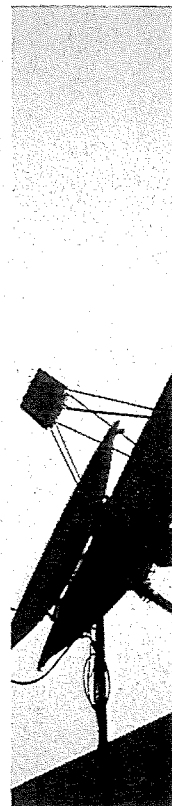


# STUDY GROUP REPORT

QUALITY OF LIFE

COMMONWEALTH NORTH  
JUNE 1997



## COMPASS NORTH II: QUALITY OF LIFE

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## **I. Acknowledgments**

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We also acknowledge and thank the members of the Quality of Life Study Group, who spent many early morning hours meeting throughout the spring and summer, identifying competencies and challenges associated with our community's efforts to improve our quality of life.

## Glossary of Terms

**Quality of Life:** Quality of Life is described as a community's perception whether or not their needs are being satisfied and opportunities presented that allow for achievement of happiness and fulfillment. (Naomi Modeste, DrPh, Dictionary of Health Promotion Terms, etc.) For the purposes of our study, the QUALITY OF LIFE Study Group identified various components that contributed to the quality of life in Anchorage. These components include: working and living in a northern environment, housing, educational opportunities, activities that promote the arts and humanities, economic development, and a comprehensive vision of community development that includes input from diverse segments of our population. These elements are by no means an exhaustive list of all the contributing factors that improve our quality of life, but they are inter-related to each other, and to other topics that are presented in the findings of the other Study Groups in Compass North. Our group recognizes that one traditional element of quality of life, overall health status, has been omitted from our report. We have deliberately chosen to focus on the social indicators listed above, with the understanding that overall community health status will improve when conditions associated with these contributing factors are improved. We argue that individual health status is more of an outcome, than a contributing factor, to quality of life conditions. When we live in a community that offers a diverse economic base, well-educated citizens, and affordable housing for all, our health status will improve, along with our overall quality of life.

APICC: The Anchorage Planning Initiatives Coordinating Committee. This Committee is composed of representatives from community development projects throughout the Municipality, including Commonwealth North, Anchorage Economic Development Council, the Municipality of Anchorage, the Chamber of Commerce, UAA 2000, and the Anchorage Healthy Future Project, sponsored by the Community Health Promotion section of The Municipality of Anchorage, United Way of Anchorage, and Providence Alaska Medical Center. The purpose of this committee is to coordinate outcomes from each process into a single document or process to improve Anchorage's quality of life. APICC takes a broad, long-term view on community development, and includes social, physical, and economic plans in its overall recommendations to the community.

The Municipality of Anchorage: The political unit of governance that includes the City of Anchorage, Eagle River, Chugiak, Girdwood, and points in between. This report often uses the word Anchorage when describing target populations within the Municipality's boundaries. The reader is advised that in all instances, the report is referring to the larger population residing in the Municipality.

## Introduction

Anchorage is Alaska's largest city, both in geographic size and population. With almost all of its growth taking place within the span of three quarters of a century, the similarities between the Municipality and an awkward, gangly adolescent are striking. Like the adolescent, the Municipality is struggling with its identity, and what it wants to be when it grows up. Are we to be the Crossroads of the World, developing our economic ties with Pacific Rim countries and in the global marketplace, or remain the largest city of America's Last Frontier, focusing on political and business links with the Lower 48? Can we continue to plan our communities using a template developed for warmer climates, or do we adapt from architecture exported from other Winter Cities in the international Circumpolar region? Our population continues to grow, but average salaries have dropped, reflecting a shift from higher paying jobs in the oil industry, to those in the service industries, where paychecks are substantially lower. Will we continue to derive our identity from economic developments that are based on natural resources, or develop new areas of opportunity, using new technology? Just who, and what, are we?

The questions are not rhetorical. We are on the brink of a new century, and the increasing availability of relatively inexpensive technology has provided us with new opportunities to develop an economy that is more diverse than that of the past. This study group, along with the others that helped compose the Compass North report, have used the text of Rosabeth Moss Kanter's book, "World Class: Thriving Locally in the Global Economy," (Simon and Schuster, 1995) as a jumping off point for our discussions. A central premise running through Kanter's volume is the need for businesses and communities to work together, not only to develop solid economic infrastructures, but to work as partners in creating a rich and rewarding quality of life for everyone who resides within the

area. Kanter argues, correctly, that one must provide for a community that can compete for the best business initiatives, and for the most qualified workers. For Anchorage to compete as a leader in the global market, we will have to also lead the way in the creation of an area that is home to well-educated citizens, who enjoy a substantially improved quality of life. This report recognizes that the greatest strength of our state, and our community, lies within the citizens of Alaska and Anchorage. Any action that improves our quality of life as a community, will improve our competitive edge in the global community.

### Concepts

This section outlines the methodology that was employed by the Quality of Life Study Group during the course of our weekly meetings, from April to August, 1995.

