

**Gregory L Jones**

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January 15, 2024

Planning Commission  
Matanuska Susitna Borough  
350 E Dahlia St.  
Palmer, Alaska 99645

RE: Long Lake Road Land Sale

Members of the Commission:

The Matanuska Susitna Borough has a comprehensive plan. The Willow Community has a comprehensive plan. Those plans exist, in part, because state law says they must. All three, the Borough plan, the Willow plan and the Alaska Statutes, say that the plans should guide the Borough's decision making with respect to, among other things, policy, public finance and the management of public assets. These documents are developed through a public process and, while the underlying laws do not dictate future public policy decisions, they do create a non-discretionary duty for public officials to follow certain procedures and processes to be used to reach those decisions. From the information available in your packet and from talking to the Borough Staff, it appears that these processes have been all but ignored with respect to the reclassification and disposal of the properties covered by Resolution 24-01 which is on your agenda tonight.

Alaska Statute AS 29.40.020 requires that the Borough prepare a comprehensive plan. The next section (AS 29.40.030) requires that the plan be adopted by ordinance. AS 29.40.040 (a) establishes the requirement for the Borough to adopt land use regulations "governing the use and occupancy of land..." within the Borough. In adopting the Borough's Comprehensive Plan, the Willow Comprehensive Plan was clearly designated as an integral part of the Borough Plan. A significant amount of public time and involvement was invested in preparing and adopting, by ordinance, these plans.

We can debate all evening whether land like this, sandwiched between residential neighborhoods and one of Alaska's most popular parks is appropriate for a wide-open classification like General Purpose. We can even debate whether the policies in the above referenced plans, which call for preservation of Willow's rural character, recreational qualities, and environmental setting are impacted by this proposal. What is not debatable are the non-discretionary responsibilities that the Borough has to:

1. **Consider the Comprehensive Plans** in making significant land use decisions that could affect the Willow community. Clearly the hundreds of acres of land included in this proposed resolution, situated in recreational and residential neighborhoods, and sharing 8000 feet of boundary with the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area (NLSRA) would have to be considered a

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RE: Long Lake Road Land Sale

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“significant” amendment to the plan. But there is no mention of the Willow Comprehensive Plan in your packet tonight. When I talked to the Borough Staff last week, they admitted that they did not know what the Willow Comp Plan says about this land. They were apparently unaware that Goal 1 of the plan says, “Public landholders should consult the community and this plan before classifying or disposing of land in the Willow Area.”

Part of considering the Comp Plan involves looking at all of the impacts of this proposed action. Among the important goals of the Willow Plan is the protection of the NLSRA. Coincidentally, economic development is identified as an important goal in the Plan. It identifies NLSRA as a major economic driver for the area. In fact, at 80,000 visitors a year, NLSRA is one of the entire Borough’s most important economic assets. In your packet, Staff specifically mentions that there may be gravel and timber resources on the land to be sold. Do we know if development of those resources would impact the Park? Could this proposal impact the economic development goals? Has anyone solicited input from the Park’s management?

In fact, there is no reconciliation of this proposal with goals and policies set forth in the Comp Plan. This is a clear abdication of the duties of the Borough.

2. **Involve the Willow Community in implementing policies that would impact the goals and policies in the Comp Plan.** As far as I can tell, the Willow Area Community Organization (WACO) was not contacted about this plan. Your packet says there was public notice, without explaining what that was. Were notices mailed to adjacent property owners? Was there a notice on the bulletin boards at the Post Office or Community Center? Was a meeting called in the community? The answer to each of these is “No”. Planning Commission Resolution 09-14 sets forth procedures for developing, updating and amending community plans. It is very specific as to the amount of input and community involvement required. I am aware that the Borough is currently proposing to embark on an update of the Willow Comp Plan. It is not reasonable to consider a significant land use and disposal measure affecting existing sensitive areas just prior to such an update.

Please do not move this resolution forward before the above-described non-discretionary duties are addressed. The end result will have a much better chance of resembling good public policy.

Thank you.



Greg Jones





# MSB

## Comprehensive Plan Community Survey Results

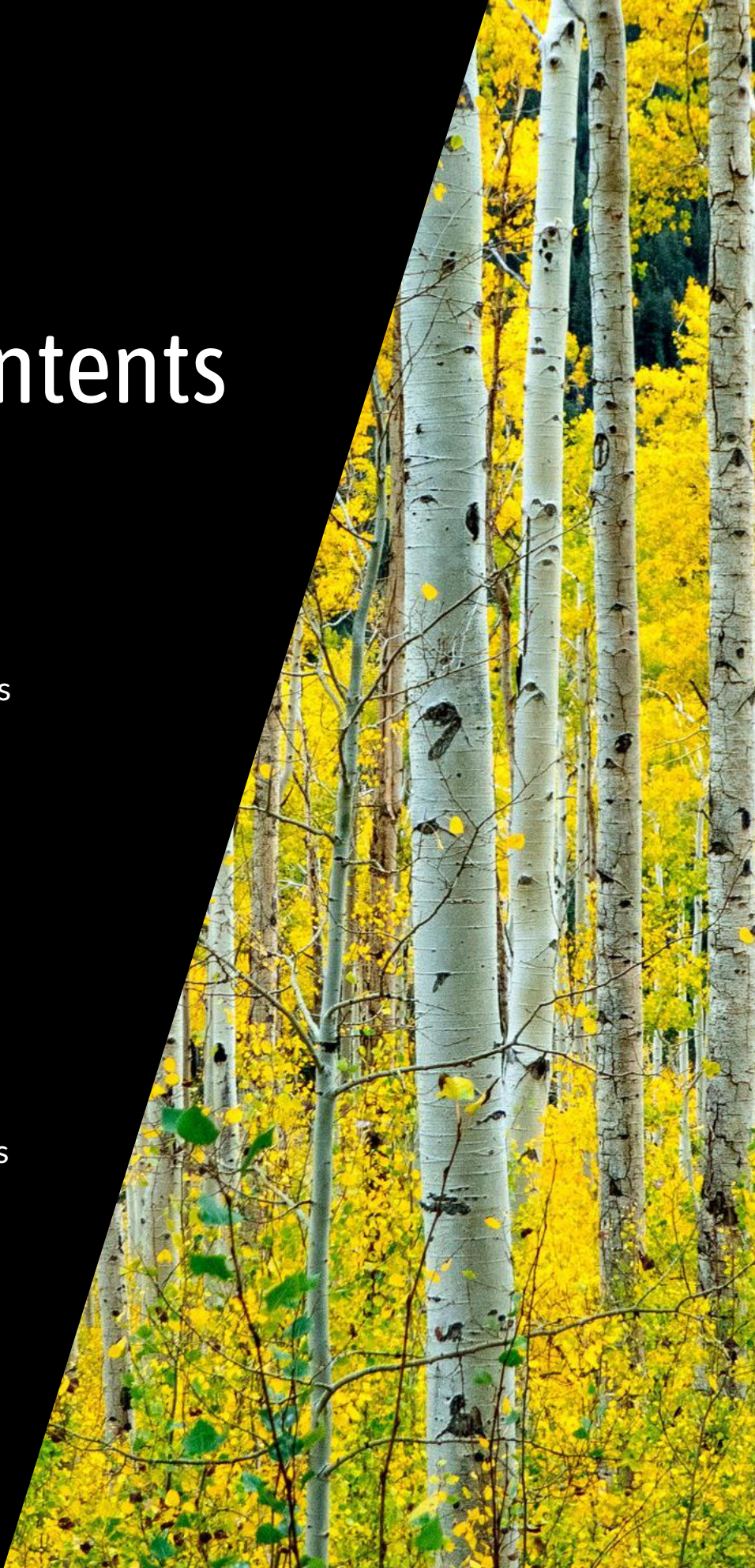


Matanuska-Susitna Borough  
Planning and Land Use Department  
January 2024



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# Overview

On August 10, 2023, MSB Planning staff launched the “Comprehensive Plan Community Survey” to increase public awareness of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan update and to learn from residents about what they value in their communities and what they believe should be Borough priorities for a more resilient Mat-Su.

This report highlights the results of the survey and summarizes important metrics. The survey is one tool of many that staff will use in the Comprehensive Plan update process and is meant to showcase community sentiment on planning issues and inform further public outreach.

## Goals

- » To amplify community voices and inform elected officials and Borough leadership with direct comments from the public
- » To identify community values as they pertain to land uses and economic development
- » To give residents the opportunity to prioritize potential MSB actions around community resiliency
- » To inform the public workshop process by outlining issues and concerns of residents
- » To increase public awareness of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan update process



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND LAND USE

- » Several questions in the survey were used to gauge the respondent's values as they pertain to land use.
- » Respondents showed a great variety of values when asked what they most enjoy about their communities, including peace and quiet, proximity to hiking and biking trails, and friendly neighbors. Respondents find junk on properties, low-quality roads, and crime to be the majority of characteristics that they value the least in their communities.
- » When asked about compatible land uses within 3 miles of neighborhoods, residents were more likely to be in agreement about what they deem as incompatible.
- » Respondents would like to see more food-centric businesses closer to their homes, such as grocery stores, farmers market locations, and restaurants. In contrast, 66% of respondents chose natural resource extraction as an incompatible use for residential areas, followed closely by shooting ranges and industrial parks, at 61% and 54%, respectively.
- » One hundred three comments from residents favored the MSB implementing different land use regulations to protect the character and quality of neighborhoods, and seven comments opposed the MSB doing anything more than it is currently doing to manage land use.

## FOOD SECURITY

- » Respondents were asked to provide information on how they fill their freezers, stock their pantries, and fill their fridges.
- » There are many opportunities for Mat-Su residents to source food by themselves through personal gardening, canning, hunting, fishing, or foraging. Similar to farmers markets and CSAs, these sources are mostly dependent on seasonal conditions.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## FOOD SECURITY CONTINUED

- » Respondents relied on emergency food resources such as food pantries at varying levels, with 43% of respondents requiring food assistance “a few times a year.
- » Most respondents rely on regional grocery stores such as Fred Meyer, Carrs, and Costco for their weekly trips and use neighborhood grocery stores for supplemental shopping.
- » 21% of respondents live less than or equal to 3 miles away from where they travel for groceries, while more than half (54%) travel between 4 and 10 miles to get groceries. 25% of respondents travel 10 miles or more, which could indicate that they live in areas where access to healthy and affordable food is limited.

## PRIORITIZING RESILIENCY

- » Respondents were asked to provide their opinion on how the Borough should prioritize activities that promote a more resilient community for all residents.
- » Respondents were give the choice to rank each action on a 0-3, 4-6, or 7-10 year timeframe, and were also given the choice of "this would be a waste of taxpayer dollars.
- » Overall, the top three priorities are geared towards emergency preparedness, economic development through incentives, and using the environment to mitigate impacts of natural hazards.
- » Responses were very evenly split when asked about strengthening food distribution networks, investing in Port MacKenzie, and Promoting energy programs such as C-PACE, showing a need for more education and outreach if the desire is to reach a consensus in these areas for future policy decisions.

# Introduction

The purpose of updating the comprehensive plan is to enhance community wealth and well-being by guiding land use and economic development policy that benefits all residents. But in order to write a plan that works for all residents, the MSB needs to hear from residents in every community across the Mat-Su.

The Comprehensive Plan Community Survey is one tool staff uses to do that.

Once adopted, Borough staff and the Assembly will use the comprehensive plan to make policy decisions that bring the community's vision to life. Partnerships across MSB departments, agencies, organizations, private industry, and communities will develop the guiding principles and goals of the Comprehensive Plan, and the Planning Commission and Assembly will take action to implement the plan through tools like land use regulations, economic development policy, and community infrastructure investments.

The Mat-Su Borough has been growing for decades, and there is no sign of slowing down. The Comprehensive Plan will be the roadmap the Mat-Su Borough uses to ensure that we only become a better community to live in as we all welcome more neighbors to the Mat-Su in the coming decades.

# Methods

Matanuska-Susitna Borough residents of any age were allowed to participate in the Comprehensive Plan Community Survey. The survey was conducted online using Esri's Survey 123 as the platform. Paper surveys were offered at MSB libraries and the Upper Susitna Senior Center. The survey was advertised heavily on Facebook through the Planning Department and the Borough profiles. Flyers with QR codes for the survey were posted at schools, libraries, trailheads, post offices, and local businesses throughout the borough.

While efforts were taken to target all MSB residents, the percentages represented in this report only pertain to those surveyed and cannot represent all residents. However, because of the sample size, the information found in this report provides a solid foundation for staff to begin a more robust public outreach phase, including public workshops by region and focused work sessions with stakeholder groups and community councils.

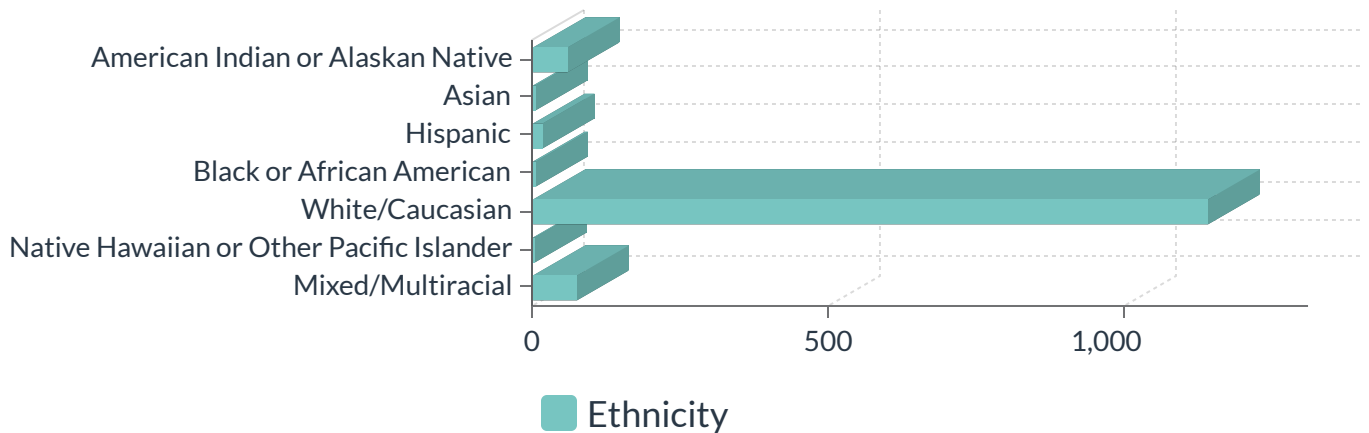




# Demographics

1,389 residents responded to the survey. The demographics included are age, ethnicity, gender, and location. The respondents were 64% majority female. Respondents were also majority white/caucasian and between the ages of 36-65. The survey reached residents in every community throughout the Mat-Su Borough.

## Respondents by Ethnicity

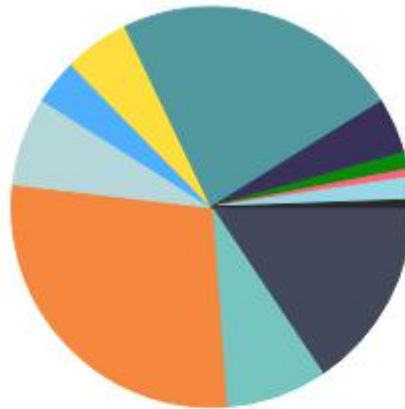


<u>Length of Residency</u>	
0-5 years.....	14%
6-10 years.....	15%
11-20 years.....	24%
21+ years.....	47%

<u>Gender</u>	
Female.....	64%
Male.....	28%
Prefer not to Answer.....	6%
Non-binary.....	1%

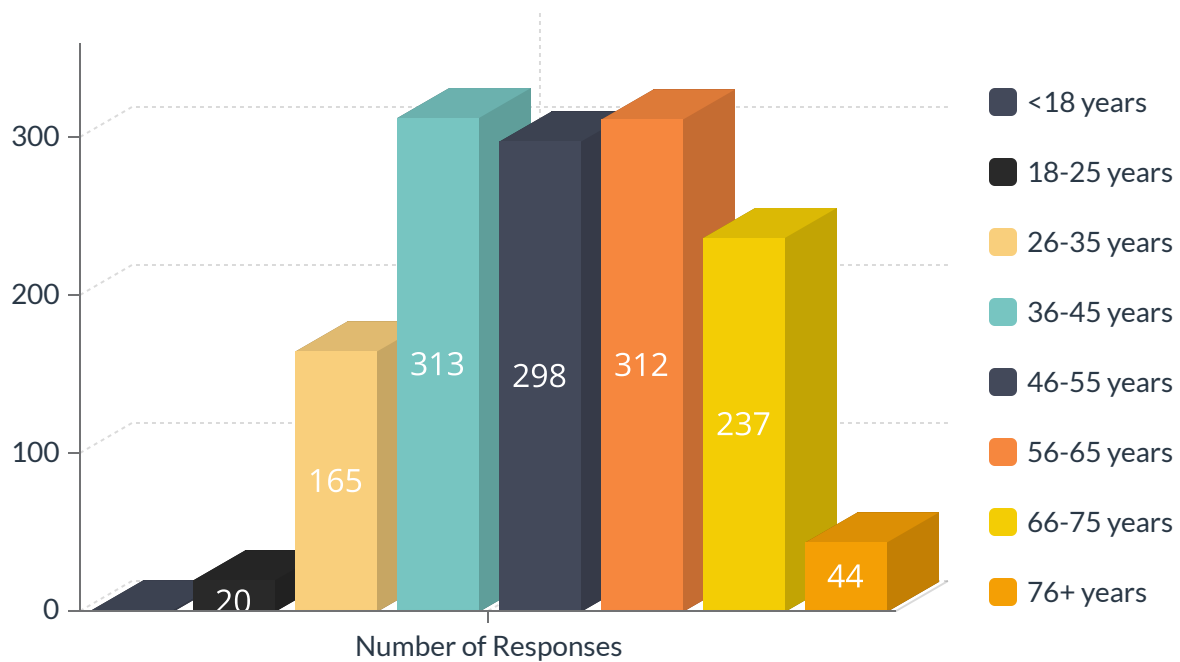
# Demographics

## Respondents by Locations



Big Lake/Susitna River Valley 217	Tanaina/Meadow Lakes 114
Wasilla 389	Knik/Fairview 99
Trunk Area 51	Fishhook 73
Palmer 323	Butte Area 62
Knik River Road 19	Buffalo/Soapstone 9
Matanuska River Valley 25	Unknown/Other 8

## Respondents by Age

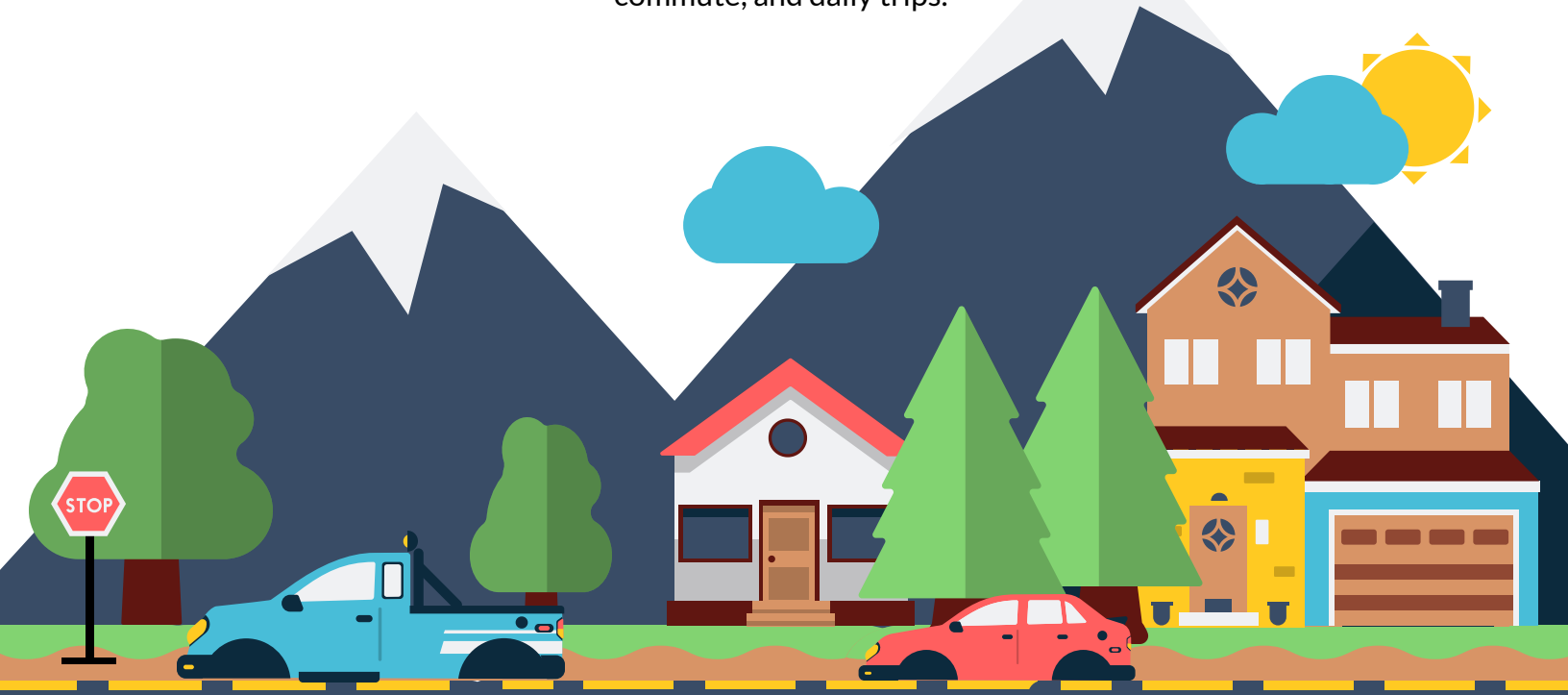


# Community Character

The Mat-Su Borough has 30 communities within its border, giving residents many options when choosing which place to call home. Communities across the borough have vastly different qualities, amenities, job opportunities, and land uses. The survey respondents were asked a series of questions regarding what they value most and least about the character of their communities. Respondents were then asked several questions about compatible/incompatible land uses in their neighborhoods and greater community areas.

