EDUCATION & INCENTIVES

EXAMPLES & STRATEGIES FROM THE WORKSHOP

As a community begins to reach some agreement on the kind of future it wants, the next big challenge is deciding how to communicate and achieve this vision. Achieving a community vision does not necessarily require zoning, subdivision regulations and similar rules common in lower 48 communities. Alternative approaches, some listed below, may achieve equal or superior results.

EXAMPLES OF NON-REGULATORY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

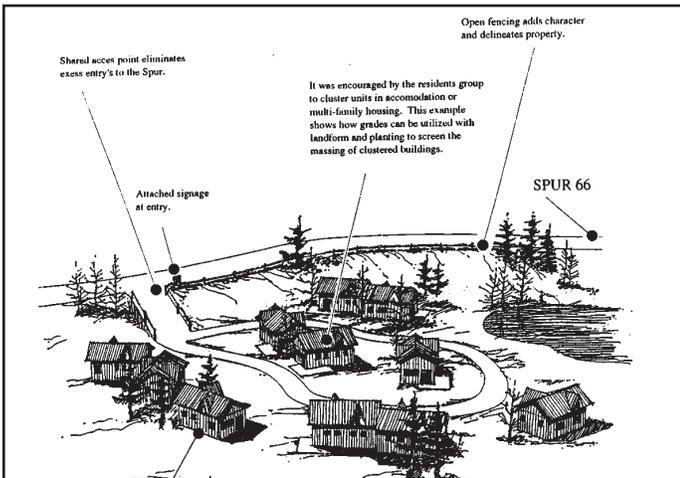
- educational programs encouraging voluntary action by businesses and citizens
- advisory development guidelines (advice on building styles, site development, signage, etc.)
- incentive systems that reward good development (e.g. Greenstar or AAA programs that set quality or performance standards, and thereby increase business)
- tax incentive programs; for example, encouraging historical preservation
- innovative programs to protect sensitive lands, such as the acquisition of scenic easements

If a community does not want to look like Panama City Beach on Florida's gulf coast, this message needs to be delivered to businesses and developers.



“Regulations can prevent the worst development from taking place, but often do little to encourage the best”

Specific Examples of Non-regulatory Implementation Strategies



In the Spur 66 neighborhood near Rocky Mountain National Park, advisory development guidelines give property owners a reference for material selection, building and site design.

"The guidelines are not mandatory. The primary goal of the Spur 66 Corridor Management Plan is to educate and increase awareness about the unique character of the area while providing specific ideas on how to protect neighborhood assets."

In this coastal community in central Maine, long residency, local pride, and an unofficial but commonly understood design tradition lead to quality building and site development without mandatory standards.

LOCAL VIEWS: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK & SUGGESTIONS

Views were heard across the spectrum from pro- to anti-regulation. A number of people expressed the opinion that while regulation is not welcome, some initiative to guide development would protect and increase property values and improve community life.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What do you think are the appropriate ways to guide growth in the Denali Borough?

Options for implementation strategies include:

- let development proceed without any guidance from the community
- voluntary development guidelines—compliance up to individual businesses and landowners
- informal collaboration—groups of residents or businesses work together on an informal basis, e.g. to build a trail system, or follow a design theme in buildings, signs or landscaping
- structured, non-governmental programs, e.g. through a Chamber of Commerce, community non-profit, or business improvement district
- local government—Denali Borough could adopt policies on topics such as site and building design, signage, roads and trails, wildlife habitat protection, or land use

"I don't especially like government, don't like the idea of zoning, and I want to see our town develop a real center, better looking signs and buildings, and fewer ugly new developments filling in open space along the highway."

(Fall Workshop Participant)

