



**Blueprint Downtown Steering Committee Meeting Agenda
Virtual Only**

March 18, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Steering Committee Members Present:

Karena Perry, Chair
Betsy Brenneman
Kirby Day
Michael Heumann
Laura Martinson

Ricardo Worl
Patty Ware
Nathaniel Dye
Jill Ramiel
Tahlia Gerger

Steering Committee Members Absent:

Iris Matthews, Daniel Glidmann, Nathaniel Dye

Staff:

Beth McKibben, Project Manager

Assembly Members:

None.

I. Roll Call

Mr. Day filled in as the meeting chair. The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m.

II. Approval of Minutes

a. February 17, 2021 DRAFT minutes, Blueprint Downtown Steering Committee Meeting

MOTION: By Ms. Ware to approve, the February 17, 2021 draft minutes. Ms. Martinson seconded.

The motion passed with no objection.

III. Public Participation

None.

IV. Steering Committee Updates

Ms. McKibben said the plan for the next meeting is to look at a more complete Chapter 2, stating that it will probably take more than one meeting. Meanwhile, staff will be refining the bulk of the chapter and implementing significant changes.

Ms. Ware asked what the public comment timeline will look like.

Ms. McKibben said it will likely take place over May or June. The comment review period used to be 30 days, but the current standard of electronic review allows it to be shortened. Since staff cannot hold a large public meeting, they will put together a series of smaller meetings.

Mr. Worl asked what groups would be invited.

Ms. McKibben said they had been considering the Downtown Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Business Association, the Juneau Economic Development Council, the downtown neighborhood association, and the Rotary Clubs, as well as the Central Council Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska and the public.

Ms. Brenneman reported that the CBJ Assembly passed the tax abatement for downtown housing, with a few amendments.

Ms. McKibben said the planners met with Scott Ciambor, the CBJ Housing Director, for an overview of the tax abatement. They are investigating other funding sources to promote housing downtown.

Ms. Ramiel reported that the 2021 Main Street convention is virtual, running April 12-14. There is a special rate for civic leaders and municipal employees to attend, in which several Steering Committee members expressed interest. She suggested the Steering Committee write a letter recommending that the Assembly consider attending the convention, and volunteered to draft the letter.

V. Miscellaneous Topic Discussions

Trash and Composting

Ms. McKibben asked the Steering Committee if they liked the actions related to trash and composting from the Focus Group Report.

Mr. Worl agreed that the City needs to work with business owners on the issue. He supported installing recycling bins next to public trashcans. He asked if there is a better process for downtown waste collection than the system currently in place.

Ms. Brenneman asked the Steering Committee members who are downtown business owners for possible solutions.

Mr. Day brought up the issue of enforcement regarding proper trashcans that keep out bears and ravens. He said there is also an issue with ensuring that trash collection happens before 7:30 a.m. to make sure the garbage trucks do not impede traffic.

Ms. McKibben said that the frequency of bags outside of trashcans is an enforcement issue. The other issue is making sure that trash collection and recycling is easily available to downtown business owners.

Ms. Martinson suggested an incentive program, since downtown business owners are not able to take their recycling to the recycling center. She also recommended education, as some business owners do not know how to deal with the specific trash landscape in Juneau. Cost is an issue for business owners as well.

Ms. Ware asked why business owners can't bring their recycling to the recycling center.

Mr. Day said Waste Management requires business owners to have it picked up, as a source of revenue.

Ms. Martinson said business owners are just putting their recycling in the garbage cans. Recycling requires more work and resources.

Ms. McKibben suggested working with the Juneau Commission on Sustainability's solid waste management group.

Ms. Ware said the amount of waste that comes from restaurants and street vendors is overwhelming. An incentive program would allow businesses to make more environmentally conscious choices.

Ms. Brenneman identified the need to address composting, since much of the waste at the dump is food waste.

Ms. Martinson supported the suggestions to place recycling bins next to garbage bins, and suggested supplying water bottle refilling stations.

Ms. Perry reported seeing downtown business owners throw away the belongings of homeless people due to lack of space or lockers in which homeless people can store them. This translates to lack of space in downtown garbage bins. She recommended supplying lockers to the homeless.

Mr. Worl suggested engaging Downtown Business Association or the Rotary Chamber when considering incentives. He recommended a statement affirming that the Steering Committee supports a long-term solution for the dump or the incinerator.

Mr. Day said the Visitor Industry Task Force was working with cruise lines to prevent offloading garbage from cruise ships.

Ms. Brenneman recommended educating tourists about the trash and recycling situation in Juneau.

Mr. Day said the waste company is hesitant to put recycle containers out for the public because recycling abilities are different everywhere you go.

Viewsheds

Ms. McKibben said the Steering Committee never discussed viewsheds. The Steering Committee has endorsed the Willoughby Plan and the Waterfront Plan, both of which have moderate discussion of viewsheds. She asked if they want to add any other recommendations.

Ms. Ware asked if it is sufficient to say the Steering Committee supports the recommendations of the Willoughby Plan.

Ms. McKibben said yes, and that this is what the plan currently says. There are viewsheds outside of those two planning areas that they did not address. Do they need to go into detail, or just broadly acknowledge that Juneau has many beautiful viewsheds and recommend spending time and effort developing guidelines to protect them?

The Steering Committee agrees to Ms. McKibben's recommendation second suggestion.

Mr. Worl asked if the recommendations in the various plans are consistent.

Ms. McKibben said the recommendations are not detailed, because no ordinances have been passed related to them.

Parking Garages

Ms. McKibben said parking garages are discussed in Appendix A, but some recommendations conflict.

Ms. Ramiel suggested using strong language to recommend against any more surface parking lots in the downtown core. City Manager Rorie Watt has expressed a vision for the State parking garage, which is currently falling apart and is difficult to maintain. The parking garage would be elevated to the height of Calhoun Avenue to bridge the Willoughby district to the downtown core. She asked if the Steering Committee is willing to support this suggestion.

Ms. Ware said she is uncomfortable endorsing this idea, since it requires the demolition of one of the houses on Calhoun Avenue.

Ms. Brenneman asked who owns the hillside on Calhoun Avenue behind Fireweed Place. She thinks that hillside should be turned into a winding parklike switchback that would allow disabled people to ascend the hill.

Mr. Heumann said the Central Council Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska owns the hillside.

Ms. Brenneman said she agrees with endorsing more attractive parking structures.

Mr. Day said they could combine the two sentiments to reduce the dominance of parking in downtown while allowing for a car-centric culture for residents who live outside of downtown.

Ms. McKibben clarified that the Steering Committee is not in support of more surface parking, but would recommend investing in parking garages and actions to make Juneau less car-centric

Ms. Martinson emphasized the need to use the current parking structures more efficiently, to keep them well maintained and well lit, and to add bike facilities. Adding awnings over more downtown sidewalks would increase Juneau's walkability, and would add to people's willingness to park farther away from their destination. An employee parking system would keep the garages from filling up with mostly CBJ employees.

Ms. Brenneman said management and enforcement seems to come up in every discussion they have. Long-term parkers are the issue, as well as poorly managed parking garages. She asked if the Title 49 parking discussion would affect their recommendations.

Ms. McKibben said the Assembly asked the Planning Commission to review the standards for off-street parking related to new developments. Title 49 is reviewing the parking code to see if the requirements need to change. Many progressive communities have parking maximums rather than minimums. She does not think that any of their work would reduce the need for parking garages.

Mr. Worl agreed that parking garages need to be safer and cleaner, as many people will not use them because of trash and out of safety concerns.

Mr. Day asked if the 2010 Parking Management Plan included the failed parking meter plan.

Ms. McKibben said that parking meters works, but the plan they used to implement them was not the right one.

Ms. Martinson asked if the parking plans address parking near the downtown high school for teachers and students. She recommended addressing that issue in the plan.

Downtown Circulator

Ms. McKibben said that the last time they discussed the downtown circulator, Mr. Day did not support the recommendations. They had talked about using the existing Capital Transit circulator route rather than recommending another downtown circulator. She asked if the Steering Committee wants to recommend a park-and-ride area outside of the downtown core that people who work downtown can use to take a shuttle or circulator to work.

Ms. Ware said they need to more heavily advertise the Capital Transit downtown circulator. Mr. Heumann agreed.

Mr. Day also agreed that it is not promoted, and asked if it is still in service.

Ms. Perry said people who ride the bus use the circulator frequently. The circulator runs every half hour in the middle of the day, and once an hour in the mornings and evenings. All reports

recommend reversing the frequency of scheduling. The tourists also ride the public buses and use the circulator route often.

Mr. Heumann said the circulator needs an obvious sign on it that advertises a free circulator, and it needs to run continuously.

Mr. Day asked where they could find ridership data. Ms. Perry said the regular bus reports have that information.

Ms. Martinson said a park-and-ride would be helpful if downtown Juneau were more walkable with the ability to get to work without getting drenched.

Mr. Worl wondered if they could use fees as an incentive or disincentive for parking downtown as opposed to a park-and-ride lot.

Ms. Brenneman asked if there is a difference using the Capital Transit circulator during the off-season and during the tourism season. A greater frequency of the buses in the mornings and evenings does not help the tourists.

Mr. Heumann cautioned against supporting the current circulator, because he feels it is dysfunctional. He identified the need to have stronger recommendations about how the circulator should run.

Mr. Day said if you add remote parking, you must add capacity to the circulator.

Ms. McKibben said she would put together some alternative actions. She asked if it is important that the circulator is electric.