#### Objectives for Development

The Quality of Life Study Group met over the space of five months in the spring and summer of 1996 to hear presentations concerning Quality of Life issues within the Municipality. As we listened to presentations, and discussed issues of concern with community professionals involved in processes to improve the quality of life, we were guided by several principles. These included:

#### 1. Collaboration between Commonwealth North and other community planning efforts.

Community Planning efforts within the Municipality in the past were often the results of many different processes, and resulted in dissimilar views on where resources should be concentrated. Without a comprehensive plan that included input from all sectors of the community, our Municipality's vision for the future seemed disjointed, at best. One of the first recommendations to emerge from our group was to encourage collaboration and cross-communication between different planning entities. Elsewhere in this report, we are pleased to note that a joint planning group has already been formed, incorporating planners from the Municipality of Anchorage, United Way of Anchorage, the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, and UAA 2000.

#### 2. A focus on Creating an Economic Climate that Encourages the Growth of Diverse Businesses.

As the output from our oil fields continues to decline, we have seen a dramatic change in the types of jobs that offer employment to our population. A shift towards service industry jobs has meant that overall, wages are lower than they have been in the past. Unfortunately, the cost of living has not taken a correlated turn downward. As we continue to work to improve the quality of life within our State and Municipality, we must focus on the development of jobs that supply more than subsistence wages.

#### 3. Serving as Guardians to our Children's Future.

Repeatedly, Study Group members have raised the concern that, in order to receive advanced education in technological fields, many of our children must go Outside. After they have graduated, it is difficult to entice them to return when opportunities in their fields simply do not exist. In addition, children enrolled in our elementary and secondary schools often do not demonstrate competence in basic educational skills, such as reading, mathematics, writing, and the ability to follow directions. If children do not receive a basic education that allows them to participate in our economy, and if they do not receive support for continuing education, then the entire community suffers. We strongly endorse increased efforts to provide all of our children with necessary skills for economic survival in the 21st Century.

4. Concentration of Permanent Fund Investments within State Boundaries. Economic issues are irrefutably linked with Quality of Life indicators. Without economic security, families are reduced to poverty, public education suffers, and existing businesses flee to areas that offer more to their employees. While many promising initiatives to develop new businesses have been discussed locally, we see no material investment in our economy by the Permanent Fund's Board of Directors. We support the reinvestment of 1-2% of the PF revenues annually, on state business initiatives.

The recommendations offered here should be viewed as suggestions to reach the goals for future developments that have been identified by our group and other community processes. We do not represent this report as being THE comprehensive guide to community planning. Rather, our recommendations, when taken as a whole with other guidelines from Compass North study groups and other community plans, can offer a valuable and comprehensive overview of our community's vision for the future.

#### Our Vision for the Next Century

The Quality of Life Study Group has identified many elements that make a community a desirable place in which to live. Some of these elements are already in place. We call for continued support for those elements, and for continued community dialogue that stresses the need for continued development of other elements that can enhance our community's way of life.

#### Anchorage 2016

In the 20 years since our Quality of Life Study Group met, our Municipality has undergone tremendous change. Our housing and business structures reflect the natural beauty of the Northern climate that surrounds us. We live in areas that have visual elements creating a sense of community. Our streets are plowed in the winter, and our transportation system has expanded to include roadways and mass transit plans that truly meet the needs of our communities. Our grandchildren are well-educated and secure in the knowledge that our expanding economic growth will provide them with many job choices, as they have the necessary skills to enhance local businesses. Our citizens are active

participants in local and state governance- we serve on organized planning processes, and we view our government officials as partners in promoting quality of life throughout the community. Tourists marvel at our clean streets, our beautiful parks, and on the safety of our neighborhoods. We have wonderful opportunities throughout the week to participate in culturally enriching activities. Volunteers of all ages recognize that their individual efforts combine to create a great community. Families remain the basic unit of strength in Anchorage: Home ownership is nearly universal, children are safe and loved, and recreational activities are offered year long.

### How We Developed Our Vision

The elements that contribute to our vision were identified throughout the spring and summer of 1996 by Commonwealth North members who participated in our Study Group. This group was one of four study groups in the Compass North II Project charged with identifying promising initiatives for Anchorage, or the State of Alaska as a whole. Compass North's overall plan covers recommendations for development in four areas, including economic development, governance and political processes, education, and quality of life issues. At the kickoff meeting, all groups met and discussed the many issues that surrounded each group's topic. The elements incorporated into our vision were first voiced at this meeting. As each group met in separate sessions throughout a five month period, our Study Group quickly decided that it would be impossible to identify and discuss every possible element that contributed to an area's quality of life. Our mission statement, as developed by the group, read: "To enhance the growth of Anchorage as a healthy, clean, safe and culturally rich place in which to live." To identify each contributor to each element in our mission statement was clearly impossible, given our timeline. We agreed, however, that it was possible for us to look at general areas that affected our community's quality of life. With that in mind, we selected four general categories to investigate. Unsurprisingly, these topics reflected the choices made by the Commonwealth North Board-a.) education, b.) economic development, c.) governance issues, and d.) quality of life. Under the latter category, we discussed e.) elements that contributed to quality of life, including housing issues, the arts and humanities, and philanthropy in Anchorage. (Please see the list of speakers and topics in Appendix A.) As the summer waned, we met as a group to review findings from each presentation, and to make specific recommendations for each general area. The remainder of this report will list and describe these recommendations, and outline future opportunities for the residents of our Municipality.

