

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Downtown Plan

Blueprint Downtown is Juneau’s subarea plan for the area from the “rock dump” to the south, and Norway Point to the north. Blueprint Downtown provides a long term, coordinated outlook to help direct decision-making affecting the ongoing revitalization and regeneration of the downtown. This will allow the City to continue to build upon its existing natural, social and physical assets. The Subarea Plan supports and implements the policies presented in the 2013 Juneau Comprehensive Plan, while concentrating on issues and opportunities at a scale more responsive to the Subarea’s specific needs.

Many plans have been undertaken for various topics that consider downtown Juneau, and Blueprint Downtown offers a different approach by incorporating the past planning efforts, and combining them with a community vision of how downtown should continue to grow, develop, and harness opportunities while addressing the challenges, and ensuring that downtown continues to be a place to live, work, learn, and visit. The existing plans, and the time and effort spent creating them, serve as the foundation for Blueprint Downtown—an action-oriented strategy to enhance downtown, update zoning, and create place-making opportunities — all built from a dynamic community engagement process, resulting in a 20-year blueprint for downtown.

The Borough Assembly, City Departments, the Planning Commission, as well as other CBJ Boards and commissions will refer to this document so they can:

- make informed decisions concerning future growth and development
- plan for projects more efficiently
- assign appropriate resources to community needs
- identify needs for new or revised zoning and /or development authorities
- identify infrastructure priorities

The plan will also guide individuals and private companies when making investment and development decisions, or when questions affecting development within the community arise. While the plan will assist to guide community changes, the plan will be updated over time to reflect the changing needs of the community as new developments and trends occur.

A major goal of the Blueprint Downtown Area Plan is to provide strategic direction for development and growth, while embracing livability and a sense of place. In doing so, the planning process coordinated with all major ongoing projects and plans with the goal of collectively strengthening Downtown Juneau and firmly positioning it as Juneau’s civic, cultural and economic heart.

Overall Vision

In a community plan, a vision is a positive outcome or an ultimate condition that a community desires to move forward. It builds upon community strengths and addresses community weaknesses. The vision is a significant aspect of a community plan because it is an expression of local desires for quality of life and future development, which will guide residents, landowners, and City decision makers. The vision should inspire and motivate the community to achieve their picture of the future. It should be used as a filter for future development proposals – “Does this fit with our stated vision? Will this help us to achieve our vision?”

The following vision was developed for the downtown planning area of Juneau:

Downtown Juneau is a vibrant, safe and accessible place to live, work, play and explore. Welcoming and appealing to residents, visitors, innovators and investors. Its unique heritage and history, access to natural beauty and urban amenities, provide opportunities for investment and sustainable growth, diverse housing, arts and culture and define continuation as the Capital City.

A Decade of Downtown Accomplishments

Downtown Juneau has a long and colorful history with many accomplishments. This list focuses on the last decade. Considerable progress has been made on community-identified goals for Downtown. The accomplishments discussed below is not a comprehensive list of the many achievements downtown in the past 10-years:

Random list here – Front and Franklin, Main Street, Downtown Transit Center, Soboloff Center, Seawalk, Marine Park redesign, when did deck over get built?, SLAM, do we want to include housing first? Main Street redesign (check date!) Private reinvestment (examples Devil’s Club, Amalaga, Baronoff facelift? Dock expansion? Others??) - this section to be refined and organized, with more descriptive text once we’ve decided what we are going to highlight.

Community Engagement: the “Blueprint” Planning Process

Visioning Process

This vision component was intended to identify broad community sentiment, and refine it to help define and guide the more detailed Area Plan. The vision process was completed in February 2019 by MRV Architects with sub-consultants Sheinberg Associates and Lucid Reverie. The first component (*reference document as appendix*) established a community vision for nine focus areas, which then informed details of the broader Area Plan as it was completed. Each focus area identified vision priorities, as well as strategies for cultivating opportunities and addressing challenges which were integrated into the plan.

A diversity of outreach techniques was used to capture a broad cross-section of what downtown users felt was right and wrong with current conditions and what changes should be prioritized over the next 20 years.

These outreach efforts took place during July through late October 2018, and included an initial community meeting (August 30) that about 120 attended; approximately 400 clip-board surveys of seasonal visitors, business owners and managers, and residents; and comment forms submitted by meeting attendees and submitted via the project’s web page. In addition, a few groups conducted “meetings-in-a box” to provide their comments. Efforts also included outreach to social, fraternal, and non-profit groups to host additional meetings, including with Sealaska Heritage Institute, Filipino Community, Inc., and the Historic Resources Advisory Committee. Social media and website updates were ongoing throughout the process for additional comments. Information was also gathered from the Juneau Economic Development Council (JEDC) 2018 Alaska State Legislature Satisfaction Survey and the JEDC 2018 (winter) Business Visitor Satisfaction Survey, and collection of short surveys left in local businesses and public venues.

These outreach efforts solicited unfiltered comment from as diverse an audience as possible and faithfully recorded and shared those results. The best estimate is that input was received from 800 to 900 unique individuals.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was appointed by the Planning Commission on October 23, 2018 to guide and inform the Blueprint Downtown Area Plan. The Steering Committee is a dynamic, well-balanced, informed group representing a wide variety of interests including business,

personal, environmental, and cultural perspectives, ensuring fairness, transparency and an effective planning process. The following individuals served on the Steering Committee:

Betsy Brenneman
Kirby Day
Daniel Glidmann
Michael Heumann
Wayne Jensen
Laura Martinson
Lily Otsea
Karena Perry, Vice Chair
Jill Ramiel
Meilani Schijvens
Patty Ware
Christine Woll, Chair
Ricardo Worl
Nathaniel Dye, Planning Commission Liaison

Meetings/Focus Groups

CDD conducted X focus group meetings in X 2019. These focus groups included professionals in transportation and infrastructure, natural resources and recreation, human services, business and economic development, history, and culture, and CBJ departments.

Each focus group was asked specific questions regarding their knowledge about an identified topic. Focus group meetings were held in an interactive forum setting where participants were to speak openly with fellow focus group members. The discussion topics and data gathered were used to further inform a wide variety of area plan topics.

The following questions and topic were discussed by Blueprint Downtown area focus groups:

- What are Downtown Juneau's strengths and opportunities?

- What are Downtown Juneau’s weaknesses and threats?
- What do you hope to see in the future, both short and long term?

A Renewed Vision for Downtown

Through an intensive public process, nine core visions emerged for Downtown Juneau:

- A. Business Vitality- Vision:** Private and public investment downtown should focus on improving Juneau as a year-round commercial center for locals and visitors alike. Increased investment in and by locally-focused businesses will be self-reinforcing, creating greater vitality. Growth should emphasize authenticity, highlighting Juneau’s setting, history, culture, and scale. Explore incentives or programs to reward businesses that are open year round.
- B. Identify and Culture- Vision:** Juneau’s appeal flows from the richness of our diverse cultures, our status as Alaska’s Capital, and the opportunity to showcase our compelling history. The real connection between people, cultures, water, and land provides an authenticity that differentiates Juneau from other communities. Our unique story should be emphasized in all downtown design and planning, building and construction, street improvements, and public art installations.
- C. Housing and Neighborhoods- Vision:** Increased housing in the downtown core is a cornerstone of increased downtown vitality, across all sectors. Increased housing will provide more business customers, better ability to attract workers, and greater street activity. New housing will include lower-income and seasonal housing, as well as improved high-end housing opportunities. The CBJ should pursue incentives that focus on rehabilitating underutilized existing buildings and empty lots to provide more housing stock, focused on a variety of income levels.
- D. Vehicle Circulation and Parking, including Bicycles- Vision:** Juneau downtown vitality and growth is critically linked to improving the vehicular movement through the downtown core. Given the limited space for roadways, and competing needs for pedestrian and cyclist flow, innovative ways to provide passage for critical buses, trucks, and automobiles will need to be implemented. A “Circulator” system to easily move pedestrians across the downtown core is a highly supported and critical step to reduce the number of vehicles on the street, as well as downtown parking demand.

