

Blueprint Downtown Steering Committee Meeting
January 17, 2019, 6:00 p.m.
City Hall Assembly Chambers

Steering Committee Members Present:

Betsy Brenneman
Kirby Day
Daniel Glidmann
Michael Heumann
Wayne Jensen
Laura Martinson
Lily Otsea

Jill Ramiel
Meilani Schijvens
Patty Ware
Christine Woll
Ricardo Worl
Nathaniel Dye, Planning Commission Liaison

Steering Committee Members Absent:

Karena Perry

Staff:

Laura Boyce, Senior Planner, CDD
Tim Felstead, Planner II, CDD
Beth McKibben, Senior Planner, CDD
Marjorie Hamburger, Admin, CDD

Agenda:

I. Welcome

Ms. Boyce welcomed the committee and asked them to think about whom to nominate for officers. This discussion was slated for later in meeting.

II. Quick Project Overview – CBJ Staff

Ms. Boyce reviewed the meeting agenda. She said that the next meeting for the committee will be scheduled via a poll of members and eventually there will be a schedule of regular meetings. This will begin after the consultants submit their final report, likely mid-February.

Ms. Boyce displayed the downtown boundary map of the area captured by the Blueprint Downtown project. This is a 20-year planning horizon, she said. The consultants were contracted to assist with the public visioning piece of the process. Unlike the planning process for other sub-areas such as Lemon Creek and Auke Bay, there are many plans (35 that apply) in place already for downtown; it is important not to forget or not to consider them. It will be necessary to determine what is still relevant and needs inclusion in this new document. As the process continues, the team will come up with zoning and future land use map recommendations, suggestions for capital improvement projects and will find planning gaps that need more work.

Ms. Boyce gave a brief explanation of the purpose of a sub-area plan. The CBJ Comprehensive Plan is an overarching document of policy and vision with goals and implementation steps which is very general for the entire city and borough. Sub-area plans are more specific. The process is the Assembly makes a recommendation to the City Manager to undertake an area plan. Staff is then directed to do the area plan and boundaries for that area are established. An area plan generally takes 18-24 months to complete and be adopted by the Assembly; this one for downtown Juneau will likely take up to 2 years.

It is hoped that a draft will be completed next year and then go out to the public for review and comment.

III. **Visioning Project Update** – MRV Team

Mr. Voelckers introduced himself and Barb Sheinberg. Lucid Reverie has also been a partner on the team, however Pat Race had another commitment so was not present, he said. The presentation for this evening was a recap of the past several months spent gathering input from the community. The consultants were helping to establish the vision, which is the front third of the process, he said. Public comment was captured in a variety of ways including meetings, surveys, internet polls, and walking tours. The goal was to capture as broad a feel from downtown residents and the Juneau population at large regarding what they wanted this area plan to accomplish.

Ms. Sheinberg said that the consultants' job was to make the steering committee's job easier. It is easy to say we need more housing but determining where, when, and how is a lot of work. The committee will need to wrestle with determining what the top priorities for taking action are. There has been a lot of public input to jumpstart things, she said.

Slide: Process and Milestones

Mr. Voelckers stated that public meetings all included active engagement of participants so as to get a lot of feedback. The consultants wanted to listen to people and learn their top priorities.

Slide: How Many Participated?

This slide contains data regarding participation at the various events include Meeting to Go opportunities that were facilitated by Sealaska and the Filipino Community. The Gallery Walk event took place at the Senate Building in December. Ms. Sheinberg said in summary they felt confident that 800-900 individuals participated in the public visioning process.

Slide: Extracting Themes

Ms. Sheinberg said that 8 themes emerged from the public comment process. There were 4,000 individual comments which were searched and the 8 big-picture themes became the organizing principals. She noted that all the comments are available to be read. The team also looked at past plans, at least many of the big ones. Topics that were of concern to the public are also found in the past plans, topics such as the balance between tourists and locals, housing needs, etc. There are also a lot of things found in past plans that have already happened such as the tourism plan and the visioning of the seawalk. The Willoughby District Plan notes that zoning allows for 60 dwelling units per acre but the only building like that currently in the district is Fireweed Place. Where are the gaps and how does that match up with what people are saying now, she asked? The team created draft vision goals and possible action statements and shared that with the public.

