

**MAT-SU VALLEY SOUTH GATEWAY VISITOR CENTER**

# Preliminary Feasibility Study

**June 2010**

Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC  
Wolf Architecture  
RECON, LLC





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Introduction

In 1986, the Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitor Bureau (Mat-Su CVB) was formed as a nonprofit organization to promote the Mat-Su Valley visitor industry. Shortly after, a Mat-Su visitor center was built near the interchange of the Parks and Glenn Highways. Over time, as the Mat-Su Valley has grown in population, jobs and services, the current location has declined in value and appropriateness as a site for a visitor center. The construction of the Parks-Glenn Highways interchange and expansion of the neighboring Triad and Valley Hospital have all made it more difficult to see and access the visitor center. As a result, visitation to the center and sales from its gift shop have declined in recent years.

In 2007, the Mat-Su CVB Board adopted a resolution “supporting the exploration of a partner-driven destination visitor center to showcase the recreational opportunities in the Mat-Su Valley and increase the visitor experience and length of stay.” The following year, the Mat-Su CVB organized a meeting with potential partners, then applied for and was awarded a National Scenic Byways grant to develop a plan for a new “gateway” partnership visitor center. A consultant team made up of tourism planners (Agnew::Beck Consulting), architects (Wolf Architecture) and engineers (Recon Engineering) were selected to work on the plan. The current project concludes in May, 2010.

## Overview

The purpose of a “gateway” visitor center is to welcome travelers into the area and serve as a jumping-off point providing access to and information about activities, events and amenities available throughout the area. The intent of the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center is to create a notable, visible entry point to the Mat-Su Valley, and provide visitors and residents alike with an inspiring, beautiful, popular facility that is emblematic of the place. The center must also be a destination in its own right, offering interesting activities and learning experiences.

The vision for the facility is grand; this vision will be tempered and refined throughout the planning, fundraising, design and building process, based on partner commitments, funding availability, site selection and control, programming decisions and the extent to which the center will serve various market segments (e.g., local residents, out-of-state package tour visitors, independent travelers, educational groups).

The findings of this Preliminary Feasibility Study indicate that:

- This project is doable in a reasonable time frame, at a reasonable cost.
- Potential partners exist that have the organizational capacity to design, construct and operate this facility. There is a significant level of interest from partner organizations to work cooperatively in establishing a Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center.
- There is a market for the facility and its programs. The facility and its programs can contribute significantly to the economic development of the Mat-Su Valley by increasing visitation, tourism and recreation in the Mat-Su Valley, particularly nearer to population centers. Further, there is an established need to relocate and replace the existing Mat-Su Visitor Center.
- There is a need to promote stewardship and caretaking of the Mat-Su Valley’s cultural and natural resources for both visitors and residents, and there is a desire on the part of many organizations to assist each other in this effort.

In determining the type of visitor facility needed, there are several primary factors to consider: facility size, cost to construct and operate, market demand, programming offered and facility location. This graphic illustrates the relationship among these primary factors.

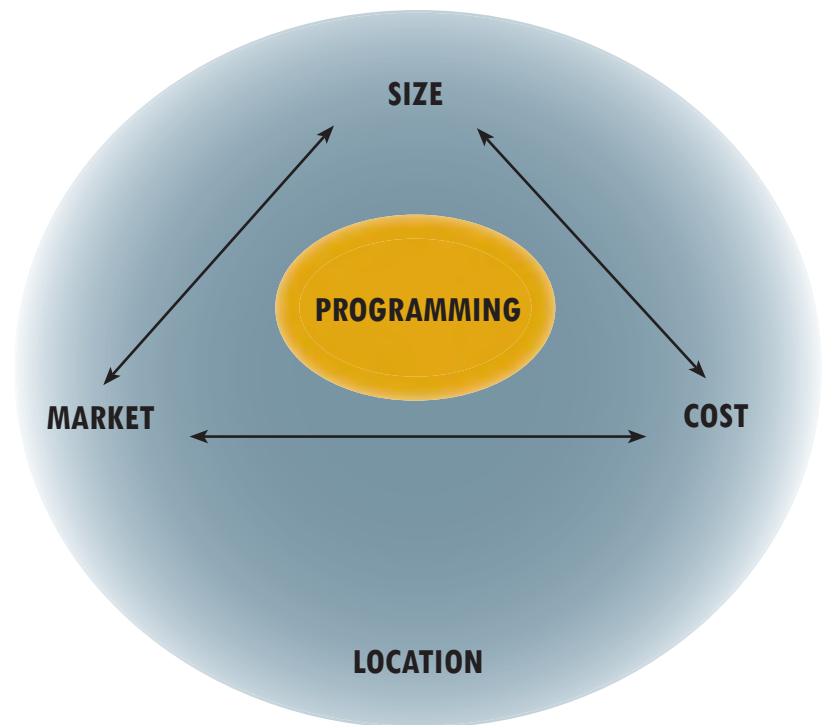
### Size, Cost and Market

The size, cost and market for the facility are directly proportional to one another; as the market increases or decreases, so does the size and cost of the facility. For example, if a large facility is imagined, the costs to build and operate it will be similarly large, and will demand a market to justify the size and expense. Likewise, if costs are a concern, a smaller facility may be all that is affordable, and the level of visitation may be limited by the physical space available for the facility. While costs rise as the size of the facility increases, it is important to note that operations revenues have the potential to grow significantly if the facility expands to include revenue-generating features such as food service.

### Programming

The facility's programs provide a central balancing point for the three factors of size, cost and market. Programming dictates:

- the market, (i.e., the types of audiences who will be attracted to the facility);
- the spaces needed (e.g., exhibit space, auditorium space, office space, etc.), and ultimately the size of the facility;
- the cost to operate the facility, including staff, materials, management and maintenance.



### Location

Underlying all these factors is the facility's location. Location can provide or limit opportunities for market (how accessible, visible is the facility?), cost (what kind of environmental or other design constraints does the location have?), size (what is the buildable area available?), and programming (what kinds of site amenities and programming opportunities does the site provide?).

These five primary factors and their relationship to each other are the main influences on the form and function of the facility. Striking the proper balance among these factors so that each are maximized to their fullest extent is the challenge of facility planning.

## Vision

The Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitors Center will be a lively, attractive, well-designed space where residents and visitors alike will learn about and directly experience the wealth of sightseeing, recreational and business amenities along the Glenn Highway. The proposed Center will welcome visitors to the Mat-Su Valley, providing interpretive information and showcasing

the natural beauty and attractions of the area. The success of the project relies on strong partnerships with a variety of local and regional entities engaged in promoting and protecting the scenic qualities to be found in the Mat-Su Valley and along the entire length of the Glenn Highway.



## Goals

- 1. SHOW OFF:** Showcase the natural beauty of the Mat-Su Valley and the culture of its peoples. Create a facility that is both a gateway and a destination. Incorporate local materials and artwork into the facility, design programming that connects visitors to the unique physical and cultural characteristics of the Mat-Su Valley, and create direct access to the outdoors.
- 1. BUILD OUR REGIONAL ECONOMY:** Bring more visitors to the region, extend visitor stays and expand visitor spending (“stay and play”). Hire and train locals in tourism-related fields. Provide support for local tourism businesses.
- 2. SHARE INFORMATION:** Create an “information bridge” between visitors and the organizations and businesses that serve them. Help visitors and community members understand the Mat-Su Valley and its people by being a central information center that will facilitate visitors’ ability to find things to do and businesses to patronize.
- 3. FOSTER STEWARDSHIP:** Encourage visitors to be responsible and help care for the areas they use and enjoy.
- 4. SERVE LOCALS:** Ensure that the facility and its programs serve local residents/visitors as well as those from other parts of the state and outside of Alaska. Encourage strong local patronage and support of the facility and its programs.
- 5. BUILD PARTNERSHIPS:** Use the visitor center as a place to support the mission of a range of partners and to facilitate use of other related facilities and programs (e.g., Science + Education Center).
- 6. BE INNOVATIVE:** The facility design, equipment and programming should take steps forward in areas of green building, look and feel, access to technology and nature as well as compelling, innovative exhibits and programming.
- 7. BE VISIBLE + ACCESSIBLE:** Locate the facility in a place where it can easily serve visitors and local communities alike.

## Leadership, Advisors + Planning Process

This preliminary feasibility study was conducted by a team of consultants hired by the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau (Mat-Su CVB), with the involvement of a number of potential project partners, Mat-Su CVB Board and staff. The study began with a visioning work session with Mat-Su CVB Board members and staff, followed by an initial site visit to the gateway area. The Project Team conducted interviews with potential partners (included in the partnership development graphic on the following page) and with managers of comparable facilities from around Alaska and the Lower 48 (listed in the Comparable Facilities chapter).

A Project Work Group was formed that included potential partners and Mat-Su CVB Board members and staff (Project Work Group members are listed in Appendix B Contacts, as well as the

Acknowledgements). The Project Work Group met twice during the process of compiling the information in this report. At the first meeting, the group met to brainstorm about the vision, programming, and look and feel/character of the facility (notes from both meetings are included in Appendix D Meeting Notes). The second meeting gave the Project Work Group a forum to confirm and/or refine the project vision and goals outlined at the first meeting, as well as discuss the consultant team's preliminary findings about the potential market, programming, design, costs and site selection for the facility.

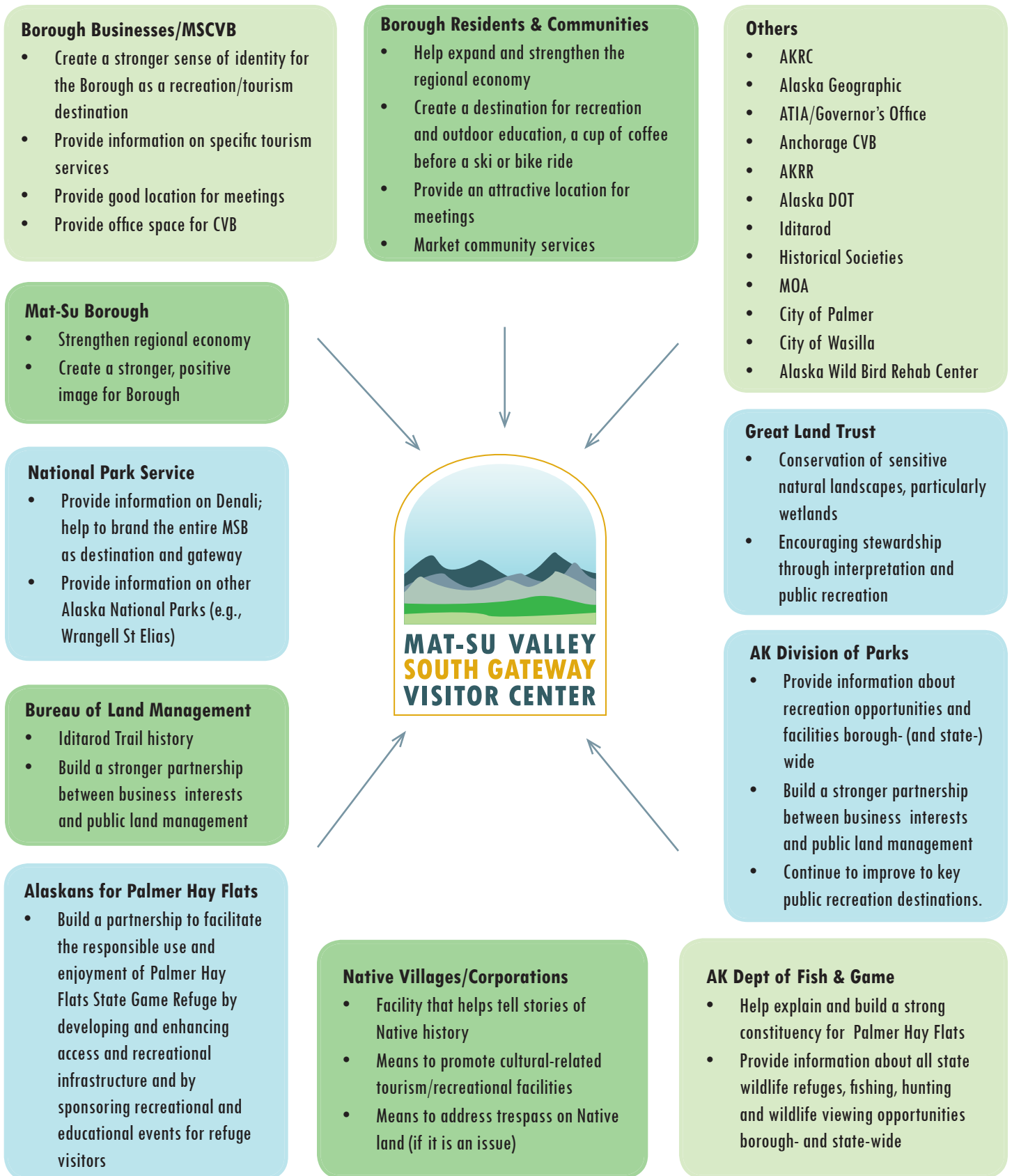
A project website and companion eNewsletters have been used to update the Project Work Group, Mat-Su CVB Board, staff and others about the project's progress.

## Partnership Development

The success of this project relies on strong partnerships with a variety of local and regional entities engaged in promoting and protecting the cultural and scenic qualities to be found in the Mat-Su Valley and along the entire length of the Glenn Highway Scenic Byway. With support from the Mat-Su Borough and a Federal National Scenic Byways Program Grant, the Mat-Su CVB is the primary, initiating partner for the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center and has been a main driving force behind the planning efforts for the past several years. The Mat-Su Borough has also played a strong role in promoting the idea of the Visitor Center, and prioritizing the project.

As the project progresses, many other organizations have joined in work sessions and strategy meetings to advise on and contribute to the plan for the facility and its programs. Partners are not only asked to contribute to the planning effort and perhaps ultimately to the facility and programs, but also benefit from their involvement in the project, and from the creation of a Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center. The figure on the next page illustrates these existing and potential benefits.

# Meeting the Needs of Borough Residents, Businesses, and Diverse Partners



## Facility, Programs + Cost

In considering how best to serve the facility’s diverse users, and in recognition of the capital and operational costs associated, the Design Team chose to explore three scenarios – small, medium and large. Each scenario contains some consistent, core spaces whose sizes grow larger. Additionally, in the medium and large scenarios, other program elements are added.

The Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center will blend traditional and emerging visitor information and interpretive services with the addition of indoor and outdoor venues for community events. A highly visible location, convenient access, flexible activity and gathering spaces, varied seasonal outdoor program areas, and efficient site circulation invite year around use. With these parameters in mind, two possible site concepts were explored: a bluff site concept and a lakeside site concept.

The proposed Visitor Center will house the administrative offices for the Mat-Su Convention and Visitor Bureau (Mat-Su CVB) who will oversee day-to-day operations and staffing of the facility. Other Core program spaces include:

- Lobby and restrooms
- Exhibits and programs
- Tour information
- Virtual tour interface
- Auditorium/theatre
- Storage
- Site amenities

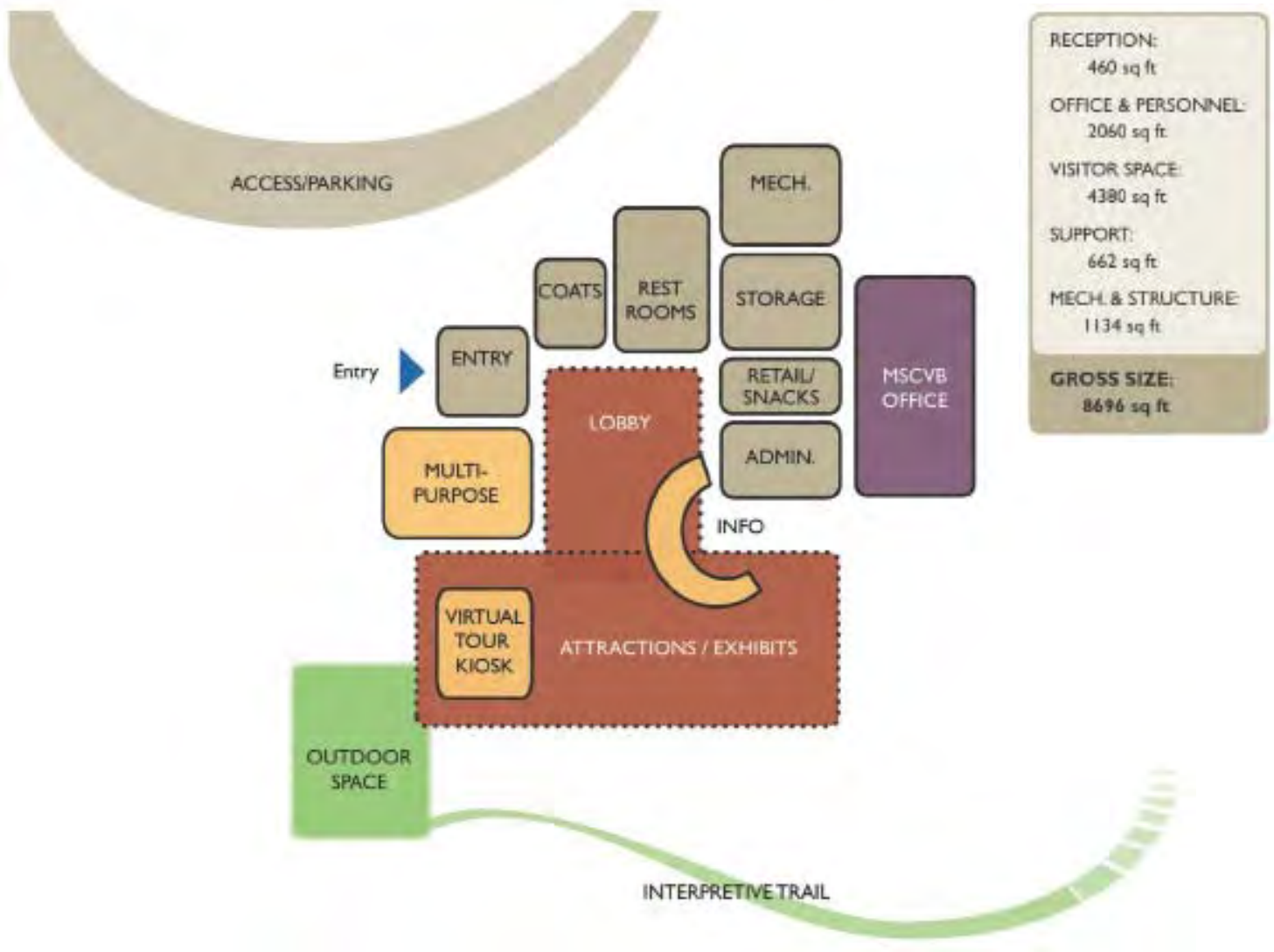
Other components of the facility are variable, depending on the size and specific programming of the eventual facility. These include:

- Size
- Meeting/education component
- Tenant space component
- Café/food service
- Retail
- Outdoor interpretive/activity component
- Outdoor event venue
- Year-round use component

The conceptual diagrams included on the following pages show the relationship among the spaces in the three different size scenarios for the facility. Also included is the estimated square footage and cost to construct.



“Earning your turns” at the nearby Hatcher Pass four-season recreation area.



### Small Facility

#### Features:

- compact, efficient
- multi-purpose space
- virtual tour kiosk
- fits on small site
- could be phase one of multi-phase
- MSCVB manages
- minimum program space

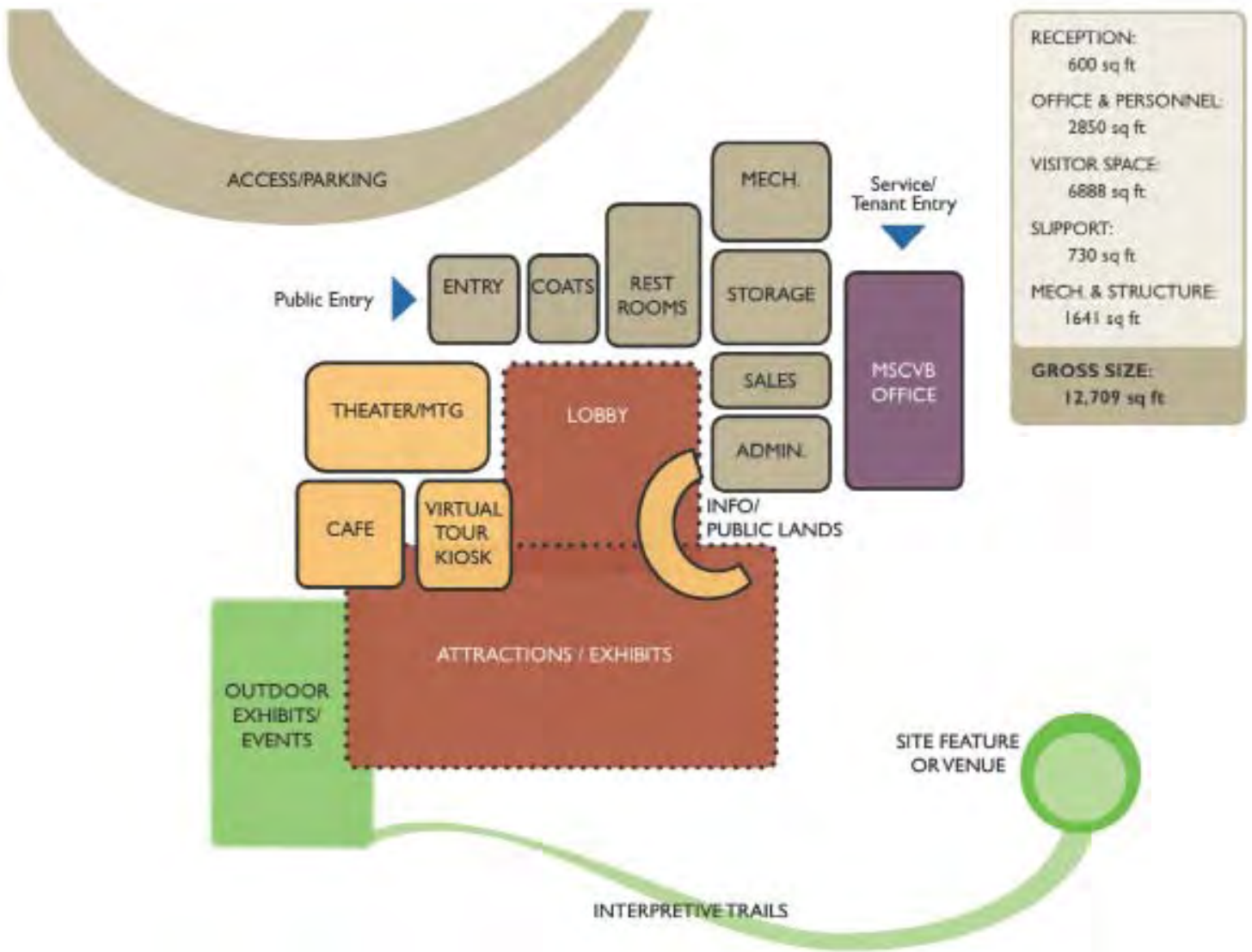
**Cost to construct:** \$4.8 million

**Cost to operate:** \$87,207 - 99,326 /year\*

\*Includes building maintenance and utilities, but not staff costs.

**Comparable Facility:** Denali Eilson Visitor Center (7,965 sf, \$9.2 million to construct)





## Medium Facility

### Features:

- more visitor space
- theatre
- cafe/concession
- sales space
- outdoor venue
- MSCVB manages

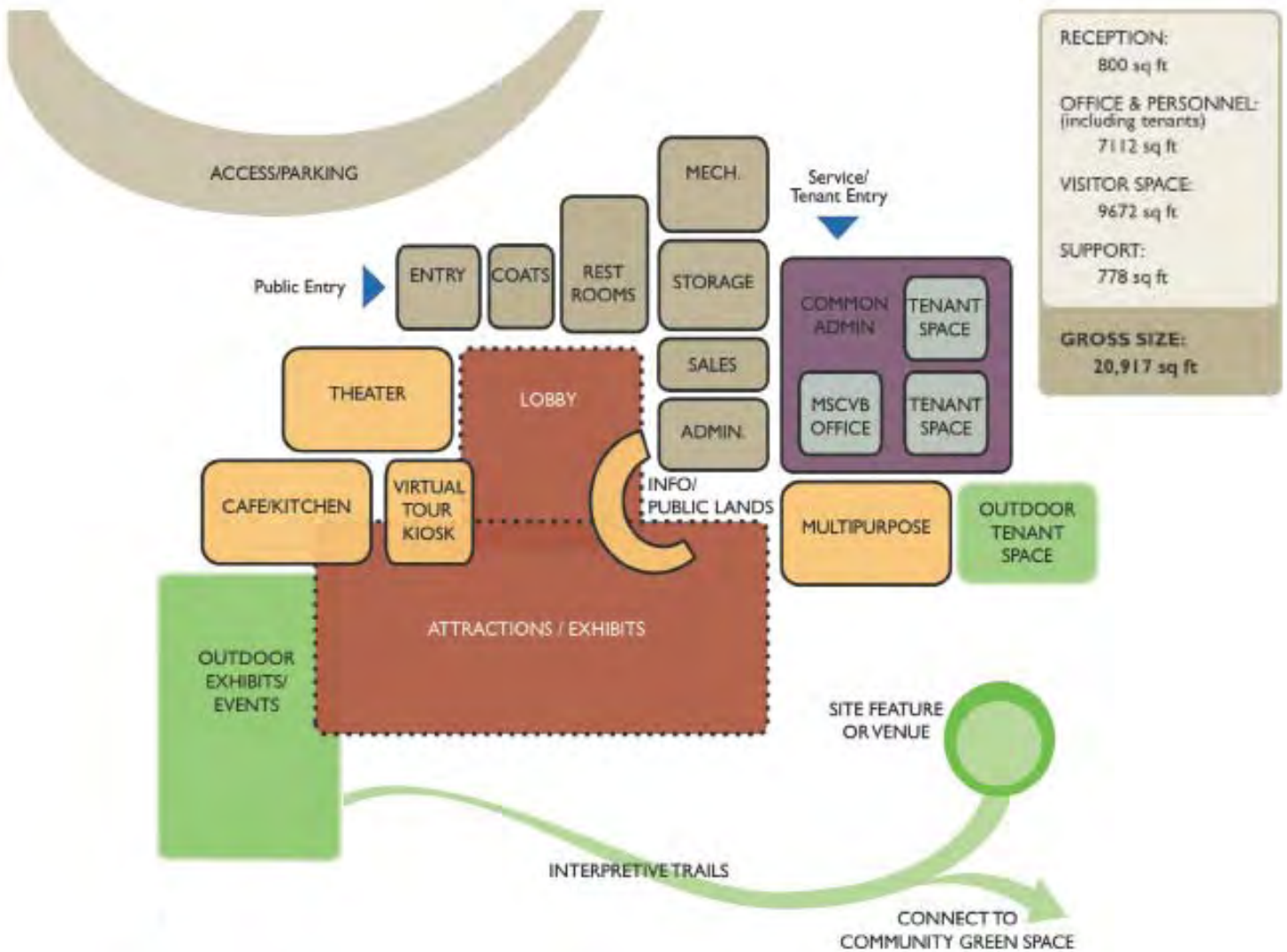
**Cost to construct:** \$9.2 million

**Cost to operate:** \$144,179 - 164,090 / year\*

\*Includes building maintenance and utilities, but not staff costs.

**Comparable Facility:** Denali Park: Wilderness Access Center (14,000 sf, cost to construct unknown)





## Large Facility

### Features:

- lease space (2800 sf)
- kitchen/cafe
- exhibit/program space
- larger theatre
- multipurpose space
- site amenities
- larger parking area
- community features

**Cost to construct:** \$14 million

**Cost to operate:** \$219,310 - 250,217 / year\*

\*Includes building maintenance and utilities, but not staff costs.

**Comparable Facility:** Begich Boggs Visitor Center (17,020 sf, \$8.1 million original construction + \$2.4 million redesign)



Small Facility Program	Estimated Square Footage	Medium Facility Program	Estimated Square Footage	Large Facility Program	Estimated Square Footage
<b>Potential Uses</b>		<b>Potential Uses</b>		<b>Potential Uses</b>	
<b>Reception</b>					
Entry	64	Entry	96	Entry	180
Lobby	240	Lobby	300	Lobby	360
Storage/Coat Room	80	Storage/Coat Room	100	Storage/Coat Room	120
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>660</b>
<b>Office + Personnel Space</b>					
Mat-Su CVB offices	1,616	Mat-Su CVB offices	2,240	Mat-Su CVB offices	1,552
				Program offices/Tenants	2,800
				Board/meeting room	600
				Restrooms	150
				Break Room	345
				Entry/Lobby	300
Storage	100	Storage	135	Storage	180
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>1,716</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>2,375</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>5,927</b>
<b>Visitor Space</b>					
Exhibit space	2,000	Exhibit space	2,750	Exhibit space	3,250
Tour Desk - visitor services	100	Tour Desk - visitor services	150	Tour Desk - visitor services	240
Virtual Tour Kiosk	100	Virtual Tour Kiosk	150		
		Info/Reservations Desk	150	Info/Reservations Desk	120
Auditorium/Multipurpose	1,000	Auditorium/Multi-purpose	1,550	Auditorium/Theatre	1,800
				Multi-purpose/Classroom	900
		Retail shop	300	Retail shop	450
Snack Bar/Coffee Cart/Retail	150	Café -- seating for 30	650	Café	1,000
Storage -- printed materials	300	Storage--multipurpose, café, retail	240	Storage	300
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>3,650</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>5,790</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>8,060</b>
<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>5,750</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>8,661</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>14,647</b>
<b>Maintenance, Operations Support and Circulation</b>					
General Storage	144	General Storage	200	General Storage	240
Cleaning Janitorial	48	Cleaning Janitorial	48	Cleaning Janitorial	48
Public Restrooms	360	Public Restrooms	360	Public Restrooms	360
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>648</b>
<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>6,302</b>	<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>9,269</b>	<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>15,295</b>
<b>ADD 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>1,260</b>	<b>+ 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>1,854</b>	<b>+ 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>3,059</b>
<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>1,682</b>
<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC*</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC</b>	<b>1,071</b>
<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>8,697</b>	<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>12,791</b>	<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>21,107</b>

## Facility Operations

Preliminary operating budgets were developed for the all three size scenarios. In all three scenarios, it is projected that revenues (as defined in the table below) can exceed expenditures. These projections are a starting point for creating a strategy that will allow the visitor center to operate in a way that is sustainable in the long-term.

Potential sources of revenues for the proposed visitor center are described in detail below. Likely primary sources of revenue fall into three categories:

- Mat-Su CVB operational funding contribution
- Facility-generated earned income, including tenant income
- Partner contributions

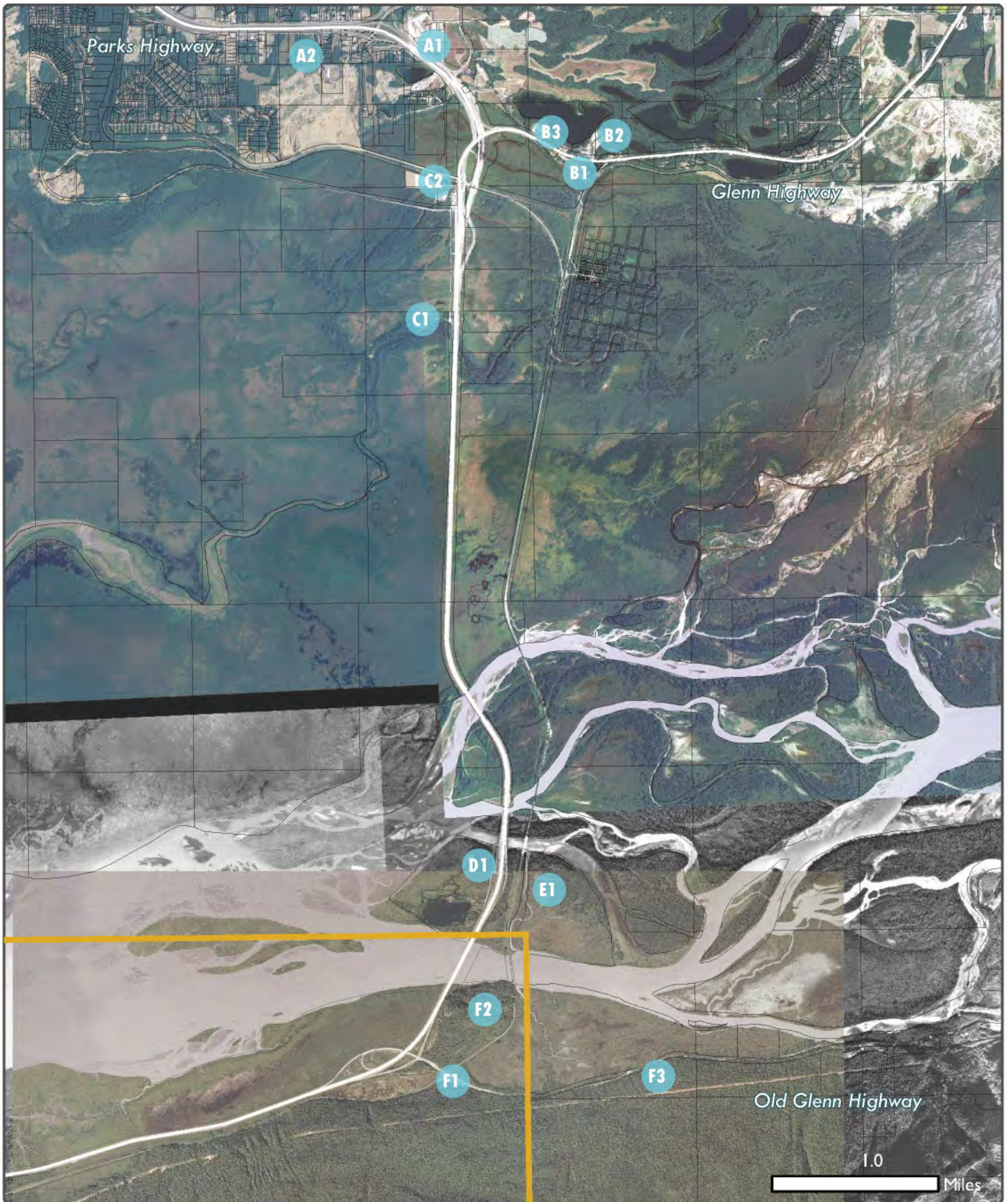
Expenses for the proposed visitor center cover operations and maintenance costs for the facility, but not program or staffing costs. It is expected that these costs will be met by individual program budgets, once the center's programs and staffing needs are further solidified in the next stages of planning. An exception is included in the "medium" and "large" expenditure scenarios: in order to

support the amount of projected revenues generated by booking special events at the facility, an "event coordinator" position is included in the facility costs.

An important finding of the operating projections is that – depending on variables such as visitor center marketing efforts, visibility and access, and spaces and programs – it is likely to be slightly easier to sustain a medium- or large-sized facility than a small one. These larger-sized scenarios have greater potential to provide facility income by having an increased amount of revenue-generating spaces, and by attracting larger numbers of visitors.

	Small	Medium	Large
<b>INCOME</b>			
<b>Earned Income</b>			
Event Income	\$6,000	\$10,000	\$14,400
Admissions*	\$85,800	\$407,750	\$727,000
Café Rental		\$15,600	\$24,000
Gift Shop sales	\$14,376	\$36,086	\$69,275
Auditorium/Theater			\$24,000
MSCVB Operations Contribution	\$26,000	\$32,000	\$40,000
Other Tenant Contributions (Rent)			\$50,400
<b>Contributions</b>			
Borough/Gov't/Partner Contributions	\$42,000	\$52,000	\$9,000
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$88,376</b>	<b>\$145,686</b>	<b>\$231,075</b>
<b>OPERATING COSTS</b>			
<b>Facility Operations &amp; Maintenance</b>			
Estimated \$/SF - Facility	\$69,574	\$102,330	\$168,857
<b>Outdoor Spaces Maintenance</b>			
Estimated \$/acre - Outdoor	\$2,400	\$3,200	\$6,000
<b>Personnel</b>			
Bookings + Events Coordinator	--	\$19,200	\$21,120
<b>Capital Reserve (Repair &amp; Replacement Reserve)</b>			
Facility	\$15,315	\$21,519	\$32,936
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$87,289</b>	<b>\$146,249</b>	<b>\$228,913</b>
<b>Income less Expenditures</b>	<b>\$1,087</b>	<b>-\$563</b>	<b>\$2,162</b>

\* Around the country visitor information centers are beginning to charge admissions as one means of covering operating costs. Often the admission fee applies only to certain, specific activities, such as a movie. Income figures above show possible admissions revenues, but these are not included in the income totals.



# Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center



Data courtesy of Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Municipality of Anchorage. This map was compiled with assistance from Agnew::Beck Consulting.

Alaska State Plane, Zone 4, NAD 1983  
 File: Mat-Su\_VC\_Overview.mxd 2/15/10



## Site

Twelve different sites were considered and evaluated as possible locations for the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center. After this initial evaluation was completed, and the opinions and advice of the Project Work Group were solicited, two locations were identified as preferred sites for the Visitor Center:

- “Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes” cluster of sites (B1, B2, and B3)
- “The Knob” site (F2)

## Governance

There are two phases to the facility’s governance: managing the process to plan, raise funds for and build a facility, and then secondly, managing the ongoing operations and ownership of a successful visitor center. The organization structure for each phase is likely to be different. Recommendations for governance during the planning phase include:

- Creation of a committee structure, made up of project partners.
- Designating one organization to take the lead on the project, with partners included on an advisory board, overseeing the process.

Additional entities or people that can significantly contribute to the planning phase include:

- Project Manager/ Facility Director
- Nonprofit partner
- Technical and expert support
- “Project benefactor”/“project champion”

There are several workable scenarios for facility ownership and operations management. At this point in the planning process, the two most likely facility managers are:

- The Mat-Su Convention and Visitor Bureau
- A partnership of entities affiliated as a nonprofit organization whose sole purpose is to manage the facility

These sites were chosen for a combination of visibility, access to visitor traffic along the Glenn and Parks Highways, setting (“Wow” factor), and land development suitability. The map on page 13 identifies all the sites considered, including the location of the preferred sites. Eventual formal site selection will depend in large part on partnership and funding opportunities and further analysis of environmental and land ownership/management constraints.

The first scenario – where the Visitor Center is operated and managed by the Mat-Su CVB – is most likely if the facility is owned by the Mat-Su Borough. The current visitor center is owned and managed through a similar relationship. Other partner agencies would contribute funds, staff and programming in the form of in-kind contributions and tenant rent, but would not have a hand in or ultimate responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the facility.

The second scenario – where the Visitor Center is operated and managed by a partnership of entities incorporated as a nonprofit, such as a “Friends of the Mat-Su Valley Visitor Center” organization – is most likely if the facility itself is owned by a similar partnership arrangement. This type of ownership and management is a little more unwieldy than a single owner and single operator, but may be an alternative to a Mat-Su Borough-owned facility if either the Borough is unable or unwilling to be the owner, or if (as mentioned in the above section) a high degree of interest from another partner creates an incentive for a different ownership arrangement.

The ownership and management structure of the facility are also dependent on the selected site. For example, if located in the Matanuska Lakes area (i.e., Kepler-Bradley, the “B sites”), the facility might be owned by the State, with the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau and/or some combination of partners managing the facility.

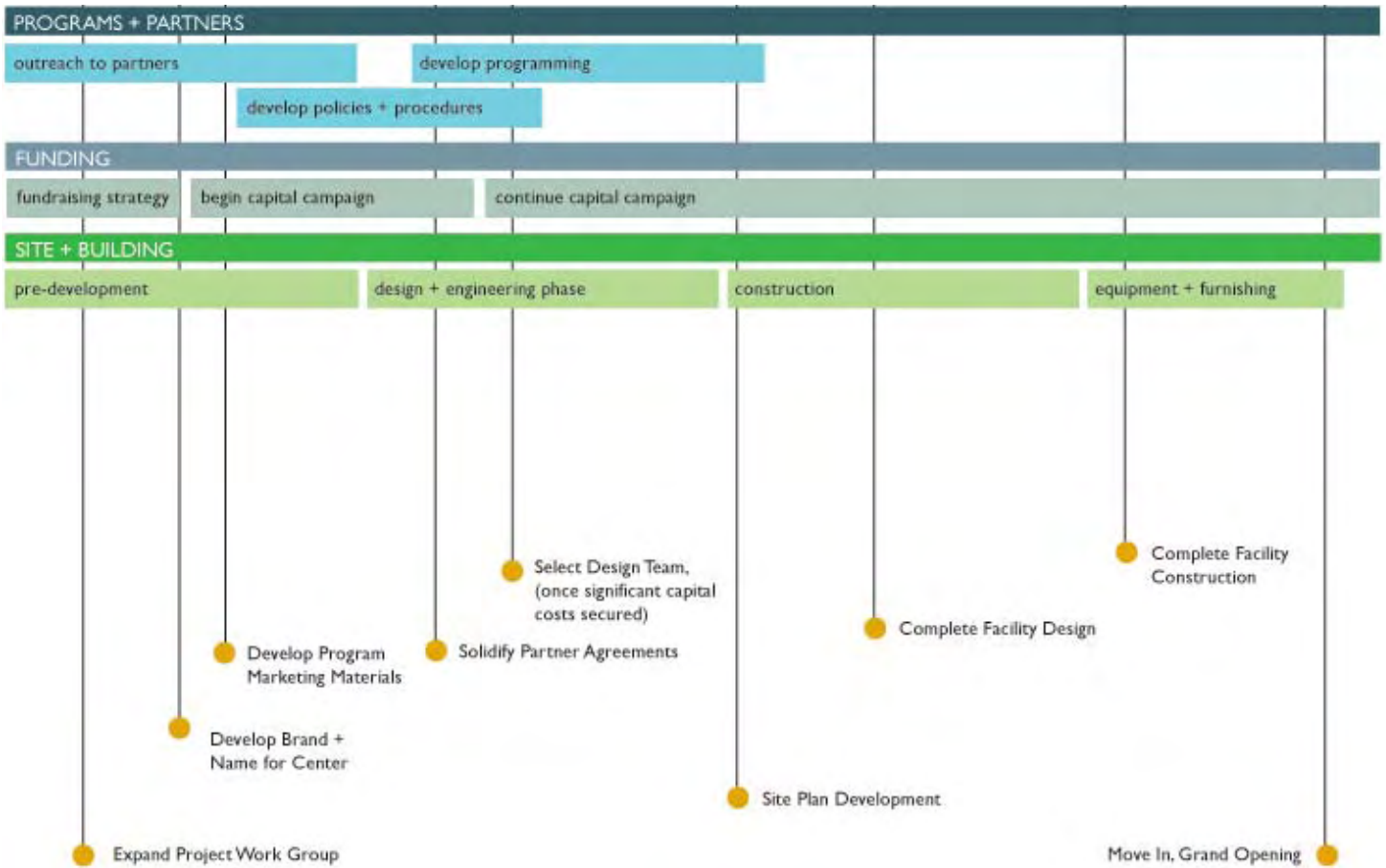
# Implementation

Bringing the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center from vision to reality will involve a series of progressively more precise refinements of the work begun in this report. The process will require sorting out the details of all major project elements: partners and programs, site control, building design, funding, governance, building construction and ultimately the operation of the new facility.

The timeline figure below gives an overview of the general process and sequence of steps to take the project from its current planning phase through fundraising, design, construction and grand opening. These steps are divided into “Programs and Partners,” “Funding,” and “Site and Building” streams. Given the

current stage of the project’s development, and the necessary work ahead, it is likely that the project will take an additional four to five years to complete; the timing of the project may change, depending on factors like funding availability, commitments from project partners, and other issues.

Experience with other public projects similar in scope and funding opportunities suggests the time needed to plan, fund, design and construct this project will be dominated by two interrelated variables: first, the capacity of the project sponsors to aggressively work through all the steps above, and secondly, the time needed to raise necessary funds.



## Recommendations

The following set of recommendations was developed in the course of this project and is intended to help direct the project leadership's next steps.

### Programs and Partners:

#### Formalize Partner Relationships.

Achieve the required level of collaboration among partners by setting up a formal project planning committee. The governance chapter includes more information on this topic.

#### Gain Local Support.

Work actively to keep local communities (residents, businesses, governments, non-profits, etc.) aware of, engaged in, and supporting the project.

#### Create Organizational Structure.

Consider creation of an Advisory Board comprised of Mat-Su CVB board members, partner members, and community leaders willing to promote and realize the Center.

#### Fund a Project Manager Position.

Consider creation of position for and recruitment of a Project Manager or Facility Director who under the direction of the Board would act to implement strategies toward securing funding for and development of this project.

### Fundraising:

#### Maximize Partner Contributions.

Design the program and the building itself with an entrepreneurial mindset: emphasize building and programmatic elements that increase opportunities to raise capital funds and generate ongoing operations funds. For example, if the project includes access to wetlands and the chance to offer education information on this topic, this opens the door to partners and funding with an interest in this issue.

#### Balance Size and Cost.

Size the facility with the goal of finding the right balance between partner needs and cost considerations; the facility should serve partner missions, but not be so costly as to require a fundraising program that stretches beyond the level of interest of partners, Mat-Su CVB staff, the public, and funders. At the same time, as is shown in the operations chapter, recognize that some program/building elements are important generators of operating revenue (e.g., gift shop, coffee sales, rentable space).

#### Have a Solid Operations Plan.

Recognize that obtaining ongoing operations revenue is almost always more of a challenge than obtaining initial capital funding. Additionally, funders are extremely interested in knowing that your facility will “pencil” – i.e., be sustainable – over many years. With this in mind, invest upfront in programs and a facility that can help reduce costs and increase revenues, and have a realistic budget showing these costs and income. Understand, too, that factors such as an upfront investment in energy conservation can save money for the full life of the project (and also provide another line on capital funding sources).

#### Secure a Local Match.

Most private and public funding sources require a local contribution as a condition for their support. Typical local matches are at least ten percent of project costs. As a rule, projects offering a higher local match are much more likely to receive funding. It pays to be creative in arranging for local cash and in-kind contributions. Even if these produce a small amount of the overall cost, they are very important to funders trying to gauge local commitment. Some options include:

- donated land (e.g., from City, State, a land trust, a private individual)
- in-kind services for design and program
- community donations and local fundraisers (e.g., a benefit social event organized by the Mat-Su CVB)

- individual contributions (e.g., sell bricks or plaques on the wall)
- donations from Native Corporations
- City bond measure

### **Secure State and Federal Appropriations.**

Public funding through the State Legislature and or Congress remains a very important strategy for funding in Alaska. This might be done either through a special appropriation or through the agency partner. Strong support in the Governor’s office is extremely helpful in getting support in Washington, D.C.

### **Work Closely with Alaska Native Organizations**

Native organization involvement and leadership not only broadens the attractiveness and cultural value of the Visitor Center, but can also open up a range of funding options.

### **Start Fundraising Now.**

Early funding (to initiate and keep the project moving) will require initial funds for project management and design, as well as a local match for capital fundraising. Project sponsors should aim to secure \$300,000-400,000 as quickly as possible.

## **Site and Building:**

### **Identify a Single, Preferred Site and Obtain Site Control.**

Building design cannot proceed beyond a concept level without greater certainty about the project site. Consequently, it is critical to push ahead and reserve a site as quickly as possible. It is essential to work with partners during this process.

### **Follow an Iterative Design/Build Process.**

Building design can be phased to respond to funding levels and deepening knowledge of site characteristics, access and partner needs. General building design steps are outlined below, along with a general estimate of time required for each step:

- Initial space program/concept design and community review: four months (much of this has already been completed as part of this report)
- Schematics (general layout): three months
- Design development: three months
- Construction documents: three months
- Bidding and negotiation: one to five months (the process can be slow if Federal funding is involved, e.g., EDA money)
- Construction and occupation: one to two years (this estimate includes site preparation, utilities and building construction)

### **Remember that Programs and People – not Buildings – Are the Key to Success.**

Ultimately, success comes from people: what goes on inside the building, not the building itself.

