

CHAPTER THREE:

PUBLIC FACILITIES PLAN

PUBLIC FACILITIES IN GENERAL

One of the general Land Use goals in this plan is to: *Ensure future development is compatible with adjacent properties.* To be consistent with this goal, and existing commercial development and public facilities in Sutton, the community would benefit from co-location of certain facilities when practical, or design of facilities to accommodate multiple community needs. Existing public facilities are located in the core area, and this complements the desire to develop a community “town center” where commercial and public activities can be concentrated. This type of concentrated development is also conducive to providing a location for a public transportation hub in Sutton, as identified in the transportation chapter. Land in the town center area should be closely evaluated for its appropriateness for public facilities development and retention or acquisition as necessary.

Recommendations:

- **When possible, design and locate public facilities to reduce construction, operating, maintenance costs, and potential impacts to land, air, and water quality, by co-location, design that accommodates multiple uses, and by utilizing LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) standards (see Sutton Library).**
- **Identify and acquire or reserve the necessary land for future public facilities.**

SUTTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The educational services for the Sutton planning area are administered by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. Sutton Elementary had an enrollment of 64 students as of May 2008, and an unknown number of home school students. This enrollment figure is down from a high of 108 in May of 1997. The school is designed for a capacity of up to 250 school children. Sutton Elementary School serves Kindergarten through fifth grades. The service area of Sutton Elementary School includes portions east of the planning area and extends from Moose Creek at Mile 55 on the Glenn Highway to King Mountain Lodge at Mile 76.

There is no middle or high school in the planning area. Currently, students are bused to Palmer Junior Middle School and Palmer High School. A small number of survey respondents noted a need for a Junior Middle School and a High School in Sutton.

Recommendation:

- **Provide public schools to meet the needs of Sutton residents in the future.**

SUTTON LIBRARY

The Sutton Public Library was established in the early 1970's by volunteers. Located first in a post office, then in a local store, it was finally given a home by Phil and Jean O'Neill who donated the property (0.74 acres) on Jonesville Road where the library is now. The current library building was Sutton's first fire hall. It was constructed in 1980 with an addition added in the late eighties



Sutton Public Library, photo found at <http://www.matsulibraries.org/sutton>

and is approximately 2,400 square ft. The library houses a collection of approximately 20,000 titles including books, audio and video material creating a facility filled to capacity. In addition, there is one small reading room which serves multiple functions: a study space, craft area, program area, reading room, public meeting space and more.

The Sutton Library primarily services Mat-Su Borough residents who reside in the communities of Sutton, Chickaloon, Glacier View and Lake Louise. As a part of the Matanuska-Susitna Library Network, the Sutton Library shares its collection with all residents of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and receives the benefit of collaborating with other Borough and city libraries.

The 2007 community survey showed strong community support for expanding the Sutton Public Library. The current library site is too small for building expansion so, in support of a new library building for Sutton, the Borough has purchased property to provide a building site near the Sutton Post Office and the Alpine Historical Park. Preliminary library and landscape designs suggest a shared parking lot for the library and the historical park.

In an effort to create public facilities with nurturing physical environments that maximize unique natural features of any building site and to create highly energy efficient buildings, the Mat-Su

Borough Assembly requires that any new Borough facility be constructed to LEED Certification Silver Standards. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Buildings that meet LEED certification rank high on a rating system that addresses the following components: water efficiency, energy efficiency, non-toxic building materials and sustainably procured building materials, indoor environmental air quality, innovation of the design process, and the sustainability of the building site including landscaping.

Recommendations:

- **Seek grant funding and other revenue sources for expanding the Sutton Public Library facility and services.**
- **Ensure the new library is constructed in accordance with LEED Silver Standards.**

SUTTON COMMUNITY HALL update 

The original Sutton Community Hall is located on Jonesville Road just across from the current Sutton Public Library and near the Jonesville Road/Glenn Highway intersection. The land was donated by Phil and Jean O’Neill, and is adjacent to Eska Creek. The building is eligible to register as a historic building



Sutton Community Hall, photo found at http://www.sacboard.com/sac_006.htm

under the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. It was constructed in 1927 and used as a mess hall and dormitory at the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project until 1930. Between 1930 and 1956 it remained unused at Eklutna. It was moved to Sutton in 1956, where it became important in the development of civic life for area residents.