Eight Strategies for Community Success

3. DEVELOP SITES & DESIGN BUILDINGS TO CONTRIBUTE TO COMMUNITY SENSE OF PLACE

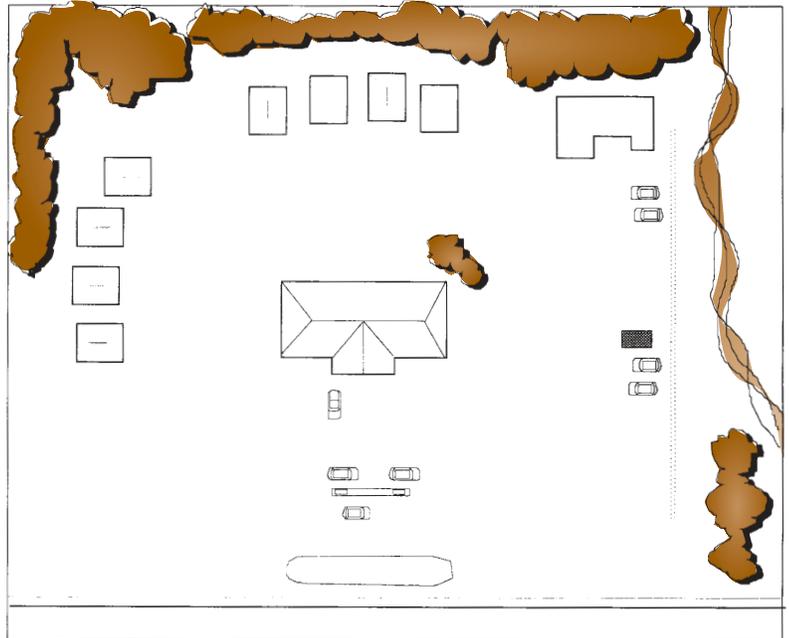
EXAMPLES & STRATEGIES FROM THE WORKSHOP

A. How Can Good Site Development Contribute to Sense of Place?

Good site design—an approach which makes the most of a site's views, sunlight, and natural features—can attract more business and often reduces development costs.

Too often, the first step in preparing a site for development is to flatten topography, remove all vegetation, redirect or bury streams and hide good views.

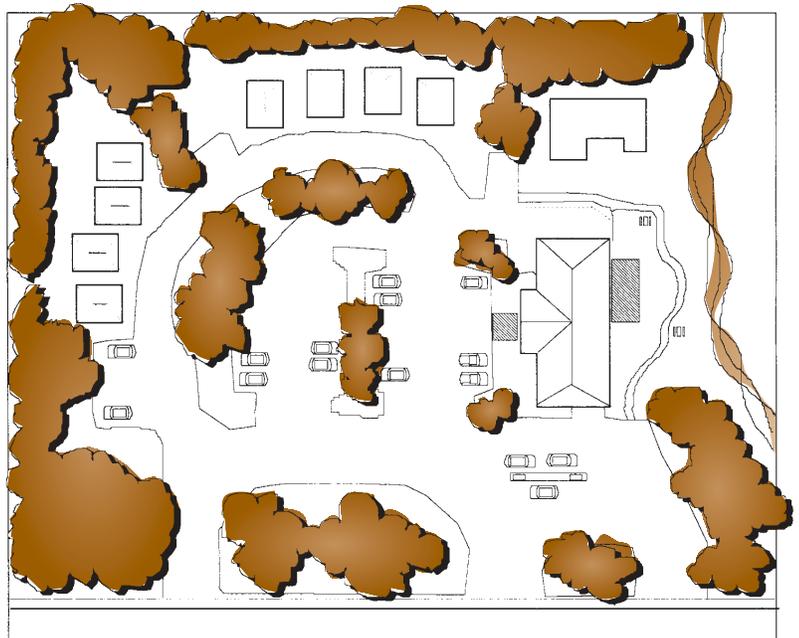
This approach increases environmental disruption and reduces the value of site features that make a place feel like Alaska—the features that most please residents and visitors.



"Place-based site planning"

(an alternative plan for the same site)

- trees and vegetation preserved to increase site value
- walking paths & deck take advantage of stream, views
- parking defined and screened with vegetation
- natural topography retained to create character
- car and pedestrian areas separated
- service areas, dumpsters out of sight



"Well designed and sited structures enhance a town's beauty, increase the value of neighboring properties and the community as a whole."

B. How Can Good Building Design Contribute to Sense of Place?

Buildings are key to a community's sense of place. They document the past and provide the backdrop to daily life in public spaces. There is no single formula for "good building design," but the workshop provided some useful principles, summarized below.

The new Healy Chamber of Commerce building illustrates many of the principles of "place-based" building design. "It looks like an Alaska building."

The building responds to the local climate, with a pitched roof to shed snow, stout walls for winter warmth, and porches for getting out of the weather. It uses a traditional style that reflects local history, and local building materials that help create a link to place.



