



BLUEPRINT DOWNTOWN

DOWNTOWN JUNEAU'S AREA PLAN

FOCUS GROUPS FINAL REPORT

JANUARY 2020

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OVERVIEW

As a key component for the update to the Blueprint Downtown Juneau Area Plan, a series of focus groups were conducted with individuals in the community about specific planning related topics. The focus groups gathered technical and professional input from those who have particular knowledge on these topics. They included professionals in transportation and infrastructure, natural resources and recreation, human services, business and economic development, arts, culture, and history, as well as from CBJ departments. CDD conducted seven focus group meetings in 2019 and 2020. The results of the focus groups will supplement the community input gathered from the visioning process to formulate draft goals and objectives for the plan update.

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 able 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 were discussed by Blueprint Downtown area focus groups, as they relate to the focus are being discussed:

- What are Downtown Juneau’s strengths and opportunities (S, O)?
- What are Downtown Juneau’s weaknesses and threats (W, T)?
- What do you hope to see in the future, both short and long term?

SWOT ANALYSIS



Why use Focus Groups?

A focus group provides insightful understanding of complex issues and situations which cannot be gathered from standard multiple choice surveys or large public meetings. Focus groups provide an opportunity for individuals to express their views in detail, to hear the opinions of others, and to collectively develop resolutions to problems. Both technical and anecdotal information can be presented and debated, which can lead to creative problem-solving and broad community support. Information collected through focus groups augments the information gathered during the survey and community meetings. Since focus groups are based on open communication and critical deliberation, they can lead to improved community relations and trust, and a sense of ownership in the process and outcome.

What are the Limitations?

There are several limitations to using a focus group. First, focus groups can require a great deal of time and other resources in preparation, information processing, and reporting. Second, selection of the participants, creation of the discussion guide, and choice of an effective facilitator can be significant challenges. Third, focus group findings are often difficult to capture, analyze, or accurately summarize. Finally, because focus groups involve such a small number of participants, it is often difficult to generalize the findings to the larger population.

Focus groups are an opportunity to get expert feedback from individuals with a particular knowledge of a given area or subject. Focus group feedback provides an in-depth supplement to the issues raised by broader public feedback and can provide deeper insight into issues and potential solutions.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION RESULTS

Transportation and Infrastructure

The Transportation and Infrastructure Focus Group met on August 7, 2019. Their charge was to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats for the Blueprint Downtown Juneau planning area. There were also asked to identify any current or future projects that may affect the planning area.

Focus Group Participants: Red Langel, Scott Hinton, Bob Dilley, Lindsey Foster, John Bohan, Alec Mesdag

Facilitators: Beth McKibben, Tim Felstead

Summary of Discussion

Strengths: Walkable, ability to live downtown without a car, the Seawalk, transit system, docks and other infrastructure, knowledgeable staff, adaptable staff, compact area makes parking enforcement manageable.

Weaknesses: Lack of central management for parking, limited staff resources dedicated to parking, new parking systems are expensive, 2-hour parking limit is challenging to enforce, poor public perception of parking management, increased traffic uses JPD resources, seasonal increase of tourists and workers who don't know the rules, confusing and inconsistent signage, Franklin Street congestion/size, right-of-way width limits, non ADA compliance, street design, winter maintenance, unrealistic expectations in street design.

A pay and display machine is a type of ticket machine used for regulating parking in urban areas or in car parks. It relies on a customer purchasing a ticket from a machine and displaying the ticket on the dashboard, windscreen or passenger window of the vehicle.

Opportunities: Change in parking allocation, pay and display, park and ride, bike parking, become more ADA accessible, replace aging infrastructure during construction/reconstruction, expand the docks, expand/complete Seawalk, management of loading zones, planning to accommodate electric vehicles (EVs); improve pedestrian and vehicle flow; and reduce congestion.

Threats: Gridlock, declining government budgets, commercial traffic, challenging weather, topography, limited right-of-way widths, world events affect cruise ships, pedestrian overcrowding, derelicts, outside interests (such as outside business owners/operators, land owners etc.).

Current and future projects: Phase 2 of Franklin Street, wayfinding signage project, Archipelago site development will add more bus parking, restrooms, year-round space for events/programming, Seward Street, Marine Way, Capital Avenue reconstruction projects, new signage in the parking garages, 2nd Street substation, Support cabinets, pocket park cabinets.

Discussion: Plans and visions for streetscapes can make street maintenance difficult, particularly in winter. Plans and visions for streetscapes don't include increased cost of time and equipment needed to maintain them. Parking management needs to be more holistic, be better-funded, and include a public education campaign.

Natural Resources and Recreation

The Natural Resources and Recreation Focus Group met on July 30, 2019. Their charge was to discuss the open space, recreational and natural resources of the Downtown area, and ways in which these resources can be created, enhanced, and preserved.

Focus Group Participants: Tom Mattice, Teri Camery, Carl Uchitel, Michele Elfers, George Schaaf, Erik Boraas

Facilitators: Beth McKibben, Alix Pierce

Summary of Discussion

Strengths: Walkable, access to trails, parks, open space, Port, harbors, water access, cultural resources, growing retail and restaurants, Tourism Best Management Practices (TBMP).

Weaknesses: Aging infrastructure, seasonality, homelessness, need for more housing, empty buildings, traffic/congestion, parking and parking management.

Opportunities: Economic development and business opportunities, programming, partnerships, improved trail access, sustainable tourism, improved infrastructure, redevelopment of the AJ dock, better coordination/communication between city departments, relocate fuel farm. Addressing uses such as Ebikes, skateboards, kayak rentals, etc.

Threats: Crowding, impacts on quality of life from increased tourism, erosion, natural hazards, decreased government budgets for funding.

Current and future projects: Perseverance bridge replacement, P&R overhauling commercial use permitting system, Mount Roberts Trail.

Discussion: Reminder that harbors are recreational facilities. Homelessness is a challenge and active programming of public spaces can help address undesirable behavior.

Health and Human Services

The Health and Human Services Focus Group met on August 7, 2019. Their task was to discuss issues related to human services in Downtown. One of the primary tasks of the group was to examine Juneau's human service situation and provide insight into how to improve coordination to meet future needs.

Focus Group Participants: Maria Lovischek, Talia Eames, Karen Perkins, Brad Perkins, Irene Gallion, Hazel LeCount, Claudette Thor, Joe Mishler, Mandy Cole, Jordan Nigro, Beth McEwen

Facilitators: Beth McKibben, Tim Felstead

Discussion Summary

Strengths: **The People, people living downtown**, collaboration among service providers, culture and tradition, natural beauty, high volunteerism rates, CBJ offices are downtown and visible, community support for services including Housing First, new businesses.

Weaknesses: Drugs, alcohol, poverty, lack of housing, burn out for social service providers, gaps in services, lack of funding, lack of activity during winter.

Opportunities: Collaboration between service providers and business operators to create/renovate housing, cultural knowledge, the subarea of the Willoughby District known as "the village," the perception that all of Juneau values downtown, better communication of successes, access to services, cultural tourism.

Threats: Pollution, income inequity, decreased funding, increased violence, perception of crime, lack of shelter, congestion, concentration of drug users downtown.

Current and Future Projects: Phase 2 of Housing First, cold weather shelter move, new management of sleep off center.

Discussion: As the "easier" to house population is housed, the more difficult, violent, drug addicted remain unhoused. There is a perception of those that "have" and those that "have not." Downtown needs to remain available to all. Keep in mind that not everyone is able to make choices about their behavior.

Business and Economic Development

The Business and economic development Focus group met on August 22, 2019. They discussed issues related to economic development and business vitality.

Focus Group Participants: Craig Dahl, Carl Uchitel, Brian Holst, Bruce Denton (Several others committed but were unable to attend)

Facilitators: Beth McKibben, Tim Felstead

Discussion Summary

Strengths: Walkability, engaged business operators, beautiful setting, hub of city government, First Fridays, new local businesses, vibrant summer season, engaged DBA, tourism revenue.

Weaknesses: Loss/move of State jobs, derelict buildings, vagrancy, drugs/crime, winter vacancies, small population does not allow for economies of scale, bottleneck/congestion, lack of housing, need for more mix of retail, limited hours of operation, parking mismanagement.

Opportunities: Unique art and culture, continued momentum of reinvestment downtown, using seasonal vacancies, expand to “shoulder season,” diversity of businesses, more events programming, proximity to waterfront, a community that wants to buy local, more year round business activity.

Threats: Vacant storefronts, high rents, competition with the internet, freight costs, “over focus” on tourism, the movement to relocate the Capital elsewhere in the state, inclement weather, decline in cruise industry, perception of unsafe, not family friendly.

Current and Future Projects:

Discussion: Noted opportunity for better coordination/communication/cooperation between the various entities focusing on downtown – this could allow for more efficiency. Perceptions of an unsafe downtown and the need for better parking management.

Arts, Culture, and History

The Arts, culture and history focus group met on January 9, 2020. They were asked to discuss issues related to culture, historic preservation, and the arts in the Downtown planning area.

Focus Group Participants: Nancy DeCherney, Chuck Smyth, Gary Gillette, Edric Carrillo, Niko Sanguinetti, Allison Eddins

Facilitators: Beth McKibben

Discussion Summary

Strengths: Historic and cultural institutions downtown, walkability, community desire and support for growth of arts and culture, diverse community, rich history, young artists, young entrepreneurs.