In preparation for the building’s relocation to Sutton, when coal miners finished their shifts at the mine, they hauled water and mixed concrete by hand to construct a concrete basement and foundation for the building. When the basement and foundation were complete, the building was moved from Eklutna to the site in two pieces. The hall was then welcomed by area residents and used as a social hall, public meeting site, a voting location, for educational activities, community schools activities, social and music festivals, and an emergency shelter.

The building, which is an estimated 2,000 square feet, is an important asset to the community. However, its condition has deteriorated and it has not been actively used for several years. To

meet safety regulations it needs many improvements or replacement. Encroachment onto the adjacent property, owned by the Alaska Railroad Corporation (historic railroad right-of-way), is relied upon for parking and outdoor activities. The building's proximity to Eska Creek is conducive to providing a community park adjacent to the creek.

Recommendations:

- **Negotiate with Alaska Railroad Corporation for a permit to use the properties already relied upon for parking and outdoor events.**
- **Evaluate the feasibility of acquiring property north of the community hall which is also relied upon for parking and outdoor events.**
- **Seek grant funding and other revenue sources for performing major upgrades to or replacement of the existing community hall.**
- **Design a community center that creates, fosters, and maintains the small-town atmosphere found in Sutton.**
- **Create a community park with access to Eska Creek.**

THE GATHERING PLACE

The Gathering Place is a Sutton project proposed by the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council. The Gathering Place would be a building to better serve our community by creating a space that nurtures and fosters the health of rural residents in communities from Sutton to Glacier View. The facility may include a Community Health Clinic (for Native and Non-native residents), Community Wellness Center, 6-10 Assisted Living Apartments, Elder's Food Program, Community Kitchen, and education/conference room.

Recommendation:

- **Support and encourage the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council's project known as The Gathering Place to provide services for all residents within the greater community (residents of Sutton, Chickaloon, and Glacier View).**

THE SUTTON MANOR AND ANNEX

The Sutton Manor and Annex are independent living, handicap-accessible facilities for low-income seniors. They consist of eight apartments in two buildings located in the core area of Sutton.

SUTTON POST OFFICE

The new Sutton Post Office opened in December of 1995. It is located on Chickaloon Way approximately 1/8 mile north of mile 61.5 of the Glenn Highway. The post office currently contains 480 post office boxes. The community survey indicated a desire to expand the post office facilities. While the post office is a federal facility and not a Borough public facility, the planning team supports appropriate development and planning of such a public facility.

Recommendation:

- **Consider appropriate development and the possible expansion of the post office.**

CEMETERY SITE

Planning team members stated a need and desire for a cemetery in the Sutton Planning Area. Currently, there is one privately established cemetery within the Sutton planning area, the Hillside Cemetery Association at Mile 57.5 of the Glenn Highway. Also, there are known Alaska Native burial sites in the Sutton area, including the core area. State law allows the burial of individuals on private property rather than an established cemetery, but transfers of land ownership often create problems if a new property owner is interested in development. Also, care and access are not assured without establishing a cemetery trust fund and cemetery organization. State law exempts up to 80 acres of cemetery land from taxation if the property is transferred to a non-profit cemetery association. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has a general policy of not owning, managing or operating cemeteries.

Recommendation:

- **The community supports and respects the Chickaloon Native community's efforts to secure existing Alaska Native grave sites from disturbance and ensure future access for worship and maintenance.**
- **The community, Borough and/or state should acquire or set aside sufficient lands to meet future cemetery needs in Sutton.**

FIRE/AMBULANCE SERVICE

The Sutton Fire Service Area (SFSA) includes most but not all of the planning area. Near the eastern and western portion of the planning area, development exists north of the SFSA within the planning area. Fire, vehicle rescue and ambulance service for the planning area is provided from the Sutton Public Safety Building. This building is centrally located in Sutton on the Glenn

Highway at Mile 61 across from Jonesville Road. This facility has Emergency Medical Service (EMS) personnel and equipment available to serve the planning area, as well as a 911-emergency phone on the outside of the building providing immediate access to 911 operators. The fire rating for Sutton is 8B, which means if you live beyond 1,000 feet of a fire hydrant but within 5 miles of a fire station, you receive a Class 8B rating.

The Sutton Fire Service Area is the smallest and least developed fire service area in the Borough. Because of the limited property tax base for the fire service area, the SFSA mil rate is approximately double the Borough average for fire service areas. Other funding sources include state revenue sharing, Borough rental of ambulance space and matching grants from state forestry. Fire service area funds do not provide for capital improvements to the Sutton Public Safety Building or vehicles which are usually obtained with state grants. The areas surrounding the SFSA do not have fire protection services partly because of the expense of providing this service in low density areas. Fire service areas have a policy of not responding to home fires outside their boundaries since this service is paid for by fire service area property owners.

Due to substandard public and private roads, some developing areas in the SFSA are not accessible by emergency vehicles. Within the planning area, a significant amount of development has occurred near Seventeen Mile Lake north and east of the Palmer Correctional Center. This area has many small residential sized lots and is likely to attract more development. Seventeen Mile Lake Road is steep and difficult to negotiate by most emergency vehicles. Additionally, several other public and private roads and numerous driveways within the planning area cannot be accessed by large emergency vehicles. The reliance on substandard roads to access certain developed areas increases the cost of providing fire protection services and reduces its effectiveness.

One of the most important factors in responding to an emergency is being able to quickly arrive at the site. Highly visible street signs and house or driveway numbers are needed. This is especially important in areas such as Sutton where a wrong turn down one of numerous dead ends, substandard roads and long driveways can effectively trap large emergency vehicles.

A storage building is needed for fire apparatus, command vehicles and the rescue boat to provide security and protection from the weather. In addition, several of the emergency vehicles included in the SFSA fleet are past the time period for refurbishing. Emergency vehicles are recommended for refurbishment or replacement every 15 years.

Recommendations:

- **Install highly visible street signs and house or driveway numbers.**
- **Encourage construction of through streets and loops rather than dead ends on public streets.**
- **Encourage the construction of adequately sized turnabouts on dead end streets, long driveways and other areas that would otherwise trap a large emergency vehicle.**
- **Acquire or reserve a site for the eventual establishment of a fire substation along Seventeen Mile Lake Road as soon as possible to accommodate future development.**
- **Encourage future large developments to occur in a way that does not have a negative impact on the ability of wells to adequately recharge.**
- **Encourage and coordinate with the Borough to complete a comprehensive 911 mapping system.**
- **Plan for emergency access when prioritizing and developing road improvement projects and allocating road maintenance funds.**
- **Plan for emergency access and egress during the subdivision development process.**
- **Encourage the installation of water sources for fire protection such as holding tanks in new subdivisions and in difficult to access locations.**
- **Work toward the construction of an additional storage building for unprotected fire vehicles, fire apparatus and the rescue boat.**

PUBLIC SAFETY – POLICE

Public safety for the planning area is provided by the Alaska State Troopers stationed in Palmer. The Troopers stationed in Palmer currently respond to calls from the Knik River Bridge to Mile 100 of the Glenn Highway, and to Mile 64 of the Parks Highway. Generally, there are four Troopers per shift serving this entire area, not counting investigators, etc. The Trooper response time is, therefore, often unsatisfactory due to travel distance. It is not anticipated that this situation will change in the foreseeable future. The community survey respondents noted a need for additional public safety.

Currently, the Palmer Correctional Center notifies a group of residents living around the prison of any immediate safety concerns at the prison. It is the community's desire that this prompt notification continue.

Recommendations:

- **Provide and enhance the public safety, health and welfare of Sutton residents.**
- **Develop public safety awareness and education.**
- **Support the prison's continued immediate notification of key residents regarding prison safety concerns.**

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

In the summer of 2009 the Sutton Community Council incorporated as a non-profit organization. While this incorporation does not officially establish the community as a "city" recognized by the local boundary commission, it does provide the possibility for the community to be the recipient of certain funding opportunities. The local governing body is still the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly. The Borough recognizes the Sutton Community Council as an advisory entity.

The prospect of incorporating as a city was discussed in the spring of 1996 at a community meeting with a state official from the local boundary commission. At that time, there was very little support expressed for incorporation. The concern among the residents was that this would lead to excessive government and more taxation.

To encourage community participation, leadership, and sound community decision making policies, the following recommendations are encouraged:

Recommendations:

- **Improve communication among the Sutton Community Council, Sutton residents, prison officials, and Borough, state, tribal, and federal entities.**
- **Maintain communication with residents by maintaining a collection of e-mail addresses to receive regular updates on community issues (i.e. electronic newsletter). Coordinate community information with the Borough website.**
- **Maintain and strengthen the advisory capacity of the community to represent community-wide agreed upon policies and goals on Borough, state and federal issues.**
- **Changes in land classifications and designations, proposed sales and platting actions should be closely examined. The Sutton Community Council and residents should be alerted by federal, state, and Borough agencies when these or any actions affecting Sutton residents occur.**

PUBLIC UTILITIES

Community utilities, where available, are provided through member-owned cooperatives, private commercial utilities, or private homeowner's groups. Community utilities available include electricity and communications (telephone/TV/Internet). There are no publicly owned community water systems in the Sutton planning area. There are no community sewer systems in the planning area. However, the central area of Sutton, where smaller lots exist and density is higher, could eventually be an area appropriate for options such as wind or solar energy or a community water/sewer system.

Electrical

Matanuska Electric Association (MEA) provides electricity to the area. MEA has periodically explored an electrical intertie with other electrical utilities through Sutton. The intertie would provide a more consistent power supply but the proposal involves large towers which some residents find both prominent and unsightly. Currently, "electrical transmission lines designed for the purpose of transporting or carrying electric power in quantities equal to or greater than 100,000 volts" in the Sutton SpUD boundaries would be required to go through a conditional use process.

Natural Gas

Enstar Natural Gas currently does not provide natural gas within the Sutton planning area. The Alaska Natural Gas Development Authority (ANGDA) is currently in a design and permitting phase of construction of a natural gas spur line from Glennallen to Palmer. The proposed route parallels the Talkeetna Mountains from Palmer to the Chickaloon River, bisecting the Sutton planning area. From the Chickaloon River the proposed natural gas spur line would go north up Boulder Creek into the Talkeetna Mountains to Chitna Pass, then from Chitna Creek to Caribou Creek, up stream to Eureka and on to Glennallen.

Residents of Sutton and Chickaloon (during the right-of-way permitting process) expressed concerns about the gas line corridor drastically increasing access to the neighboring wilderness, increasing the potential for private property trespass along the gas line corridor, and greatly increasing the hunting pressure on local game animals. Many residents suggested that the natural gas line corridor follow the Glenn Highway right of way or the Parks Highway right of way to minimize the impacts of a new access corridor in the wilderness. Additionally residents

commented on the need for a natural gas supply line from Prudhoe Bay to Glennallen before any gas is delivered through the proposed ANGDA spur line. With no current proposal for such a supply line to be built, residents feel it is hasty to build the spur line first.

ANGDA informed residents that the proposed natural gas spur line through the Sutton area was going to be underground. However, if it is above ground it will potentially compromise animal migration patterns and pristine viewsheds. Additionally, above-ground utilities are at increased risk for vandalism. Containment is another concern expressed with above ground gas lines. In 2007 Enstar Natural Gas, a private company, proposed construction of a natural gas “bullet” line from Prudhoe Bay to Wasilla following the Parks Highway right of way.

Recommendations:

- **Provide underground utilities wherever feasible to reduce utility visibility, animal migration barriers, the probability of vandalism and the risk of a natural gas leak.**
- **Support a bullet line along the Parks Highway right of way.**
- **Support efforts to provide natural gas through options that are generally accepted by the community.**
- **Continue to explore options to provide low cost and environmentally friendly alternate energy when possible.**