Healy Chamber of Commerce

"Good building design provides a 'sense of habitation'. Attention to design and maintenance tell you that real people live in this building, and care about this place"

Chris Beck (Workshop Presenter)



This Girdwood B&B gets a sense of habitation by breaking the building into a series of smaller parts instead of presenting a single monolithic structure, and by using abundant details like doors, decks, small windows, porches and stairs that suggest inhabitants.



Typical gas station: generic, "placeless" design



Gas station designed to add to neighborhood character

"Communities trying to attract visitors need to remember that travelers crave integrity of place. Homogenous, 'off the shelf' corporate chain and franchise architecture work against this goal."

Ed McMahon (Workshop Presenter)

LOCAL VIEWS: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK & SUGGESTIONS

A. "Community Building Design Theme?"

At the workshop some people proposed adoption of a community design theme. One option is to develop advisory design standards to encourage a design theme reflecting local traditions, such as homesteads. Another possibility is to encourage a non-local architectural design theme (like the Bavarian theme in Leavenworth, WA)



In Santa Fe, traditional adobe style buildings are required by regulation, even for cinder block parking garages



Along Creek Street in Ketchikan, new and restored buildings follow a waterfront/wood building theme. This style reflects tradition, site conditions and, in a few instances, historical preservation standards



In Nenana, a traditional log cabin design was selected for a visitor information center

B. Landmark Buildings



photo by Felicity Spears

One or two landmark buildings, like this church along the Upper Frasier Highway in Canada, can help shape the character of a town, as well as be a center for community life. Train stations, churches, meeting halls, schools—if well designed—all can serve this goal

C. Good Building Signs



We can all think of buildings with signs that are too big or too gaudy. Such signs detract from the character of the community, and lead to a spiral of ever larger and more costly signs as nearby businesses feel obliged to match their neighbors. Above is a quite successful roadside store in Maine—with a sign the size of a couple of pizza boxes!

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What kind of site design, what kind of buildings and signs would increase property values, improve the appearance and "sense of place" of the Denali Borough?

"Why can't Alaska's built environment—its stores, shops, hotels, gas stations—come closer to matching the beauty, the quality of our natural environment?"

Chris Beck (Workshop Presenter)

Eight Strategies for Community Success

4. PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL TOWN CENTERS

EXAMPLES & STRATEGIES FROM THE WORKSHOP

Good town centers become the heart of a community—a place to find the goods and services needed for regular life (Post Office, shopping, a church), a place to run into friends, to read the paper while having a cup of coffee, or to hang out on a bench and enjoy the sun.

Clustering Uses Supports Community Life

Giving people a reason to visit begins by clustering uses like bakeries, barbers, book and grocery stores, and a Post Office. Housing, lodging and places to work need to be close enough for walking to the town center. Town centers must have food, pleasant sidewalks, comfortable places to sit and talk, shelter from the elements, and restrooms. Some art and history, flowers, pleasant views, and an attractive building or two help out as well. This list is commonsensical but rarely delivered in US towns. Well designed, successful town centers are equally good for community life and for businesses.



The heart of Mill Valley, CA—a combination book, coffee and pastry store fronting on a sunny plaza in the middle of town.

Successful Town Centers are Lively, Safe, Comfortable Places



Whitehorse, Yukon

This Whitehorse Yukon sidewalk gives a good pictorial lesson on how to make a successful town center. Over the last 15 years, this town of 20,000 on the Yukon River has undertaken an ambitious program to create a better community. Public investment has spurred a much larger set of private investments. Convention facilities and other big attractions are part of the story, but what is most striking is the town's sense of care for public space: for streets, sidewalks, parks and parking lots.

More ingredients for Successful Town Centers



“Anchor Uses”

Certain uses—a grocery store or public facilities like the Park City, Utah, Post Office shown above—regularly draw people into town and anchor a lively commercial core.



Gathering Places

Town centers need outdoor, public places for people to meet friends and spend time. To succeed, these sites should be comfortable, safe, offer food and drink, and have a busy central location (pictured above—cafe chairs on the sidewalk, Washington DC)



Places for Play

Town centers need to offer more than just shopping. This Ashland, Oregon playground is just a 30 second walk from the city's main commercial square.

