

## “Lillihammer or L.A.

### Can we create more livable Winter City neighborhoods?

A livable winter city. How many people think of Anchorage as a winter city? From the middle of October through the middle of April, our community is subject to the different cycles of winter - Early Winter when cold and darkness make their presence felt; Deep Winter when only the Holidays bring light and warmth, and Late Winter when light begins to return and the sun begins its slow transformation of the landscape.

Toivo Pekkanen, a Finnish novelist, writing in 1946 eloquently captures the spirit of the Nordic seasons:

*“Winter is the true season of the North. Spring is only a promise that something great is about to happen; Summer is only an illusion of what people, during some hot days or weeks, at the most, believe to be true; Autumn means death, it is the dark grave of the promises of the Spring and of the illusions of the Summer. But winter is something that really exists. Winter - it never deceives. It always comes back.”*

Six months of snow, ice, cold and darkness. Fifty percent of every year is spent living in these winter conditions. Yet do we as a people respect our climate and its condition? Are our buildings, meeting places and neighborhoods constructed with winter in mind? Do we embrace and celebrate our winter seasons or just endure them?

Unfortunately, in too many instances a community improvement is oriented solely around the six months of non-winter. The result is a city that can be extremely difficult to live in for half the year.

We in Anchorage, both as individuals and as a community, persist in applying models from the Lower 48. This is in part due to the fact that most people come to Alaska with Outside expectations of how to live. Our culture is also dominated by Lower 48 imagery. For example, our media acquire most of their material from the Lower 48 since the production of information is predominantly for the contiguous 48 market.

This Outside thinking dominates too many of our decisions. According to Canadian Professor Louis-Edmond Hamelin, there are two “winterlands” around the world: the Nordic World (where winter is longer than three months) and the periphery.

The Nordic World is an immense circular network that involves three continents and three oceans, especially the Arctic Ocean, Russia, most of Canada, Greenland, the Scandinavian Countries and Alaska.

Anchorage and its citizens need to recognize that we are a winter city and a member of the Nordic World. As a result, innovative solutions to our winter problems should be looked for in other parts of the northern lands rather than the Lower 48.

Extended low temperatures and extended periods of darkness have given birth to a type of mental “Nordicity” in most of the northern lands. This unique perspective accepts that a good part of what constitutes “winter” comes from the attitude of men and women.

Our attitudes must be changed to develop an Alaskan version of Nordicity. For it is when we begin thinking like people of the north that we acquire northern wisdom and create solutions that are appropriate for our land and its climate.

Many of us live a kind of half-life, indulging ourselves in the good things served up by our northern lands through half the year and pretending the other half away. By our indifference to our own self-interest, we are risking being the also-rans in the global contest between nations and economies for progress and achievement.

A livable winter city makes good economic sense. Our economic lives are becoming increasingly meshed with other countries on a truly international scale. We are competing for jobs with the world. Advances in technology, such as computers and communication, combined with our evolving information-based economy, truly make the planet a global village.

The manipulation of information into knowledge drives many of the new service-based enterprises. This type of business doesn't depend on traditional development infrastructure. It needs excellent communication linkages, adequate supporting businesses, a well-educated workforce and a high quality of life.

Anchorage has little problems with meeting these criteria in the summer months. It's when winter rolls around that our quality of life declines. Anchorage is no longer a frontier town on the edge of civilization. It is a modern metropolitan area. We cannot afford to ignore the role a livable winter environment plays in our economic development.

A more livable winter city is full of life. This energy attracts productive people. Dynamic individuals coming together and generating economic vitality. They share ideas, concepts, business contacts and innovative ways of doing things. The lifeblood of a prosperous city is energetic people making things happen. If

prosperity is wanted in Anchorage, the best investment for growth is a quality winter living environment.

What kind of investments can we consider?

## **I. Visual Environment**

a. **Ice as Art** - Ice could be used in more visually stimulating forms such as illuminated fountains, floodlighting of frozen waterfalls, umbrella sprays left from fountains during freezing periods, ice sculpture, and 'snow and ice' decorative features. These can counteract winter's stark features qualities and serve as centerpieces for civic spaces. Our firefighters could hold winter training sessions applying water in freezing conditions to create marvelous ice sculptures at strategic locations.

b. **Use of Bold or Warm Colors** - judicious selection of colors for buildings and public art can provide contrasts during the dark winter. The brighter hues - red, orange, yellow - are most easily recognized in daylight and present the greatest contrast with snow cover. Certain colors provide symbolic warmth, literally "heating" space and giving it a warmer, vibrant glow. Others can absorb heat and reflect light - important factors in winter.

c. **Illumination for the 'dark' periods** - push back the night with strategic placement of lighting which is pedestrian scale and aesthetically pleasing. Sodium vapor lighting, for example, tends to be more attractive than mercury vapor during winter.

d. **Civic Embellishment** - sculpture, fountains, murals, laser images, banners and flags, signage and other forms of graphic display can emphasize public animation and fantasy in civic space throughout the urban fabric. Visual stimulation through more intense sensory participation will add greater vitality to urban life.