### Competencies for a New Era

In any discussion of future opportunities, we would be well advised to begin with an understanding of our competencies. These competencies are the local "gifts" that allow us to operate at the highest standards of any place anywhere, according to Kanter. This section will review the many competencies that play a part in contributing to Anchorage's quality of life.

### Regional Strengths: An overview of Alaska's Quality of Life

The 49th State has always been viewed as a wild, rugged land full of natural resources, ripe for development. This view has not only been espoused by wishful thinkers and opportunists from Outside, but has been incorporated, more or less wholesale, into the mythology that's promoted within our boundaries. Our license plates proudly proclaim that we are "America's Last Frontier" and our bumper stickers tell people, "We don't care how they do it Outside" Our natural resources have undoubtedly contributed to our economic development as a territory and State, but we are also rich in human resources. Our statewide population, numbering some 616,000, continues to grow. Future population growth projections for our state are at 20%+ this decade. (1996 Anchorage Indicators)

A youthful population leaves us well placed to develop new industries that are based on technological advances, as it is this age group that will have the best training in this area. Anchorage's demographic trends also indicate continued or increased impetus for growth in businesses involved in housing, day care, and schools, especially for elementary and secondary grades. Continued population growth in general indicates that there will be continued demand for housing construction and renovation, service industries that offer food, fuel, and clothing, and for industries that serve the transportation and financial needs of our communities. We will undoubtedly see new demands on local and state governments to provide for more accessible roads and parks, and to streamline permitting processes so that growth in needed areas can take place more quickly. As our state grows, we should expect a continued demand on our ability to supply power to outlying areas, to provide adequate health care for our populace, and to protect ecosystems through responsible development. While growth is usually viewed as a positive change, we must recognize that current trends toward environmental protectionism also leave the State vulnerable to charges of exploitation, if natural resources are not developed in a sustainable manner. In sum, while the sustained growth of the population in our State, combined with the abundance of natural resources, leaves us in comfortable position to plan for the future, this same growth will also bring with it new problems and pressures.

As third and fourth generation Anchorage family members take their places in our community's infrastructure, we can expect more consensus on what it means to be a part of Anchorage. Some values that we already share, as gleaned from the statistics presented in the 1996 Anchorage Indicators (Municipality of Anchorage, March, 1996) are:

Participation in local labor forces. Some 87% of Anchorage's population ages 16 and older, are employed, compared to 65% of the US population.

Support of small businesses. Interestingly, while government wages form the single largest payroll category in the Municipality, small businesses employ



more than half of all Anchorage workers. In fact, our small business employment patterns almost exactly mirror the US patterns

Continued investment in the "American Dream". Although the average price of a home is now around \$150,000, we still aspire to house our families in single unit dwellings. After the slump in the mid-eighties, housing units sold remains steady in the 3000- 4000 range annually this decade. Almost half of the population lives in single family homes, although the number of lots suitable for building such units has decreased significantly.

Education. The average high school graduation rate in Anchorage for all races is 90% of adults ages 25 and older. The US rate for the same group is just 78%.

Mobility. In 1990, almost 72% of all commuters drove alone to their workplaces. Only 6% of the households in Anchorage lack a vehicle, as compared to 10% of the US. 40,000 people in Anchorage owned cellular phones last year.

Household amenities. Of the 65,000 subscribers to cable television statewide, all but 4000 of them are in the Anchorage area. There are 23 radio stations in Anchorage, over two-thirds of all households have computers in them, and 45% of adults in Anchorage reported ordering goods from catalogues in 1994.

The extras that city life provides. The Municipality's neighborhoods are blessed with an elaborate system of trails that offer access to runners, walkers, and cyclists in the summer, and provide 133 kilometers of ski trails in the winter.

Organized sports offered throughout the year include softball, baseball, soccer, hockey, volleyball, and swimming. There are a half-dozen health clubs, and five hospitals are housed in the Anchorage Bowl. While expensive, day care is usually fairly easy to find. Unlike other communities in Alaska, travel destinations are easily reached, and don't require expensive "hops" to a hub airport.

#### Creating New Opportunities: Analysis of Local Quality of Life Indicator Trends

As we examine the current status of our regional and local quality of life indicators, we can assume that several trends will continue to hold true for residents in the future. First and foremost, the dogged Alaskan resistance to doing it any way but our own will continue to drive us as we develop new ways of interacting nationally and internationally. We can capitalize on this Alaskan characteristic by promoting the natural beauty that our state offers, and its unique populace, but we should not be surprised if continued population growth results in pressures to copy what's been done in the Lower 48. We already know that buildings and services that make perfect sense in warmer climes do not work in our sub Arctic region; but we cannot replace this mentality until we have developed a comprehensive, community-owned vision of what we want to be.

Although the country as a whole is aging, Alaska, and Anchorage, continue to experience greater than normal birth rates. Continued pressure on our school systems will result in an increased need for building maintenance. If bonds must be raised to cover these expenses, then the community will ask for greater control over the kinds of repairs or construction that are being proposed.

Moreover, the quality of the education that our children receive will come under more scrutiny by members of the public.