Throughout every region, respondents agreed that they most value peaceful and quiet neighborhoods, which means that maintaining that quality as the borough continues to see its population increase should be a top priority for the Comprehensive Plan. Responses also show some distinct differences between the types of businesses respondents categorize as compatible and incompatible within 3 miles of their neighborhoods. Residents were more likely to agree on incompatible uses than they were to agree on compatible uses. For example, the top five incompatible uses had more votes than the single highest-ranking compatible use. This highlights that residents are more accepting of a wide variety of land uses such as grocery stores, medical services, agriculture, and daycares, but agree that there are several uses such as natural resource extraction, marijuana retail/cultivation facilities, shooting ranges, and industrial parks that they want to see separated from neighborhoods.

Responses are shown by the whole and then by the regional groupings. Because of the great diversity in community needs and values, it is vital in the Comprehensive Plan process to understand land use issues and values as they change from place to place. As a note, “community” was not defined in the survey. However, when answering questions in this section, residents were asked to consider their neighborhood, work commute, and daily trips.





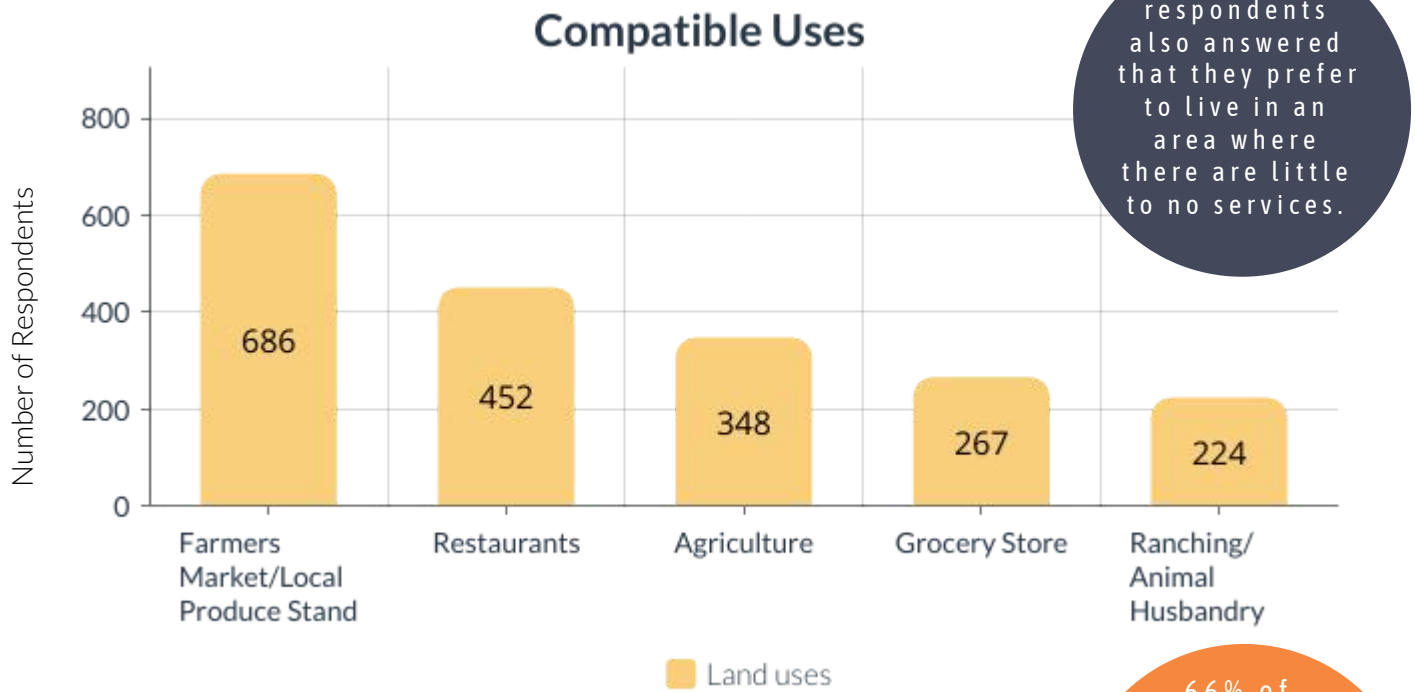
# Neighborhood Character - All Responses

Residents were asked to identify the characteristics of their community that they find the most and least valuable. Here's what they said:

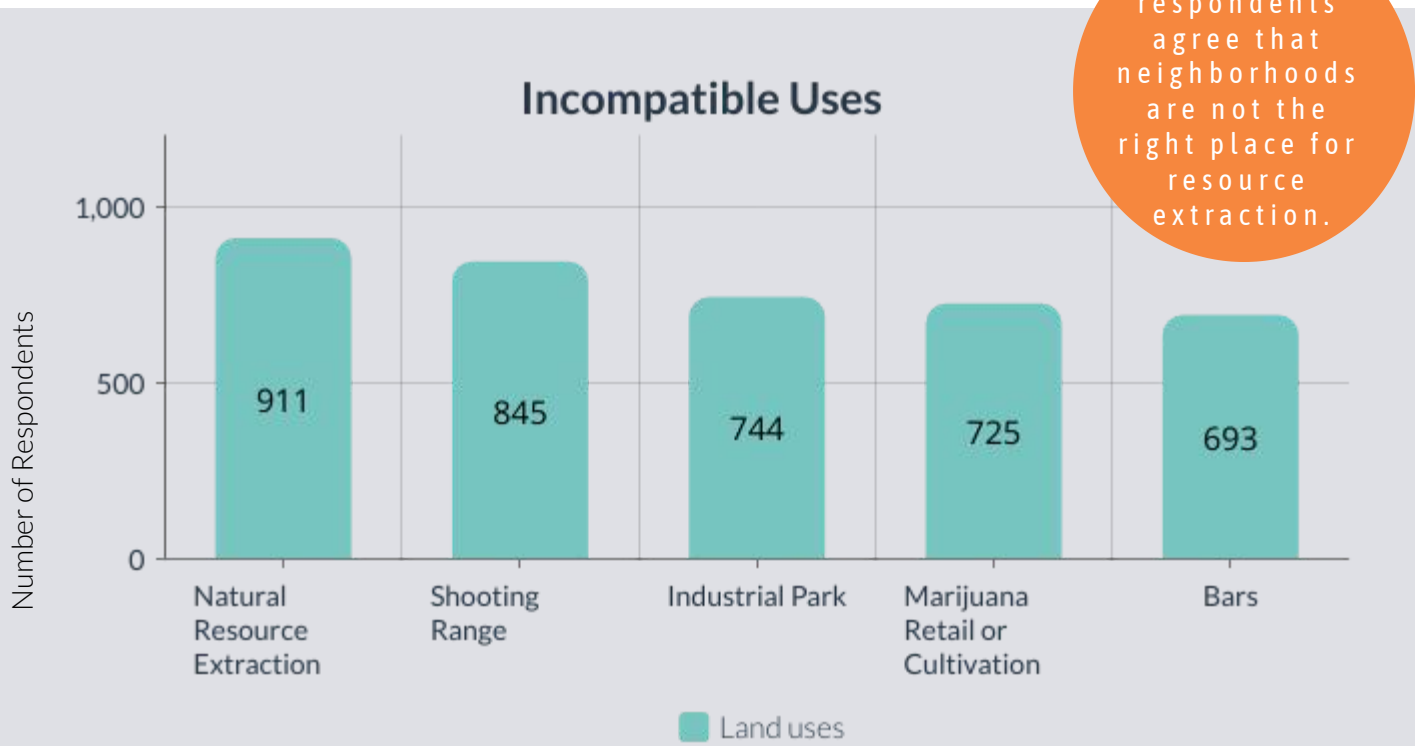


# Neighborhood Land Use - All Responses

Residents were asked to identify businesses they would like to see incentivized near their neighborhoods and what they deem incompatible with neighborhoods. Here's what they said:



508 respondents also answered that they prefer to live in an area where there are little to no services.



66% of respondents agree that neighborhoods are not the right place for resource extraction.

# Neighborhood Character & Land Use: Tanaina/Meadow Lakes

**Communities Included:** Tanaina, Meadow Lakes, North Lakes

**Assembly Districts:** District 7, District 6, District 4

## **Character: Most Valuable**

Quiet and Peaceful  
Low Crime  
Friendly Neighbors

## **Character: Least Valuable**

High Crime Rates  
Junk on Properties  
Low Quality Roads

## **Land Use: Desired Businesses**

Farmers Market  
Prefer Few Services  
Restaurants

## **Land Use: Undesirable Businesses**

Resource Extraction  
Marijuana Facilities  
Shooting Range

# Neighborhood Character & Land Use: Big Lake/Susitna River Valley

**Communities Included:** Big Lake, Houston, Willow, Talkeetna, Caswell Lakes, Trapper Creek, Petersburg, Chase, Y, & Remote Parks Highway