Concentrated, Pedestrian-Friendly Development

Sprawling development is the main reason lively, pedestrian oriented town centers are rare in the United States. Town centers need to be less than 1/4 mile in diameter, so walking is a practical means of getting from place to place. If buildings are spread out, people drive from store to store. Auto-oriented stores and parking areas offer few reasons or places to linger.



Anchorage Midtown—not enough concentration for pleasant walking (plus a near complete lack of other town center amenities)



Livingston, Montana—concentrated stores make this traditional Main Street a great place to walk, to shop

An additional benefit of concentrating development in town centers is that it helps to keep natural land natural

Clustering development helps keep other areas open for views, wildlife, and opportunities for hiking, hunting, trapping, mushing, wood gathering. Natural land is among the most important economic assets of the Denali Borough, key to the area's sense of place, and the heart of what makes rural life different from city or suburban life.



Denali Borough—open space along the Parks Highway

LOCAL VIEWS: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK & SUGGESTIONS

Workshop participants virtually all spoke in favor of improved town centers, including:

- attractive, comfortable public places for gathering, a focal point for community life, with a coffee shop, bake shop, Post Office
- in Healy, this discussion got more specific, and residents started talking about where and how a commercial town center might develop, including a bank, grocery store, Post Office, park, Chamber of Commerce building and other attractions.



Corvallis, Oregon Main Street Downtown

Workshop participants also spoke strongly of their hope that all open spaces between Denali Borough communities would not fill with unsightly development.

Reasons given include economic benefits linked to property values and tourism and quality of life for residents. Specific goals included maintaining high visual quality, opportunities to see wildlife, and places to hike, ski and snowmachine. Participants also stressed that more concentrated, attractive town centers would be more successful locations for retail shops and restaurants.



Corvallis, Oregon Open Space and Rural Landscapes Just Minutes From Downtown

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Are there communities you enjoy which have a distinct town center? If so, what makes the town center a particularly interesting, enjoyable place??
- Where, if anywhere, would a town center be desirable in your community?

“The large majority of land along Alaskan highways is land that today or soon will be open for development. This land is the accessible wilderness, the great scenery, the places where we hunt, hike, freely roam. Most Alaskans like freedom from land use controls; most Alaskans also treasure their ready access to natural areas. As Alaska grows we are going to have to make some tough choices.”

Eight Strategies for Community Success

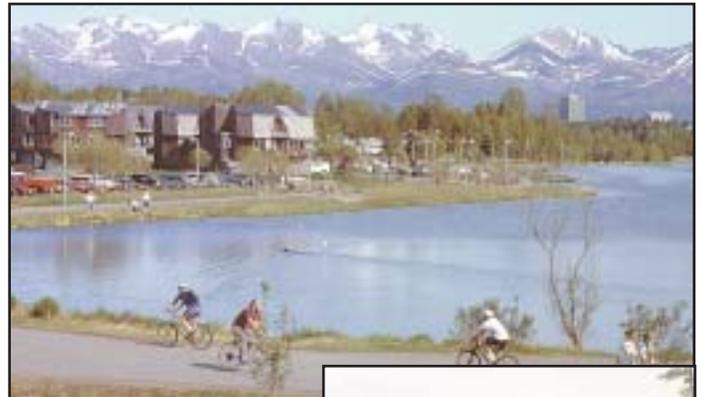
5. PROMOTE TRAILS AND PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS WITHIN AND BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

EXAMPLES & STRATEGIES FROM THE WORKSHOP

Creating walkable communities and trails between communities—even in places with Alaskan weather—is both practical and profitable. A community that is easy and safe to get around without a car is a big plus for residents, particularly for kids. Tourists love to explore on foot (especially in Denali where most visitors don't have a car).

Anchorage is built for the automobile, but the town's heavily used trail system (summer and winter) is what a majority of residents most like about the city.

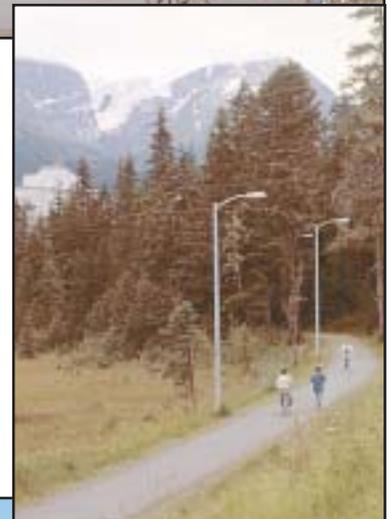
In surveys done as part of the Comprehensive Plan process, Anchorage residents identified trails as the public feature that most contributes to quality of life. In national surveys, a good trail system providing pedestrian access to schools, parks and shopping is consistently at the top of the list of amenities home buyers seek when buying a new home.