Ms. Sheinberg and Mr. Voelckers proceeded with an overview of the eight themes that were identified.

Slide: Sustainability and Visitor Capacity

Mr. Voelckers said that the main issue for this theme is balancing the needs of visitors with those of residents. He reminded the committee not to forget that all Juneau residents have a stake in the downtown area, not just the people who live there. Juneau is looking at the question of how to expand infrastructure to reduce congestion and have more capacity for tourism. Should tourism be unlimited or

limited? It was found that most people's answer landed on what we have currently for tourism capacity. Mr. Voelckers said the team was forward about asking these hard questions.

There will be a final public meeting, for this phase, on January 24. At this meeting, half of the time will be spent providing an overview of the conclusions, similar to this presentation to the steering committee, and the other half of the time will be spent on a live poll. For each of these themes the attendees will be asked a few questions such as their opinion on the best locations for additional downtown housing. If committee members have something they'd like to hear from the community, a question can be asked on the 24th using the live polling technique, said Ms. Sheinberg.

Mr. Voelckers reminded the committee that they welcomed questions.

Ms. Sheinberg pointed out the emergent discussions listed on the slide for Sustainability and Visitor Capacity. How do we make sure the core downtown does not experience seasonal closure of business? How to adapt to climate change and mitigate impacts? For example, Merchants Wharf is subject to extreme tides, should we think about things there to include traffic congestion and FEMA concerns? At the meetings the participants were presented with 25 actions to take which were whittled down to 10 per section and then voted on. What are presented here are the 4 actions that received the most votes. These will also appear in the consultants' final report. Then it will be up to the committee to pick priorities.

Slide: Business Vitality

This topic resonated with the public, said Mr. Voelckers. There was much interest regarding making sure downtown is a bustling year-round center for the community. There was concern about protecting what is vital about Juneau. People love the idea of 12 month business success, he said. But how to also make it work for those looking at a seasonal focus; how can CBJ incentivize and support these goals? The more we can be locally focused and work with what is unique about Juneau is good – our beauty, authenticity, etc. How can that be balanced with businesses that are closed seasonally? It was found that people are excited about the emergence of young entrepreneurs downtown. There was a lot of conversation about vacant and underutilized buildings downtown and much wondering if there was something that could be done with those spaces. Related to that is population density and housing, which is another theme but has a lot of overlap with this theme.

Slide: Identity and Culture

Ms. Sheinberg said that questions were asked about what makes Juneau unique and authentic, celebrated and not diluted? Our community's appeal flows from the richness of the culture and the ability to tell our story, not just to the tourists. Past plans have often focused on the gold mining story, but the story is more multifaceted. This shows up in places such as the Historic Preservation Plan and building codes for historic buildings. Juneau has strong connections between people, culture, and the land. At public meetings, some discussions that occurred in front of posters with these kinds of actions were that downtown needs to be more than just about mining history. Storefronts and infrastructure can all tell stories and there are lots of opportunities to tell the story better. Regarding actions that rose to the top, completing the seawalk was very important for many people. There was a lot of comment about wanting to see an area closed to vehicles like on First Friday or when five cruise ships are in town or for special events. Suggestions were made to have arts or cultural events or marketplaces occur on the streets then. This type of activity draws people in. Mr. Voelckers pointed out that downtown has

very few vehicular threads and so closing an area impacts transportation flow. Ms. Sheinberg asked what is diluting our story downtown. An example could be the abundance of jewelry stores downtown; what ability does the city have to influence this situation?