**Assembly Districts:** District 5, District 7

## **Character: Most Valuable**

Quiet and Peaceful  
Friendly Neighbors  
Libraries

## **Character: Least Valuable**

Junk on Properties  
Low Quality Roads  
High Crime Rates

## **Land Use: Desired Businesses**

Farmers Market  
Prefer Few Services  
Healthcare Services

## **Land Use: Undesirable Businesses**

Resource Extraction  
Shooting Range  
Industrial Park



# Neighborhood Character & Land Use: Wasilla

Communities Included: City of Wasilla, South Lakes

Assembly Districts: District 4, District 6

## Character: Most Valuable

Quiet and Peaceful  
Low Crime  
Friendly Neighbors

## Character: Least Valuable

High Traffic  
Low Quality Roads  
Junk on Properties

## Land Use: Desired Businesses

Farmers Market  
Restaurants  
Prefer Few Services

## Land Use: Undesirable Businesses

Resource Extraction  
Shooting Range  
Marijuana Facilities

# Neighborhood Character & Land Use: Knik-Fairview

Communities Included: Knik-Fairview, Point MacKenzie

Assembly Districts: District 5, District 3

## Character: Most Valuable

Quiet and Peaceful  
Friendly Neighbors  
Access to Foods & Goods

## Character: Least Valuable

High Traffic  
High Crime Rates  
Low Quality Roads

## Land Use: Desired Businesses

Farmers Market  
Restaurants  
Prefer Few Services

## Land Use: Undesirable Businesses

Resource Extraction  
Industrial Park  
Marijuana Facilities

# Neighborhood Character & Land Use: Palmer

Communities Included: City of Palmer, Greater Palmer Area, Gateway

Assembly Districts: District 2, District 3

## Character: Most Valuable

Quiet and Peaceful  
Close to Trails  
Low Crime

## Character: Least Valuable

High Traffic  
Low Quality Roads  
Junk on Properties

## Land Use: Desired Businesses

Farmers Market  
Restaurants  
Agriculture

## Land Use: Undesirable Businesses

Resource Extraction  
Shooting Range  
Industrial Park

# Neighborhood Character & Land Use: Fishhook

Communities Included: Palmer-Wasilla Fishhook

Assembly Districts: District 1, District 6

## Character: Most Valuable

Quiet and Peaceful  
Close to Trails  
Low Crime

## Character: Least Valuable

Disconnected Bike & Ped Paths  
Low Quality Roads  
High Traffic

## Land Use: Desired Businesses

Prefer Few Services  
Farmers Markets  
Agriculture

## Land Use: Undesirable Businesses

Resource Extraction  
Industrial Park  
Shooting Range

# Neighborhood Character & Land Use: Knik River Road

Communities Included: South Knik

Assembly Districts: District 1

## Character: Most Valuable

Quiet and Peaceful  
Close to Trails  
Friendly Neighbors

## Character: Least Valuable

Noise  
Junk on Properties  
Other

## Land Use: Desired Businesses

Prefer Few Services  
Agriculture  
Other

## Land Use: Undesirable Businesses

Shooting Range  
Other  
Resource Extraction

# Neighborhood Character & Land Use: Buffalo Soapstone

Communities Included: Buffalo Soapstone, Farm Loop

Assembly Districts: District 1

## Character: Most Valuable

Close to Trails  
Quiet and Peaceful  
Connected Pathways

## Character: Least Valuable

High Crime Rates  
Junk on Properties  
Disconnected Bike & Ped Paths

## Land Use: Desired Businesses

Farmers Markets  
Agriculture  
Prefer Few Services

## Land Use: Undesirable Businesses

Industrial Park  
Resource Extraction  
Shooting Range



# Neighborhood Character & Land Use: Matanuska River Valley

Communities Included: Sutton, Chickaloon, Glacier View

Assembly Districts: District 1, District 7

## Character:

### Most Valuable

Quiet and Peaceful  
Low Traffic  
Friendly Neighbors

## Character:

### Least Valuable

Junk on Properties  
High Crime Rate  
Low Quality Roads

## Land Use:

### Desired Businesses

Prefer Few Services  
Farmers Market  
Grocery Store

## Land Use:

### Undesirable Businesses

Resource Extraction  
Shooting Range  
Industrial Park

These ideas of community character and land use were further discussed in public workshops in the winter of 2023. Staff facilitated nine public workshops, seven throughout the Mat-Su that were held in person, and two virtual meetings. **There was a total of approximately 160 attendees for this round of workshops!** During these workshops, attendees were asked to identify issues they face in their community and solutions they would like to see the MSB prioritize. **They identified 203 issues and 150 solutions.**

Many of the same issues were brought up in these sessions, including struggles with the transportation network, incompatible land uses around neighborhoods, and lack of food options throughout the Borough. The Comprehensive Plan will include a full report on the public involvement process that dives deeper into these issues and solutions.

# Food Security

Survey respondents were asked how they stock their fridges, supply their pantries, and fill their freezers. The answers showed that respondents primarily shop for groceries at regional outlets like Fred Meyer and Carrs and neighborhood stores like Three Bears. However, respondents also access locally sourced fish, game, and foraged foods throughout the year.

When asked how far respondents have to drive to access the staples of their diet, responses varied between 0-3 miles, all the way up to over 20 miles. The term “food desert” has many definitions, but in a rural context, it is most often referred to as an area “where grocery stores are miles apart, accessible primarily by car and not served by public transportation.” 25% of respondents travel 10 miles or more, which could indicate that they live in areas where access to healthy and affordable food is limited.

While the respondents show a strong use of farmers markets and Community Supported Agriculture shares, there is still a lot of work to do to make sure Borough residents have access to healthy food. The most notable statistic comes from a question regarding the use of food banks, where the survey found that 80% of respondents have to rely on food banks to pad their pantry at least once a year, with 43% of responses showing the need a few times a year.



# Food Security Responses

67%

Percentage of respondents who rely on a regional grocery store for their everyday needs.

30%

Percentage of respondents who would like to see the MSB prioritize diversifying the food distribution transportation network within 3 years.

2X

Respondents who have lived in the Mat-Su for over ten years are two times more likely to use emergency food services than respondents who have lived here less than ten years.

## Neighborhood Outlet Visits



- At least once a month 253
- At least once a week 111
- Never 270
- Once a year or less 270

Mat-Su residents rely heavily on their weekly trips to the regional food hubs and supplement their diets with trips to local neighborhood outlets, hunting, fishing, and other means of food gathering. What does this all mean in the context of the Comprehensive Plan update?

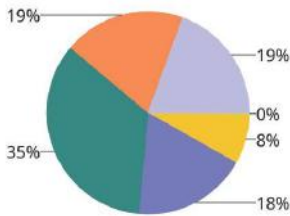
Results from the survey, public workshops, and stakeholder interviews will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan through an implementation framework. Planning staff intend to provide solutions for how the Mat-Su Borough can support a more resilient agriculture economy, including storage and distribution. We will meet with food security stakeholders throughout the planning process to learn what is already being done and where our efforts as a local government make sense. Then, we will include some next steps in the implementation plan.

# Food Security Responses

We asked residents to share where they go to get their groceries. Here's what they said:

## Neighborhood Outlets (Bushes Bunches, European Deli, Asian Market, etc.)

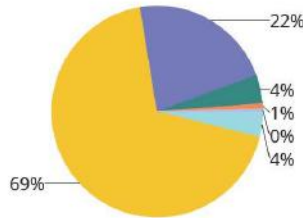
Borough-Wide



- At least daily 3
- At least once a week 111
- At least once a month 253
- A few times a year 482
- Once a year or less 270
- Never 270

## Regional Grocery Stores (Costco, Fred Meyers, Carrs, etc.)

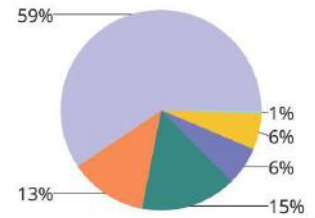
Borough-Wide



- At least daily 54
- At least once a week 952
- At least once a month 305
- A few times a year 61
- Once a year or less 11
- Never 6

## Food Pantry/Emergency Food Resources

Borough-Wide

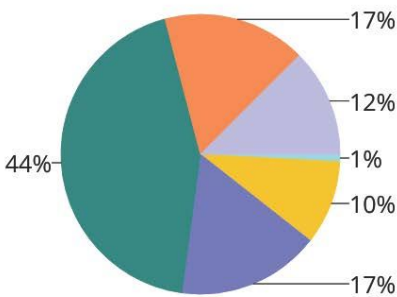


- At least daily 8
- At least once a week 81
- At least once a month 86
- A few times a year 215
- Once a year or less 174
- Never 825

Note: This question was added after the survey was developed. Due to unknown technical difficulties, this question cannot be analyzed by region.

## Farmers Markets

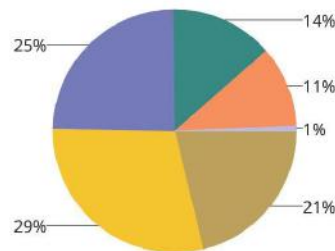
Borough-Wide



- At least daily 12
- At least once a week 135
- At least once a month 230
- A few times a year 608
- Once a year or less 231
- Never 173

## How far do you travel for groceries?

Borough-Wide



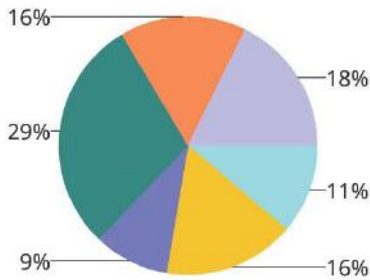
- 0-3 Miles 295
- 4-6 Miles 404
- 7-10 Miles 341
- 10-20 Miles 190
- 20+ Miles 150
- Blank 9



# Food Security Responses

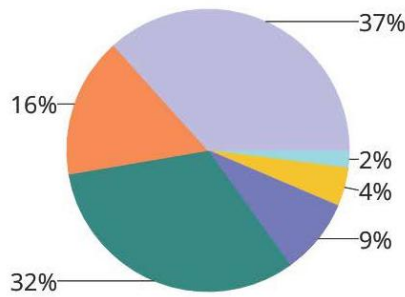
We also asked residents how often they hunt, fish, forage, and garden. Here's what they said:

**Personal Gardening/Canning**  
Borough-Wide



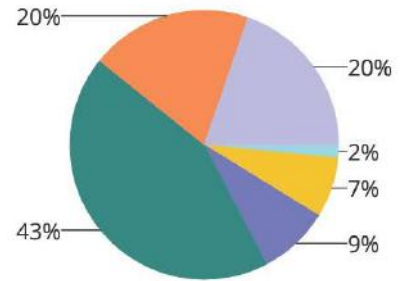
- At least daily 156
- At least once a week 229
- At least once a month 131
- A few times a year 407
- Once a year or less 220
- Never 246

**Foraging**  
Borough-Wide



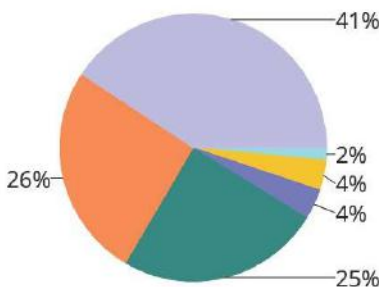
- At least daily 28
- At least once a week 61
- At least once a month 121
- A few times a year 447
- Once a year or less 223
- Never 509

**Fishing**  
Borough-Wide



- At least daily 22
- At least once a week 100
- At least once a month 119
- A few times a year 603
- Once a year or less 271
- Never 274

