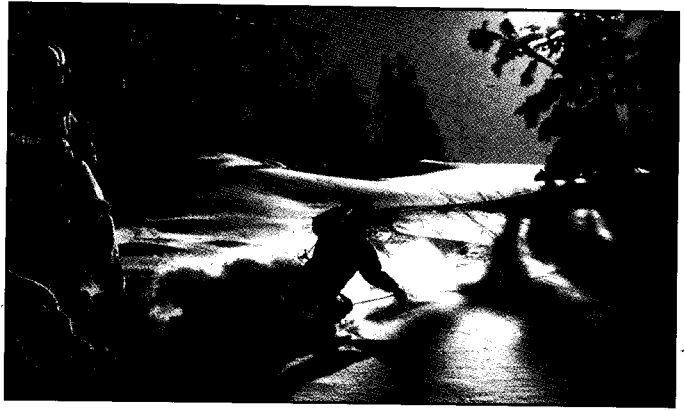


Chapter 4  
*Population, Employment  
and Housing*



ALTHOUGH A FULL TOWNSITE HAD BEEN PLATTED IN 1916, ONLY MAIN STREET WAS EVER BUILT,  
AS VIEWED HERE DURING THE 1930'S.



*Downhill skiing.*

**G**irdwood's distinctive demographic, social and livelihood patterns stem largely from its growth as a winter recreational community within convenient reach of the Anchorage Bowl. These current patterns suggest how the town's socioeconomic character may be affected by continuing resort and visitor industry development. The fundamental forces that have imprinted a character on Girdwood today, its geographic and economic position within Southcentral Alaska, and its role as a recreational/tourism destination will persist. As a result, future socioeconomic patterns should resemble present-day Girdwood more closely than those of Anchorage or other Alaska towns.

## *Population*

### **PAST POPULATION TRENDS**

There has been a settlement at Girdwood since the turn of the century. However, the community was not listed separately by the U.S. Census until 1950. At that time, 79 people were counted.

Following completion of construction of the Seward Highway in 1951, Girdwood lost population. This was reflected in the community's 1960 population of 63, a drop of 20.3 percent from 1950. The 1960 Census also counted 71 persons at Portage, 25 at Bird, and 24 at other locations along Turnagain Arm.

The 1964 earthquake and expansion of Alyeska ski amenities resulted in a reversal of Girdwood's downward population trend. Although much of the old townsite was not usable after the earthquake, reconstruction quickly took place further up the valley. Construction of a hotel and condominiums under the auspices of Alaska Airlines also took place during this decade. Reflecting this increased level of economic activity, the 1970 Census counted 170 people at Girdwood, a 128.6 percent increase over the 1960 figure.

The impact of the Alyeska expansion in the late 1960's resulted in an increase in real estate activity during the 1970's. During that decade, Girdwood's population grew 300 percent, with a total of 577 people counted here by the 1980 Census.

Seibu purchased Alyeska from Alaska Airlines in 1980 and began to make further improvements in the ski resort's amenities. Population growth was especially rapid during the early 1980's. In 1983, the Municipality estimated Girdwood's population at 1,070, an increase of about 85 percent. Also in 1983, the Municipality estimated part-time residents during peak population periods at 1,865 people.

Population growth since the mid-1980's has been much flatter, as it has been elsewhere in the Anchorage area. The 1990 Census counted 1,221 residents in Girdwood. In 1993, the Municipality estimated the community's population at 1,350, an 11 percent increase over the 1990 figure.

### PRESENT POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

The composition of the population of the Girdwood area differs significantly from that of Anchorage as a whole. In brief, Girdwood's population is an older, relatively heterogeneous one, which includes a disproportionate number of males.

According to the 1990 Census, the median age for Girdwood (33.6) resembles national (33.1) more than Alaska (29.5) or Anchorage (29.8) norms. Closer examination, however, indicates that the median age is older in Girdwood because 43.2 percent of the population is concentrated in the 30-45 age ranges. The proportion of the population in both the older and younger age groups is actually lower than is the case for Anchorage. Although unusual by Alaska standards, the concentration of Girdwood's population in a few age groups is not unlike that of other ski resort areas. In addition, the lack of a local high school may be a factor in the relatively low proportion of teenagers in the Turnagain Arm area.

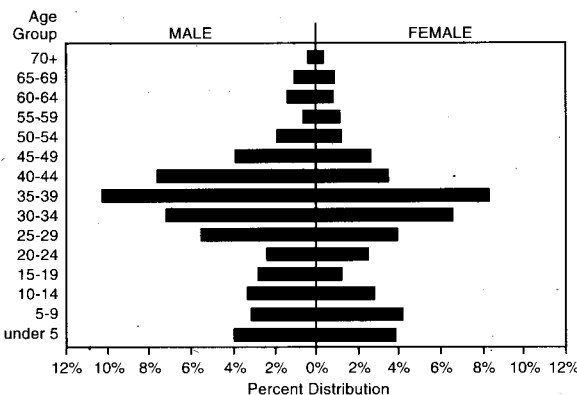
Unlike national norms where females (51.3 percent) outnumbered males (48.7 percent) in 1990, males typically outnumber females in Alaska. The 1990 statewide ratio was 52.7 percent males versus 47.3 percent females. However, in an urban area such as Anchorage, the sexes are typically more balanced, as reflected by the Municipality's 1990 ratio of 51.4 percent males to 48.6 percent females. Girdwood's male-to-female ratio was more extreme, with males outnumbering females by a 56 to 44 percent margin in 1990.

**Table 1**  
**Historic Population**  
**1950 - 1993**

Year	Number	Percent Change
1950	79	
1960	63	-20.3
1970	144	128.6
1980	577	300.7
1990	1,221	111.6
1993	1,350	11.0

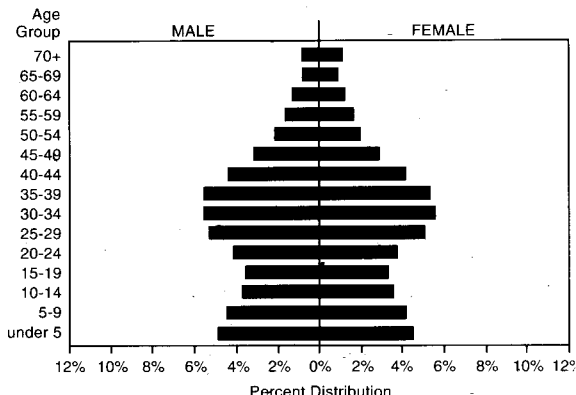
Sources: U.S. Census  
MOA, Department of Community Planning and  
Development, Research Division

**Figure 2**  
**Population Distribution, by Age & Sex**  
**Girdwood, 1990**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

**Figure 3**  
**Population Distribution, by Age & Sex**  
**Anchorage, 1990**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Girdwood has a lower share of family households (54 percent) than Anchorage (68 percent), with a high share of households comprised of unrelated persons (46 percent). Households tend to be small, with an average 2.24 persons per household, compared to Anchorage's 2.68 average.

Although Girdwood's population is ethnically diverse in national origin, it is racially uniform (97.5 percent white). In Anchorage, by comparison, whites account for 80.7 percent of the population.

## *Employment*

Girdwood's economy is dominated by the tourism and recreational industry, with Alyeska Resort being by far the single largest employer. A lesser source of economic strength is the U.S. Forest Service's Glacier Ranger District which is headquartered in the community. However, approximately one-third of Girdwood's resident workforce is employed outside the local area, mainly in Anchorage.

### COMPOSITION OF EMPLOYMENT

Employment in Girdwood constitutes a very minor part of employment for the Anchorage area as a whole. In addition, Girdwood's economy is fundamentally different from that of Anchorage. As a result, employment information for Anchorage is not relevant to Girdwood's situation.

Insured employment statistics for Girdwood developed by the Alaska Department of Labor were examined. However, insured employment statistics do not include self-employed persons or municipal employees. As a result, although insured employment information indicates some of the seasonality of employment in the Girdwood area, it does not give a complete picture of the composition of employment.

A separate survey of employment in Girdwood was therefore undertaken in August, 1992. Each business in the area was contacted and asked to provide information on full-time and part-time employment at different times of the year. The results were tabulated and arrayed by industry category.

The dominant industry in the Girdwood area is services, which accounted for an equivalent of 320.75 full-time jobs in 1992. Although the major single employer was the Alyeska Resort, this industry sector also included the Crow Creek Mine, the Little Bears Playhouse, and a large number of other, smaller employers.

The second largest industry sector in Girdwood in 1992 was construction, which had a total of 101.25 employees when converted to average annual full-time employment. Most were temporary jobs associated with construction of the new Alyeska Prince Hotel and tramway. However, several small contractors who live and operate out of Girdwood fell into this category.

**Table 2**

#### **Average Annual Full-time Employment 1992**

Industry Sector	Number	Percent of Total
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries	0.00	0.0
Mining	2.50	0.4
Contract Construction	101.25	17.5
Manufacturing	2.50	0.4
Transportation, Communication & Public Utilities	6.25	1.1
Trade	91.75	15.9
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	6.25	1.1
Services	320.75	55.4
Government	47.50	8.2
Federal	(16.00)	(2.8)
State	(7.50)	(1.3)
Local	(24.00)	(4.1)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>578.75</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Municipality of Anchorage Employment Survey, August 1992

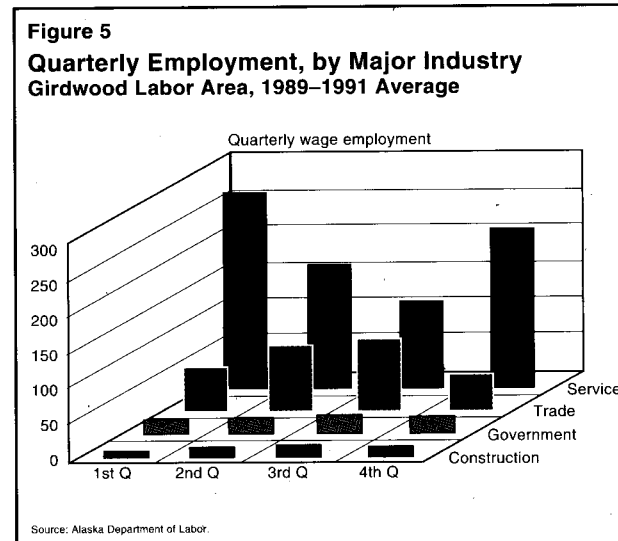
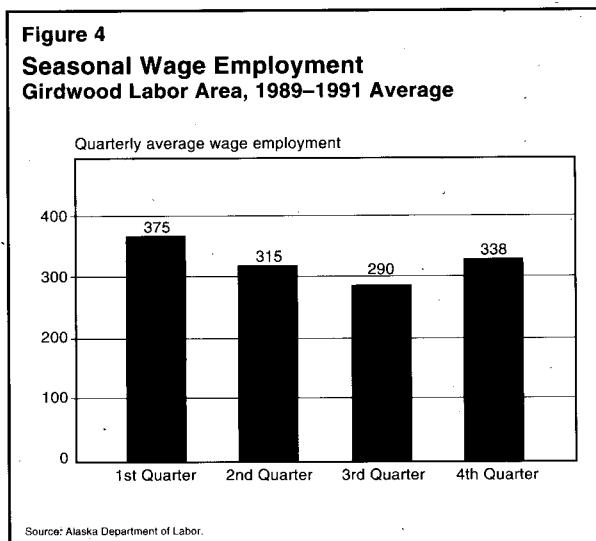
Trade was the third major industry sector in Girdwood in 1992. Although some jobs in this sector serve primarily local needs, most depend on visitors for a major share of their business. Included in the latter group are restaurants, bars and gift shops.

Other industry sectors in Girdwood are less well represented. Government accounted for an annual average of 47.5 full-time job equivalents in 1992. The major government employers were the Girdwood elementary/junior high school and the U.S. Forest Service's Glacier Ranger District. Other employment sectors accounted for a combined total of less than 15 full-time jobs in 1992.

**UNEMPLOYMENT AND SEASONALITY OF EMPLOYMENT**

Although there are no data available specifically for Girdwood, it is not believed that unemployment is a major problem locally. Furthermore, almost one half of local jobholders commute to Anchorage or work in other locations outside the Girdwood area. Nevertheless, Girdwood does experience marked seasonal fluctuations in employment and seasonal unemployment may be a problem for some local households.

Unlike most Alaskan communities, peak employment in Girdwood occurs in the winter months, reflecting the seasonal activities of Alyeska Resort, the community's major employer. Typically, employment at the Resort peaks during prime skiing weekends in the winter and is at its lowest in the summer months. However, unlike most skiing communities, Girdwood also has a strong summer tourist season. Except for a few employers directly involved in servicing skiing activities, most local businesses experience peak activity during the summer. This is particularly true in the trade sector where tourists and other visitors contribute to increased employment. As a result, the "low" periods of employment in Girdwood are months such as October and April, which fall between the winter skiing and summer tourist seasons.



Construction of the new Alyeska Prince Hotel and associated parking and skiing amenities got underway in 1992 and helped mask local employment seasonality in the summer and fall of that year. In July, 1992, there were 204 jobs in contract construction in Girdwood, most of them associated with the expansion of Alyeska Resort. Employment in this sector continued at a high level through 1993. A significant proportion of these jobs were held by Anchorage residents who either commuted each day to Girdwood or who lived temporarily in the community.

When the new Alyeska Prince Hotel opens, summer employment in Girdwood will show a significant increase. Management of the Resort anticipates that the hotel will have its highest rates of occupancy during the summer tourist season. In turn, this will translate into additional non-resort summer jobs in Girdwood, particularly in the trade and services sectors. However, it is anticipated that many of the new jobs will be filled by non-Girdwood residents. Any future expansion of resort development in the Girdwood area is likely to further accentuate winter and summer peaks of employment.

### **RECENT TRENDS AND CHANGES**

Trends in employment for the Municipality of Anchorage as a whole are not representative of those for Girdwood. However, the Alaska Department of Labor does compile "sub-area" insured employment data for the Girdwood area. Although they have major limitations in that local government employment and self-employed persons are not counted, these statistics do provide some indication of the changes that have taken place in Girdwood since 1990. A review of those data indicates that, although overall employment grew only about 4 percent between 1990 and 1992, strong growth was recorded in the retail trade sector, which grew almost 12 percent during the same period.

The most significant change in Girdwood's economy since 1990 is related to the expansion of Alyeska Resort. Major components of this expansion include construction of a 307-room hotel and associated parking amenities, a 60-passenger mountain tram and a new mountaintop restaurant. The tramway and mountaintop restaurant opened in late 1993, and the hotel opened in August, 1994. These improvements involve a corporate investment estimated at between \$60 and \$70 million and will significantly alter the scale and seasonality of the tourist industry in Girdwood. It is anticipated that during peak season Alyeska Resort's expansion will generate 300 new jobs, and indirectly 100 more in the area.

A second change affecting Girdwood's economy is the improvement of seven miles of the Seward Highway between Bird Point and the Alyeska Highway. Initial work on the first phase of the "Bird-to-Gird" project got underway in 1993, and the project is currently scheduled to be completed by the end of 1998. Upgrading of this route will greatly reduce the likelihood of road closure due to avalanches and will also make the daily drive for commuters safer and less stressful. Such improvements are important to Girdwood residents who commute by car to Anchorage and are equally important to Anchorage residents expected to commute to work in Girdwood.

### **INCOME LEVELS**

Personal and household purchasing power are comparatively high in Girdwood. In 1989, per capita income was \$25,769 (compared to \$19,620 for Anchorage) and median household income was \$47,920 (compared to \$43,946 for Anchorage). These figures partly reflect a statistically higher labor force participation rate by Girdwood residents and fewer dependents. The percentage of Girdwood residents reporting incomes below the poverty line 1989 was only about 1.5 percent, compared to 7.1 percent for Anchorage.

# Housing

Girdwood's multiple roles as a primary residential community, a second-home setting, and a resort community have produced several distinct housing submarkets, each with its characteristic housing stock, spatial arrangement, and occupancy patterns. Many of these characteristics are unique to Girdwood, reflecting the dominance of the resort/recreational character.

The most notable housing characteristic in Girdwood is that there are more second homes than primary homes and, as a result, there are more vacant than occupied dwelling units. In 1990, the community had a total of 1,227 residential dwelling units, only about 1 percent of the Municipality's total housing stock. However, 56 percent of the units in Girdwood were vacant. Most vacant units (86 percent) were second homes (seasonal, recreational or occasional use), while another 11 percent were for sale or rent. The remainder had been sold or rented and were either not yet occupied or were vacant for unidentified reasons.

Of the secondary homes, 53 percent were multi-family units, with most being located close to the ski resort. The remaining 47 percent were single-family homes. Whereas the second home market is skewed toward multi-family units, the primary home market is dominated by single-family homes.

Primary homes (those occupied by residents) account for less than half (44 percent) of the total housing units in Girdwood. However, nearly three fourths of them are single-family residences, with the remainder being multi-family (includes small number of mobile homes.) Compared to Anchorage, Girdwood has a much higher percent of residents living in single-family homes (74 percent to 52 percent).

Girdwood homes tend to be smaller than in Anchorage, with the median number of bedrooms per dwelling being 2.38 versus 3.07 in Anchorage. This probably reflects the fewer number of people per household in Girdwood, as well as the fact that over half of the units are second homes.

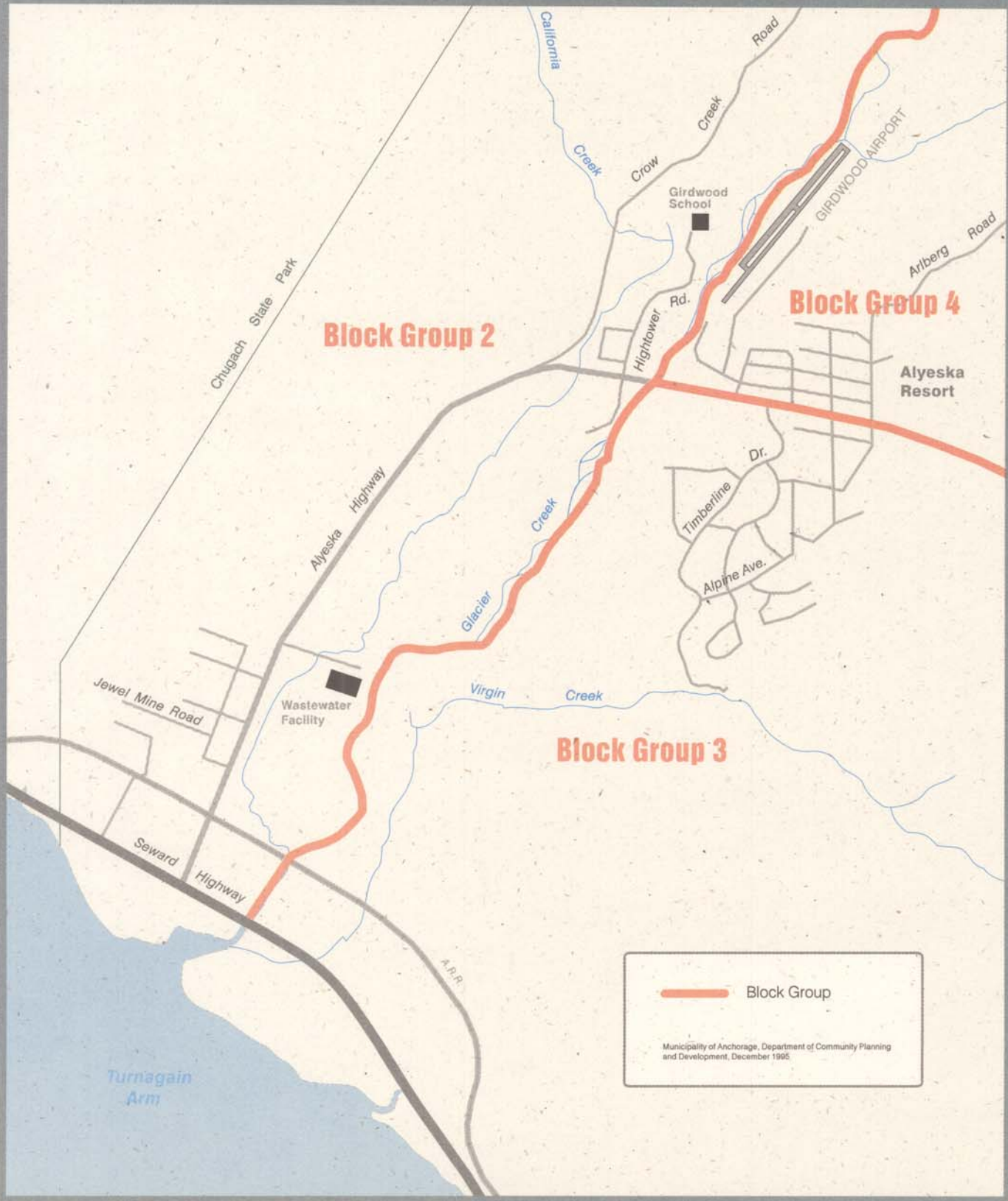
The distribution of dwelling units is not uniform throughout the Girdwood area. Proximity to the ski resort has heavily influenced the siting of most of the large multi-unit structures and other second homes in the valley. For example, Block Group 4 (see Map 5) contains 91 percent of Girdwood's dwellings in large multi-unit (10 or more units) buildings, 71 percent of its condominiums, and 52 percent of its second homes. By contrast, Block Group 2, the western side of the valley, includes only 9 percent of Girdwood's multi-unit dwellings, 3 percent of its condominiums, and 13 percent of its second homes.

**Table 3**  
**Household Income Distribution**  
**1989**

Household Income	Number	Percent of Total
Under \$10,000	13	2.6
\$10,000 - \$19,999	16	3.2
\$20,000 - \$29,999	83	16.5
\$30,000 - \$39,999	80	15.9
\$40,000 - \$49,999	91	18.1
\$50,000 - \$59,999	41	8.1
\$60,000 - \$74,999	66	13.1
\$75,000 - \$99,999	39	7.8
\$100,000 - \$124,999	45	8.9
\$125,000 - \$129,999	9	1.8
\$150,000 or more	20	4.0
<b>Total Households</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Median Household Income</b>		<b>\$47,920</b>

Source: U.S. Census

# 1990 Census Block Groups





Housing densities vary throughout the valley, but some general patterns are worth noting. On the east side of the valley in Block Groups 3 and 4 are two residential subdivisions near Alyeska Resort. The single-family portions of these subdivisions range from 2.1 to 2.4 dwelling units per acre. The multi-family housing developments, which are located immediately adjacent to the resort, average around 12 dwelling units per acre on the south side of the resort area, and 40 dwelling units per acre on the north side. Densities actually exceed 60 dwelling units per acre in a couple of individual developments on the north side.

Away from the resort on the west side of the valley, in Block Group 2, nearly all residential development is in the form of single-family homes. Two major exceptions are an 8-unit condominium development in two 4-plexes along Alyeska Highway, and a 15-unit condominium development located in the new townsite.

Lot sizes vary considerably in Block Group 2. The original lots created by BLM along Alyeska Highway ranged from 1-3 acres in size. However, several were subsequently subdivided. Today, densities typically range from less than 1 dwelling unit per acre to 8 dwelling units per acre.

The availability of housing in Girdwood is limited: Despite the overall high vacancy rate, the number of units for sale or rent was only about 8 percent of all units. Most second-home owners appear reluctant to rent or lease their homes. Consequently, without new construction, Girdwood's existing housing stock will continue to be limited in the demand it can accommodate.

**Table 4**  
**Housing Occupancy Characteristics**  
**1990**

Housing Occupancy	Number
<b>Occupied Units</b>	<b>544</b>
Area 2 -- West Valley	(231)
Area 3 -- South Alyeska	(191)
Area 4 -- North Alyeska	(122)
<b>Vacant Units</b>	<b>683</b>
Area 2 -- West Valley	(118)
Area 3 -- South Alyeska	(239)
Area 4 -- North Alyeska	(326)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,227</b>

Source: U.S. Census, 1990

**Table 5**  
**Vacant Housing Characteristics**  
**1990**

Vacant Unit Type	West Valley	South Alyeska	North Alyeska	Total
Unit for Rent	19	25	6	50
Unit for Sale	8	7	8	23
Unit Rented or Sold, Not Occupied	7	0	1	8
Seasonal/Recreational/Occasional Use	76	203	306	585
Other Vacant	8	4	5	17
<b>TOTAL VACANT UNITS</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>683</b>

Source: U.S. Census, 1990

## *Projections for Employment, Population and Housing*

The fundamental forces that drive community change are employment and population growth. Growth creates new demand for the use of land, with new housing typically being the single most important use in terms of the amount of land consumed.

There is always a certain degree of uncertainty in projecting future economic and population growth. Much future activity and growth will occur as a result of variables that are beyond the local ability to control, although they may be influenced by local actions. Therefore, it is important to anticipate, as reasonably as possible, those variables over which there is little local control, and combine them with local actions to form the assumptions upon which the projections will be based.

Although the uncertainty of long-range projections is recognized, it is still important to make best "guessestimates." The projections are used to indicate future land demands for various uses and activities which, in turn, can influence spatial development patterns. Projections are also used to guide the size and placement of public facilities and utilities.

In the course of developing this plan, employment, population and housing projections were developed for various land use alternatives. These projections were based upon differing levels of new resort development that could possibly occur in the Girdwood area over the next two decades, or longer.\*

The projections also considered the degree to which the community would grow without additional resort development. Such growth would result from people desiring to live in Girdwood, but whose economic livelihood was derived elsewhere. Most of this group would commute to jobs in Anchorage, as many of Girdwood's residents already do.

The basic assumptions underlying the projections used in this plan are as follows:

- There will continue to be local, regional, national, and international interest in outdoor recreational activities as a way to occupy leisure time.
- Alaska, particularly the southcentral region, will continue to attract visitors who are interested in the area's natural scenery, wildlife, history, and for a variety of recreational opportunities.
- It is in the State's best interest, as well as that of the region and local community, to foster a variety of year-round recreational activities, supported by varying levels of support services.
- The Girdwood valley and the immediate environs currently offer a limited range of opportunities for outdoor recreation.
- The Girdwood valley has natural features and space, within limits, for the development of additional recreational activities, and the lodging and services to complement them.
- Girdwood will expand as a destination resort/recreational community, as well as a satellite community within the larger Anchorage metropolitan area.
- The State and Municipality will make available, as appropriate, ample land for community and resort/ recreational development in the Girdwood area.

Tables 6 and 7 indicate 20-year projections for employment, population, and housing that form the basis for the **Girdwood Area Land Use Plan**. To a large degree, these projections reflect the moderate level of new resort development identified as scenario/alternative 2/2A in studies completed by Sno.engineering, Inc., and Kevin Waring Associates.

\*The land use alternatives, and the assumptions and projections which they are based upon, are described separately in the Girdwood Community Impact Study, by Kevin Waring Associates, et al., August, 1993. This report also includes a description of resort alternatives prepared by Sno. Engineering, Inc.

**EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS**

The 20-year employment projections include a combination of new resort and visitor industry employment, coupled with increasing community-based, local-serving employment. The initial major increase in employment will accompany the opening of the Alyeska Prince Hotel and mountain restaurant. This is projected to add 300 new resort-related jobs, as well as indirectly create 100 additional jobs in the community.

The employment projections also assume that additional skier-based recreational development will occur during the next 20 years in the Glacier-Winner Creek area. The scale of that development is assumed to be comparable in capacity and number of visitors to the maximum level of development at Alyeska Resort under its current expansion program. New recreational development, combined with new base area resort facilities, is projected to add another 700 jobs in the Girdwood valley.

Separate estimates are included in Table 6 for direct on-site and indirect off-site employment. On-site employment includes jobs within the resort area. Off-site employment includes new jobs elsewhere in Girdwood supported by community growth and increased visitor activity.

Currently, Girdwood's employment multiplier is about 3.5:1. That means 3.5 jobs in basic industries (e.g., the visitor industry) generate one additional support sector job in trade, construction, public and private services. Girdwood's multiplier is low, chiefly because residents purchase many goods and services in Anchorage. This situation is not projected to change significantly over 20 years. However, as Girdwood's population and visitor numbers grow, the local economy will expand and diversify, resulting in an off-site employment multiplier projected to be closer to 3:1 for new resort development.

**POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

Table 6 indicates the change in population that is projected from the 1993 base year to the year 2013. Included are projections for residents and visitors that would be expected on a typical in-season day.

Even without additional resort development, Girdwood's resident population is anticipated to double over the next 20 years. This equates to an annual average growth rate of approximately 3.5 percent. A further increase of more than 600 residents is anticipated, however, as a result of additional resort development. Thus, the housing and land demand projections in this Plan are based upon a resident population that is projected to increase by about 145 percent by the year 2013.

It should be noted that the resident population projection assumes that a majority of the resort workforce will be transient/seasonal workers, and commuters from Anchorage's labor pool. This assumption, however, restricts overall population growth. If more workers become Girdwood residents, local population growth will increase.

**Table 6  
Projections for Employment, Population, and Housing**

	1993 Current Estimates	Incremental Increase	2013 (Total)
<b>Total Employment</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>1,873</b>	<b>2,483</b>
Direct-Resort-On-Site	300	1,000	1,300
Indirect-Off-Site (trade/services)	310 (207)	873 (582)	1,183 (789)
<b>Total Population</b>	<b>3,230</b>	<b>4,945</b>	<b>8,175</b>
Resident	1,350	1,950	3,300
Visitor (overnight)	1,880 (805)	2,995 (1,510)	4,875 (2,315)
(daytime)	(1,075)	(1,485)	(2,560)
<b>Total New Housing Demand</b>	<b>1,314</b>	<b>1,559</b>	<b>2,873</b>
Primary Homes	631	895	1,526
Secondary Homes	683	549	1,232
Employee/Transient Housing	N/A	115	115
<b>Vacancy Factor</b>	<b>(8%)</b>	<b>(5%)</b>	<b>(5%)</b>

Also included in the population projections are nonresident visitors. Projections of visitors have been included because the demands they place on lodging/camping, local circulation, commerce, and public utilities and services must also be taken into consideration.

### HOUSING PROJECTIONS

New population growth in Girdwood will create a demand for additional housing. Table 6 includes projections for both primary and secondary housing demand. Also included is the addition of a certain amount of employee/transient housing.

Housing projections were also distinguished by housing type (single-family/multi-family) for both primary and secondary homes. The projected housing splits by type are identified in Table 7. The housing type splits are significant because each has different siting and density characteristics that influence the land demand and placement within the valley.

**Table 7**  
**Housing Projections by Type**

	1993 Current Estimates	Incremental Increase	2013 (Total)
<b>Primary</b>			
Single-family	467	662	1,129
Multi-family	164	233	397
<b>Secondary</b>			
Overnight	321	258	579
Daytime	362	291	653
Employee/Transient Housing	N/A	115	115
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,314</b>	<b>1,559</b>	<b>2,873</b>

Note: Projections include a vacancy factor.

The projected demand for primary homes is keyed to resident population growth, and the assumption that the average number of people per household will remain constant. It also presumes that the present ratio of single-family to multi-family homes will remain constant.

Like other resort communities, there will also be demand for additional second homes, which will continue to comprise a sizable share of the total housing stock in Girdwood. Currently, nearly all of the second homes are owned by Anchorage residents, with some owned by residents of the neighboring Kenai and Matanuska-Susitna Boroughs. Only a handful are presently owned by non-Alaskans.

Even though second homes currently outnumber primary homes in Girdwood, the rate of growth for second homes is projected to be less than for primary homes over the next 20 years. Should Girdwood become a national and international destination resort, the feeling is that most new second homes will continue to be owned by Alaskans. These projections assume that most out-of-state visitors overnighiting in Girdwood would be staying in commercial lodging.

A significant portion of the visitor industry employment is seasonal. Many of the seasonal jobs are relatively low paying and are typically filled by nonresident workers. A certain amount of housing is projected specifically to meet the needs of these employees. The amount of housing equates to 1 unit for every 2.5 transient/seasonal employees.