Slide: Public Safety

It was found that there is active and perceived threatening environments downtown. It was heartening to discover data indicating that active steps by the borough have turned the corner on crime a bit. Officer Colon of the Juneau Police Department stated that things downtown are a little better. The Housing First building is completed and occupied and they are working to construct a second building. The police force is responding with an active presence. This is all related to 12 month a year dynamism downtown. The businesses open year round work well. When the seasonal businesses close, the feel of the area changes. Having housing for seasonal workers, for people who wanting to downsize, or who just prefer to live downtown helps with the perception of safety.

Opioid use and alcoholism are issues of concern. Actions to address the problem include treatment centers and housing alternatives. The consultants were surprised to find that of all the issues, this item rose to the top of the community's concerns. When participating in the pay-with-pennies activity, services for people in need was the number one category that people were willing to pay for. Another top action item was more winter activities bring more people presence downtown. Another great concern for public safety was cruise ship pollution.

Slide: Pedestrian Access and Experience

The vision of this theme is pedestrians' ability to walk easily and safely downtown. Whether a tourist or a local walking the docks, there are challenges to connecting the waterfront to the other parts of downtown. The Department of Transportation (DOT) is starting a project this spring to enhance pedestrian islands and slow traffic downtown. When we have multiple cruise ships in port it is congested. Are there physical ways and spaces that are opportunities to expand space for pedestrians? Where are the restrooms? Another issue is about benches. Lately the city has removed any benches that were in place due to concerns about their use by the homelessness population which means elderly residents and visitors do not have resting places.

Slide: Vehicle Circulation and Parking including Bicycles

There is a strong perception, maybe a reality, that there is no parking downtown and so residents in other parts of the borough don't come downtown. Given the geometric limitations of the area and the demands on the single road for through traffic, there was a lot of interest in a stronger transit-oriented solution like a circulator allowing for easy on and off, likely free, linking places downtown and limiting the need to bring cars into the congested area. There was hot debate at the public meetings between more parking and making cars less necessary. A more subtle issue is better housing but does that come with the city's standard dose of parking requirements? Is that needed or could requirements be waived? Regarding carbon emissions, should we incentivize bike riding? See slide for the 4 most popular action items.

Slide: Natural Environment and Recreation

The consultants decided to combine these two topics because recreation needs a place to happen and much of Juneau's recreation involves the natural environment. Some surveys were done that included people downtown enjoying the night life, business people, and tourists on the street. Interestingly,

tourists commented on the beauty of the natural world, but this was rarely mentioned by the locals in these surveys. Juneau's location between mountains and the sea coupled with its history, size, and infrastructure makes this a spectacular place that people want to preserve. Viewshed was another topic that came up especially when thinking about developing the sub port and the archipelago areas. Where should viewsheds be preserved and how? Is it better to have two taller buildings with a view of water between versus one lower building that acts like a dense wall? Downtown recreation was an interesting topic. There was a lot of interest in having places for kids and families to go. Whale Park has proven to be a real success in this regard for people all over Juneau as well as for tourists. A trend in planning is to talk about 8-80 design which means thinking about an 8 year old being able to engage with a designed space and be safe as well as an 80 year old. The concept is that if the 8 year old and the 80 year old both have their needs met, then everyone else is captured in that picture. There is grant money to fund making cities work this way. The most popular actions in this category include requiring cruise ships to plug into local power while in town to reduce reliance on diesel power. CBJ might be able to spend head tax on that effort. Also the proposed ocean center was of great interest.

Slide: Housing and Neighborhoods

This theme appeared to be one of the most critical due to an unnoted gradual loss of housing over decades that has reduced the vitality of downtown. Affordability of housing is a related issue. The city has taken some steps towards improvements with one example being the creation of the housing officer position. For a future poll it would be helpful to see what types of housing people respond to. Using underutilized housing is an opportunity. A specific concern that came up was threading different parts of downtown together such as Capital Avenue, a street which is in bad shape and not good for pedestrians but is a major link between different areas. The location of the Glory Hall location is another important discussion topic.

Slide: Understanding Fiscal Priorities

Following up with the 8 broad thematic the consultants showed this slide about the penny voting activity at one of the community meetings. People took quite a bit of time thinking this through, they said. While not a scientific way to collect data, it was found that housing for the homeless ranked highest followed by affordable housing and the seawalk.