Our belief in private enterprise shows no signs of slowing down. Due to transportation costs to the Lower 48, and the ease with which international communications are now made, the state and Anchorage have already established trade links with countries on the Pacific Rim. Ties with northern communities in the Circumpolar region continue to expand- local scientists and health care providers from Anchorage serve on several committees of the Circumpolar Health Institute, and collaborate on a regular basis with peers from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Greenland and Canada. The economic and cultural ties we share with communities in the Soviet Union continue to grow.

International links also will strengthen with Central and South America, especially for Anchorage residents, as the fastest growing ethnic group in the area are Hispanics.

The recommendations made by this Study Group, and by other community planning processes, are intended to capitalize on the trends listed above, and prompt further discussion.

#### Challenges To Anchorage's Quality of Life

While the development of future events affecting our quality of life are largely conjectural, we can begin to plan for improvements in this area today. We will always need a comprehensive, community-owned plan for our continued growth and development, and we will always need a well-educated workforce. These needs, and others that remain consistent in any future scenario, are detailed in this section.

##### A. Community Planning on a Grand Scale

No community can continue with unchecked growth for long, before its quality of life begins to suffer. Witness the slums that coexist with thriving industries in Sao Paulo, Brazil, or Cairo, Egypt. Anchorage has long needed a comprehensive set of plans that address every aspect of community life: our transportation systems, our parks and recreational areas, economic growth and enhancement of the social development of our residents. This subsection briefly describes three community planning efforts, reports the challenges that each has identified as affecting our area's quality of life, and illustrates the linkages each has with these other processes.

Anchorage Healthy Future Project: Dennis McMillian, United Way of Anchorage. In his presentation to the Quality of Life Study Group, COMMONWEALTH NORTH member Dennis McMillian described a community collaboration that focuses on improving the quality of life throughout Anchorage. This Project involves the planning efforts of over 400 individuals, representing governmental and non-profit agencies involved in health and human services, neighborhood associations, local businesses and private citizens. The Project has targeted six areas in which to direct its efforts, including:  
local economic development,  
life long learning for all residents,

healthy family life,  
citizen participation in the democratic process,  
cleaner environments,  
and health and safety issues.

This report supports these areas as presenting challenges, and agrees that improvements in each area will have an indelible effect on our area's quality of life. The Study Group's own recommendations in many of these areas will be detailed in Section VI.

Comprehensive Plan: Sheila Selkregg, Ph.D., Planning Officer, Municipality of Anchorage.

Dr. Selkregg discussed the components of the Planning Office's Comprehensive Plan, which will offer a detailed set of proposed projects covering every aspect of the government's future activities within the Municipality, including new road and trail construction. The plan will be written in the next three years, and is to include a social component as well. Dr. Selkregg stated that one of her hopes for this plan was the development of community identifiers- plants, banners, or architecture that distinguished one neighborhood from another. "If I placed a blindfold on you, and then dropped you in the back yard of any home in Anchorage, you'd be hard pressed to know where, exactly, you were," commented Dr. Selkregg. "We need more sense of place here. Our suburbs all look the same, our streets all look the same, and there's no recognition that Airport Heights is any different from Turnagain, or Bayshore." Study Group members have voiced support for Dr. Selkregg's efforts to rewrite a comprehensive plan for municipal development.

#### APICC: A Community Collaboration

As a result of the interest of this Study Group, and other community development groups, Commonwealth North took a leadership role in the formation of the Anchorage Planning Initiatives Coordinating Council, (APICC.) APICC membership is composed of representatives from Commonwealth North, Anchorage Healthy Future Project, the Anchorage Economic Development Council, the Chamber of Commerce, UAA 2000, and the Municipality of Anchorage's Department of Health and Human Services and Planning Office. Meetings have been ongoing since spring of 1995, and common use agreements have been made between all parties, to facilitate free use of each groups findings in other reports. It is expected that a protocol will be developed to incorporate all parties recommendations into one document, to serve as a guide for community development throughout the area. APICC is just the first achievement that can be cited by members of COMMONWEALTH NORTH, as we call for increased collaboration by community developers. However, challenges to shared community leadership in this area continue to exist. Chief among them is the general lack of knowledge of the specifics of each planning process, and in the goals and objectives of the combined APICC group. This

lack of awareness is an issue that must be corrected, if the residents of Anchorage are to achieve a higher quality of life in the next century.

### Winter City, Year Round Concerns: Environmental Challenges

Residents of the Anchorage bowl have long complained of ice-encrusted architecture, inaccessible trails and walkways, and unsafe buildings. While our buildings often concern us, our land use patterns have come under increasing scrutiny, as well. Our Municipality covers more than a million acres of land, 83% of which is unpopulated. How much of this unpopulated land are we able, and willing, to develop, given our population growth trends? And how can we continue to support the growth of businesses, without damaging the natural resources around us? One wag recently wrote the local newspaper to comment to the effect, "I couldn't wait to get here, but now that I am, let's close the gates." (Anchorage Daily News, Letters to the Editor, June, 1996.)

We must accept that much of our past economic growth has been based on the marketing of natural resources from other areas in Alaska. As oil output diminishes in some fields, we recognize the challenge that we all face: Do we continue to base our efforts around one natural resource, expand our economy to develop other natural resources, or promote a major economic shift to other industries, especially those involving tourism, and technology? The continued struggle to balance the needs of a growing population against the need to preserve fragile ecosystems throughout the state will continue to be a challenge well into the next century. This section provides a brief overview of the group's findings, as we discussed the issues presented in each session.