## **II. Human Comfort**

a. **Micro-climatic studies** - focus attention to how small scale improvements to facilities can dramatically improve the micro-climate by emphasizing solar gain and wind protection.

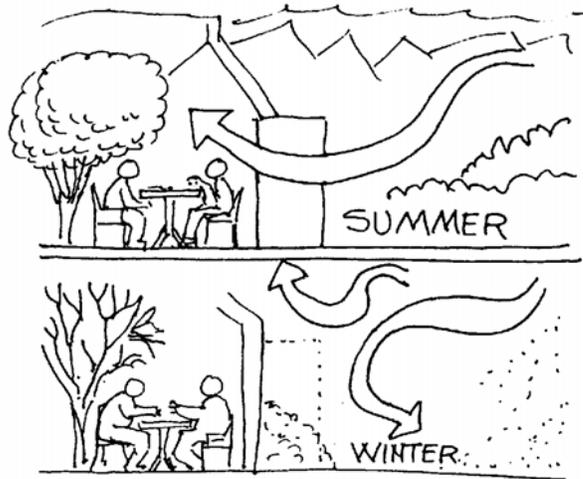
b. **Landscaping concepts to reduce discomfort** - selection and location of vegetation, shelterbelt, trees, walls, fences and orientation, can produce better localized climates. Prepare landscaping designs for the winter and not the brief weeks of summer.

c. **The use of Eco-charts** - analytical techniques that map out neighborhood sunshine and climate parameters (e.g. heating degree days, wind, precipitation, etc.) would produce more effective site selection and longer use of the outdoors.

d. **Solar exposure** - Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD has been shown to significantly impact 10 percent of the population according to Alaska specific research. The technological solution is for individuals to buy light lamps but this approach is not available for the poor or the uninformed. A better approach by the community is: (1) change the rules and regulations so that development from here forward optimizes access to the sun. Harbin, China for example requires that each living unit have at least one hour of sunlight during the winter solstice. (2) Encourage and facilitate increased outdoor activities by developing appropriate infrastructure such as ski trails, ice rinks with warm up huts, etc. which act as an incentive for citizens to enjoy outside winter activities. (3) Change the curriculum of the school district so that it teaches northern living. For example, in the Scandinavian countries, cross-country skiing is taught to children in elementary school.

### III. Protective Urban Strategies

a. **Pedestrian Protection** - colonnades, canopies, arcades, galleries, and glazed over spaces will facilitate movement throughout the city's commercial districts. These could be linked to above-grade protective systems.



b. **Pavement heating** - Use where the benefits are greatest. Where possible, use waste heat from wastewater systems and recycled heat from waste combustion. Explore strategic application of computer and information technology to improve heating of crucial intersections, slopes and walkways.

c. **Multi-use buildings** - buildings containing various functions and activities will minimize the need for movement when these can be concentrated in a single structure or group of buildings. Encourage the placement of residential above commercial, especially in the downtown and in our mid-town primary transit corridors.



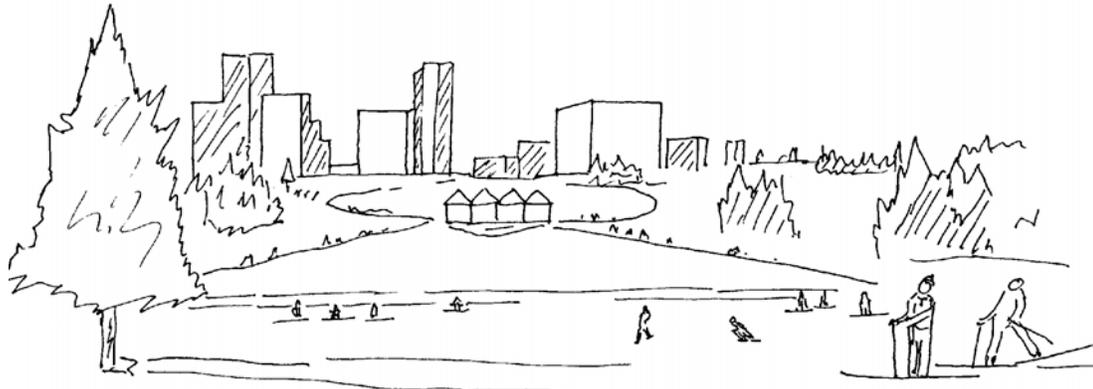
d. **Pedestrian or Vehicular-free Zones** - During winter when water, ice and slush are prevalent, the strategic use of pavement heating to create comfortably warm, non-slip surfaces for pedestrians make more sense than conventional streets. Not every street in our community needs to be devoted to the automobile. Some locations warrant serious consideration as pedestrian malls.