**Hunting**  
Borough-Wide



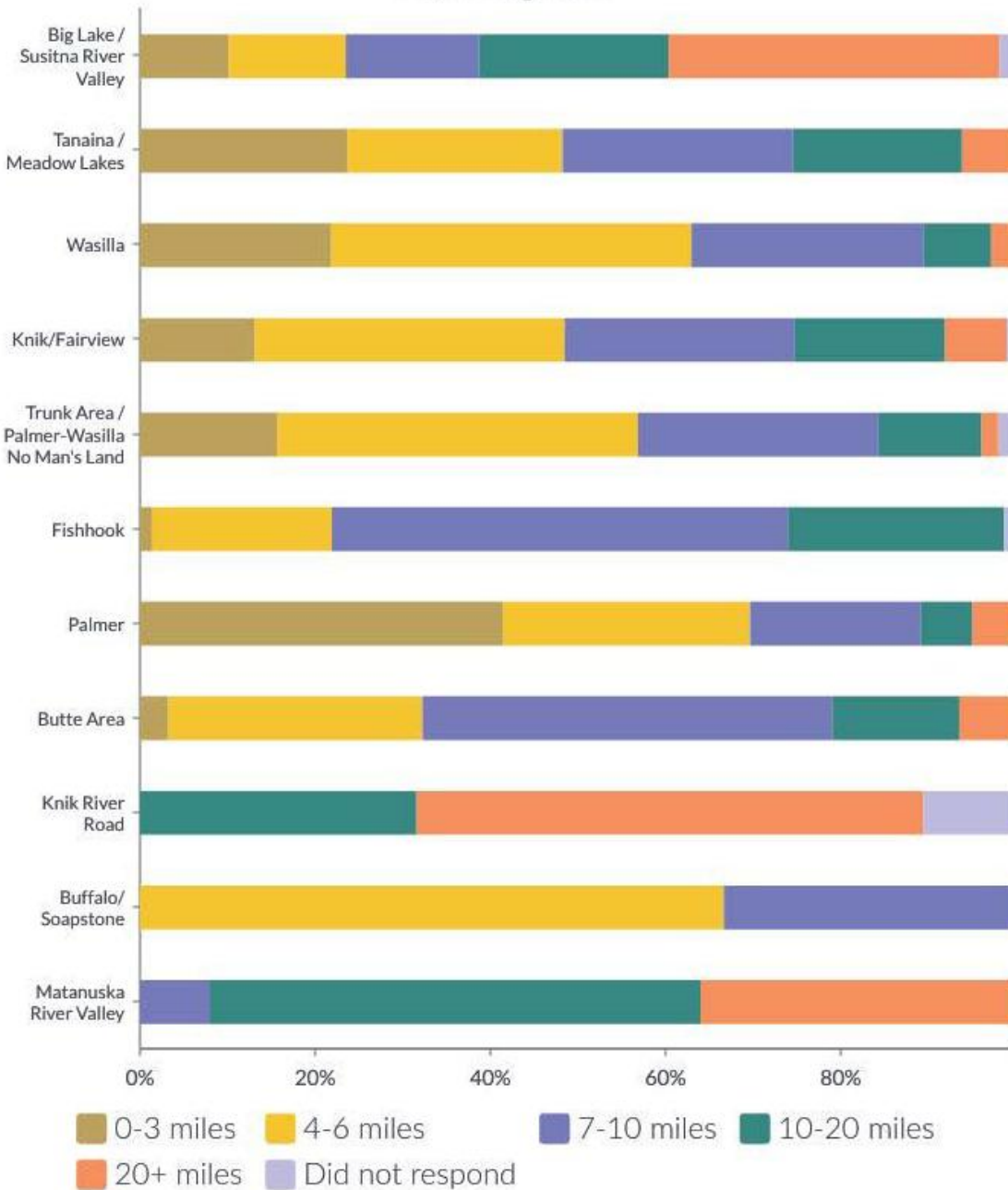
- At least daily 21
- At least once a week 50
- At least once a month 51
- A few times a year 343
- Once a year or less 358
- Never 566



# Food Security Responses

## How far do you travel for groceries?

By Region



Over 40% of residents who live in Big Lake/Susitna River Valley, South Knik River Road, and Matanuska River Valley travel more than 20 miles for groceries.

Residents in more urban areas like Fishhook and Knik-Fairview are still averaging between 4-10 miles for everyday runs to the grocery store.

# Prioritizing Resiliency

In the survey, respondents were asked to consider community resilience, which was described as "Our ability to react to and persevere through natural and manmade disasters such as earthquakes, protecting air/water quality, experiencing an energy shortage, or a break in the food supply chain."

The following pages show how residents borough-wide prioritized the actions and priorities by region. Results show that residents are eager to see their local government invest in resiliency actions, such as investing in agriculture and providing community training for emergency response teams.

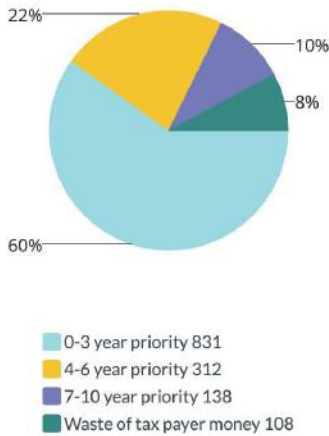




# Prioritizing Resiliency

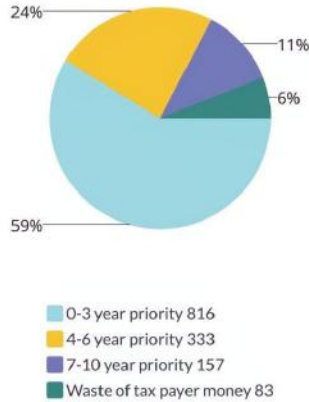
## Tax Incentives for Local Agricultural Businesses

Borough-Wide



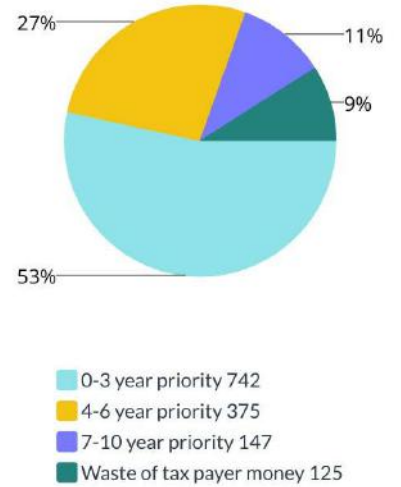
## Establish Community-Based Emergency Response Teams and Training

Borough-Wide



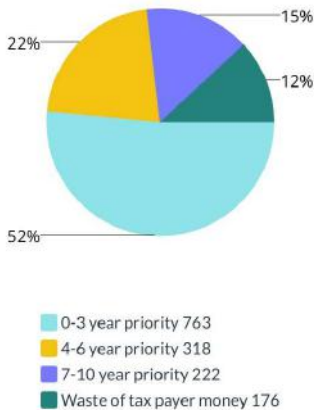
## Diversify and Strengthen Transportation and Food Distribution Networks

Borough-Wide



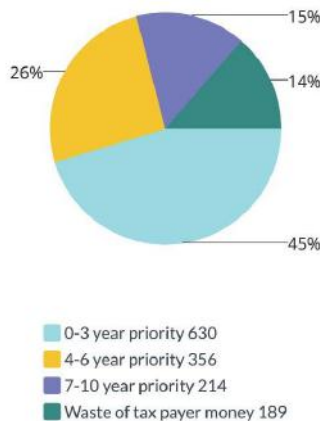
## Establish and Maintain Green Spaces and Natural Buffers to Mitigate the Impact of Environmental Hazards

Borough-Wide



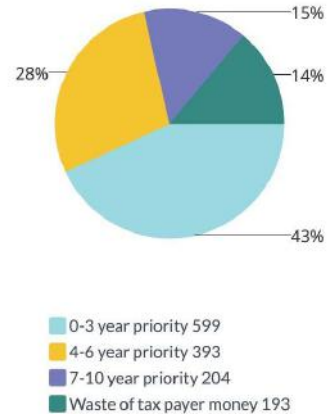
## Improve Development Standards Near Waterbodies

Borough-Wide



## Create Building Development Standards for Wind and Earthquake Resilience

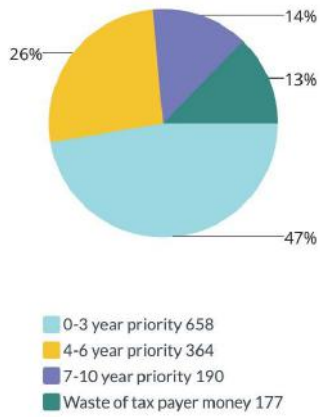
Borough-Wide



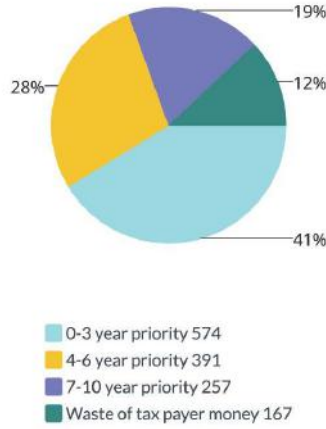


# Prioritizing Resiliency

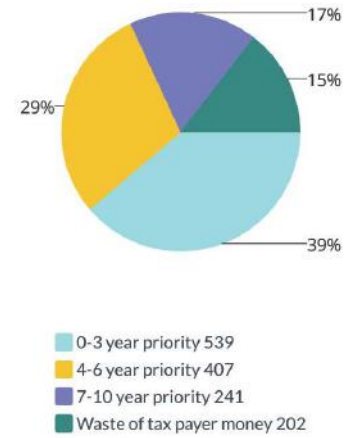
**Improve Telecommunications Infrastructure and Access to Broadband**  
Borough-Wide



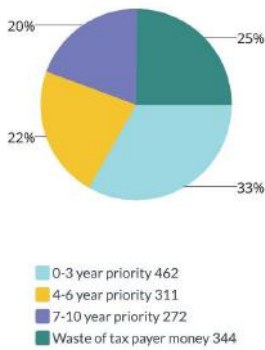
**Create an Implementation Schedule for the MSB Hazard Mitigation Plan**  
Borough-Wide



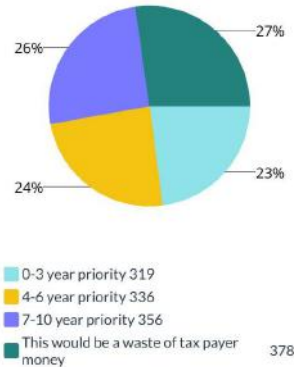
**Build Community Centers for Safe Gathering Spaces in Emergencies**  
Borough-Wide



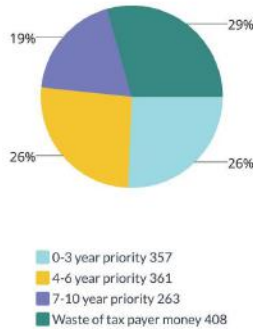
**Develop Renewable Energy Projects on Borough Property**  
Borough-Wide



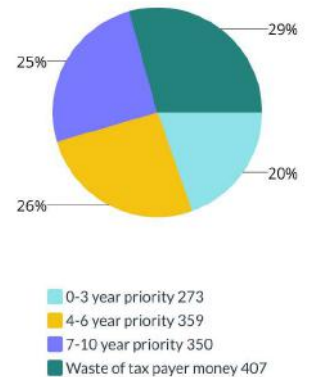
**Invest in Port MacKenzie Infrastructure and Upgrades**  
Borough-Wide



**Tax Incentives for Local Business Development**  
Borough-Wide

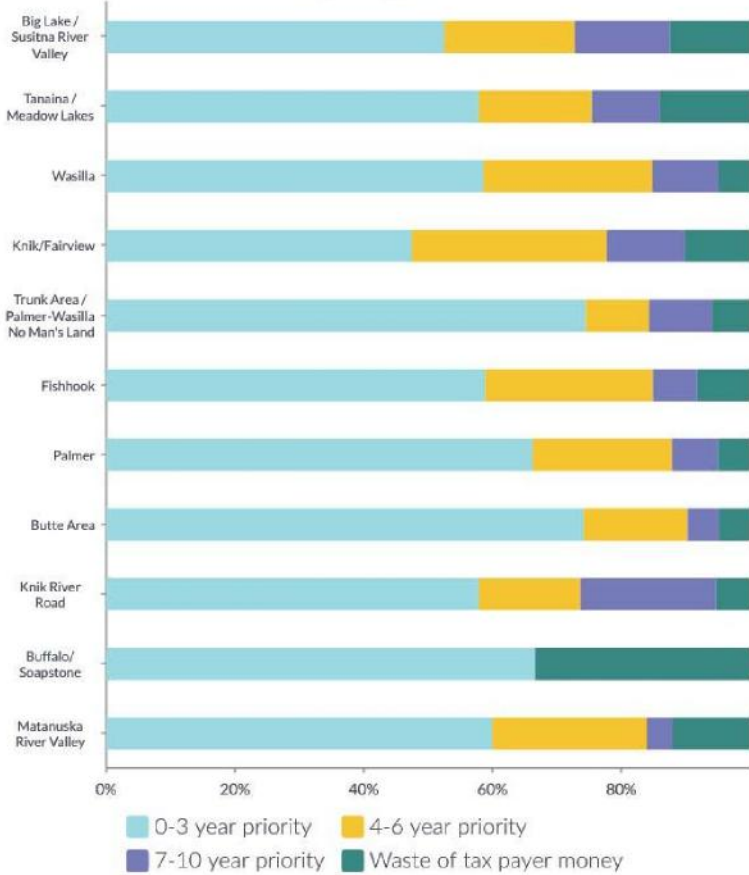


**Promote Energy Programs such as C-PACE**  
Borough-Wide



# Prioritizing Resiliency Economic Development

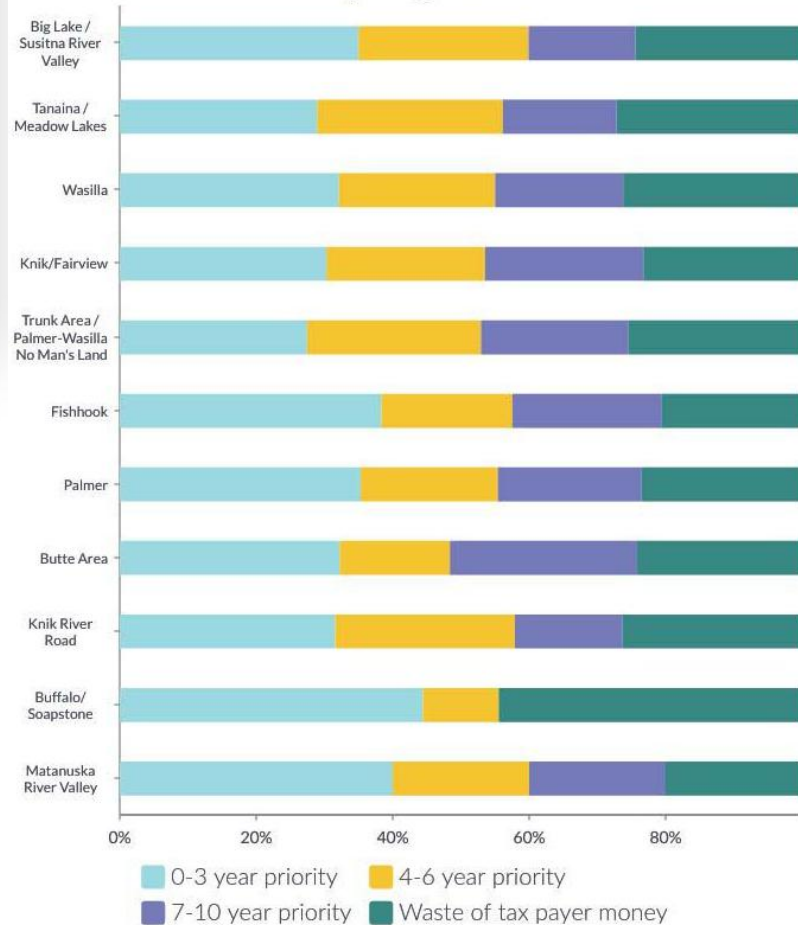
## Tax Incentives for Local Agriculture Businesses By Region



Respondents across the Mat-Su agree that tax incentives for local agricultural businesses should be a top priority for the MSB.

The majority in every region shows support for renewable energy projects as a 0-6 year priority for the MSB.

## Develop Renewable Energy Projects on Borough Property By Region



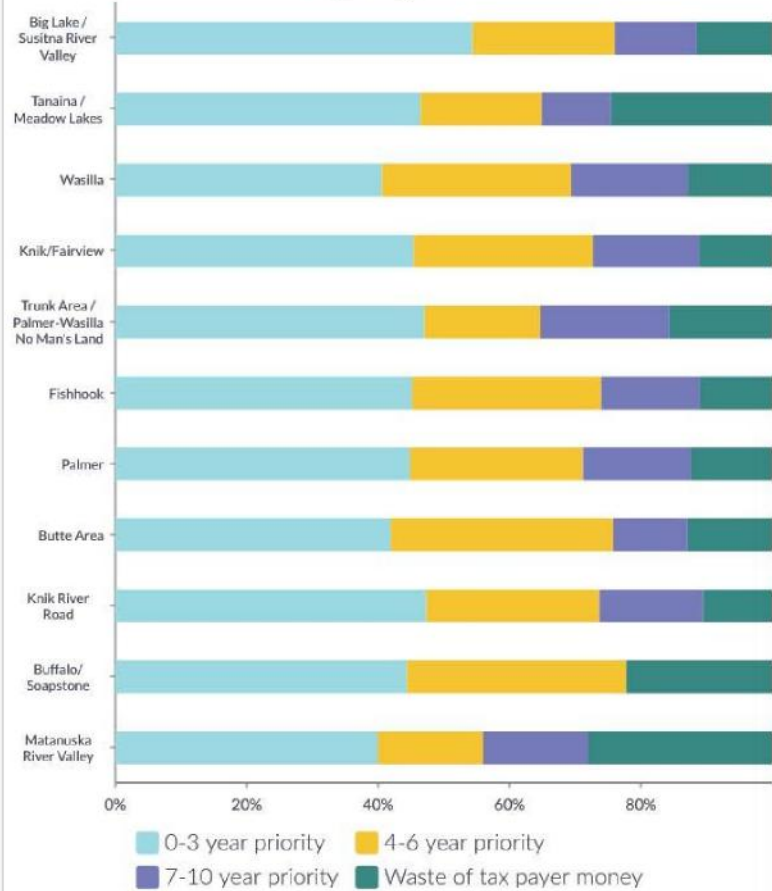
Respondents showed varying support for other economic development themes like providing tax incentives for small business development, supporting the C-PACER program, and investing in Port MacKenzie Infrastructure and Upgrades.

Comments left by respondents highlighted that they would like more information and education on potential resiliency projects.

# Prioritizing Resiliency

Building standards

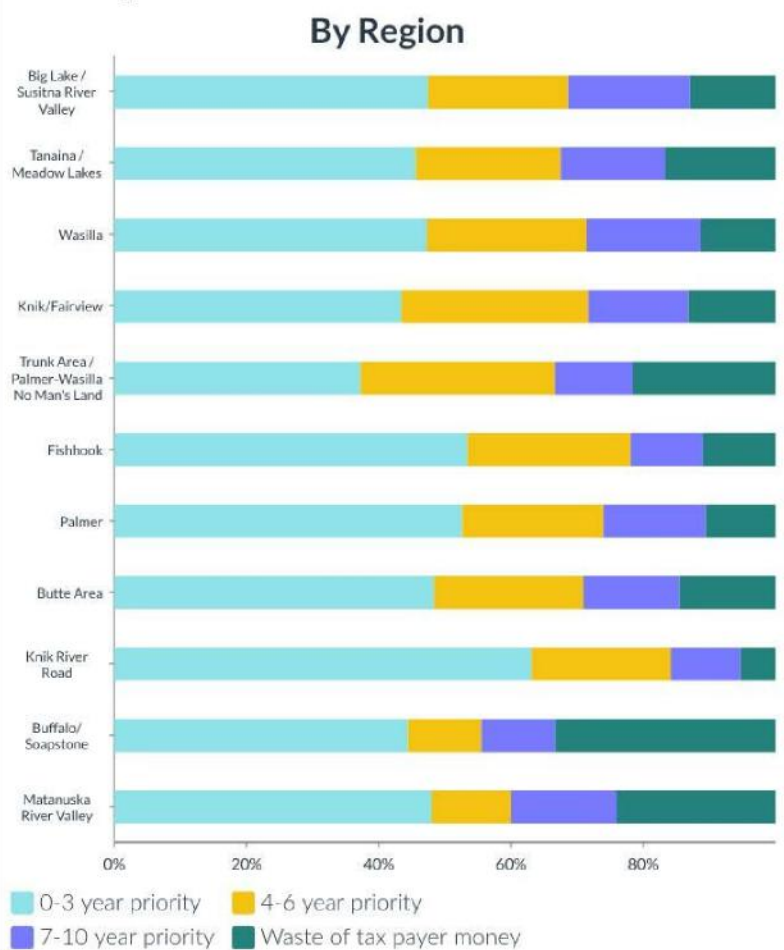
## Improve Development Standards Near Waterbodies By Region



Over 50% in each region agree that prioritizing improving development standards near waterbodies should be a short-term (0-6 year) priority.

Respondents would like to see the use of natural buffers and green spaces incorporated into hazard mitigation practices.

## Establish and Maintain Green Spaces and Natural Buffers to Mitigate the Impact of Environmental Hazards By Region



Residents were also asked to rank developing an implementation plan for the hazard mitigation plan and creating building standards for wind and earthquake resilience.

Respondents in more densely populated areas favored making new building standards a short-term priority, while residents in more remote regions favored building standards as a mid- to long-term project.