Living in Balance with Nature: Cheryl Richardson, The Alaska Center for the Environment.

COMMONWEALTH NORTH member Cheryl Richardson gave a comprehensive overview of current environmental challenges facing the residents of the Anchorage Bowl. Among them are:

Unhealthy air quality. In some Anchorage neighborhoods, dust, diesel soot, and benzene have reached dangerous levels.

Over-reliance on automobiles as our chief form of transportation has contributed to environmental pollution. Cars emit carbon monoxide, a dangerous chemical compound that is associated with respiratory diseases and premature death.

Controversy over the Long Range Transportation Plan continues. An interim plan developed in 1991 calls for road projects in many family neighborhoods in the Municipality. Although much citizen protest has been noted, what will happen to the Transportation component is still uncertain.

Plans for transportation will be developed by the City Planning Office within three years.

Ms. Richards' organization has called for AMATS reform, further trail developments, and full funding for the study of transit options and air quality programs.

2. Building a Winter City: Allan Kemplen, Fairview Community Council.

This much is irrefutable: we live in a sub-Arctic region. Anchorage receives an average of 69.3 inches of snow each year. While that may seem like a paltry

average to residents of Valdez, it is a considerably greater amount than Minneapolis' (49.8) or Great Falls, Montana's (59.2) average snowfalls. While individual residents of Anchorage may take pride in their ability to survive our harsh winter months, often stretching from September well into April, it is clear that many of our buildings were designed for warmer climates. In his presentation of Design Techniques for Winter Cities, Fairview Community Council President Allen Kemplen identified ways that other cold-weather cities have embraced winter life styles: public heating stands in parks and pedestrian areas, smaller roads that are more easily cleared, road and sidewalk defrosting systems, ice sculptures, and plenty of recreational areas for winter sports. While the idea of incorporating winter city design schemes is increasingly gaining popularity, some challenges face us.

Single family homes remain the most popular form of housing in Anchorage. This does not allow for the more densely located housing developments of other Arctic cities.

Winter cities often rely on mass transportation, and narrower roads, to lessen the impact of frequent snowfalls. Anchorage, on the other hand, is reliant on private automobiles, and our far-flung road system means that often, residential streets are not plowed until three days following substantial snow fall.

Winter cities, especially in European sub-Arctic regions, often are the result of rigorous code enforcement. Whether Anchorage residents will cede some of their own exterior design ideas, including junk automobiles and home-made fish smokers, to those of the local government's, remains to be seen. It is fairly safe to assume that changes in codes that call for greater proximity to neighbors, may go against the long-cherished Alaskan value of "doing one's own thing".

#### Political Realities: Governance and Economic Issues

Group discussion, suggestion, and action form the essence of participation in the democratic process. How do we encourage this participation from all parties involved in local governance? How can local initiatives foster a climate where economic growth results in an improved quality of life for all residents? The challenges that are reported in this section grew out of our group's frequent discussions on the topics of governance and economic growth. Each subsection addresses a separate, but related issue, and each issue has a lasting impact on our community's quality of life.

#### Who Influences Whom? Group Discussions

Because of our size, and the development of international air and sea hubs, Anchorage leads the state in business development. Because of our population, we also could lay claim to potential political power within the State's Legislature. Unfortunately, our business, educational, and political ties are often with communities in the Lower 48. The perception, often self-inflicted, that Anchorage is somehow not related to the rest of the state, affects our ability to act as a cohesive unit to improve our quality of life. How can we best capitalize on our competency as a leader within our state? This question continued to rise

throughout the group's discussion. We recognize that many challenges are facing us, including:

Limited resources throughout the state.

Mistrust between communities.

A perception that our resources are limited, and that only communities closest to these resources should be allowed to develop them.

2. Creating a Business-Friendly Climate: Patty DeMarco, Anchorage Economic Development Council.

COMMONWEALTH NORTH member Patty DeMarco presented findings from the AEDC survey and Compass North's Economic Development Study Group. As detailed in a separate report in this document, the Economic Development Study Group has found many resources within our area that can promote future economic growth. Both surveys agree that many local assets contribute to our quality of life, including our young population, a skilled military presence, and the physical beauty of the land surrounding us. Challenges that impede economic developments include:

Our inability to clearly track revenues and expenses of companies based Outside, including the seafood and tourism industries. Without realistic data, it is difficult to assess the impact that out-of-state businesses have on our local economy.

Lack of Statewide progress in defining the role of an "Owner State." The State has an inherent interest in the well-being and proper development of our natural resources, and should assert itself when these assets are not being properly cared for. Whether this "should" will translate into a recognized policy remains problematic. The group suggests that if we fail to protect our local resources, it is inevitable that someone else will exploit them.

3. Building a Solid Economic Infrastructure:

While we gratefully delegated the task of identifying new business initiatives to the Economic Development group, Commonwealth North's Quality of Life Study Group has endorsed policy changes that can promote those initiatives. These include local reinvestment by a portion of Permanent Fund revenues, not only in the Anchorage bowl, but throughout the state. Through wise local reinvestment, the Fund will in effect develop an equity investment that not only raises the economic growth rate of local businesses, but also raises the quality of life throughout the state. While such an investment strategy may provoke comment from members of the Fund's Board, the Study Group finds that it is unwise, both politically and in financial terms, to allow other states the benefit of flow-through Fund money, while Alaska does not. The group also encourages discussion on the impact of a personal or sales tax, if such were to be established within the Municipality. We raise these issues, in part, because of current and future challenges that we face. These include:

Inadequate financial investments in our community by regional corporations, including the Permanent Fund.

Inadequate financial support for our community's infrastructure by its residents.

A growing population. If our citizens in the Year 2016 cannot find jobs that provide more than subsistence wages, our entire community will suffer. The growing disparity, nationally, between the "haves," and the "have-nots." Without a substantial middle-class, we risk Anchorage becoming another divided political region, with the rich living in neighborhoods outside city boundaries, (and in lower property tax areas,) while the urban poor remain concentrated in downtown and midtown areas.

Fragmentation and separation of the Municipality's boundaries. We have already had a preview of the potential "Balkanization" of Anchorage with a call for Eagle River residents to consider a proposal to form their own city government during the first part of 1996. How strongly can the Municipality resist the urge to allow communities to go their separate ways, without a comprehensive vision of economic and social security to offer us all? The continued fragmentation of resources and community services leads to fragmented neighborhoods. We note the angry reaction of the Eagle River and Hillside neighborhoods in the past years to what is perceived as heavy-handed interference by local government. We must realize that we cannot impose a sense of belonging to a larger Anchorage on any particular area, if we are not willing, as a larger community, to listen and to respond to the smaller neighborhood concerns.

Everyday Living: Challenges Meeting Basic Quality of Life Needs

We live where we do, because of choices that were made many years ago. If we were brought here by the military, it is because somebody long ago recognized the strategic importance of a military presence in Anchorage. If we are here because of oil, we are here because our jobs pay well, and allow us to have a better quality of life than can be achieved elsewhere. And, if we are here because this is where our family comes from, we are here because, a century, or a millennia ago, somebody's grandparents decided to take a chance that life would be better here. For many long-time residents of Anchorage, life has indeed proceeded in a satisfactory manner. As a whole, we tend to enjoy the highest standard of living within the State. However, current trends may well cause a downward shift in overall quality of life if they continue unchallenged.

These include :

A shift from higher paying jobs in the oil industry, to lower wages offered by service industries, including grocery stores and discount "marts."

An education system that may not prepare our children to compete in a world increasingly dominated by technology and advanced degrees.

A lack of community investment in the areas of arts and humanities.

A lack of community volunteerism in improving our quality of life.

In this subsection, we'll examine the impact of these trends on home ownership, community support for cultural offerings, and community philanthropy.

Housing and Work: Cynthia Parker, Anchorage Neighborhood Mutual Housing, and Mitzi Barker, Anchorage Housing Finance Corporation.

COMMONWEALTH NORTH board member Cynthia Parker, co-facilitator of the QUALITY OF LIFE Study Group, and her colleague, Mitzi Barker, presented the

Study Group with information describing the growing inability of large segments of the Anchorage bowl to purchase or rent affordable housing. As wages drop, reflecting the shift in our economy, many people have been compelled to spend far more on housing than the national standard, which is capped at 30% of income. Housing expenses in Anchorage tend to remain on the high side, adding to the problem. The average "wage gap" between a two-earner family's combined salaries and the average rent on a three-bedroom home was \$129. If only one worker contributed to family income, the gap was even higher, at \$579, for this same home. If this worker is a single mother, with children for whom she must provide shelter, she is in dire straits. A 2 bedroom apartment will still result in a gap of \$290. Heaven help her if she gets sick, and misses a day's wages, or if her children are going through growth spurts. This wage earner will be tasked with the choice of paying rent, or buying groceries. The challenges facing our worker, are the same ones that have been repeated throughout this report. Lack of skills, lack of higher paying jobs, lack of community development of friendly infrastructures, are all taking their toll in many neighborhoods throughout the Municipality.

## 2. Arts and Humanities: Bonnie Bernholz and Dr. Robert Wilkins

Presenters Bernholz and Wilkins led off their presentation of the arts and humanities in Anchorage with an oral history that recounted the proud tradition of community support for such cultural activities. Community donations of time and money have helped provide for many hours of enrichment for our citizens, but patterns of giving have shifted in the past decades. Where individual support helped allow for many diverse concerts and presentations in the early post-war era, the financial responsibilities shifted in the mid-70s to the oil companies. Complacent in the knowledge that "they" were paying for it, Anchorage's residents have been slow to recognize that along with falling revenues, the oil companies have also reduced community giving in this area. If we are to continue to provide our residents with cultural offerings to enhance our quality of life, we must recognize and overcome several challenges. These include:

A general attitude that the arts and humanities are somehow elitist, and do not involve the majority of our population. Ms. Bernholz commented that in 18th century Europe, the notion of exposure to the arts by the "common folk" was considered revolutionary. She pointed out that calls for reduced or eliminated subsidies for activities involving arts and humanities is a reflection of that earlier attitude. "If we do away with subsidies and community support, then art becomes that less accessible to a community," Ms. Bernholz said.