Slide: What's Next?

At the final public meeting for this phase of the project, the consultants will give a similar presentation followed by live polling. In mid-February the final visioning document will be completed. Much of what was discovered was not surprising or unexpected, they said, but a project cannot begin without this public piece and taking the pulse of the community. Things for the committee to think about will include capital improvement projects and advocating with the legislature. In a year, hopefully, the document will be ready for review and approval by the Assembly. This will then be followed with action.

If any areas are underrepresented or need more information, Ms. Sheinberg and Mr. Voelckers said they could add questions to next week's meeting.

Steering Committee comments:

Daniel Glidmann – A repeated concern was about completing the seawalk but the obstacle has to do with valuation of wharf property. He said he would appreciate having an update on that topic. Also, he recalled that the last time FEMA chimed in they indicated that the wharf building cannot be torn down

because then it could not be rebuilt. This was a long time ago that he heard that, he said, and it is not just a Juneau problem. There was talk about legislative action to see if there is a way to attack that rezone issue and at that time FEMA said that the only way to have downtown not be in a V Zone (FEMA designation of a Special Flood Hazard Area) would be to build a breakwater at Marmion Island. You also cannot fill into a V Zone and change the classification, is his understanding. He would like an update if any rules have changed and have the steering committee understand the limitations in that area. Everyone at the wharf wants a seawalk. He said he would like to see about a 50-foot promenade there to expand Marine Park. If there could be a plaza or a boulevard out there the result would not be a taking away from the community but a giving. Mr. Voelckers replied that any FEMA stuff is beyond the scope of the visioning study, but this is an important process question.

Mr. Glidmann said he also wants an update on the DOT project. How many apartments are displaced by CBJ offices located in the Marine View Building? He would like information about reductions in housing units downtown in recent years. Ms. Sheinberg said that this is good for staff to hear regarding what information is helpful to the committee. Ms. Schijvens said she has those numbers that Mr. Glidmann desires.

Betsy Brenneman – A V Zone does not just apply to Merchants Wharf. Mr. Glidmann said that before the tram project and the People's Wharf were approved it was in a V Zone that was contested by the city. FEMA modified that area because it was in the shadow of the Rock Dump. The city can issue a permit for construction but FEMA threatens the flood insurance.

Ms. Brenneman said she was puzzled about the first theme and wonders given the responses if sustainability and visitor capacity are two different things. It seems from the presentation that the most favored actions are about electrification and emissions and not about visitor capacity. However when she says to community members that she is on the steering committee, she hears concerns about visitor capacity; this does not jive with what she is hearing tonight, she said. Mr. Voelckers said that in public meetings carrying capacity was its own theme and there may be reasons to parse these out. Sustainability can encompass the environment, but in this project it most often was about visitors, said Ms. Sheinberg. There were not as many comments regarding the physical environment. Ms. Brenneman said she thought that for most people the issue of visitor capacity should come first. Ms. Schijvens concurred. Mr. Voelckers said that it was correct that the community wants to have a conversation about capacity for visitors and that it impinges on all the other themes as well. So is the theme how to sustain visitor capacity, asked Ms. Brenneman? Ms. Schijvens suggested breaking these into two different categories.

Michael Heumann - Some of these themes are technical challenges and others are characteristics. His question is what resources does the committee have to study the nuts and bolts? Most of this information is opinions of people but he wanted to know what resources are there to address things? Mr. Voelckers said there were some sidebars put on development costs like the housing action plan. Ms. Boyce said that as the committee goes through the planning process, there will be deep dives on the various topics. If it is found that not enough data is available to proceed with or make a recommendation of action, the plan could recommend that a study be done on something of concern. Mr. Voelckers said that this meeting was critical to understanding where the points came from but that lots of deep work is needed to be done to come up with any recommendations.