Anchorage Coastal Trail

At tourist destinations worldwide, a great system of trails and pathways is key to economic success.

The opportunity to leave the car behind and stroll, hike, bike, rollerblade, cross-country ski, or snowmachine is a key part of the vacation experience. In Colorado, a 15-mile trail system connecting Vail and ski towns in Summit County has become a major tourist attraction. Girdwood's trail system, pictured here, is a boon both for residents and visitors.



Girdwood Trail

Shoppers would much rather walk than drive between stores. The success of bustling small downtowns (and major shopping malls) comes from offering a pleasant place to walk and shop.

Outdoor strolling, shopping and restaurant areas in Whistler, Mt. Tremblant, Vail and other well-designed resort communities stay busy year round. Success in these towns comes from stores that are close together, from walkways designed so there is a choice between covered and open paths, scheduled outdoor events, and concentrating accommodations, residential and commercial development to create a buzz of people and activity.



*Winter in Mt. Tremblant Ski Resort, North of Montreal
photo by Eldon Beck*

"Walking is the number one recreational activity in America."

LOCAL VIEWS: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK & SUGGESTIONS

The subject of trails and other pedestrian linkages was another topic where workshop participants agreed that big improvements were needed, and would bring direct recreational, safety and economic benefits to Denali Borough communities. Key recommendations are listed below:

Improve trails and pathways within communities

Safe pedestrian crossings of the Parks Highway at the Nenana Canyon commercial area is very important. The photo shows the current practice—a hazardous, freestyle crossing. For better walking within the remainder of Nenana Canyon commercial area, one suggestion was to open most of the many small private roads for public pedestrian use, publish a map, add signs and encourage walking.



Crossing the Parks Highway in Nenana Canyon

Establish trails linking adjoining communities, and linking most common destinations, e.g. Nenana Canyon and the Denali National Park Visitor Center, Nenana Canyon and Healy

Develop trails and trailhead parking areas along the Parks Highway and in towns so people can easily walk into nearby natural areas

One workshop participant, who runs a B&B, said that the lack of good hiking trails branching out from near communities was the “number one complaint” of her clients. This effort could include formalizing the network of recreational trails that already exist (e.g., Yanert Valley, Stampede Trails)



View North down the Nenana River

Improve the transit system, including shuttle bus service, and shuttle bus parking & stops

Nenana Canyon businesses collectively operate a fleet of shuttle buses and vans. Several workshop participants suggested that with better coordination, better waiting areas, etc., the system could more efficiently serve a broader set of users, and improve the enjoyment and appearance of the Nenana Canyon area.



Stout wooden bus shelter in Valdez with interpretive information

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Do you feel new or better trails, pedestrian pathways, and/or transit improvements are needed in your community? If so, where?

Eight Strategies for Community Success

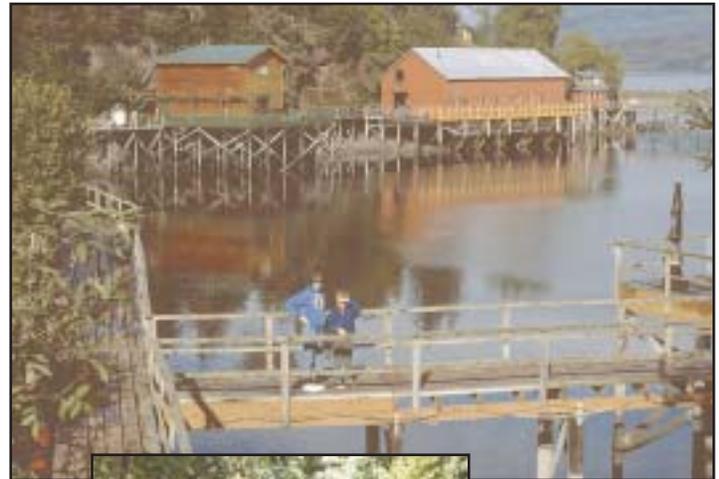
6. LINK TO NATURAL SETTING

EXAMPLES & STRATEGIES FROM THE WORKSHOP

Abundant wildlife, intact natural ecosystems, beautiful natural scenery,—all these things are increasingly rare in the world and increasingly in demand. Small towns in the western US have grown phenomenally in the last decade, in large part because they offer “out-the-door” access to natural places, and to hiking, skiing, climbing and other outdoor recreation opportunities. Communities that combine the pleasures of town life with strong contact with the natural world are some of the most desirable places to live and visit on the planet.