- E. Pedestrian Access and Experience- Vision:** Pedestrian routes should continue to be improved to reduce summer congestion and flow smoothly and safely, linking the waterfront and various downtown destinations. Expanded canopies and improved streetscapes will enhance comfortable and safe routes in all weather conditions and times of the year. Pedestrian enhancements and congestion management should explore pedestrian only street areas for special activities and events. Greater ease of pedestrian links between the waterfront dock areas and downtown streets should be a focus.
- F. Sustainability- Vision:** Juneau has the opportunity to showcase best sustainable practices, focusing on a transition from fossil fuels to renewable hydroelectricity for heating and transportation. Mitigating cruise industry impacts, with steps such as increased shore-side power, is a key element of this shared focus on enhancing renewable energy. Sustainable practices are critical to maintaining our area’s intrinsic beauty, quality of our setting, and working with our local resources.
- G. Carrying Capacity- Vision:** Juneau must continue to balance the increasing demands of rapidly rising seasonal visitation with those of local residents. For Juneau to retain its enviable position as a top cruise destination, logistical challenges and impacts must be mitigated to retain the quality experienced by visitors. A key element of this success should focus on the authenticity of the experience in Juneau and sense of place.
- H. Natural Environment, Recreation- Vision:** The location and scale of Juneau offers an unrivaled opportunity to emphasize our setting between the mountains and sea, showcasing an unspoiled and pristine environment. A community and business focus on our setting, coupled with an authentic experience, can make Juneau a leading example of a community embracing residents and visitors ranging from “8 to 80” in a deeply beautiful place. A key community priority is the waterfront, with needed steps to enhance recreation assets and opportunities along the waterfront for both visitors and residents, including families.
- I. Public Safety- Vision:** Public safety and downtown vitality will improve hand in hand. The CBJ should continue to emphasize on-street neighborhood policing. This step, along with increased housing for the homeless, housing opportunities, and year-round uses, will improve real and perceived public safety, increase community pride, contribute to our community’s health and wellness, and enhance economic opportunity.

Together, these nine focus areas facilitate the overall vision for Downtown Juneau.

Planning Area Boundary

The Blueprint Downtown Area Plan area boundary (see map X) encompasses approximately X acres and is divided into 8 (*to be updated w/decision on map*) districts. The following districts are included in the planning area and addressed in detail in the plan:

Harbors

Chicken Ridge/Star Hill

Downtown

Flats

Highlands

Rock Dump

Waterfront

Willoughby

Relationship to CBJ Comprehensive Plan

The 2013 Comprehensive Plan of the City and Borough of Juneau (Comp Plan) is the overall guiding document for the entire borough. The Comp Plan provides a logical, consistent and purposeful approach to managing community growth and development throughout the borough. This plan is further refined with the adoption of addendum plans which generally fall into two categories – “functional” and “area specific”. Functional plans compliment and provide more specific direction or guidance for the entire borough, and may include recommendations specific to the Blueprint Downtown planning area. Area specific plans provide more detail for a particular geographic area within the borough. Figure X inventories the adopted plans and illustrates the relationship of the plans beginning with the comprehensive plan, which provides broad direction for the entire city. All of these documents include implementation actions, which are later carried out through a variety of mechanisms and entities. Additionally, all of the plans completed that touch on the Blueprint Downtown effort, whether they are adopted as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan, by resolution, or not adopted, are listed in appendix X.

The Comp Plan identifies the need to conduct a neighborhood plans. Additionally, the Comp Plan outlines policies that are designed to shape Downtown into a vibrant city center and support Juneau’s continuation as Alaska’s Capital City. The Comp Plan sets the stage for the Blueprint Downtown Area Plan, and future amendments to comprehensive plan maps, the land use code and zoning districts. Throughout this plan relevant policies from the 2013 Comprehensive Plan and officially adopted addendum plans are acknowledged.

The Blueprint Downtown Area Plan is adopted as an addendum to the Comp Plan. The Blueprint Downtown Area Plan refines, and in some cases, updates the goals of the Comp Plan. Blueprint provides a 20-year vision to guide growth, protect natural resources, and enhance and maintain amenities to ensure that downtown Juneau continues to be a safe place to live, work, learn and visit. Where Blueprint Downtown and the Comprehensive Plan conflict, or where Blueprint is more specific, the Blueprint Downtown Area Plan supersedes the Comp Plan as it pertains to the Blueprint Downtown planning area. The Blueprint Downtown Area Plan is consistent with 2013 Comprehensive Plan. In fact, when the Blueprint Downtown Area Plan is implemented, it will help Juneau reach many of the goals articulated in Comprehensive Plan.

The following policies from the 2013 Comprehensive Plan are particularly relevant to the Blueprint Downtown Plan:

To maintain and strengthen downtown Juneau as a safe, dynamic and pleasant center for government and legislative activities, public gatherings, cultural and entertainment events, and residential and commercial activities in a manner that complements its rich historic character and building forms.

To reserve sufficient lands and facilities to support the State Capital functions in Downtown Juneau, including the provision of adequate transportation, housing, commerce communications services, cultural and entertainment activities and other support services.

Relationship to Existing Plans and Policies

As discussed above, many other plans have been adopted as addendums to the comprehensive plan. Additionally, other plans have been adopted by resolution. These plans are not officially a component of the comprehensive plan, but they do represent official borough policies. Many of the stated goals and policies of those plans also inform or guide Blueprint Downtown. As with the Comprehensive Plan and addendum plans, relevant polices are acknowledged.