Weaknesses: Limited space, outdated facilities, geography (land constrained), diverse community isn't always represented, historic district guidelines are weak/unenforced, deteriorated buildings, empty storefronts, seasonality, diamond district (the area of downtown with seasonal jewelry shops), transportation, public parking, restricted seasonal and hourly availability.

Opportunities: Development of second-level residential spaces, cultural tourism, creative population, artists in residence program, diverse geography, cultural events bring residents downtown, use Mainstreet to revitalize downtown, lots of "blank canvases," Juneau's cultural diversity, NW Coast Art.

Threats: Decreased government funding, limited land/space for growth, expanding tourism threatens Juneau's character, seasonality of businesses, lack of commitment for historic preservation, transportation issues, development means moving those with less economic means out of downtown (in general not specific to arts and culture), **misinformation**

Current and Future Projects: Soboloff Center expansion to parking lot, discussion of city museum moving, new JACC campaign.

Discussion: Concern about homelessness and perceptions of personal safety. How to get people more tuned into what is going on, the opportunities for programming to include artists.

Neighborhoods and Housing

The Neighborhoods and Housing focus group met on October 8, 2019. They discussed issues related to neighborhoods and housing in the Blueprint Downtown planning area.

Focus Group Participants: Scott Ciambor, Mary Grant, Andy Hemenway, Bob Sylvester, Kay McCarthy, Jessica Geary, Molly Keisel

Facilitators: Beth McKibben, Tim Felstead

Discussion Summary

Strengths: Many well-cared for homes, historic character, proximity to jobs, walkability, diversity of housing types, amenities for residents, access to nature, city services, recent reinvestment, desirable location, sense of community, strong neighborhoods, value per square foot.

Weaknesses: Limited space, high prices/rents, parking, lack of affordable housing, aging infrastructure, absent landlords, low vacancies/housing inventory, lack of green space, provincial mindset, difficulty of reconstruction/repair of dilapidated buildings.

Opportunities: Infrastructure improvements, prioritizing housing, zoning changes, public/private collaboration, community willingness to help, underuse of land for infrastructure (high density), and improve transit.

Threats: Reduction in year round jobs, influx of tourists, safety/security, underutilized properties, lack of housing, homelessness, topography/avalanche/landslide, climate change, land value is high, parking lots.

Current and Future Projects: Glory Hall move, warming shelter

Discussion: Appreciation for historic homes and character but some would prefer any rehabilitation over none, even if that means giving up character. Some feel the current political climate is not friendly to small cities. Discussion about adding housing downtown can stimulate other reinvestment and increase safety.

CBJ Departments

The City & Borough Departments Focus group met on June 18, 2019. They did not undertake the SWOT analysis as the other focus groups did. Instead the leadership team was asked to identify any recent, current, or future projects, plans, or developments that their respective departments were responsible for that affected the Blueprint planning area.

CBJ Focus Group Participants: Mila Cosgrove, Carl Uchitel, George Schaaf, Greg Chaney, Jill Maclean, Robert Barr, Alix Pierce, Beth McEwen

Facilitators: Beth McKibben, Tim Felstead

Current and Future Projects:

- Mental Health Trust land at the subport. At the time of the focus group, CBJ was bidding to purchase (note: Norwegian Cruise Lines was successful bidder). CBJ owns adjacent tidelands.
- Archipelago Project
- Sealaska Heritage project
- Demolition of former Public Safety building. The site is now temporary parking, allowing for future development of the Aak'w Kwáan Village District
- Wayfinding signs
- Possible reconstruction of the State's north parking structure
- Seawalk extension from AJ dock to Franklin dock
- Downtown circulator
- Small cruise ship infrastructure study
- The downtown library limited Wi-Fi; there is now unlimited Wi-Fi at Marine Park
- Parks and Recreation venter regulations/process
- CCFR taking over operation of Rainforest Recovery
- Making Warner's Wharf pedestrian friendly
- Relocation of the City Museum
- Cruise ship electrification
- Small business Incubators in village district?

Discussion: Focused primarily on CBJ projects planned for Downtown

SUMMARY OF STAFF FINDINGS

The following staff findings were generated as a result of the discussions at the various focus group meetings.

- All focus groups expressed concerns about homelessness
- Participants understand the nexus between programming and activity, and perception of safety
- Need for better parking management was identified by most focus groups
- Vacant/underutilized buildings/storefronts were identified by most focus groups, both as a threat and an opportunity

Generally, input gathered from the focus groups parallels, and reinforces, input gathered through the community-wide visioning process. Focus group discussion refined and informed aspects of the planning process by providing differing perspectives on the same topic, as well as reinforcing areas of concern that cross all focus areas. Discussion with subject matter experts also helped to identify knowledge gaps of the planning team, so they could be adequately addressed in the plan document. Working with the diverse focus groups also highlighted differences of opinion regarding how some issues might be addressed, which enabled the planning team to explore and present options to the Steering Committee, and develop a balanced narrative.