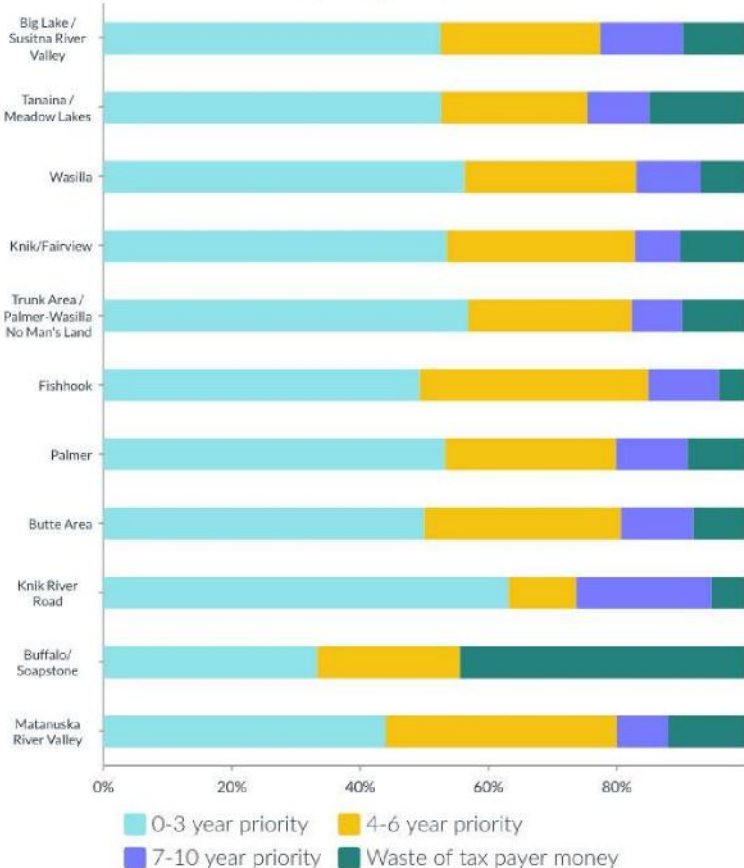
# Prioritizing Resiliency Community Infrastructure

Food distribution and telecommunications are crucial components of resilient communities. Residents agree that these should be short-term priorities for the Mat-Su.

Over 50% in each region agree that prioritizing improving development standards near waterbodies should be a short-term (0-6 year) priority.

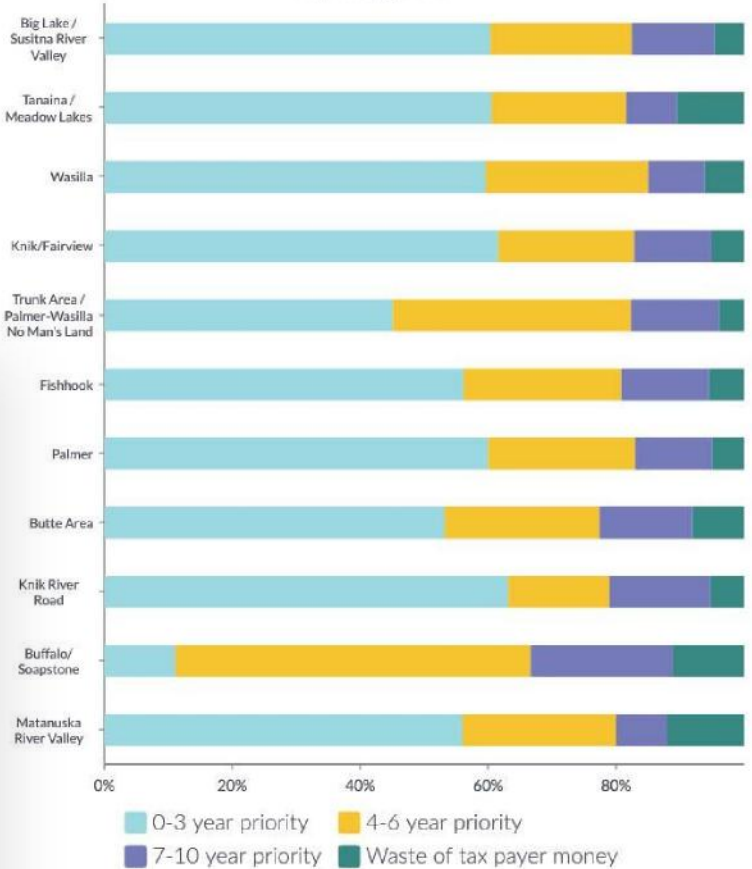
## Diversify and Strengthen Transportation and Food Distribution Networks

By Region



## Establish Community-Based Emergency Response Teams and Training

By Region



Mat-Su residents pride themselves on being self-reliant and always willing to help out a neighbor. The overwhelming support for establishing community-based emergency response training throughout the MSB shows this. Respondents also showed great interest in seeing more community centers around the borough that can act as emergency shelters, youth activity spaces, and senior centers.



# OPEN COMMENTS

The survey offered an open comment box labeled “Parting Thoughts for Planners” It was not a required question, but 668 respondents left their comments! These comments ranged from several words to paragraphs and offered candid details to supplement the overall survey.

Many themes were covered in the comment section. The most referenced theme was transportation infrastructure, including traffic, bike and pedestrian safety, and poor road conditions. Other topics of interest included zoning, parks and recreation, and emergency services. Planning staff reviewed all 668 comments and pulled out eight topics to share in the report that provide greater insight into themes that could significantly impact the Mat-Su Borough.

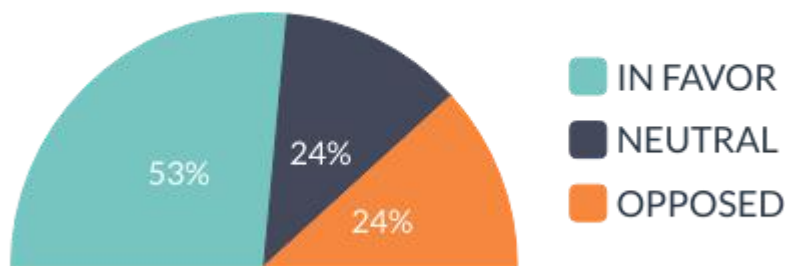
Based on the sentiments shared by respondents, the topics shared in this section are explored through the lens of comments in favor of the borough taking more action on an issue or against the borough taking any action, with quotes from all viewpoints where available.



**48% of respondents left comments on a wide variety of topics including zoning, taxes, transportation needs, community infrastructure, parks, and more!**

# Comments: Port MacKenzie

## Public Comments on Port MacKenzie



### In Favor (9)

"We MUST finish the rail spur to Port Mac. Nothing is more important than that. Port Mac and the railspur will foster economic development in the Mat-Su, providing jobs and infrastructure needed for further growth."

"Port Mac is ESSENTIAL as a secondary port to Anchorage. There has to be an alternative to protect Alaskans in case of an emergency that will reach the MSB and the Interior."

"It should also be a priority to get more ships to use Pt. Mac. That facility is vastly underutilized."

### Neutral (4)

"The borough needs to either fully commit to a project or not do it. The MSB has wasted too much money on projects that they couldn't finish, such as the ferry, the rail spur to Pt. MacKenzie, and pretty much anything associated with the Port."

"Either do something with the Pt. Mac railroad corridor or open it to recreation."

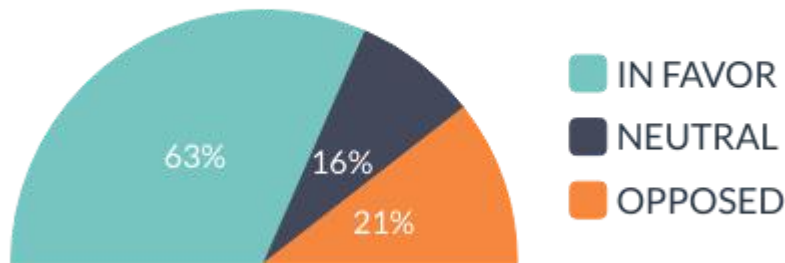
### Opposed (4)

"I think the Port Mac upgrade is a waste of money. I would prefer that our limited Borough funds be spent on fixing the roads that we have, building the community centers that we need, and maintaining the resources that we already have trouble maintaining. Please do not pursue pipe-dream projects that do not benefit your constituents."

"Some things are better left for private companies to do (telecom and Port Mac)."

# Comments: Wasilla Bypass

## Public Comments on Wasilla Bypass



### In Favor (12)

"We need to find a way to route traffic around Wasilla in the very near future. Traveling to and from work/school/grocery store has become an ordeal and is getting quite dangerous."

"Traffic is a huge issue and it would be nice to see road improvements completed such as a bypass around Wasilla."

"I lived in San Antonio Texas for 4 years. It took less time to get from one end of San Antonio to the other, than it does to go from Big Lake to the south side of Wasilla."

### Neutral (3)

"If the Wasilla bypass is really going to happen, development needs to be halted in the areas being considered as it will severely impact neighborhoods with noise, light pollution, and traffic. Why build a nice house on quiet street to have a full size highway to come through your backyard in 10 years?"

"No additional bypasses should be constructed through the valley till all the KGB roadwork is completed and new traffic surveys/counts are taken."

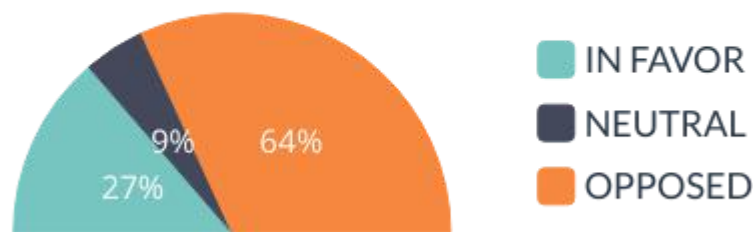
### Opposed (7)

"Previous lack of planning and failure to enforce current regulations have left some areas of the valley in a less than desirable state. I'm also strongly opposed to the State's proposal of spending hundreds of millions of dollars on the Parks Hwy Alternative Corridor."

"Forget the Wasilla bypass. The state is already making a Parks Hwy two on KGB. We don't need anymore high speed traffic through our neighborhoods."

# Comments: West Susitna Access Road

Public Comments on West Susitna Access Road



## In Favor (3)

"West Susitna Access! Get it done!  
The Borough could be more proactive in encouraging the project and promoting the benefits of the West Susitna Access for fishing, hunting, etc."

"MSB is doing very well for those living in Wasilla, Palmer, Houston, and Big Lake. Unfortunately, MSB has more undeveloped areas than developed. MSB has the opportunity to develop its western borders and its deep water port. I am in favor of both developments. Both developments will lead to addition short term expenses but long term revenues and jobs that don't require a degree."

## Neutral (1)

"I have concerns about the impact the West Susitna Access Road will have on Point MacKenzie Road. The road was not improved for the increased traffic from the prison and going forward with the West Susitna Access Road without road improvements and more Troopers on patrol is a bad idea. "

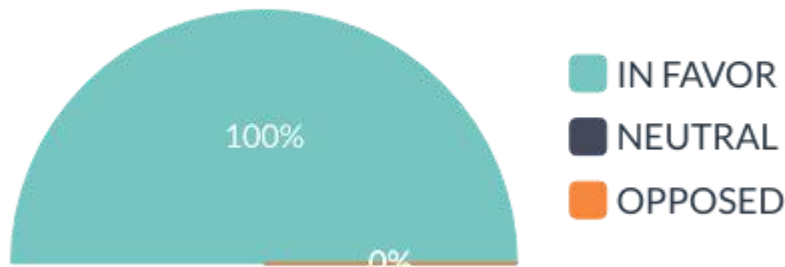
## Opposed (7)

"I think West Susitna Access is a waste of our money."  
"We don't want the West Su Road. We live here for our wild spaces and recreational and hunting opportunities. West Su road will not help us."  
"Fix what is here now. Clean up the Borough. Fix/expand the roads (not the giveaway road project out Point Mac, the roads the residents use). Get schools operating properly. Invest in stable energy and food supply before taking on new projects like green energy..."



# Comments: 75-Foot Waterbody Setbacks

## Public Comments on Waterbody Setbacks



### In Favor (16)

"We need to collectively protect our water and waterways. Enabling smaller gravel pits and reducing lake setback requirements are the wrong approach. We have 111,000 people in the Borough and need to realize 'we all live downstream.' "

"Changing the water setback to 25-feet is absurd. Removing the public boat access to lakes in order to develop private properties is downright shady. And development in salmon spawning grounds should be criminal."

"Residents have concerns about the ability of some self-serving Assembly members to game the system by promoting legislation that threatens water quality, relaxes rules for certain players, creates pollution, disrupts peace, and weakens community bonds in order to line their own pockets."

### Neutral (0)

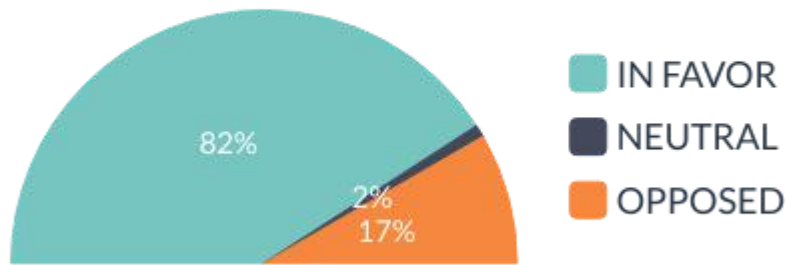
No neutral comments to waterbody setbacks.

### Opposed (0)

No opposing comments to waterbody setbacks.

# Comments: Land Use Regulations & Zoning

## Public Comments on Zoning



### In Favor (103)

"We need real zoning and need to take the power away from developers who are trashing the MSB while walking away with pockets full of cash. Then the residents of the MSB are on the hook to fix their mess."

"We need responsible and enforceable development standards and zoning laws ASAP. The unmanaged and unmitigated sprawl in the MSB is no longer acceptable. Let's all get to work on it."

"Become a 1st Class Borough. Grow enough to help provide more public safety that is enacted by the Borough. ZONING! this Borough needs to grow up and act like it is the fasted growing area in Alaska. Too many people move out here and think they are in the frontier and act like the whole area is the wild west."

### Neutral (1)

"A limit on number of cannabis shops allowed in a specific radius would be a good idea. It's easier to sell cannabis than it is to get a liquor license."

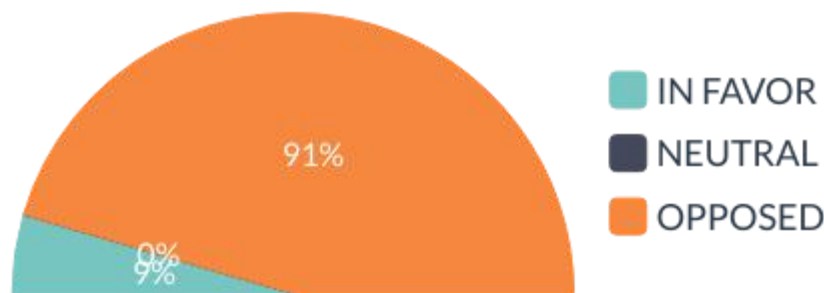
### Opposed (7)

"Please keep the MSB a place of freedom. Don't hem us in with do-gooder legislation to make us more like the Lower 48. I live in a small rural community because I don't want people telling me what to do, how to live, etc. And I'm certainly not going to tell my neighbor what he can do on his own property."

"I do not support restrictive zoning measures."

# Comments: Property Taxes

## Public Comments on Property Taxes



### In Favor (2)

"Quit lowering the mill rate. No one likes taxes, but we desperately need infrastructure to protect and increase quality of life in the borough."

"Families moving here from Anchorage have fueled the MSB's growth, and local business. Instead of reducing the mill rate, we need to invest more in our schools, broadband, roads, and healthy civic infrastructure to support these families and the business development that follows them."

### Neutral (0)

No neutral comments on property taxes.

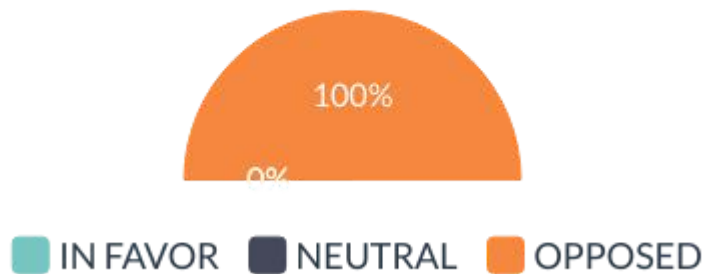
### Opposed (20)

"I would be concerned about any study or program that would cost tax payers money. In these uncertain economic times, we, the tax payers, cannot afford raised taxes."

"Reduce the size of borough government drastically. Cut school administrative budgets by minimum 50%. Stay out of the way and let people thrive. We do NOT need more of anything funded by local taxes, especially since the burden is borne almost solely on the backs of property owners. Just back away and shrink your size."

# Comments: South Knik River Road Noise

## Public Comments on the Knik River Road Noise



### In Favor (0)

No comments in favor of the increased noise in the South Knik River Road community.

### Neutral (0)

No neutral comments on the increased noise in the South Knik River Road community.

### Opposed (20)

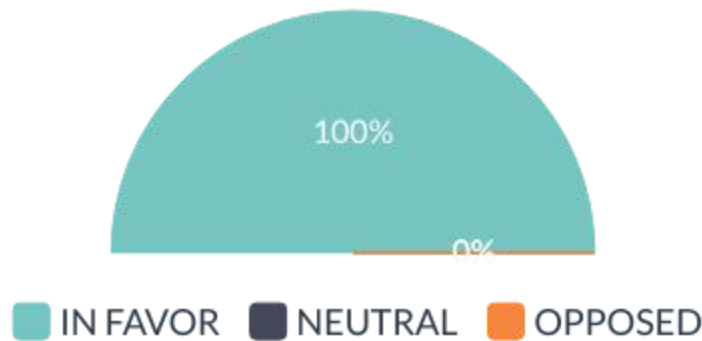
“A law that prohibits the operation of a helicopter company in a residential area needs to be passed. Where I live, the value of my property has significantly decreased due to recent expansion and addition of helicopters.”

“I would also like to see some restrictions for noise in my local living area. It was a peaceful place that I decided to call home 14 years ago. And the business at the end of the road has been allowed to expand aggressively in the last two years.... While tourism supports our economy, there is certainly a balance to be reached.”



# Comments: Water and Sewer Systems

## Public Comments on Water and Sewer Systems



### In Favor (16)

"Proper 50-year plan for infrastructure is 20 years overdue. Build water and wastewater services for populated areas."

"It's time to start developing infrastructure like water and wastewater. And get serious about attracting industry to the Borough.

Far too many people commute to Anchorage for work. We need to incentivize commercial and industrial growth in the Valley."

"Communities need incentives to invest in sewer systems."

"Seems that growth has far exceeded infrastructure e.g. present roads are not keeping up with demand of the population increase, as well as first responders, water, septic, etc."

### Neutral (0)

No neutral comments for Water and Sewer Systems.

### Opposed (0)

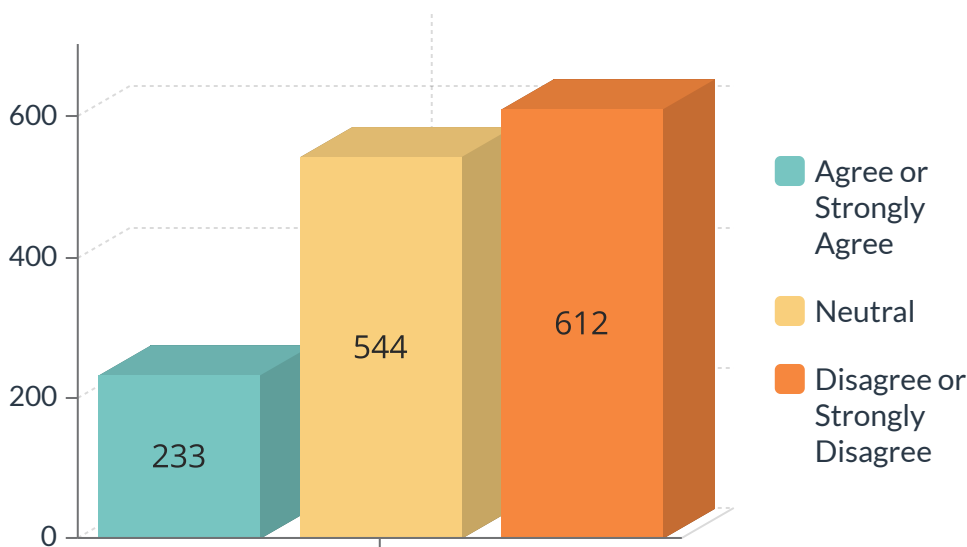
No opposing comments for Water and Sewer Systems.

# Strategic Planning

Finally, we asked residents if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

"The Borough is developing in a way that protects property values, promotes economic development, and delivers high-quality services."

Perception of Development



- 17% of respondents agree or strongly agree
- 39% of respondents are neutral to this statement
- 44% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree

The majority of survey respondents do not believe that the Borough is developing in a way that meets the strategic goals of the Assembly.

# Conclusion

Mat-Su Borough residents share many core values, such as wanting to protect their communities' quiet and peaceful character as the population increases. Respondents provided insight into how they view their communities through the lens of land use, food security, and resiliency planning. They were clear on the types of activities and businesses they want to see incentivized around their communities and which uses they would like to see placed outside their neighborhoods. They also showed many opinions on how the MSB should prioritize varying resiliency efforts.

The Mat-Su Borough is diverse, with approximately 114,000 residents living in thirty distinct communities within its boundary. This requires a dynamic approach to managing land use, promoting economic development, and delivering high-quality services. There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to the issues raised by the public comment found in the survey. All efforts will be taken to understand each community and work closely with residents to develop land use policies that will help each place develop in a way that aligns with their values and ideas for the future. As the MSB goes through the process of updating the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan, staff and leadership have a responsibility to listen to and consider the voices of all residents. Surveys and other outreach efforts like this help the MSB learn more about the values of each community and enhance our ability to make intelligent decisions that consider the long-term vision of each region so the Mat-Su can continue to strive to deliver high-quality services and manage growth in a way that protects the quality of life of all residents.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in this surveying process!



**WE HEAR YOU.**