The lack of a community infrastructure for charitable giving. Our reliance on financial support for community activities from companies that have economic headquarters elsewhere, has caused us to shirk away from our responsibility to maintain our own community infrastructure. In order to take a leadership role in encouraging the growth of cultural life throughout the area, and state, we will have to change our perceptions, both of the value of arts and humanities, and of our community's responsibilities in funding them.



### 3. Caring and Sharing- Community Giving: Panel Discussion

A presentation on community philanthropy patterns was led by COMMONWEALTH NORTH member Jeff Leschensky, of the Community Foundation for Greater Anchorage. Mr. Leschensky was accompanied by Gerri Shaefer and Dennis McMillian, Susan Churchill, and Julie Alfred-Troiano. Each presenter has worked many years in the field of community philanthropy. While presenters agreed that giving patterns appear to have stabilized over the past few years, each indicated that a solid infrastructure for community giving has not been built. The single largest United Way giver in the area has only lived here four years. Many well-established local families do not appear to donate sums in an amount that would be correlated with their incomes and status within our community, according to Dennis McMillian. While a local study conducted by Susan Churchill indicating that over 88% of secondary students surveyed had volunteered in some fashion was encouraging, these findings do not translate into increased support for local charities by adults in the area. Ms. Shaefer said that the results of a comparison study between donation patterns in Alaska and California indicated that the largest group of givers in this state were corporations, not individuals. The opposite held true in California, where many family foundations exert a profound influence on the quality of life in that state. The challenges in this area again reflect the dependency that has occurred when we focused most of our economic efforts in one direction. The development of new businesses that expand the economic base of Anchorage will also expand the community infrastructure, especially the areas that are supported through donations.

A speaker came from a group called Creating Opportunities for the Next Generation, Educating for Everyone.

In her presentation to the study group, discussion emphasized the need for school districts throughout the state to produce graduates who are skilled in basic areas of educational competence, including reading, writing, mathematics, and science. Without these fundamental tools, children in Anchorage and elsewhere throughout the state will be unable to cope with our future economy. This plan should include the following:

- Active participation by members of local businesses, both small and large;
- Participation from parents of local school children;
- Student participation; and
- Participation with local educators.

We call for a "Ready For Work" plan that acknowledges and supports basic training for adults who want to work, as well as youth. We call for a "Ready for Work" plan that emphasizes flexibility, and that encourages local input from both small business owners and representatives from larger companies. We call for a "Ready for Work" plan that provides for on-the-job training, and one that solicits and listens to ideas from parents and other concerned adults. Education is everyone's concern, and does not "belong" to any community sector..

## **Conclusions**

### **Common Concerns: A Call to Action**

This report has identified many challenges and competencies, which, if properly addressed, will result in a greatly improved quality of life for residents of the Municipality. We emphatically state that quality of life for all Alaskans is inextricably linked with development of an expanded economic base, with local and state governance that responds to the will of the people, and with increased support for school systems that produce well educated, ready-to-work students. Our greatest resources are our children, who will take their places as leaders well within the time frame of our group's vision. If they are to remain here, then it will be because each of us, within our families, our neighborhoods and regions, and our state, recognizes the need to provide them with the tools they'll need to meet their own challenges and opportunities. We encourage each reader to carefully look at the full set of reports from each group, and to act on those recommendations.

There will always be a need for comprehensive planning in any community. Anchorage has already made tremendous progress in identifying common concerns that link our area's separate planning processes. The QUALITY OF LIFE Study Group calls for the continued dialogue between community planning processes that has begun with the APICC group. We strongly recommend that the groups' findings be published in one document, with a summary that highlights the features that each process has in common. We support additional linkages with state organizations that are involved in strategic planning. We support regional ties with communities that are addressing their own quality of life concerns, recognizing that, in many ways, our regions benefit most when we speak with one voice. We call for links between local planning efforts and national organizations that are involved in enhancing quality of life efforts, including the National Civic League, and the Healthy Cities movement. By joining our efforts with others nationwide, we can have an enduring effect on the quality of life in our neighborhoods, our state, and our country.

## **Recommendations**

This section will outline recommendations for policy changes and local actions that will promote an enhanced quality of life within the Municipality of Anchorage in the next 20 years.

### **Proposals for Policy and Legislative Changes**

We strongly support policy changes that result in reinvestment of Permanent Fund revenues in Anchorage business initiatives.

We strongly recommend local and state incentives for business initiatives that encourage the use of new technology, new uses of existing natural resources, and that have potential to increase links between our area and other Pacific Rim communities.

We support the continued development of an "Owner State" policy, and call for any legislative changes that can be made to strengthen this policy. We recommend that our state, and our community, explore the pros and cons of personal income taxes. Without local responsibility for shouldering some of the burdens associated with continued growth and development, we will not be able to overcome many of the challenges currently facing us.

### Municipal Initiatives

We strongly recommend that the boundaries of the Municipality remain as they are. Any move to realign boundaries deprives the entire community within the Municipality of vital and much needed human resources. We must work together to achieve our goals. To that end, we strongly encourage greater communication between the residents of outlying communities, including Stuckagain/Basher, South Anchorage, Eagle River, Chugiak, and Girdwood, and the arms of the Municipal Government, including the Anchorage School District, the Municipal Assembly, and the various Departments that make up the Municipality, and the Commissions that advise these Departments.

We recommend a sustained community dialogue on the proper role of local government in the enhancement of our quality of life. We recommend that our communities prepare for this dialogue, by identifying the issues that are most important to them. For example, how much zoning enforcement do we, as residents of many Anchorage neighborhoods, really want? If we are presented with a comprehensive plan, how do we know that it adequately reflects the will of our residents?

We call for an overhaul of the Municipality's permitting processes. The current system of permitting is cumbersome, results in many delays, and engenders hostile feelings toward local government in general. Continued responsible growth can only take place, when local government, businesses and residents view themselves as partners in promoting our quality of life.

We recommend that the assembly study the effectiveness of AMATS, and that citizen input for environmental health issues be given stronger influence in helping direct policy in this area. We recognize the need for additional funding for clean air programs, mass regional transportation, and enhanced foot and bike trails connecting our Municipality.

We support the expansion of existing and proposed programs to increase home ownership within the Municipality. One possible policy change is to allow use of land from the Municipal Land Bank for housing developments. We call for further study on the feasibility of this proposed change.

We recommend that the Municipality incorporate pedestrian amenities into its Comprehensive Plan. These amenities include additional funds for trail maintenance, and funding for increased winter maintenance of area streets.

We call for changes in the curriculum that is offered by the Anchorage School District, that will reflect an increased emphasis on learning and applying basic skills that are needed in our workforce. We call for additional vocational training

programs, and for advanced instruction in math and sciences for students. We support mentoring programs that introduce students to workplaces, and we call for increased partnership development between local businesses and the Anchorage School District.

We recommend that the Municipality, in conjunction with its residents, begin a dialogue identifying the pros and cons of a universal sales tax for all residents of the community.

### Community Efforts

We strongly recommend that neighborhood groups use local schools as gathering points for community celebrations and activities. By bringing families into the schools, we can foster a sense of mutual collaboration and responsibility that can only enhance our efforts to produce ready-to-work students. In addition, the use of local schools can help to define neighborhood boundaries. A lack of identity has been cited by presenters throughout our Study Group's sessions, as contributing to a diminished quality of life in Anchorage.

We support the use of local design elements that reflect our community's identity, and issue a challenge to new and existing neighborhoods to clearly identify and link their communities through landscaping, architectural distinction, and other means.

We call for increased participation in, and funding for, cultural activities by the residents of Anchorage. As members of COMMONWEALTH NORTH, we endorse the promotion of arts and humanities as an element of healthy communities that improves the overall economic status of our area. Through our ability to offer enhanced activities in this area, we will be better placed to attract new businesses and economic initiatives to our city.

We very strongly support the development of a corps of volunteers who are willing to work with local businesses, government, and non-profits to plan and implement programs that will enhance our quality of life. As government funding shrinks, active partnering with local citizens becomes even more vital, if basic community needs are to be met. The burden of identifying and addressing those needs belongs with the communities of Anchorage, not with government.

We strongly support the initiative proposed by our APICC partners in the Anchorage Healthy Future Project, to develop a community-wide Website and electronic data base, with telephone links available. Information from this Website can be used to attract new businesses from around the world, and will also provide our citizens with information that can help enhance the quality of life for families from Chugiak to Girdwood.

We support the development of business initiatives that capitalize on the strengths that come from our geographic location. In particular, we call for a feasibility study to be made on a proposal that was first proposed by Anchorage businessman Dick Block. Because we are located beneath a geosynchronous orbit route that is near the North Pole, we have the capability to download information from communications satellites 4-6 times daily, in contrast with the once- or twice-daily capabilities of other communities in the lower 48. We are

also located in a time zone that allows us to communicate with Japan during our working hours, and also allows us to communicate with the East Coast of the US during the same working day. If Anchorage could position itself as a stock market exchange, we would be able to facilitate stock trading between major world stock markets during the same business day, using periodic data links. Finally, we support an ongoing civic campaign to increase individual and group participation in the democratic process.

Anchorage is at a cross roads. We have a tremendously gifted and youthful population. We have energy, and the will to apply that energy in positive ways. What we have lacked in the past is a community vision of our future. There are many possibilities in that future, and our study group has recognized that, as a community, we are faced with the awesome responsibility of choice. We can choose to continue doing "business as usual," and dig our own graves while the world changes around us. Or, we can choose to consciously address the issues that adversely affect our quality of life. By addressing these issues, our team emphasizes that we are also agreeing to share the financial and logistical responsibilities for needed improvements.

In her book, "World Class," Rosabeth Moss Kanter recognizes that areas can be united through a shared vision of excellence. This vision is developed through a shared value system, one that states that

- the best social program is good jobs;
- the best jobs are those that link with global economies;
- that the best sources of those jobs come from a community that is ready to enter the global economy through the development of local businesses;
- that the way to attract and keep world class companies is to build a strong community- one that adds value to the company's business through its core global skills, welcomes newcomers, and provides a high quality of life;
- that a desirable community is one that can work together to address its problems and build a healthy business climate that creates good jobs, which is the best social program.

Our team supports the recommendations of the other study groups, and recognizes that quality of life is a reflection of community efforts in education, economic development, and government. It is our strong desire to help promote policies that encourage responsible change in each of these areas, and to support the Compass North vision of our future.