Residents and visitors love Halibut Cove because the community fits so well into its spectacular coastal setting.

Buildings and boardwalks perch over the shoreline and between trees. Most travel is by foot and by boat. It's a quiet place where you can have clean sheets and a shower, eat great food, and also watch wildlife off your deck, or out your window. The town itself is a great attraction, not just a jumping off point for outlying fun.



Halibut Cove Boardwalk

In Ashland, Oregon, a stream and park cross perpendicularly through the town's busiest commercial district. This crossing point of commerce and nature is the center of town.

Communities that think ahead can make the most of natural features—for example providing parks and trails, retaining waterways and woods, protecting views. The tangible reward for this behavior is a more attractive environment for residents, for existing and new business, and a stronger visitor economy.



Ashland, Oregon Park and Stream

LOCAL VIEWS: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK & SUGGESTIONS

Workshop participant ideas included

- better trails radiating out from communities
- better access to, along and over the Nenana River
- re-planting disturbed sites, retaining vegetation on new development sites

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- How could new development in your community best take advantage of its natural setting?

Eight Strategies for Community Success

7. MANAGE HIGHWAYS TO ENHANCE SENSE OF PLACE AND COMMUNITY

EXAMPLES & STRATEGIES FROM THE WORKSHOP

The experience of driving the Parks Highway is a big part of a visitor's impression of Denali Borough, and the quality of life of residents. Undeveloped portions of the highway are spectacular. However, the appearance of the built environment along the highway (signs, buildings) and the design of highway features (bridges, rest stops) currently adds little to the quality of the experience of driving through the Borough. In addition, like many highways, the Parks tends to divide communities by creating a hazardous barrier to pedestrians. This includes visitors shopping in Nenana Canyon and kids walking to school in Healy.

How Can Management of the Highway and Adjoining Lands Benefit Communities & Sense of Place?

First impressions matter. The huge oak tree at the edge of a small town near San Francisco announces your entry and sets an attractive image for the community.

Other options to mark a community entry include columns, fountains, large stones and arches like Ketchikan's. The frequently seen (readily forgotten) entries to new subdivisions—typically low walls with plants and signs—suggest that the best entries are in some manner rooted in the character of a place.

Well designed road features—stone retaining walls, distinctive informational signs, attractive bridges and outdoor light standards can transform just another dull highway into something special.

Popular scenic highways often include "Good Road Stuff": scenic turnoffs, rest stops, attractive bridges incorporating local character, sidewalks, highway signs, lights, utilities. For example, the bridge entrances on Highway 101 across the Klamath River, California, are guarded by golden bears—the state symbol.



Danville, California Town Entry



Ketchikan Archway



Klamath River Bridge, California

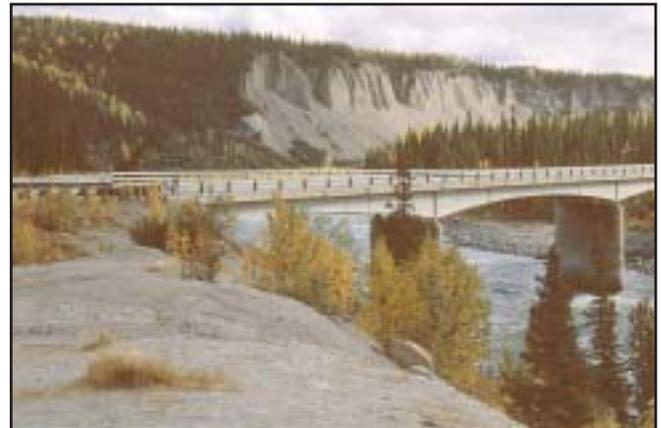
LOCAL VIEWS: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK & SUGGESTIONS

Most Denali residents are happy to share opinions about the appearance, quality and functionality of the Parks Highway. Two ideas with broad support are outlined below:

1. Develop a coordinated, Borough-wide system of signs, entry features and rest stops, to mark the entrance to the Borough, and entries to each community.



Develop rest stops with a place to view and take pictures of Denali at the north and south entries to Denali Borough



Create more attractive entryways for Denali Borough communities.

The bridge on the south side of Nenana Canyon provides a great opportunity for creating a better sense of arrival. One strategy would be to add interest as was done on the Highway 101 Klamath River bridge in California. Landscaping the boat launch pad at the south entry to Nenana Canyon was another widely supported suggestion.

2. Improve the safety and appearance of pedestrian crossings of the Parks Highway in Nenana Canyon and Healy.

A busy road crosses through the center of the small downtown of Brunswick, Maine. A number of changes were made to the road to slow traffic and create a better place for people and commerce. Improvements included planted medians (“pedestrian islands”), crosswalks with special paving and pedestrian-operated traffic signals, sidewalk “bulbs” to narrow the street, and diagonal parking to slow traffic.



Main Street, Brunswick, Maine

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What could be done in or near your community to create an attractive sense of arrival?
- What other changes would you suggest in how the highway is managed to enhance your sense of community?

Eight Strategies for Community Success

8. TELL GOOD STORIES: PROVIDE INFORMATION ON HISTORY, CURRENT LIFE & THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT TO LINK PEOPLE TO PLACE

EXAMPLES & STRATEGIES FROM THE WORKSHOP

The pleasure in living or visiting somewhere expands greatly when you understand what makes the place special—the stories about a place’s myths, history and heroes; rocks, plants and wildlife. Successful communities and visitor destinations tell these stories in ways that are fun, imaginative, and don’t always require standing quietly and squinting at small print.



Sidewalk Pleasures - Museums aren't the only place to learn about history, culture and local life.

In Anchorage, strollers learn about sled dog Balto, the serum run to Nome and the Iditarod sled dog race.

Active Storytelling

“Living” history—the chance to interact with people and experience the creative process firsthand—is a powerful, engaging way to tell stories. The Alaska Indian Arts Center in Haines is a simple building. The magic of this facility is a carving room where visitors can smell the cedar, feel the tools, hear stories told by a carver, and watch the progress as work continues.



Ornamental cannons at this building entry in Savannah, Georgia, are actual Civil War relics.

Building Details - the built environment can capture tangible evidence of a place's history and character



The Alaska Indian Arts Center in Haines

LOCAL VIEWS : WORKSHOP FEEDBACK & SUGGESTIONS

Workshop participants were enthusiastic about telling better stories of the natural and cultural history of the Denali Borough. Equally important, participants believe that most visitors are interested in but don't have a clue about current local life. Some specific suggestions are listed below:

Cultural History

Put up a display or sculpture depicting famous dog mushers, Native history, history of mining and river exploration, or the remarkable Sourdough expedition to the North Summit of Denali, including a replica of the famous pole hauled all the way to the top.



Denali in the news, 1910

Current Life

Create an entry monument at the Parks Highway turnoff into Healy using a large, striking piece of coal-mining equipment. Most tourists zip by Healy without even knowing they've passed the town. Very few visitors (or Alaskans) know about the Healy coal mine.



Bear in Colorado, moose in Yukon

Natural History

Make it easy for everybody to see the most popular sights - commission a scale model of Denali or a full size sculpture of caribou, moose, bear, Dall sheep or other creatures seen in the local area. Statues located strategically around a community would help create a flow of pedestrians past business's doors.



Highway Signs

Provide a coordinated set of highway informational signs so visitors feel like they are at an important destination in communities throughout the Borough. This could help increase visitor spending and local business opportunities.



Simple interpretive signs along the Alaska Highway in Canada

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What are the most important stories to tell? What makes the area special?
- Where and how should these stories be told?

BUILDING A VISION

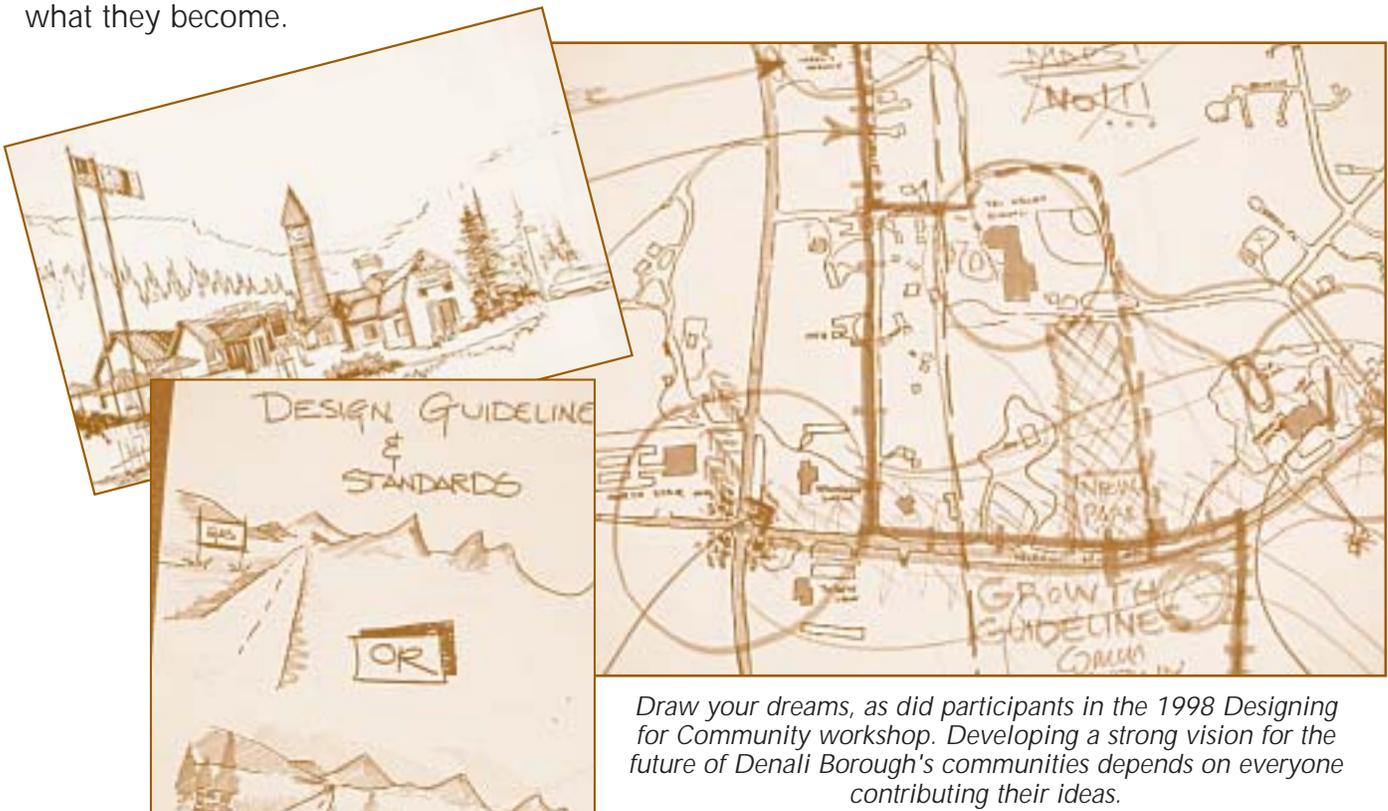
CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The keynote speaker of the Designing for Community workshop, Ed McMahon, stressed a very important point: many communities become bitterly divided over local growth and development issues because they get caught up in a discussion over how to accomplish community purposes rather than having a discussion about what they want their community to be. If the members of a community establish a shared vision of what they want their community to become, and the vision is inspirational and energizing, those same individuals will figure out how to make the vision come true in way that is consistent with the values of the community.



This workbook is a step toward building a common vision for the Denali Borough. Taking a vision to reality is a long process, but the Designing for Community Steering Committee intends to further the cause by publishing the responses to the questions asked in this workbook, continuing to educate the citizens of the Denali Borough about the principles of community design, and refining the common vision into specific actions that can be accomplished by community organizations.

Ed McMahon perfectly captured the dilemma of development for communities which have a strong sense of place through his statement, "No place in the world today remains special by accident." This simple notion has become the rallying cry for the Designing for Community effort. Our communities will change—we have a chance now, and perhaps only now, to help determine what they become.



Draw your dreams, as did participants in the 1998 Designing for Community workshop. Developing a strong vision for the future of Denali Borough's communities depends on everyone contributing their ideas.

CREDITS

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NOTES