The Steering Committee agrees this is a goal to work toward.

Ms. McKibben said the Steering Committee needs to discuss the recommendation to ban vehicles except a circulator during tourist season in defined downtown areas to allow pedestrians to move more freely and create a plaza atmosphere.

Ms. Ware said they have historically supported short-term street closures, but not long-term closures. The Steering Committee agreed.

Mr. Day said the people working on implementing the Tourism Best Management Practices have been working on reducing the routes that tourist buses take downtown. He is not sure why someone would want to get on a bus at the Mt. Roberts Tramway to take a route with few stops, since downtown is so walkable. If you are going to run the circulator correctly, you need to have appropriate capacity, which adds to downtown congestion.

Ms. Brenneman said this needs to be a free circulator, which is the difference between what the City and what private companies can provide. This is helpful for elderly people.

Mr. Heumann recommended keeping in mind the removal of barriers for people trying to patronize downtown Juneau.

Mr. Day mentioned the recommendation to move the staging area for tourism buses. Nearly all the buses that pick up tourists downtown are staged at the Rock Dump. This means that there would be extra traffic driving through the downtown core.

Ms. Martinson asked if there is a transportation group that studies these problems.

Ms. McKibben said Capital Transit is the one who sets the routing and scheduling. She also knows it has not changed in quite a few years. They could recommend working with Capital Transit to look into transportation issues.

Ms. Perry expressed frustration with the current routing and scheduling of Capital Transit buses. Ms. McKibben said the current schedule could also be improved for the bus drivers. The up-coming new capital transit center would allow for more bathroom breaks for the drivers.

Ms. Brenneman said that moving the tourism staging area would not work any better than the current situation if nothing changes like rezoning the Rock Dump or moving the docks.

Ms. Ramiel said she does not understand why the tourist and resident circulators need to be separate. Mr. Day agreed.

Mr. Heumann said moving tourists out of the downtown is bad for the downtown businesses.

Ms. Martinson said it is better to include the concerns about the shuttle rather than remove the recommendation all together.

Ms. McKibben said they might want to refine the language in the Transportation chapter based on this discussion.

Year-Round and Seasonal Housing

Ms. McKibben said the visioning report is trying to capture the short-term vacation rental market.

Ms. Brenneman said she asked Housing Director Scott Ciambor about the legality of restricting these types of rentals. She identified a need to prioritize year-round residents. She thinks it is possible to address seasonal rental issue for the legislature and seasonal workers, but not with the rising prevalence of short-term vacation rentals downtown.

Ms. Ware asked what it means that the CBJ is not currently regulating vacation rentals.

Ms. McKibben said this means the zoning code had a section for bed-and-breakfasts, but short-term vacation rentals are a newer concept. The zoning ordinance does not have a mechanism to address this. The City also does not have a business license requirement, so the City does not

have a way to track them. A number of short-term vacation rentals pay sales tax, but she is sure many do not.

Ms. Martinson said that Juneau does not have much hotel space, so the community is in danger of becoming overrun by short-term vacation rentals.

Mr. Heumann said it would be helpful to have some context for this issue. Whether or not Juneau restricts these vacation rentals, more housing downtown is needed. Adding affordable housing means also adding some expensive units for which property owners can charge travelers a premium to balance out the costs. He suggested recommending a restriction instead of a ban.

Ms. Ramiel said if Juneau is successful at growing its independent traveler market, someone would build a hotel. She is concerned with the regulation of short-term vacation rentals, since they do not pay into hotel taxes that are used to market Juneau.

Ms. McKibben said she thinks the plan needs to recommend more study of this issue.

Ms. Brenneman disagreed, saying she thinks the recommendations need to be stronger. Unless the issue is addressed quickly, it will create issues for maintaining adequate year-round housing, since property owners can make more money with short-term vacation rentals than long-term rentals.

Mr. Day asked for clarification regarding the intention of the statements about short-term vacation rentals in the recommendation prioritizing year-round housing over seasonal rentals.

Ms. McKibben said cited community impacts of short-term vacation rentals. For example, Mr. Glidmann and his neighbors bought a house in order to prevent it from becoming a constant vacation rental, and so they could rent it out long-term.

Ms. Brenneman suggested a regulation or disincentive in at least part of downtown.

Ms. Martinson said short-term vacation rentals should have to pay the same taxes as hotels. She does not like the idea of telling property owners what they can and cannot do with their investments, but she does think regulation and taxes are a good idea.

Ms. Brenneman supports recommending better enforcement and management for bed-and-breakfasts as well.

VI. Committee Comments

Mr. Day asked if these recommendations would be coming back to the Steering Committee once staff refines them.

Ms. McKibben said she needs to consider the most efficient way to progress.

The Steering Committee will discuss the rest of the agenda at the next meeting.

VII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Next Meeting Date: April 1, 2021, 6 p.m., virtual only

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