



Quality of Life

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Quality of life is a broad topic that includes the characteristics and features in a community that contribute to the overall well-being and satisfaction of its residents. This chapter focuses on dining, entertainment, retail, and indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities available to active duty EAFB members and their families; it also relates to and references many of the other chapters in the RGP.
- Active duty personnel and their families want to feel they are a part of their surrounding civilian community. Unfortunately, due to frequent location changes, achieving community connection and integration is an ongoing challenge across all military bases. FNSB is a military-friendly community, as reflected in its high concentration of military veterans. However, there is still greater opportunity for expanding connections between local businesses, organizations and EAFB families.
- EAFB has many activities and resources available on-base for EAFB personnel and their families. The 354th Force Support Squadron oversees most of these programs through the Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program. Current facilities and programs have sufficient capacity to absorb the increase in personnel associated with the F-35 Beddown, and should be able to meet the increase in demand by adding staff and extending facility hours accordingly.
- Military families enjoy the extensive outdoor recreation opportunities that are unique to Interior Alaska, include: hiking, hunting, fishing, boating/rafting, gold panning, camping, visiting the hot springs and viewing the northern lights (aurora).
- The City of Fairbanks is the second largest city in Alaska after Anchorage, and offers many retail, dining and indoor recreation needs. However, the area within a 20-minute drive radius of EAFB, including the nearby City of North Pole, has limited retail, dining and indoor recreation options. Both civilian residents and military families have indicated support for an increase in the availability of retail, restaurants and other commercial developments in the North Pole area.
- Access to health and social services is a critical component of quality of life. Limited health care is available in the immediate vicinity of EAFB. Active duty personnel and their families must travel to Ft. Wainwright or Fairbanks for many types of care, and some specialties, require travel to Anchorage or Seattle. There are gaps in access to behavioral health care, supportive services for families and Otolaryngology (Ear, Nose, Throat) care. Non-military residents in the area have expressed interest in expanding local options for health care, including the need for primary care providers in the North Pole area. For more information on the Health and Social Service resources and needs, see the Health and Social Services Appendix.



The F-35 Beddown will bring additional active duty members and their families to Eielson Air Force Base (EAFB) from locations all over the country, and most will be unfamiliar with the Interior Alaska region, the highly variable climate and the surrounding community. These new Air Force personnel and their families will seek quality neighborhoods, good schools, recreation opportunities and other services – many of the same characteristics that civilian residents desire. Improving the quality of life in the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) for incoming military families will also improve the quality of life for existing residents.

Most EAFB active duty members are stationed in FNSB for a limited duration, typically two or three years. However, all active duty members eventually retire from service, and many choose to live somewhere they have been stationed during their career. By creating a positive experience and a sense of community for active duty EAFB military members and their families, the FNSB can maintain its strong heritage as a military-friendly community and continue to attract and retain military veterans.

On-base Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs and services are an essential part of military installations. These offerings help enhance morale, support military households through transitions and deployments, and support family and individual wellness for active duty families.

Blue Star Families and the Defense Manpower Data Center conduct an annual survey of active duty military members and their families to understand the challenges and needs of American military households, called the Military Family Lifestyle Survey. According to the 2017 survey report, integration with the surrounding civilian community is a critical part of a military family's experience. However, civilian community

integration remains low for many military families due to isolation and frequent moves (see related statistics in Figure 1). Creating strong outreach programs and building community ties help military families adjust to their new location, integrate into the community and increase their quality of life.

The objective of this chapter is to examine the quality of life factors that contribute to a military family's experience during their time in FNSB, including those that make them feel welcome, and the challenges they experience. The term "quality of life" can encompass a broad range of services and characteristics. Every individual has a different set of priorities and preferences that contribute to their choice of where to live and their views on the positive and negative aspects of their experiences. This chapter focuses specifically on recreation, entertainment and commercial activities. However, quality of life is influenced by and relates to almost all other categories in this plan, including education, child care, public safety, health care, workforce development, transportation and land use planning.

FIGURE 1: CIVILIAN COMMUNITY INTEGRATION: FINDINGS FROM NATIONAL BLUE STAR SURVEY

53% want greater opportunities to meet people, make friends, or expand professional networks in their civilian community

51% feel they don't belong in their local civilian community

31% have not had an in-depth conversation with a civilian in their community in the past month



SUMMARY OF EXISTING SERVICES, FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Dining, Retail and Services

On-Base: What's Available at EAFB

EAFB offers a range of dining options for its active duty members and families. The primary dining facility, Two Seasons, serves breakfast, lunch, dinner and midnight meals throughout the week. EAFB is also home to the Yukon Club, which contains the Bonfire Grill and Restaurant and a sports bar. There is also a snack bar inside the bowling center and a coffee shop and coffee/bagel stand on EAFB. Food trucks sometimes visit the base, increasing the variety of food offered. These facilities will often extend their hours periodically throughout the year to accommodate an increase in on-base population during major exercises such as RED FLAG.¹ EAFB also has a commissary with food items available for purchase, including fresh meat, a bakery and produce, although EAFB focus group participants indicate the commissary hours are limited and the selection is small compared with other commissaries on larger installations.

For retail, The Eielson Shopping Center includes a range of clothing, personal care items, housewares, electronics, books, toys and souvenirs. The Shopping Center also includes a food court, barber, salon, alterations, floral and optical shop, along with a fuel station outside.

¹ RED FLAG is a series of Pacific Air Force field training exercises, which bring together U.S. and international partners to simulate real combat experiences. EAFB hosts several RED FLAG exercises each year. For more information, visit <http://www.eielson.af.mil/Info/RED-FLAG-Alaska/>

“ The Commissary here is small; I’ve never seen anything like that in any location. ”

“ As it is, we rely on Amazon Prime. ”

“ We just have the necessities to survive. ”

-EAFB focus group participant

“ There is a small shopping center here, but no one wants to walk around with the same shirt, so most people do their clothes shopping in Fairbanks. ”

-Member of the 354th Support Squadron



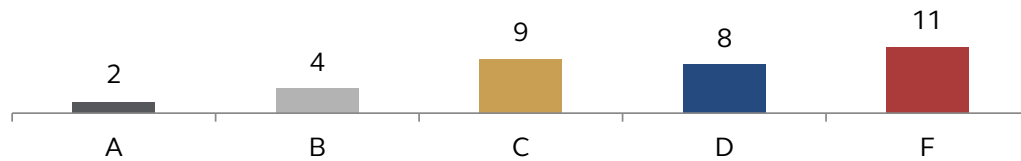
Photo by TSgt Shawn Nickel, EAFB Public Affairs

Off-Base: What's Available in the Area

Overall, EAFB focus group participants expressed dissatisfaction with access to retail and shopping in the area, with 19 out of 34 (56 percent) giving it a grade D or F (Figure 2). The City of North Pole has a small commercial center, with a mall and grocery store in the center of town and a

variety of franchise restaurants nearby. However, many civilian residents in North Pole, EAFB and surrounding areas must travel to the larger City of Fairbanks for major purchases, activities, services and food.

FIGURE 2: EAFB FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS - RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, "GRADE YOUR LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH ACCESS TO RETAIL AND SHOPPING."



The City of North Pole conducted a telephone-based retail needs and opportunities survey in spring 2017. The survey collected feedback from 507 residents living in the City of North Pole and surrounding areas, including zip codes 99705 (434 respondents), 99702/Eielson Air Force Base (45 respondents) and 99714/Salcha (28 respondents). The survey focused on current shopping behaviors and desired retail services. A majority of area residents (75 percent) reported a high quality of life in the North Pole area (see Figure 2). However, respondents gave poor scores for "local shopping and retail," "low tax rates and cost of living," and "access to medical services."

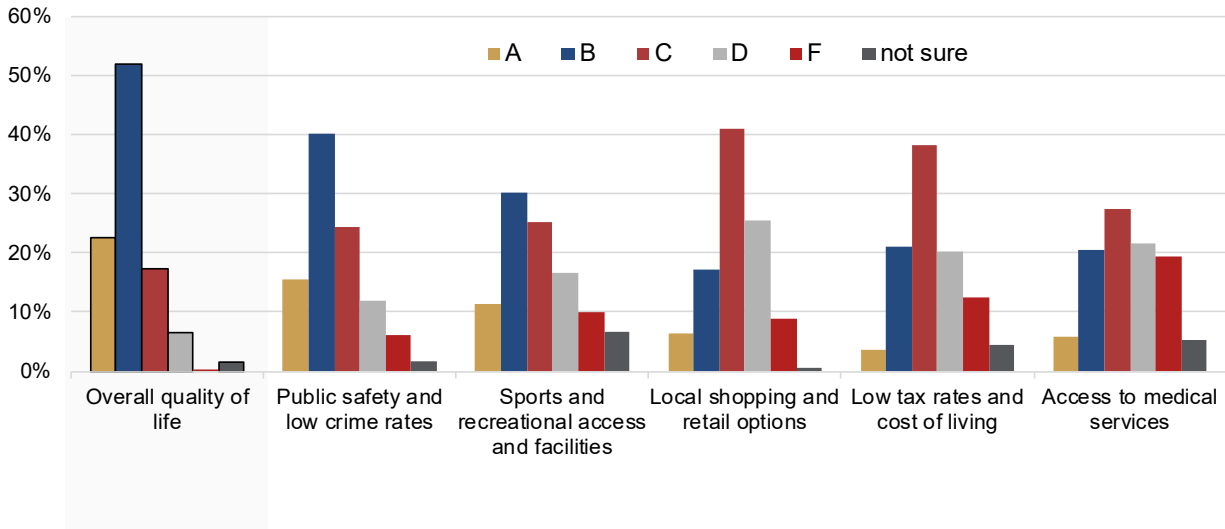
“ There is more shopping and activities for kids in Fairbanks but we did not want to live there because of the commute. North Pole was a good half-way point and has a great library.”

“In greater Fairbanks we need a Target. And chain restaurants. And some place to buy clothes!”

“ We want a Fred Meyer in North Pole.”

-EAFB focus group participant

FIGURE 3: EAFB FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS - RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, “GRADE YOUR LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH ACCESS TO RETAIL AND SHOPPING.”

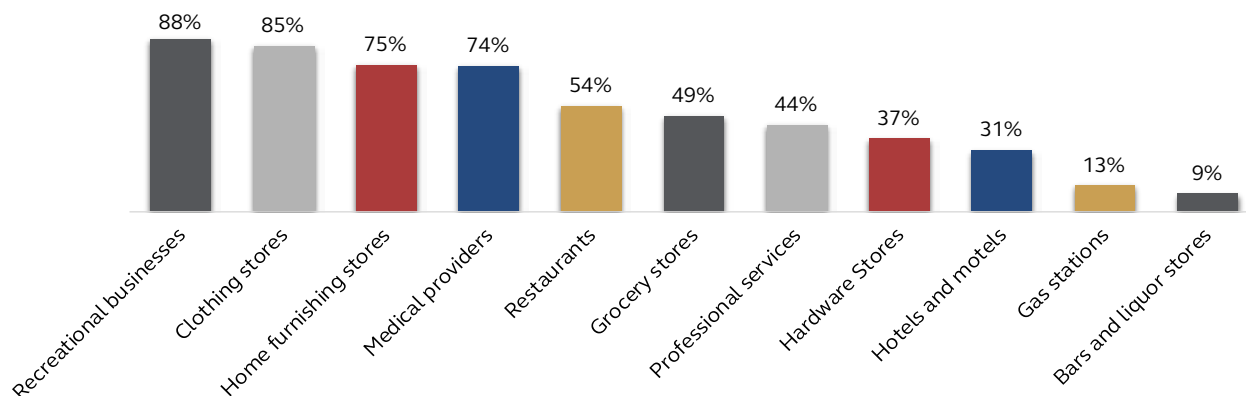


In follow-up questions, survey respondents indicated they want more options for local services and shopping. The distribution of desired businesses and services is shown in Figure 3. Specifically, residents indicated a desire for more recreational businesses (88 percent), clothing stores (85 percent), home furnishing stores (75 percent) and medical providers (74 percent) in the area, as depicted in Figure 4.² When asked their

top choice for a new business in North Pole, most frequent responses were Fred Meyer (130 times), Walmart (37), Target (35), Arby’s (19), Costco (16) and Sam’s Club (11).

² City of North Pole Comprehensive Strategic Plan Implementation: Retail Needs and Opportunities Summary. Conducted Spring 2017 by Alaska Survey Research.

FIGURE 4: CITY OF NORTH POLE RETAIL NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY, 2017: TOP CHOICES FOR NEW BUSINESSES AND SERVICES



The survey also asked respondents about trip frequency to North Pole and to Fairbanks. More than half of survey respondents (57 percent) made six or more trips to downtown North Pole in the last 30 days, with an average of 12.8 visits per month. Three-quarters of respondents (75 percent) made six or more trips to Fairbanks, with an average of 15.7 visits per month.

Unsurprisingly, those who live close to North Pole travel slightly more to North Pole than Fairbanks. Those who live near EAFB also travel more to North Pole than to Fairbanks, and respondents with children make more frequent trips to both areas.

When asked about why they choose to shop in North Pole versus Fairbanks, residents provided a range of reasons, summarized in Figure 5.

Residents choose to shop in North Pole for convenience and to save time when looking for items that are available in town. However, for specific purchases and extended shopping trips, residents typically opt to travel to Fairbanks. Those who are in Fairbanks, especially those working there, are more likely to do their shopping in Fairbanks. Survey respondents also indicated the four percent North Pole sales tax sometimes discourages them from shopping locally. Fairbanks has a greater variety of goods and services available, including bulk purchasing options. While the Sam’s Club in Fairbanks closed in early 2018, Costco has announced preliminary plans to move into the warehouse space, a much-celebrated announcement.

FIGURE 5: CITY OF NORTH POLE RETAIL NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES SURVEY, 2017: TOP CHOICES FOR NEW BUSINESSES AND SERVICES

Why residents choose to shop in the North Pole area	Why area residents choose to shop in the Fairbanks area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s convenient, close, on the way • Prefer to buy local • Desired items are available • To eat at restaurants and get groceries • Closer, safer, less driving than Fairbanks • Cheaper or similar costs to Fairbanks • People are friendly and familiar • Easier for urgent purchases • It’s convenient for when you only need a few items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s cheaper • Wider variety of stores and products • Bigger and better stores, bulk options • Convenient, closer, quicker • There for work/ in Fairbanks anyway • Doctor is located there • More likely to have what I need • No sales tax • One-stop shopping

There are fewer retail, food and shopping options outside of the metropolitan areas of Fairbanks and North Pole, although there are a small number of businesses in the Moose Creek and Salcha areas. The Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development's Alaska Community Database lists 98 active business licenses in Salcha and three in Moose Creek, including a mix of lodging, arts and crafts, cleaning services, plowing services, farms, construction businesses, animal boarding and tax, legal and bookkeeping services. There is also a seasonal farmer's market in Salcha, and a lodge and general store in Moose Creek. According to resident feedback during an August 2017 project meeting in the Salcha area, Salcha business owners are seeing a decline in the sale of goods and services, citing the statewide recession and an aging population. Salcha residents also indicated a strong desire for a laundromat in the community.



Indoor Recreation and Cultural Activities

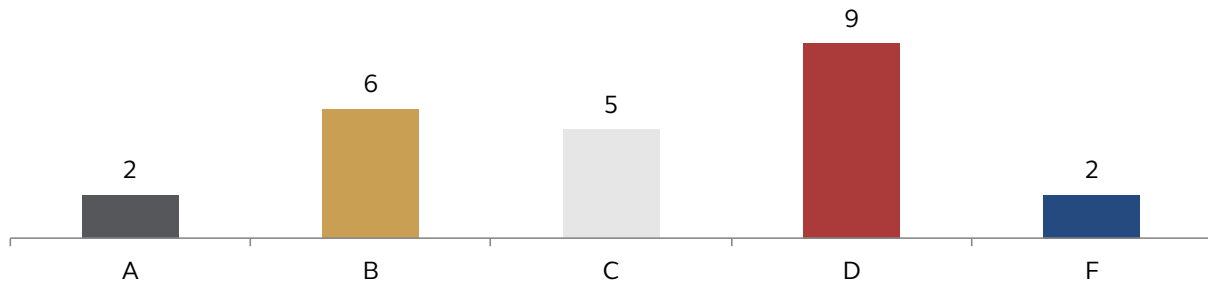
On-Base: What's Available at EAFB

EAFB has a suite of recreation, dining and supportive activities available for military personnel and their families, overseen by the 354th Force Support Squadron. Indoor activities include a movie theater, 12-lane bowling center, an arts and crafts facility, a sports center, an auto skills center, an indoor pool and more. The Eielson City Center contains a library, music room and community center with a conference room, 1,800 square foot jungle gym and fitness equipment. Many of the programs are funded through self-generated revenues; for example, movies at the theater are free with costs offset by selling concessions. The squadron adjusts staffing and operating hours for activities depending on demand; if a facility is slow, they can reduce the number of operating hours to keep costs down; if demand goes up, they can add additional staff and expand hours. Due in part to this flexibility, staff are not concerned with the capacity of the squadron's recreation, retail and dining facilities to withstand the increase in users resulting from the F-35 Beddown.

While there are many activities available on-base, many EAFB focus group participants were dissatisfied with access to indoor recreation; 11 of 24 participants gave it a grade of D or F (Figure 6). Based on follow-up discussions, one of the primary reasons for this score is the lack of indoor recreation options near EAFB.

“ The indoor community center on-base is really good. ”
-EAFB focus group participant

FIGURE 6: EAFB FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS - RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, “GRADE YOUR LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH ACCESS TO INDOOR RECREATION”

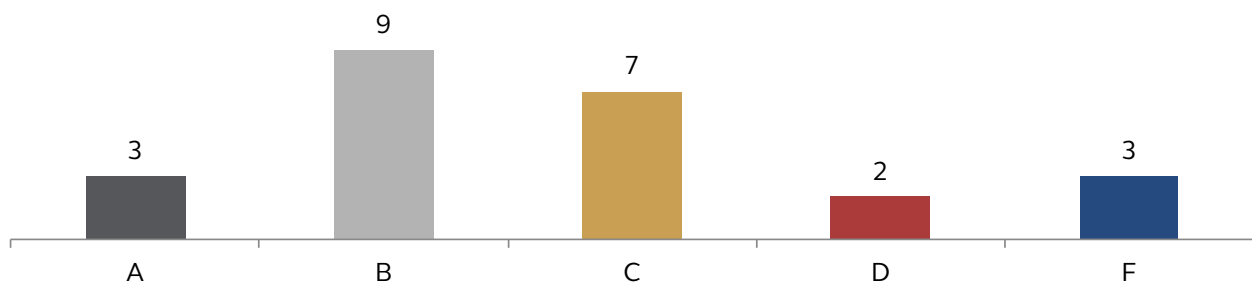


Off-Base: What’s Available in the Area

The areas surrounding EAFB have limited commercial development and indoor recreation opportunities; most are in the City of North Pole, including a library. There are many churches and religious groups in the area serving a broad range of denominations. During the Eielson focus groups, participants were asked to grade their

satisfaction with access to cultural activities and resources. They gave this category higher marks than the indoor recreation category; the grade receiving the most votes was B, and only 5 of 24 participants gave the category a grade D or F (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: EAFB FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS - RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, “GRADE YOUR LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH ACCESS TO CULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES”



For a more extensive selection of activities, EAFB personnel and their families can travel north for approximately half an hour to reach the City of Fairbanks and surrounding area. Fairbanks has many of the amenities associated with a medium-sized city, including museums, theaters, shopping, gyms, galleries, parks and more. Newer additions to the year-round local attraction inventory are the 30,000 square foot Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum at Wedgewood Resort, the 38,720 square foot Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center, the newly-configured and expanded Gold Dredge 8, the remodeled Chena Hot Springs Resort and Ice Hotel, the Fairbanks Community Museum, and the Fairbanks Children's Museum. During the City of North Pole's Comprehensive Strategic Planning process, a survey was conducted of area residents, with over 200 responses received. Overall residents indicated higher levels of satisfaction for "parks, trails and recreational opportunities" than youth activities or museums, art and culture (Figure 8). When asked in more detail, respondents indicated a desire for more entertainment options such as a movie theater and bowling alley, and more activities for children and young adults.

“ The Fairbanks Children’s Museum is great, and so is the University museum. They have exhibits for the whole family. I wish they would bring back the dinosaurs! ”

-EAFB focus group participant

“ There needs to be more things for the youth in this community. They should not have to hang out at Safeway or food plaza. ”

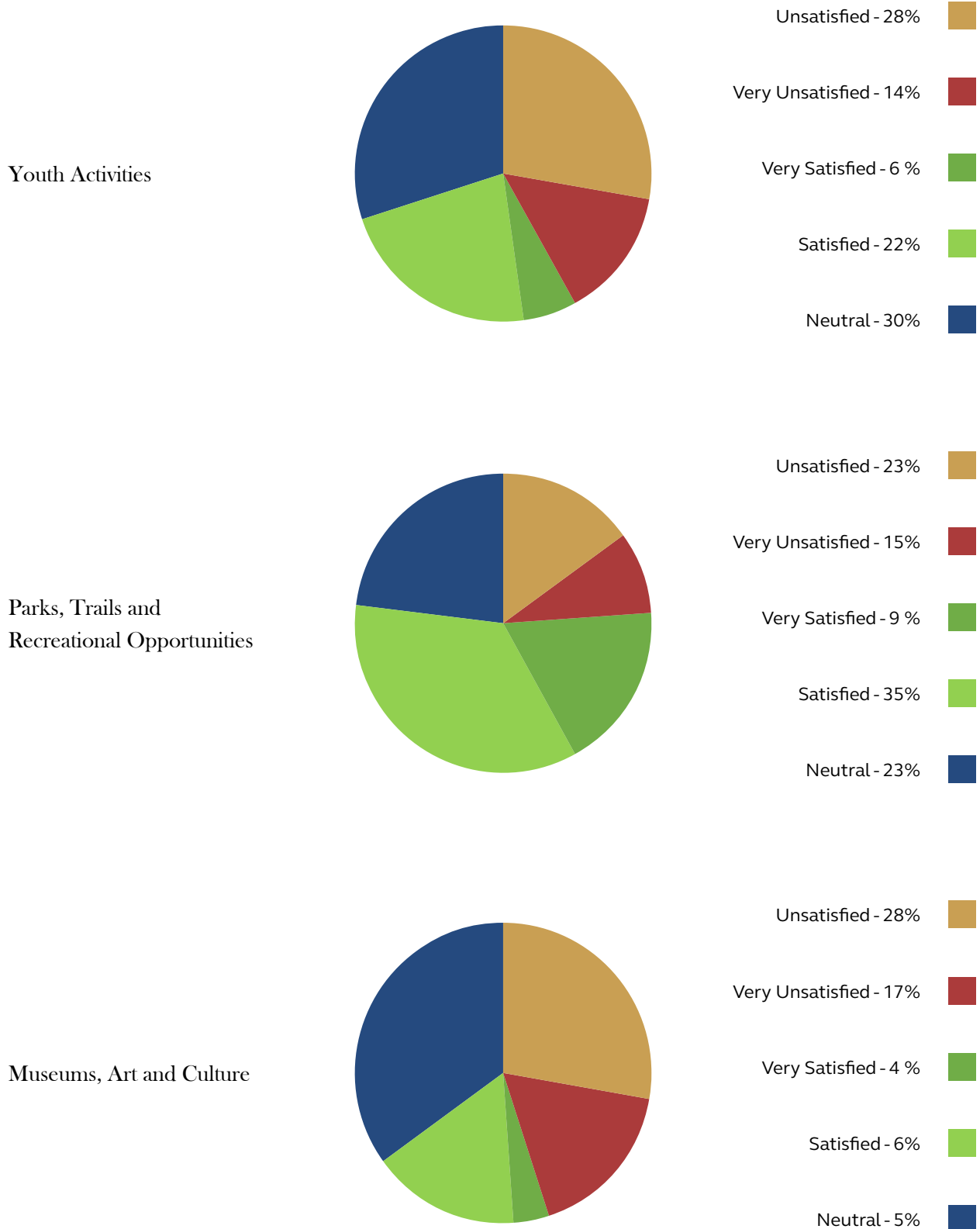
I grew up here and really like the area. I just wish there was a few more things to do in North Pole.

-North Pole Strategic Plan Survey Respondent, 2015



Photo by FNSB Public Libraries

FIGURE 8: CITY OF NORTH POLE COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PLAN 2015 SURVEY RESULTS TO THE QUESTION, “HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE AVAILABILITY OF THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMS OR SERVICES?”



The following table provides an overview of the types of indoor recreation opportunities available on and around EAFB.

FIGURE 9: AVAILABILITY OF INDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Activity Type	On-Base	Off-Base (within approximate 20-minute drive radius)
Bowling	Yes: Baker Field House	Yes: multiple gyms and fitness studios in the area
Galleries and Art	Yes: Arts and Crafts Center (classes, materials, custom framing and resale store)	Yes: various small studios, gift stores and businesses in the North Pole and Salcha area
Library	Yes: Eielson Library	Yes: Noel Wien Public Library
Movie Theater	Yes: Ernie Walker Theater	No
Religious Services	Yes: chapel (supports range of denominations)	Yes: approximately 30 serving many denominations
Swimming Pool	Yes: in the Fitness & Sports Center	Yes: North Pole Middle School

Military families frequently change locations and must build new connections after each relocation. For many military families, the local public library is one of their first stops. Military personnel and their families need to rapidly learn about their new location, schools, shopping, resources and culture. Public libraries can help new residents connect to this information and to the community. FNSB's public libraries, consisting of two branches (including one in North Pole) and a bookmobile, offer research assistance, local information, educational opportunities, online access, meeting rooms, printing, research and activities. Newly arrived military personnel and their families can find low-cost entertainment for all ages, including books, movies, music, magazines and programs. This unfettered access to information is an extremely valuable resource for members of the military community.



Credit: Fairbanks North Star Borough

Outdoor Recreation

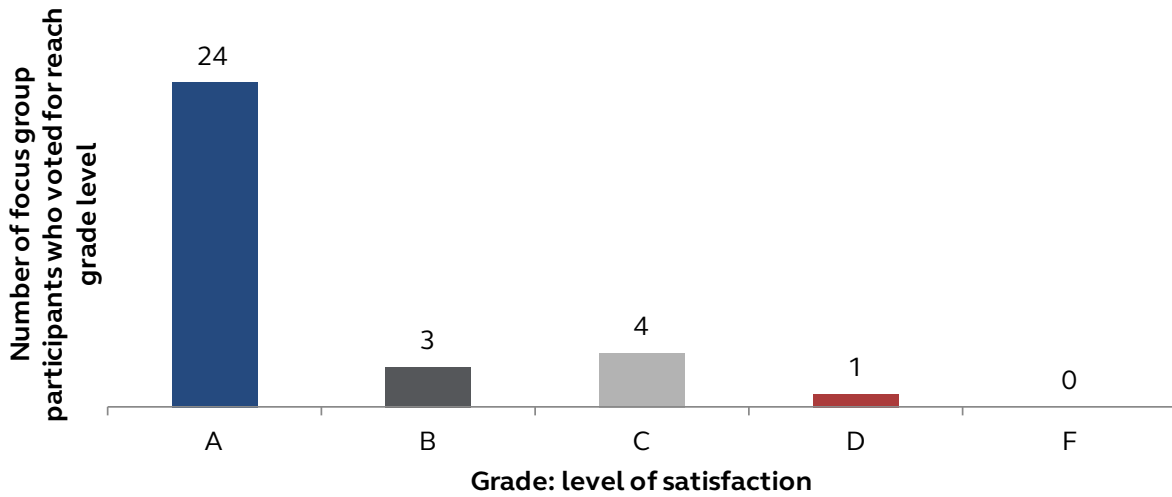
On-Base: What’s Available at EAFB

Eielson families have access to many on-base recreation opportunities. Outdoor facilities include athletic fields, trails, campgrounds, lakes, cabins, a skate park, an outdoor track, ski area, a sledding hill and a skeet and trap area. There are also indoor athletic facilities and equipment rentals. These programs are managed through the Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program by the

354th Force Support Squadron. The squadron also operates and manages two off-base recreational sites at Birch Lake and in Valdez.

Overall, EAFB focus group participants are very satisfied with access to outdoor recreation; 24 of 32 gave access to outdoor recreation a grade A, by far the highest-scoring category during the focus group meetings (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10: EAFB FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS - RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, “GRADE YOUR LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH ACCESS TO OUTDOOR RECREATION”



“ The hunting and fishing opportunities are awesome! ”
 -EAFB focus group participant



Off-Base: What's Available in the Area

In addition to on-base amenities, EAFB personnel and their families have access to excellent recreation opportunities in the surrounding area. Based on North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes, there are 12.3 Recreation and Fitness Facilities per 100,000 residents in the FNSB, compared with 12 statewide, and 10.5 in the U.S.³ This number has increased over the past five years, from 9.2 in 2010, indicating there are an increasing number of recreation and fitness facilities for FNSB residents. The City of North Pole, the nearest incorporated community to EAFB, is home to multiple parks and trails, including a dog park, nature trail, skateboard and BMX park, fitness trail and playgrounds. A map of parks and recreation facilities is available at www.northpolealaska.com/parksites.

The FNSB has approximately 76 miles of shared-use paths and 50 miles of roads with sidewalks. Downtown Fairbanks is considered more walkable than other parts of the Borough due to its higher density, sidewalks, short block lengths and short traffic signal cycles. Outlying areas of the FNSB have fewer opportunities and dedicated space for bicyclists and pedestrians. According to crash data, over ten percent of all fatal and severe injury crashes in the Fairbanks metropolitan area involve bicyclists and pedestrians.⁴

The area around EAFB has significant amounts of land under federal and state control, many of which are available for recreation, hunting, subsistence harvesting and other public uses. For example, the popular state-owned Chena Lakes Recreation Area lies North of EAFB, with camping, volleyball courts, trails, swimming, boating access, fishing and groomed winter ski trails.

Figure 11 summarizes the availability of outdoor recreation activities on-base and within a 20-minute drive radius off-base. This list is not comprehensive; many of the recreation areas listed in the table have additional unique features such as picnic pavilions, horse shoe courts and boat rentals. Beyond the 20-minute drive radius there are other recreation opportunities frequented by Air Force families, including Birch Lake, Chena Hot Springs, Denali National Park, Chena River State Recreation Area, and the White Mountain Recreation Area.

“ The camping opportunities here are awesome. You can pull off the road and camp for a week. ”

-EAFB focus group participant

³ US Census Bureau, County Business Patterns. Additional data analysis by CARES. 2015. Accessed from Community Commons.

⁴ FMATS Non-Motorized Transportation Plan, 2012.



FIGURE 11: AVAILABILITY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Activity Type	On-Base	Off-Base (within approximate 20-minute drive radius)
Boating	Yes: Bear Lake	Yes: Salcha River State Recreation Site, Harding Lake State Recreation Area, Tanana Valley State Forest, Chena Lake Recreation Area
Camping	Yes: Bear Lake	Yes: Salcha River State Recreation Site, Harding Lake State Recreational Area, Tanana Valley State Forest, Chena Lake Recreation Area
Fishing	Yes: Bear Lake	Yes: Salcha River State Recreation Site, Harding Lake State Recreational Area (summer and winter), Tanana Valley State Forest, Chena Lake Recreation Area
Golf	No, but the community center has two golf simulators	No
Hiking	Yes: Bear Lake	Yes: Harding Lake State Recreational Area, Tanana Valley State Forest, Chena Lake Recreation Area
Hunting	No, but there is a skeet and trap range	Yes: Tanana Valley State Forest, Chena Lake Recreation Area
Cross-Country Skiing	Yes: Iceman Falls (also includes small downhill ski hill and sled hill)	Yes: Harding Lake State Recreational Area, Tanana Valley State Forest, Chena Lake Recreation Area
Snowmachining	Yes; members can schedule snowmachine tours through the outdoor recreation program	Yes: Salcha River State Recreation Site, Harding Lake State Recreational Area, Tanana Valley State Forest, Chena Lake Recreation Area



Credit: Agnew:Beck

Events and Activities

On-Base: What's Available at EAFB

EAFB has a steady rotation of events and activities available on-base. There are theme nights at the bowling alley, organized hikes and activities through the outdoor recreation program, fireworks shows, life skills classes featuring topics such as home-buying, interviewing and investing, family-friendly activities at the arts and crafts center. The 354th Force Support Squadron publishes The Talon magazine six times per year, and RED FLAG magazine annually during RED FLAG training. These magazines include calendars with current events, schedules and a map with hours and locations for various EAFB support facilities. Air Force families can also sign up for text message alerts to receive text notifications with information on topics such as dining, fitness and other categories.

- To view a calendar of upcoming events for EAFB, visit: <https://www.eielsonforcesupport.com/index.php/personnel/magazines/1646-calendar-of-events>
- To view the latest issues of Talon and RED FLAG magazines, visit: <https://www.eielsonforcesupport.com/index.php/personnel/magazines>

The Fort Wainwright Public Affairs Office also produces a weekly newspaper called the Alaska Post, published by the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner. The publication summarizes military-relevant news and highlights upcoming activities on Fort Wainwright. View the latest issues here: <https://www.dvidshub.net/publication/561/alaska-post>.

EAFB used to have a similar weekly newspaper (most recently called the Polar Press) but stopped publishing in 2012.

Off-Base: What's Available in the Area

FNSB is an active community with activities and events occurring throughout the year. Annual community events include the Yukon Quest Sled Dog Race, the North American Sled Dog Racing Championships, nordic ski races, the Fairbanks Winter Carnival, the World Ice Art Championships; Midnight Sun Festival, Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival, Golden Days Pioneer Celebration, Mush for Kids, World Eskimo Indian Olympics, Midnight Sun Pow Wow, Fairbanks Folk Festival, Tanana Valley Fair, Equinox Marathon, the Festival of Native Arts, and Iron Dog and Midnight Sun baseball games. Fairbanks has a vibrant arts community with events and programs offered through the Fairbanks Council of the Arts, Fairbanks Light Opera Theater, Fairbanks Concert Association, Fairbanks Drama Association, Fairbanks Shakespeare Theater, Fairbanks Community Band, Fairbanks Children's Choir, First Friday Art Events, Festival Fairbanks, and Tanana Chiefs Conference Cultural Programs at the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center and Fairbanks Children's Museum. The University of Alaska Fairbanks has a concert hall and a theater and offers many cultural activities. North Pole also hosts events, including Christmas in Ice and Patriot's Christmas over the 4th of July.

The Fairbanks Ice Dogs are another example of a successful military-community partnership. The Ice Dogs are a Junior ice hockey team in the North American Hockey League's Midwest Division. The team has a strong fan base and high attendance from military families, who receive a discount to Ice Dog games. The Ice Dogs host a military appreciation night each year, reinforcing the connection between the team and the military installations in the area.

“ Military families desire improved opportunities to meet people, make friends, or expand their professional network within their local civilian communities. ”

-EAFB focus group participant

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce has several military specific programs. The Chamber hosts an annual military appreciation banquet in early May for service members, including those serving in the Air Force, Army and Reserve. 2018 will mark the 50th anniversary of the event. The banquet is a way to honor those serving and to demonstrate community support for military families. Military families are hosted by a civilian couple in the community for the event. In addition to the military appreciation banquet, the Chamber oversees “Operation Standing Together,” an annual event that brings together business leaders, local elected officials and military leadership to informally network and strengthen military-business relationships. Given the frequent turnover of military and community leadership and a constantly-evolving business community, the event plays an important role in supporting military-community relations and reinforcing ties. The Chamber also has a Military Affairs Committee, which includes a mix of community and military representatives who promote cooperative relationships between the military and interior Alaska businesses. The Committee meets monthly and offers an opportunity for the business community to get updates on changes and upcoming plans on the military installations.

Explore Fairbanks maintains a community calendar with events. Anyone in the community can submit an event to include. View the calendar here:

<https://www.explorefairbanks.com/events/calendar/>

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner also maintains a community calendar:

<http://www.newsminer.com/calendar/>

Other Quality of Life Factors

This section focuses on the availability of and access to recreation, community services and retail. However, there are many other factors that contribute to whether EAFB personnel and their families have a positive or negative experience during their time stationed at EAFB. The following is a brief summary of factors and characteristics featured in other focus areas in this plan but relate to overall quality of life. For recommendations associated with each category, refer to each focus area.

Education and Early Childhood Development

For military households with school-age children, access to quality schools is a top priority. Ensuring the children of military families have access to high quality education, can integrate smoothly into a local school, access military-specific support services and keep up with curriculum is important for families to feel satisfied with their time in FNSB. Schools are also important social access points for new EAFB families to meet their military and civilian neighbors, make friends and find ways to engage and contribute to their new community.

The availability of affordable, high quality, licensed child care is also an important factor for maintaining a high quality of life. High child care costs or availability of quality child care can discourage or prevent spouses from working and create cost pressures on households.

“ North Pole is an excellent community. It is a great place to raise your kids, with low crime and a rural feel. North Pole offers great services for a small community. North Pole has a lot to offer such as the library, schools, police, emergency services.

-North Pole Strategic Plan Survey Respondent, 2015

Public Safety

Adequate police, fire and emergency medical service response is important for residents to feel safe and protected. These critical community services are provided through a combination of the FNSB, the City of Fairbanks, the City of North Pole, the State of Alaska and the Air Force.

Health Care

Physical, emotional and mental health are all key components of an individual's quality of life. Access to quality health care is important for active duty personnel and their families. Fortunately, most primary care and specialty care providers in the FNSB have adequate capacity to serve incoming residents. However, both military and civilian residents do occasionally need to travel outside FNSB for specialty care, which can be disruptive and inconvenient and negatively impact quality of life.

Housing

Access to quality and affordable housing remains a challenge in many communities, including FNSB. Air Force families seek homes in safe neighborhoods; those with children want to be near good schools. For Air Force families who chose to live off-base, most prefer to be within a 20-minute commute of EAFB. Meeting the housing demands of these incoming residents requires more than just the appropriate number of vacant units, since the vacant housing stock may not meet quality standards, be the appropriate size for families, or be within the 20-minute commute radius. Finding housing is one of the first hurdles a family must overcome when arriving at EAFB, and can ultimately contribute to whether active duty personnel and their families have a positive or negative experience during their time in the FNSB.



Credit: Agnew::Beck

Transportation

Convenient and connected transportation systems can increase quality of life by reducing travel time, increasing safety and creating effective ways of moving around an area. Conversely, high traffic, long commute times and poorly maintained and/or unsafe roads can negatively impact the quality of life in an area. Some residents may prefer non-motorized transportation options such as walking and biking; these create opportunities for exercise and recreation and can encourage healthier lifestyles.

Planning and Zoning

Planning and zoning is intended to guide community growth in a way that meets resident needs and reflects community values. It is especially valuable when used in an area experiencing rapid growth, which is the case for EAFB and the surrounding Salcha-Badger Road area. Land use planning helps guide the establishment of new housing, commercial development and transportation connections. It contributes to quality of life by preserving the characteristics residents value and creating livable and safe communities.

Environmental Health Challenges

The greater North Pole area (99705) has experienced some challenges with environmental quality, discussed in more detail in the Planning and Zoning chapter. While the City of North Pole has piped infrastructure with quality water service, many private residential wells in the area have contamination issues including septic problems, elevated iron levels and chemical contamination from fire retardants and industrial solvent.⁵ The industrial solvent sulfolane is a concern in the community.

Sulfolane was discovered in 2009 in drinking water wells near the North Pole Refinery, with an

underground plume that extends beyond the city limits. The City of North Pole is working with the State of Alaska and Flint Hills Resources Alaska to expand its water system to provide clean drinking water to residents impacted by the sulfolane contamination.

Moose Creek, a community to the southeast of North Pole, is also impacted by contaminated groundwater. Homes in the area have tested positive for elevated levels of perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), man-made chemical compounds with the potential for adverse health effects. PFOS and PFOA were formerly used in firefighting foam at Eielson Air Force Base (EAFB) and at a firefighter training center in South Fairbanks; EAFB also has high concentration levels of the chemical on some areas of the base.

Due to the unique combination of weather conditions, geography and home heating types in the FNSB, the region also faces challenges related to air quality, with high concentrations of particulate matter in the air. Much of FNSB has been designated as a “non-attainment area” for not meeting national air quality standards. The FNSB, State of Alaska and the Environmental Protection Agency are working together to reduce emissions and bring air quality measures to within acceptable limits.

Workforce Development

Many F-35 active duty personnel who will be stationed at EAFB are married and will be accompanied by their spouses. Due to the transient nature of the military, many military spouses must find a new job after each transfer. Employment not only brings financial gains; it also helps new residents engage in the community and brings fulfillment through meaningful work contributions. Having sufficient employment and training opportunities in place is an important contributor to the overall quality of life for many military personnel and their families.

⁵ Source: City of North Pole and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

ESTIMATED GAPS – WHAT ARE THE GAPS BETWEEN NEEDS AND EXISTING SERVICES, FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES?

Limited Retail and Commercial Activity Near EAFB

EAFB personnel and their families have access to most necessities on-base and in nearby North Pole. However, most must travel to Fairbanks for more specific purchasing needs and to access varied retail, dining and recreation options. Both military households and existing residents in the Greater North Pole area have expressed a desire for more commercial development in the North Pole area. At the same time, the 99705 zip code includes some of the fastest-growing parts of the FNSB. These combined factors indicate a potential opportunity for expanding the number of commercial businesses that serve incoming EAFB personnel, their families and existing residents.

Transportation is another limiting factor to accessing retail, dining and services. Not all EAFB personnel have cars. In addition, many active duty military personnel and their families come from much warmer climates and are unfamiliar with and intimidated by the extreme cold and winter driving conditions in interior Alaska. As a result, the distance between EAFB and the metropolitan centers of North Pole and Fairbanks can be a barrier for families who are not comfortable or able to make the trip for shopping, dining, services and activities. Past efforts to introduce regular Fairbanks-Eielson bus service were not widely utilized, and a route that operated between Fairbanks and Salcha was discontinued in 2017 due to insufficient ridership. These transportation barriers can make it difficult for EAFB personnel and their dependents to participate and engage in the civilian community off-base.

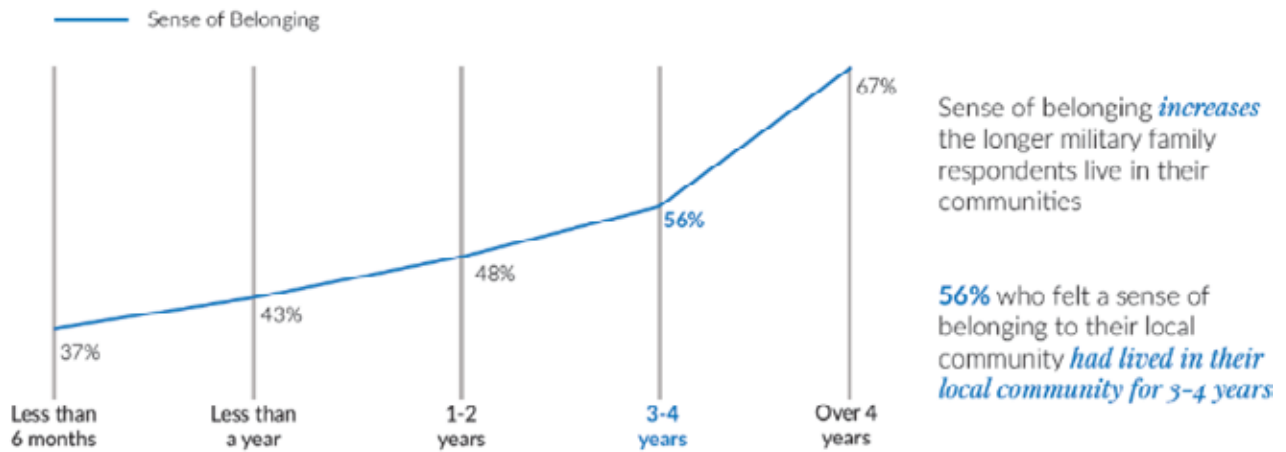
Room for Improved Community-Military Partnerships

The FNSB is a very military-friendly community. The region has some of the highest rates of veterans in the country, including many former Air Force who have retired in the FNSB and opened businesses. However, there is room for improved communications between the military and local businesses and organizations. One of the challenges of building relationships between the community and the military is frequent turnover, as EAFB military personnel are typically reassigned every two to three years. This makes it challenging for local businesses and organizations who seek to communicate recreation and volunteer opportunities and create lasting partnerships with the Air Force.



Credit: Agnew::Beck

FIGURE 12: BLUE STAR FAMILIES 2017 LIFESTYLE SURVEY: CORRELATION BETWEEN SENSE OF BELONGING AND LENGTH OF TIME RESIDING IN A COMMUNITY



Source: Blue Star Families 2017 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

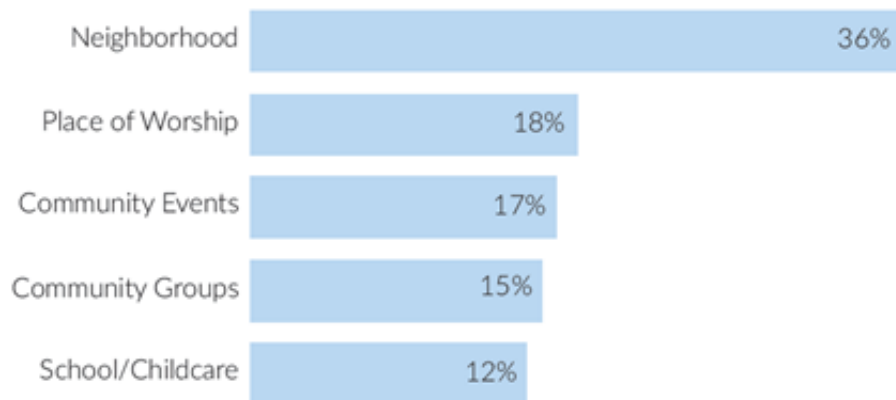
According to the 2017 Blue Star Families’ Military Lifestyles Survey, active duty military personnel and their families desire stronger integration and closer connections with their civilian communities. Frequent station moves can make this a challenge, since a military family must re-establish these connections with each relocation. The longer a family resides in a community, the greater the sense of belonging (Figure 12). Prioritizing outreach to military families, hosting community events, encouraging businesses to hire military spouses can

all help accelerate this transition period for families new to the FNSB.

“ The small-town feel is really important. The outdoor activities are great and our neighbors are super friendly. Our neighbor brought us a quarter of a moose. ”

-EAFB focus group participant

FIGURE 13: BLUE STAR FAMILIES 2017 LIFESTYLE SURVEY: CORRELATION BETWEEN SENSE OF BELONGING AND LENGTH OF TIME RESIDING IN A COMMUNITY



Source: Blue Star Families 2017 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

The Blue Star Families survey identifies five opportunities to increase local community connection, summarized in Figure 13. The number one opportunity is to better connect military families at the neighborhood level, including encouraging individual-level communications and friendships between civilian and military families. Other opportunities include connections through a place of worship, community events, community groups and school/child care.

Another potential gap is a tool to connect military spouses with volunteer engagements. Military spouses often seek ways to get involved and contribute to the community; according to Blue Star Families survey results, 71 percent volunteered in the past year and of those, 78 percent volunteered in the civilian community. However, there is currently no standard place for EAFB dependents to learn about volunteering opportunities. The Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce regularly receives calls from military spouses seeking volunteer opportunities. Alaska 2-1-1, a statewide call center and resource database, includes volunteer opportunities in its database, but the list for the FNSB has only three entries. There is a need for a more comprehensive place to identify and track volunteering opportunities. Addressing this gap would support local non-profits who would benefit from the additional assistance, and could also be utilized by civilian residents who want to increase their volunteer contributions to the community.

Limited Bicycle and Pedestrian Connectivity in FNSB

EAFB personnel and their families have widespread access to recreation options, both on and off-base. However, there is room to improve the connectivity of bike and pedestrian routes and trails in FNSB. There are a number of intersections and crossings with insufficient infrastructure for bike and pedestrian use, creating unsafe conditions and potentially discouraging residents from non-motorized activities. Many of these sites have been identified in local transportation planning documents, with proposed plans to address connectivity in areas including Homestead Road, NPHS Boulevard and the Old Richardson Highway. The City of North Pole has also received requests for snowmachine trail connections through town, which may be difficult to accommodate given the limited amount of open land within the city boundaries.



QUALITY OF LIFE STRATEGIES – WHAT ARE OUR RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS FOR MEETING ANTICIPATED GAPS?

Strengthen Community-Military Partnerships

QOL1. Increase the dissemination of information to EAFB families to increase awareness of and participation in local activities and events.

For example, share community-related events and activities calendar for inclusion in the EAFB Talon magazine. One of the challenges of building relationships between the community and the military is frequent turnover, as EAFB military personnel are typically reassigned every two to three years. This makes it challenging for local businesses and organizations who seek to communicate recreation and volunteer opportunities and create lasting partnerships with the Air Force.

QOL2. Increase distribution of Explore Fairbanks' list of businesses and partners who offer military discounts.

QOL3. Create a list of volunteer opportunities in the FNSB for military spouses and civilian residents.

This could be shared via a newsletter, a website or some other method such as working with Alaska 2-1-1 to expand their list of FNSB-based volunteering opportunities.

QOL 4. Improve education and outreach about the availability of existing facilities and outdoor recreation options.

QOL5. Consider providing bus transportation options from EAFB to North Pole and Fairbanks during large events and festivals to increase military engagement in community activities.

See also Transportation Recommendation T4.

QOL6. Develop guided programs to introduce newcomers to Alaska's unique outdoor recreational opportunities.

QOL7. Investigate options for developing a community center in the Greater North Pole area.

The center would provide space for residents and families to gather and recreate indoors.

“ Those military family respondents who engaged with civilians in their local, off-installation communities at least once a week in the following six settings - work, fitness centers, parks and recreation programs, religious facilities, community parks, and educational facilities - reported the highest levels of belonging... Simply going to the local fitness center or community park every week will not increase a military family’s sense of belonging to the local civilian community; rather, it is the frequent, sustained, and meaningful engagement with civilians that was associated with increased belonging. ”

-Blue Star Families 2017 Survey Summary

QOL8. Establish a military-community liaison to coordinate the sharing of information with EAFB personnel.

This liaison could share information, coordinate off-base orientations, connect local and regional organizations and businesses with relevant military contacts and maintain a list of contact information for key positions in the EAFB Public Affairs office, Airman and Family Readiness Center and other relevant EAFB departments.

Expand Retail and Commercial Activities near EAFB

QOL9. Continue progress on commercial re-district rezoning efforts in the City of North Pole.

QOL10. Consider policies that will attract businesses to the City of North Pole.

Start by developing (and then continuously updating) a database of potential commercial real estate opportunities in the Greater North Pole area.

QOL11. Continue to support the wholesale retailer Costco's entry into the FNSB market.

Expand Bicycle and Pedestrian Connectivity in FNSB

QOL12. Support implementation efforts to increase bike and pedestrian safety in high-use areas already identified in previous transportation planning efforts.

Example efforts include the Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System (FMATS) 2012 Non-Motorized Transportation Plan and Safe Routes to School plans for North Pole area schools.

QOL13. Continue to work with landowners and developers to establish designated recreation areas, including creating and preserving access to trails and recreation from residential areas.



Credit: Agnew::Beck