INFILL DEVELOPMENT CAN EXTEND RETAIL FRONTAGE, MEETING PLACES, AND PROVIDE BUS SHELTER.

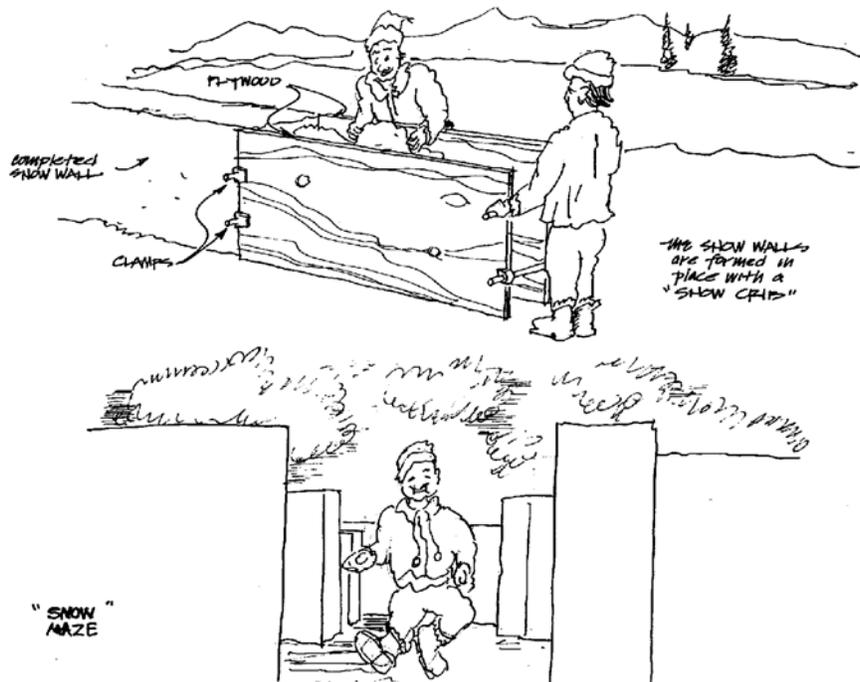
#### IV. Recreation and Leisure

- a. **Parks, Open Space Systems and Waterfronts** - develop more imaginatively using ice, snow wind and sun as positive features for year-round use.
- b. **Ski trail networks** - expand the current system to include a Pedestrian/Ski/Bikeway around the urban core.



CIRCULAR ACCESS FROM CBD TO MAJOR PARK SYSTEM (I.E. TRAIL CORRIDOR AROUND PERIPHERY OF WINTER CITY DISTRICT)

- c. **Winter oriented outdoor amenities** - hockey and ice-skating rinks, slalom tracks, ski-jumps and related amenities will promote fitness and sport programs. Educational objectives shall assist in helping young adults to enjoy and appreciate winter-life. Nordic skiing to be taught in the elementary schools.



d. **Carnivals and Festivals** – encourage more festivities to promote positive images of winter.

e. **Winter indoor gardens** - climate controlled parks to include glazed over, atrium like structures and provide citizens with a welcome respite from winter. Advocate the building of winter gardens as proposed in the CBG plan.

## V. **Transportation**

a. **Reducing the necessity to walk** - locate residences closer to places of employment as in the traditional neighborhood.

b. **Improved transit** - Increase transit service in the winter and reduce it in the summer.

c. **Neighborhood based snow removal** - Support local initiatives for property owners to assume responsibility for snow removal from residential areas. Use federal ISTEA funds to purchase small-scale mechanized snow removal equipment for distribution to neighborhood associations who take responsibility for sidewalk snow removal.

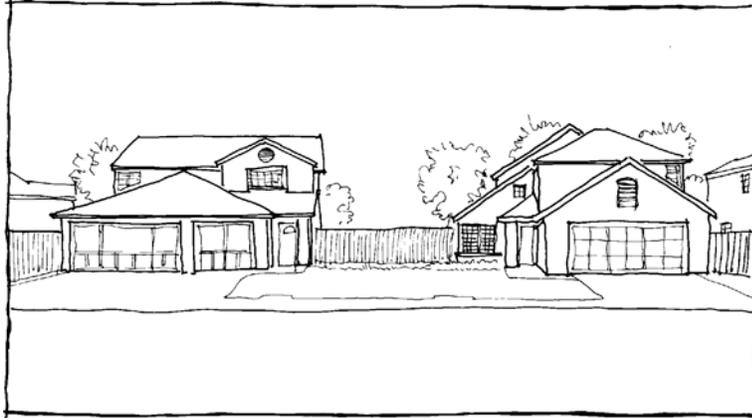
d. **Improved modal linkages** - install ski racks on public transit buses.

In order to obtain a reduction of winter discomfort, incremental and short-term objectives at relatively low cost will be necessary. Through the demonstration that even seemingly small transformations to the city can ease many difficulties associated with the cold, dark season, it will be easier to gain the public and political support required to achieve longer-term, more elaborate goals.

Some suggestions:

### 1. **Land Use Policy**

- \* Changes to conventional practices on land parcels (e.g. more mixed use such as bringing residential into commercial areas especially along our Primary Transit Corridors)
- Variations to street widths and reduction or elimination in certain areas of “segregated use” zoning.
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HOUSING FOR AN AUTOMOBILE SOCIETY



HOUSING FOR A PEDESTRIAN SOCIETY

## 2. Transportation

- \* Changes to existing curb details (sidewalk/roadway interface). Streets with significant pedestrian traffic should be designed to favor pedestrians. For example, Swedish communities are re-building specific intersections to raise the asphalt roadbed rather than ramp the sidewalk down.
- \* Improved maintenance procedures and selective use of sheltering devices
- \* Transit scheduling based on “seasonal demand”. Ski racks on the buses. It’s done in other communities, why not in Anchorage.

## 3. Massing and building controls

- \* Desirability of wind control statements, especially in the downtown area.
- \* Shadowing studies for new developments
- \* Solar access rights guaranteed under normal conditions
- \* Innovative climate responsive design encouraged through competitions
- \* Reducing the setback for commercial development to bring the building closer to the street

#### **4. Open Space/Outdoor Living Areas**

- \* Application of micro-climatic principles to improve thermal comfort.
- \* Vegetation selected for improved aesthetic quality and pedestrian comfort
- \* Integration of “winter landscaping” concepts and not just summer landscaping

#### **5. Public Amenities**

- \* Sensitively designed seating areas emphasizing southern orientation
- \* Passenger shelters provided at intensively used transit stops
- \* Canopies, gallerias, colonnades, arcades for pedestrian protection where acting as connecting links between important parts of a site or between different sites.

We must co-exist with our winter environment. This means a concerted effort to establish and encourage social events, businesses and an urban fabric that celebrates the uniqueness of winter.

Planners, designers and policy makers must encourage and promote application of climate know-how in land use and urban design concepts.

Builders should be provided incentives to demonstrate advantages of climate-adapted projects on particular sites. They must be encouraged to develop projects,

especially housing and mixed-use, which reflect the wisdom of other northern lands.

Local governments must embrace climate-sensitive development as part of their policies through the adoption of new design guidelines, revision of master plans and zoning by-laws, and inclusion of climate-oriented performance standards in competition programs.

Approvals for building and site planning projects should be subjected to review of how well designs are adapted to local winter conditions.

Finally, there exists the need to encourage and promote year-round outdoor activity of both an active and passive nature as a counter-thrust to prolonged indoor confinement.

In Canada, as early as 1920, J.E.H. MacDonald, one of the “Group of Seven” school of painters, stated:

*“Every country has its peculiarity of physical features, its characteristic scenery, its distinguishing climate and atmospheric effects; and out of these and other well-recognized traits of the land and their outgrowth in the life of the people has grown each country’s art.”*

These observations closely echoed those of Swedish artist Richard Bergh who, in 1902, wrote the following:

*“It is not so important that all small nations make immediate and astonishing contributions to the great culture.. it is, on the contrary, of major importance that they develop independently and logically from their own roots, working with subjects which especially suit them - in order little by little, and in an original way, to grow part of the larger organism, and address its variety from an original and vital perspective.”*

Can we use Alaskan ingenuity to solve the problems of light deprivation, snow removal, pedestrian safety and livability in our winter city? Can we develop our own version of northern living that reflects our unique Alaskan culture. I believe we can. But it means that people of our city must reach out as Nordic Citizens and bridge the gaps that stop our progress. We can create a uniquely Alaskan Winter Community if people like ourselves begin acquiring northern wisdom and making those small incremental changes necessary for real achievement. We start by

making a commitment to join together in true Friendship to advance a more livable Winter City.

Allen Kemplen