

Downtown Fairbanks Plan Working Group Meeting
Friday, November 18, 2022, 2:30 – 4:30 pm



How to Join

In-Person

- Ester Conference Room, 2nd Floor, next to the Community Planning Department, 907 Terminal Street, Fairbanks, AK

Virtual

- Zoom (audio/visual): <https://agnewbeck.zoom.us/j/85319445968?pwd=RkJzdWYzbzY0SVd0cWFvRzBBSVUVUT09>
- Phone (audio only)
 - 1-877-853-5257 (Toll-free)
 - Meeting ID: 853 1944 5968#
 - Passcode: 010194#

Objectives

Share and gather Working Group input on:

- Planning Process & Schedule
- Public Review Draft Plan
- Outstanding Components of the Draft Plan
- Next Steps, working toward launch and Public Launch/Comment Process

Materials

1. Agenda (this document)
2. Public Review Draft Plan – Working Group DRAFT (emailed on 11/16)
3. August 11th Working Group Notes (emailed on 11/16)

Agenda

Time	Item
2:30 – 2:45 pm	Welcome, How We Got Here & Today’s Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • Process and progress-to-date and potential scheduling 2022/2023 • Today’s meeting purpose and guidelines
2:45 – 4:15 pm	Public Review Draft Discussion <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction 2. Economic Development 3. Land Use 4. Public Safety 5. Transportation 6. Parking 7. Housing Outstanding Components – Executive Summary & Action Plan
4:15 – 4:30 pm	Next Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate actions • Public Launch/Comment Period • Closing comments and questions

Invited Participants

First	Last
WORKING GROUP MEMBERS	
Jerry	Cleworth
Jackson	Fox
Sharon	Hildebrand
Scott	McCrea
Chris	Miller
Brenda	Riley
Doug	Sims
Sue	Sprinkle
Buki	Wright
TECHNICAL STAFF – City of FAI, DTA, FAST Planning, FNSB	
Bob	Pristash
John	O'Brien
Kellen	Spillman
Melissa	Kellner
Don	Galligan
Kayde	Whiteside
Brittany	Smart
David	van den Berg
Olivia	Lunsford
CONSULTING STAFF	
Shelly	Wade
Molly	Mylius
Pat	Cotter

Downtown Fairbanks Plan Working Group Meeting

Friday, November 18, 2022, 2:30 – 4:30 pm; Ester Conference Room and Zoom
Discussion Notes



Attendees

First	Last	Present/Absent
WORKING GROUP MEMBERS		
Jerry	Cleworth	Present
Jackson	Fox	Present
Sharon	Hildebrand	Present (virtual)
Scott	McCrea	Present
Chris	Miller	Absent
Brenda	Riley	Present
Doug	Sims	Absent
Sue	Sprinkle	Present
Buki	Wright	Absent
TECHNICAL STAFF – City of FAI, DTA, FAST Planning, FNSB		
Bob	Pristash	Present
Bill	Rogers	Present
John	O'Brien	Absent
Kellen	Spillman	Present
Melissa	Kellner	Present
Don	Galligan	Present
Kayde	Whiteside	Present
Brittany	Smart	Present (virtual)
David	van den Berg	Present (virtual)
Olivia	Lunsford	Present (virtual)
CONSULTING STAFF		
Shelly	Wade	Present
Molly	Mylius	Present (virtual)
Pat	Cotter	Present (virtual)

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Discussion Notes* = edit proposed to the draft**

Welcome, How We Got Here & Today's Focus

- Introductions; Shelly introduced the meeting purpose and guidelines.
- Shelly provided an overview of our progress-to-date, and proposed process for public comment and finalization. Highlights include:
 - Working Group members have an additional two weeks with the draft; we recognize likely not everyone has had a chance to review it in detail yet.
 - There will be a minimum 30-day public comment period.
 - Following the public comment period, the planning team will review comments and share proposed modifications with the Working Group to make refinements before it goes back out.
 - Refreshed Census information – Kellen would like to incorporate into the draft; population will go in the introductions chapter, buildings data will go in land use, housing will go in housing chapter.***
- Questions from Working Group members
 - Are we sending this back to the City of Fairbanks for review?
 - Yes, the first group the project team will meet with during the public comment period will likely be the City of Fairbanks, followed by other priority stakeholders like the Fairbanks Downtown Association, the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, etc.
 - Ultimately we would like to see the City of Fairbanks submit a resolution of support.
 - What is included in the public review draft?
 - Executive Summary would be included in the draft release.
 - Action Plan would be developed over the course of the public comment period.
 - Would the draft go out with an action planning prompt?
 - Yes, we would include action planning questions, including inviting partners to sign up to help with implementation.
 - In general, we will add specific guiding questions to target feedback – e.g., to identify what should rise to the top as a priority strategy.
- Kellen presented updated census numbers from 2020 Census.
 - For the Downtown Census Tract: overall household counts are going down; population going down; even building counts are going down.
 - We've seen a maximum buildout of public infrastructure, so it's unfortunate these numbers are negative.
 - Have buildings been taken down for parking lots?
 - Speculation that with short term rental popularity, we will likely see downtown population continue go down, since residents will be displaced for visitors.
 - FNSB is collecting data on this right now, working with a third-party data company. Over 200 short term rentals came online in FNSB over the past 12 months.
 - Not all short-term rental owners are getting business licenses. There are about 50 different sites people book over, FNSB is monitoring those sites to try and identify places that are not signed up with license and get them connected so they can collect bed taxes.
 - Sitka passed a policy that discourages/limits short term rentals.
 - Consider adding a short term rental related policy in the draft.***
 - Would like to see Census data incorporated throughout the chapters, such as the fact about vehicle ownership per household in the transportation chapter. Some of this already exists but would be good to do this in a more enhanced way.***

Public Review Draft Discussion

1. Introduction

- Master Page 3
 - Jerry/Geri acknowledgements: swap the Doyon affiliation. ***
- Master Page 10
 - Code enforcement needs to be added under City responsibilities. ***
 - Agencies and other partners: add Festival Fairbanks. ***
 - Add ROW management and permitting authority to the City responsibilities. ***
 - Change private sector to “public and private sector.” ***
- Master Page 11
 - The intent of the plan gets lost here.
 - A lot of joint responsibilities; includes City and other agencies, public, private sector partners. Under “How to Use This Plan,” the section needs to be more comprehensive; currently too borough-centric. ***
 - Discussion: How detailed should the plan be? How detailed should the action/work plan be?
 - Q. What does the Community Planning Department see as the end goal? This plan could be like a comp plan or a trails plan; is X project or development consistent with the downtown plan? Or it could be a detailed work plan. Or it could have a scattering of ideas that could be used to apply for funding.
 - A. (Kellen): On a scale with guiding policy document on one end and very prescriptive document on the other, we view this as something right in the middle. Want to stay away from, “this entity will do this by this year.” That’s what made Vision Fairbanks fail – it was overly prescriptive. Simple tasks like having a parking map, having improved parking signage downtown. FNSB and other partners can facilitate those conversations.
 - Agnew::Beck shared the Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan list of preliminary strategies as an example. The caveat: all Salcha-Badger strategies are at a government level, whereas the Downtown Plan strategies span more diverse partners. Indicates some prioritization, but not an action plan.
 - We don’t want something overly prescriptive; that was clear in early Working Group guidance. At the first meeting, discussed not wanting to get into the weeds. Overall, this example seems general enough. When we talk about an action plan, get a little nervous.
 - Some working group members would still like to see an action plan. “Without one, nothing will actually change. Population will continue to dwindle. Nothing to drive partners to implement changes.”
 - Results will happen after the plan is approved. There is no official FNSB document that has current guidance around Downtown, not even around big objectives like increasing population and reducing parking. We don’t even have those – our policies are bare bones. The actions and conversations will follow the plan’s completion.
 - The current draft does offer examples of specific action steps, without being overly prescriptive. During the public review draft, if partners want to sign up for implementation around a specific action, we can add specifics.
 - Q. Without an action plan, where is the engagement and accountability? I want to believe in good intentions, but without an action plan, there’s no guarantee we will get anything out of this. We want to know there will be engagement.

- A. This could happen through letters of engagement; could also come with entities signing up for implementation.
- What makes the CEDS a solid document is the action plan, which creates accountability. However, CEDS is more straightforward, it's specific by sector. There is a lot of overlap.
- Q. When it comes to implementation, the City gives money to FEDC. Does the City expect, with the money they give to FEDC, that they will follow the CEDS? Is that one way to support implementation? How do we make sure implementation continues? Who keeps an eye on it?
 - A (Kellen). This would be adopted as an element of the comp plan, so it would have the same weight as that document. For example, it would inform conversations with private developers, and would be referenced during a rezone.
 - A. (Melissa). the land use map and transportation circulation map are implemented incrementally through daily activities in the FNSB department. This is an important part of this plan.
 - A (Kellen). It depends on what kind of plan you have. Vision Fairbanks died because of specific action items that didn't have enough support. I worry about being overly prescriptive in this plan. The longer and longer that time passed, the less useful the document became; the very first action never happened. The downtown plan in Houston, TX is only 10 pages long, it is very broad. Or we could get super detailed – e.g., “this storefront should look like X.” While there is room to still beef a few things up, Kellen suggests the current draft is close to the right level of detail.
- Master Page 14 – not all roads are classified correctly on map. Specifically, Barnette and Cushman are incorrect. ***
- Master Page 15 – really like this page. Want to see more of how demographics touch each section of the plan, using cross-referencing or color coding.
 - Shared an example where we did that in transportation chapter with household vehicle data.
 - Jackson will send other recommended callouts around demographic needs – e.g., seniors, households without cars, where we should cross reference in the strategies and actions. ***

2. Economic Development

- This chapter was moved to the front of the document, incorporated elements of the eliminated quality of life chapter, and had vague recommendations removed.
- Bring the “Fairbanks is a Winter City” earlier in the chapter. ***
- Add more cross-referencing, e.g., to land use chapter in the section that talks about redevelopment. ***
- Grocery recommendation, which is currently Econ Development strategy 4 action b, could be more specific. Highlighted as a higher priority. Maybe the recommendation is to conduct a feasibility study first? Chicken or egg. ***
 - Add example/next step of feasibility study; Kellen shares the FNSB has done some research on attracting grocery stores; there are menus of options; e.g, NYC has changed zoning code to give many allowances that make it easier; tax exemptions.
 - Revise the action to include conducting a feasibility study and implementing recommendations to recruit. ***
 - Current grocery store isn't THAT far away.
 - Q. If we had a grocery feasibility study, would that get folded into the document?

- A. We would cross-reference it if it existed already. Most files live individually. Downtown Plan gets adopted as an element of the Comp Plan. Could be added as an amendment, but usually we reference it. Confirmed importance of making sure related documents are accessible/available if they are not embedded in the plan.

3. Land Use

- Figure 6
 - Shelly highlighted the addition of Figure 6. She suggests we also add a short narrative analysis/summary of the map.***
 - Confirmation: these are vacant parcels, not vacant buildings.
 - Recommendation to make the map bigger or have a 2nd view of just the central business district.***
 - Recommendation to make the legend somewhat transparent or move it off the map.***
 - Some confusion around designations, boundaries.
- Mayor Ward requested a proposed change, via a memo – sent separately.
 - Background:
 - In lower left-hand corner of the draft land use map: green space to the North of the Library. Owned by FNSB, previously acquired from the City.
 - Would change from open space to mixed use preferred residential and would establish new open space a bit further south.
 - Mayor Ward working with the FNSB Natural Resources Department on this proposal. He is highly motivated to move quickly. Exploring different ways to do it; wants to help with the development of new housing.
 - Potential drawbacks
 - Folks on Smythe would hate to lose their southern view.
 - Would this negatively impact Barnette Magnet School?
 - It is a beautiful space. “I hesitate to lose public space, once you lose it, it’s gone forever. So the offset will be important in order for me to support.”
 - Benefits/advantages
 - Use is always to the east and north, no one uses the property.
 - General support for the change; this would achieve much of what we’re trying to do with increased housing.
 - This area sees much less use than other open space areas.
 - FNSB owns it, it could be made available to a developer quickly to see action.
 - Other discussion
 - Would prefer to see new housing achieved through infill, but if the ultimate objective is more housing, this would still help.
 - Is there a way to guide the type of housing? Proposed is currently mixed use residential.
 - Q. Has there been a use study?
 - Q. Is Raven’s Landing interested in participating in or acquiring the property?
 - Short answer: no.
 - Q. Has the mayor’s office identified other potential areas for pocket parks?
 - Answer: not that Brittany is aware of. Kellen shared those pocket park conversations have not happened yet.
 - There are also derelict properties that could become green space. Offset doesn’t have to be downtown.

- River has so much land locked up on the north side, would like to see more green space.
 - Summary: Working Group generally in support of concept but would like to see specific properties in the downtown area identified to offset the loss of the open space. ***
- From a recent Cook Inlet Housing Authority (CIHA) presentation.
 - CIHA presented on one of their housing projects in Mountain View.
 - They have been developing colorful subdivisions. Prior to them investing in that community, there was lots of theft, vandalism, robbery. As they begin investing in low-income housing – saw improvements. People had more pride in their housing. Consider adding as a case study. ***
 - Doyon recently put in a statue near their offices. Lots of cultural stuff currently near Doyon, would like to see more of that spread throughout downtown.
 - Tax credits are another tool for people to invest in Downtown.
 - Should mention Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) convention as a major event/opportunity that brings energy to Fairbanks. ***
- Q. It’s reassuring to hear borough staff share that they feel this will be a helpful document, even if it’s not prescriptive. What is something that excites you in this document? What are you looking forward to getting started on the second its approved? How will this move forward?
 - A (Kellen). Parking. We have a big parking problem downtown. This is low hanging fruit – Kellen has sat down with David 15 times to review parking maps, look at regulations, think about redevelopment. We have no FNSB document or approved plan that says there is too much parking downtown, or guide is to promote existing parking. Kellen confirms this document will support him in these changes.
- Future Land Use Map (Land Use Chapter Figure 7, on master page 37 with descriptions on master pages 38-39)
 - Would like to see more prioritization of the land use map changes. We don’t want to wait until 2040 for all of this – some should happen right away. For example, 2a should be a priority.
 - Would like to translate to match the look and feel of other maps. ***
 - Based on conversation with the Chena Riverfront Commission, will likely revise the green strip along the length of the river. ***
 - Future land use map is future looking, won’t happen overnight.
 - Recommendation to move map and table to follow 2a instead of after all strategies. ***

4. Public Safety: no discussion

5. Transportation

- Add an action: conduct traffic study for Downtown. This could examine the conversion of roads from one-way to two-way. We received many comments that Downtown is difficult to navigate. Doing a study does not commit you to a conversion but helps move the dialogue forward toward keystone changes that could turn Downtown around. Could consider economic development impacts, health/safety improvements, and navigation benefits, not just technical changes. ***
- Jackson has some other minor comments he will send. ***
- Given that 40% of downtown households do not have vehicles – how do we pull that in/make sure our recommendations are relevant?
- Feels too general still e.g., sidewalk recommendations should be recommended in more discrete focus areas. “Downtown area” is still too general. Identify specific streets – Jackson can share some recommendations, such as areas with higher traffic or with senior living nearby. ***
- Lots of discussion and ideas around cycling. Downtown currently has many areas with on street parking that are in conflict with biking connectivity/routes and recommendations. There is no easy solution.

Jackson can offer some strategies/examples for priority actions. Next step could be an assessment of need. ***

- For all chapters, consider adding a starting point – identifying what’s first/top priority. What is the sequence of implementation. ***

6. Parking

- 6b has already been implemented. The first 30 minutes in the garage is free, all on street parking is free.
- Parking facility update – City Council put it up for sale, no buyers. “Nothing we should concern ourselves with.”
- Parking chapter is more prescriptive than others, and therefore a bit inconsistent. The Working Group spent 4 meetings dedicated to this topic, and many of these strategies are verbatim from what the working group drafted.
- Strike 6D. Too prescriptive. ***
- FAST wants to continue to refine graphics that show what we have, make them easy to follow. They will send along updated versions for inclusion. ***
- FNSB did an intensive parking study. That will be documented and connected to the plan (appendix?). Contains 100s of pages of inventory. Lots of backup that support many of the assertions made here that there is too much parking downtown. Many entities are owned by owners out of town/out of state – absentee owners. ***
- Parking enforcement, on street management – through the public process there were many comments/complaints about on street parking enforcement downtown. Where is this addressed in the draft plan?
 - Strategy 6 on master page 66 gets at this concern at some level, but we’re trying to walk the line of not being overly prescriptive.
 - Do we need to include something more concrete to address community feedback on this topic?***
 - Example – City could change parking ordinance to revise on street parking management/approach.
- FAST could do a map showing on street parking. They have a shapefile layer produced by a graduate student that is a representation of each individual space.
- One other map – Walmart comparison. If people can see the building, it doesn’t feel as far. They want to walk where they can see. Probably not to include in the plan, but it’s an interesting education tool.
- Private lots – another issue we have with parking downtown are driveways. Too many driveways are disruptive and unsafe. The draft already includes an action that addresses that concern.
- Olivia expressed appreciation that comments about Fairbanks being a winter city were implemented. There are many other communities that are winter cities that are doing these things just fine. Doesn’t make us unique or prohibit pedestrian and bike activities.

7. Housing: no discussion

Next Steps

- Immediate actions
 - A::B to provide instructions on how to send comments, along with notes from the conversation today.
 - December 2nd as deadline for comments/individual review.
 - December 9th – Reconvene as a full team with thoughts and suggestions.
- Following public comment period, hold one final meeting to “tighten the nuts.”