Ricardo Worl – What is the plan for the cruise ship head tax? Is there anything within our discussion or should we not even go there, he asked. Mr. Voelckers explained that an area plan ideally ends up concluding with implementation and action items. There are uncertainties at present about the head tax, but over the next year there might be some fiscal note attached and someone would be able to answer questions about what is possible. Ms. Sheinberg said that if she were staffing the next part of the process, she would want to know the top two issues each member wants to solve and what information they needed to make decisions and set some action items.

Meilani Schijvens – Ms. Schijvens said she wanted to hear from Docks and Harbors staff as well as AEL&P regarding the electrical grid and hooking up cruise ships. She said she wanted to know if the idea is practical, even if it is a public priority. She also would appreciate hearing from Tim Felstead or other local experts about parking. Ms. Boyce said that this information can be presented to the committee. Mr. Voelckers agreed that the Docks and Harbors Department is an important partner in the planning process. Some staff came on the last walking tour, for example, and shared some interesting information about cruise ship electrification. Also there is a substantive document as a Capital Improvement Project request that came from the Juneau Commission on Sustainability (JCOS), he said.

Kirby Day – Mr. Day said that Juneau Hydro and AEL&P have good information. Ms. Sheinberg said that the topic will be talked about at this Saturday's walking tour.

Jill Ramiel – Ms. Ramiel said she hoped that the homeless issue does not overtake the meeting next week because it stops the conversation. Also, she pointed out, it is a borough-wide problem, not just downtown, and should not be the single issue that takes the air out of the room.

Christine Woll – Ms. Woll wondered if thought had been given about how to get the opinions of people who don't regularly come downtown now. How to engage that audience? Ms. Boyce said that picking events like Halloween was an attempt to capture some of the people not usually found downtown. Ms. McKibben noted that there was a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis done during the Maritime Festival. Mr. Voelckers said that when the consultants did a presentation for the Assembly, this same question was posed. He said he felt it would be a loss if those folks were not involved in conversation about coming downtown. The consultants will try to do more outreach for next week's public meeting. Ms. Woll said that the steering committee will need to check in with the public along the way of the plan development process and asked if the consultants had any advice about that. Mr. Voelckers said it might be appropriate to move the meeting venue around to different parts of town so as to send a message that everyone in Juneau has a stake in downtown. Also, he advised that there be an opportunity for public comment at all committee meetings.

Wayne Jensen – Mr. Jensen noted that another group of stakeholders is the capital city people here during the winter legislature session. He would like to hear from them and recommended active outreach to the legislature. The Juneau Economic Development Council (JEDC) has performed surveys with people who are here for the session so there is some recent data that can be mined. Ms. Sheinberg said that the consultant's final report will include a summary with the opinions of the different stakeholder groups. This will include a summary of the JEDC survey. Also, she noted, Travel Juneau has undertaken their own survey and that information can be useful to this effort.

Meilani Schijvens – Ms. Schijvens said that in reviewing the major themes that have emerged, she does not see Juneau as the capital city and building and maintaining Juneau as the state capital.

Betsy Brenneman – Ms. Brenneman would like to press people at next week's public meeting regarding if they could see themselves or their families giving up cars in the next 20 years. In Seattle people say that the city is "forcing us to ride bikes". What would be realistic about giving up car use in Juneau? We live in a bubble here, she said, and she does not hear people talking about giving up cars, instead there is talk about technology. Also are there any kinds of questions to ask the public about a trade off in zoning such as if downtown were to be rezoned this way you could do this but couldn't do that? Mr. Voelckers said that the public was asked to put a dot on the spectrum of housing versus parking at some of the public events. Some people think we are at the point of making radical decisions about cars downtown, he said.

Nathaniel Dye – The Auke Bay Plan proposed zoning changes are being processed with the public right now, he noted. This involves another set of public meetings and public process. He used this as an example of how the area plan will be followed up with implementation activities for many years down the road.

Patty Ware – Ms. Ware suggested asking questions at the next public meeting regarding specific parts of downtown where housing might be located and what people think it should look like. Also, have questions been asked about carpooling? Ms. Sheinberg said there was a balance point activity that included taking actions to reduce demands on parking downtown and so carpooling was included in that way. The most preponderance was on reducing demands. Ms. Ware wondered if there might be a way to gather that information next week for those who come to downtown to work and try to determine if they would consider carpooling. Mr. Dye said that JEDC did a study about carpooling a few years ago. Mr. Glidmann suggested thinking about qualifying the question. There might be limited attraction to a park and ride system suggestion. But framing the question by saying if a rider were to get on a coach type of bus and leave their car in a covered, secure park and ride site, i.e. paint an upscale version picture, would that get a different type of response?

Kirby Day – Street fairs bring people downtown, he said, but if there is no parking perhaps that changes the equation. When John Mackinnon was on the Assembly, he pointed out that people use their cars as umbrellas. Mr. Day said there is concern about the Department of Transportation (DOT) project for traffic moving in and out of town. Concerns include the narrowing of one traffic lane for two blocks, new development at the Rock Dump, and the new Sealaska project on Thane Road. Regarding the Business Vitality theme, he wondered if there is a movement to "prevent" the spread of seasonal businesses. It is not easy to keep a business open year round, he noted. It would be his suggestion to make that a more positive statement. Also regarding concerns about the amount of jewelry stores, he would instead want to encourage other types of businesses. Ms. Schijvens said that in a study that was done regarding what gives the largest bang for the buck in terms of simple economics; the biggest bang is a jewelry store.

Mr. Day said regarding appropriate pedestrian walking paths from the Seawalk to S. Franklin Street, the little alleyways could be done up as destinations to attract traffic. Also he noted during the walking tour that there were a number of places the group could not walk on the sidewalk due to the snow and ice. Mr. Voelckers agreed this it is better to phrase things in the positive but it is also good for the

committee to be aware that “jewelry store” is a kind of a battle cry for the us-versus-them emblem, indicating a detached business person who impacts the quality of downtown Juneau.

Michael Heumann – Mr. Heumann said he would like to see a greater density of street vendors as he has experienced in a positive way when traveling in other areas. People come to Juneau to enjoy themselves, and so it is his suggestion to pack more in and offer more for visitors to do. He said he did not notice questions about reducing regulations for operators who wish to establish themselves in temporary locations.

Daniel Glidmann – Mr. Glidmann offered some imagining of downtown Juneau: a high-tech escalator originating at the lightering dock and spanning across Egan into an open building where the city hall used to be. A new facility built for city hall in the Willoughby district. It is easy to focus on short term problems, he said, but this document is supposed to be a long range vision. He advocated for remembering the length of this vision. Mr. Voelckers said maybe it is not crazy to talk about elevated walkways.

Jill Ramiel – Ms. Ramiel said that when representatives from Eagle Rock Venture were here to discuss their proposal to build housing on CBJ lot at the corner of Franklin and Second Streets, they said that no one will need parking in 10 years because people will use driverless Ubers. This committee should be thinking on that scale, she suggested.

Ms. Boyce requested that if committee members think of other things they would like included in next week’s public meeting, they should send an email to the blueprint downtown email address.

IV. Planning 101 – CBJ Staff

There was no time for this presentation/discussion so it was postponed until the next meeting.

V. Election of Officers

- Nominations for Chair – Christine volunteered. All were in favor of her appointment.
- Nominations for Vice Chair – Karena Perry volunteered. All were in favor of her appointment.

VI. Public Participation - None

VII. Adjournment

Ms. Boyce announced that the next meeting of the Steering Committee is anticipated to take place in mid- to late-February. At that time, the agenda will include do Planning 101 and a review of the final report from the consultants.

Mr. Felstead announced that the Department of Environmental Conservation is doing a presentation in city hall chambers on Tuesday, January 29, sponsored by the Juneau Commission on Sustainability. The topic of the presentation is having a monitoring system for cruise ship emissions. Ms. Ware asked is committee members could receive an email about the event. Also if other municipal bodies are meeting to discuss or learn about things of interest to the Steering Committee, could staff update members about those meetings, she asked?

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm.