

Recreation, Retail, & Entertainment Summary

Strengths *Internal attributes that contribute to success*

Natural Resources & Environment

- Access to outdoor recreation (trails, parks, fishing, hunting, winter sports) and culture of recreation
- Beautiful landscapes and wildlife
- Proximity to protected public lands, parks

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Availability of quality public libraries
- Increasing number of local hospitality businesses (food, drink, lodging)
- Many community events, festivals throughout the year
- Quality and diverse museums that attract visitors and preserve the region's history and heritage

Funding & Markets

- Shopping and supply hub for the surrounding region

Infrastructure

- Downtown Fairbanks is historic and walkable
- Extensive trail network
- Facilities such as Pioneer Park, Carlson Center, Morris Thompson Cultural & Visitor Center

Other

- Traditional arts and crafts of Alaska Native artists
- Vibrant and talented local artisan community

Weaknesses *Internal barriers to success*

Natural Resources & Environment

- Chena River is polluted, waterfront is mostly private land

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Limited chain restaurants and shopping outlets
- Limited retail, dining, and indoor recreation options in the North Pole area

Education & Workforce

- Lack of information for how and where to recreate outdoors safely

Funding & Markets

- Limited options to purchase Alaska Native arts and crafts
- Sales tax in North Pole (5.5%) can be a disincentive for shopping locally for some residents

Infrastructure

- Lack of a large concert/convention center
- Insufficient indoor space for play space, organized sports
- Limited transit to recreation, entertainment destinations
- Poor bike and pedestrian facilities, especially in winter
- Limited sidewalk snow removal in winter

Other

- Impacts of motorized vehicles on trails due to lack of hardened, sustainable trails
- Lack of “middle” recreation options for those who are not doing extreme/high intensity activities
- Limited access for seniors and those with mobility challenges
- Some Downtown Fairbanks visitors and residents exhibit problematic behaviors such as public inebriation

Opportunities *External forces that contribute to success*

Funding & Markets

- Funding for quality-of-life improvements based on a Fort Wainwright Behavioral Health Epidemiological Consultation (BH EPICON) study that was conducted in response to a high number of suicides and fatalities
- Increasing year-round visitation to better support the leisure and hospitality industry year-round
- Climate change may create a longer visitor season in Alaska

Infrastructure

- Alaska Long Trail
- Resource extraction could create new recreation access

Threats *External forces that could be barriers to success*

Natural Resources & Environment

- Climate change, such as permafrost melting trails and resulting in damages to board walks, erosion
- Conflicts with resource extraction that negatively impact open space/viewsheds and access
- Land use conflicts at recreation and aurora sites

Businesses, Organizations, & Government

- Regulations of recreation, entertainment, and retail businesses, including food trucks, licensing challenges

Funding & Markets

- Ongoing supply chain disruptions due to the pandemic and workforce shortages

Where We Are	What measurements can we use to track progress? Where do we want to be in 5 years?	2027 Targets
260 (2020)	Retail Trade Businesses – Number of retail trade businesses in FNSB; largest subcategories include motor vehicle and parts dealers (40), Sporting Goods, Books, Music, etc. (29), Gasoline Stations (29), Building Material and Garden (22) <i>Increase of 3% since 2016 (252 businesses)</i>	273
81 (2020)	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation Businesses – Number of businesses in FNSB; this category includes performing arts (18), and amusements, gambling, and recreation (55) <i>Increase of 4% since 2016 (78 businesses)</i>	85
\$143 Million	Wages – Annual wages to FNSB residents employed in leisure & hospitality <i>Leisure & hospitality employs 10% of the population but only covers 4% of FNSB’s total wages, indicating these jobs pay less than other industries</i>	\$150 Million

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2016 and 2020 data

Most Valued Aspects of Living in Fairbanks:

- “Artists are supported by the community”
- “Fairbanks is an urban hub with access to shopping”
- “Outdoor spaces with events”
- “Outdoor adventure”
- “Indigenous roots”
- “Overall food quality and options”
- “Military family wants to retire here”
- “Hiking and fishing”
- “Playing in the Chena River”
- “Festivals and the State Fair”
- “The library”
- “Sledding and skiing”
- “A lot of natural space”
- “Activities for kids”



Recreation, Retail, & Entertainment Objectives – Long term improvements and changes we want to see in five years or more



1. The FNSB’s portfolio of year-round recreation, retail, and entertainment options continues to grow, contributing to a high quality of life and encouraging FNSB residents to live joyful, healthy lifestyles.



2. Alaskans, military families, and newcomers increasingly choose to relocate to and live in FNSB due to the high quality of life and abundance of activities.

Strategies & Actions – Activities we will implement over the next five years to accomplish objectives & targets. See Chapter 3 for a detailed action plan.

Icon Key: Capital Project Military-related

1. **Expand Indoor Recreation** – Expand indoor recreation and wellness opportunities that appeal to residents and visitors alike. *(Objectives 1, 2)*
 - a. Conduct a conceptual design study for renovation of the Carlson Center, including expanding indoor recreation, fitness, and multipurpose space and connection to University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Hockey.
 - b. Remodel and expand the Noel Wien Public Library and consider expanding operating hours.
 - c. Maintain, modernize, and replace existing indoor recreation facilities, including pools & recreation centers.
 - d. Complete project scoping and design for the North Star Community Recreation Center, integrating both public and privately managed spaces.
 - e. Create a cultural tourism plan to better integrate and connect visitors and residents with cultural learning and retail opportunities in the community.
 - f. Support the performing and visual arts, including Alaska Native and culturally relevant public art installations.
2. **Enhance Outdoor Recreation** – Expand outdoor recreation opportunities that appeal to residents and visitors alike. *(Objectives 1, 2)*
 - a. Maintain and modernize existing FNSB outdoor facilities, including athletic fields, Pioneer Park, Tanana Lakes, Birch Hill, and improvements to Chena Lake Recreation Area.
 - b. Better promote existing events such as Equinox activities, World Eskimo Indian-Olympics, and the Yukon Quest.
 - c. Identify ways to better support the missing middle recreationist (e.g., improved facilities, signage, information, guides, lessons).
 - d. Adopt and implement the Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan.
 - e. Improve signage and wayfinding throughout the community, including online and onsite tools.
 - f. Create a checklist of landmarks around the community for visitors to “check off,” with QR codes and photo opportunities.
 - g. Revitalize the bike share program in downtown Fairbanks.
 - h. Support organizations that facilitate and provide spaces, trails, and outdoor activities for the public, such as Interior Alaska Land Trust, Alaska Dog Musher’s Association, Interior Alaska Trails and Parks Foundation, and Fairbanks Paddlers.
 - i. Improve accessibility to recreation facilities for seniors and the mobility impaired.
 - j. Provide toilets and sink/rest facilities connecting main traffic corridors in and out of FNSB.

See *Tourism summary* for related recommendations, including the *Alaska Long Trail*.

- 3. Support Gathering Spaces & Events** – Ensure Fairbanks has the facilities needed to host year-round gatherings and large community events. *(Objectives 1, 2)*
- Secure funding for and implement phases 2 of the Pioneer Park Master Plan, including opening the park to the riverfront, adding a multi-purpose center, and promoting development and renovations in the park.
 - Better promote and connect residents with Tribal events; improved integration between Tribal and community planning.
 - Create and expand designated spaces for food trucks and local vendors in summer; potentially in partnership with First Friday and on the fairgrounds. ↗
 - Create safe spaces for transient residents to spend time during the day (e.g., day shelter with operator). ↗

See *Tourism summary* for related recommendations, including a new Fairbanks Convention and Arts Center in downtown Fairbanks.

- 4. Connect with Military** – Implement quality of life strategies that support military and incoming households. *(Objectives 1, 2)*
- Increase the dissemination of information to new households to increase awareness of local activities and events. ↘
 - Increase distribution of Explore Fairbanks' list of businesses who offer military discounts. ↘
 - Expand promotion and use of the Volunteer Action Center list of volunteer opportunities in the FNSB for military spouses and civilian residents. ↘
 - Consider providing bus transportation options from EAFB and FTW to North Pole and Fairbanks during large events and festivals to increase military engagement in community activities. ↘
 - Develop guided programs to introduce newcomers to Alaska's outdoor recreation opportunities. ↘
 - Investigate options for developing a community center in the Greater North Pole area. ↗ ↘
 - Establish a military community liaison to coordinate information-sharing with EAFB and FTW personnel. ↘

- 5. Enhance Retail** – Implement the following quality of life strategies. *(Objectives 1, 2)*
- Continue progress on commercial re-district rezoning efforts in the City of North Pole. ↘
 - Create policies to attract businesses to North Pole, including creating a database of commercial real estate opportunities. ↘
 - Encourage commercial and retail operations located near public recreation spaces that enhance the resident and visitor experience (e.g., equipment and facility rentals, dining, etc.).
 - Recruit businesses to meet retail needs not currently met in the community (e.g., the successful recruitment of Costco after the Sam's Club closure).
 - Use land use tools to encourage businesses to concentrate near existing commercial development.

Other Relevant Resources

- **Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. Est. completion spring 2022. [View here.](#)
- **Pioneer Park Master Plan.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. November 2021. [View here.](#)
- **Feasibility Study & Market Analysis for the Carlson Center Study.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. 2020. [View here.](#)
- **Eielson Regional Growth Plan.** Fairbanks North Star Borough. 2018. [View here.](#)

Recreation, Retail, & Entertainment Action Plan

See Appendix A for a list of acronyms.

Strategy #1: Support Gathering Spaces & Events – Ensure Fairbanks has the facilities needed to host year-round gatherings and large community events.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
✓	a. Secure funding for and implement phases 2 of the Pioneer Park Master Plan, including opening the park to the riverfront, adding a multi-purpose center, and promoting development and renovations in the park.	FNSB	TBD	TBD	TBD
	b. Better promote and connect residents with Tribal events; improved integration between Tribal planning and other community planning.	TCC, FEDC, GFCC	Other Tribal organizations, Explore Fairbanks	TBD	TBD
✓	c. Create and expand designated spaces for food trucks and local vendors in summer; potentially in partnership with First Friday and on the fairgrounds.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
✓	d. Create safe spaces for transient residents to spend time during the day (e.g., day shelter with operator).	Fairbanks Housing and Homeless Coalition	FNSB, TCC	TBD	TBD

Strategy #2: Enhance Outdoor Recreation Opportunities – Expand outdoor recreation opportunities that appeal to residents and visitors alike.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
✓	a. Maintain and modernize existing FNSB outdoor facilities, including athletic fields, Pioneer Park, Tanana Lakes, Birch Hill, and improvements to Chena Lake Recreation Area.	FNSB	Interior Trails & Parks Foundation, Department of Defense	TBD	TBD
	b. Better promote existing events such as Equinox activities, World Eskimo Indian-Olympics, and the Yukon Quest.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
✓	c. Identify ways to better support the missing middle recreationist through improved facilities, signage, information, guides, gear rentals, lessons, and reduced or subsidized fees.	Interior Trails & Parks Foundation	FNSB	TBD	TBD
✓	d. Adopt and implement the Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan.	FNSB	Interior Trails & Parks Foundation	Varies	Ongoing

✓	e.	Improve signage and wayfinding throughout the community, including both online and onsite tools.	Interior Trails & Parks Foundation	FNSB, City of Fairbanks	TBD	TBD
✓	f.	Create a checklist of landmarks around the community for visitors to “check off,” with QR codes and photo opportunities.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
	g.	Revitalize the bike share program in downtown Fairbanks.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
	h.	Support organizations that facilitate and provide spaces, trails, and outdoor activities for the public, such as Interior Alaska Land Trust, Alaska Dog Musher’s Association, Interior Alaska Trails and Parks Foundation, and Fairbanks Paddlers.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
	i.	Improve accessibility to recreation facilities for seniors and the mobility impaired.	FNSB	TBD	Varies	Ongoing
	j.	Provide toilets and sink/rest facilities connecting main traffic corridors in and out of FNSB	FAST Planning, DOT&PF	GFCC	TBD	TBD

Strategy #3: Expand Indoor Recreation – Expand indoor recreation opportunities that appeal to residents and visitors alike.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	a. Conduct a conceptual design study for renovation of the Carlson Center, including expanding indoor recreation, fitness, and multipurpose space and connection to University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Hockey.	FNSB	TBD	TBD	TBD
✓	b. Remodel and expand the Noel Wien Public Library and consider expanding operating hours.	FNSB	TBD	TBD	TBD
✓	c. Maintain, modernize, and replace existing indoor recreation facilities, including pools & recreation centers.	FNSB	FEDC	TBD	TBD
✓	d. Complete project scoping and design for the North Star Community Recreation Center, integrating both public and privately managed spaces.	FNSB	TBD	TBD	TBD
	e. Create a cultural tourism plan to better integrate and connect visitors and residents with cultural learning and retail opportunities in the community.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
	f. Support the performing and visual arts, including Alaska Native and culturally relevant public art installations.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD

Strategy #4: Enhance Retail – Implement the following quality of life strategies, as identified in the Eielson Regional Growth Plan Quality of Life chapter.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	a. Continue progress on commercial re-district rezoning efforts in the City of North Pole.	FNSB	City of North Pole	Varies	Ongoing
	b. Create policies to attract businesses to North Pole, including creating a database of commercial real estate opportunities.	TBD	FEDC	TBD	TBD
	c. Encourage commercial and retail operations located near public recreation spaces that enhance the resident and visitor experience (e.g., equipment and facility rentals, dining, etc.).	FNSB		Varies	Ongoing
	d. Use land use tools to encourage businesses to concentrate near existing commercial development.	FNSB		TBD	TBD

Strategy #5: Connect with Military – Implement the following quality of life strategies, as identified in the Eielson Regional Growth Plan Quality of Life chapter.

Capital Project?	Action	Lead	Support	Estimated Resources	Target Completion
	a. Increase the dissemination of information to military families to increase awareness of local activities and events.	FEDC	DoD, GFCC, Explore Fairbanks	TBD	TBD
	b. Increase distribution of FEDC’s list of businesses who offer military discounts.	Explore Fairbanks	DoD, FEDC	TBD	TBD
	c. Expand promotion and use of the Volunteer Action Center list of volunteer opportunities in the FNSB for military spouses and civilian residents. View here .	United Way of Tanana Valley	DoD	TBD	TBD
	d. Provide bus transportation options from EAFB and FTW to North Pole and Fairbanks during large events and festivals to increase military engagement in community activities.	FNSB	DoD	TBD	TBD
	e. Develop guided programs to introduce newcomers to Alaska’s outdoor recreation opportunities.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
✓	f. Investigate options for developing a community center in the Greater North Pole area.	TBD	FEDC	TBD	TBD
	g. Establish a military community liaison to coordinate information-sharing with EAFB and FTW personnel.	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD