



**Blueprint Downtown Steering Committee Meeting Agenda
Virtual and Telephonic**

December 30, 2020, 6:00 p.m.

Steering Committee Members Present:

Betsy Brenneman
Kirby Day
Daniel Glidmann
Michael Heumann

Tahlia Gerger
Laura Martinson
Nathaniel Dye
Iris Matthews

Steering Committee Members Absent:

Patty Ware, Karena Perry, Jill Ramiel, Ricardo Worl

Staff:

Beth McKibben, Project Manager
Alexandra Pierce, Planning Manager

Assembly Members:

None

I. Roll Call

Mr. Day volunteered to chair the meeting. The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

II. Public Participation

None.

III. Steering Committee Updates

Beth said she would close the poll for upcoming meeting dates and let the Steering Committee know when the next meeting will be.

IV. Review of Steering Committee comments on Draft Chapters 1 & 3 – 8

Chapter 4: Economic Development

Ms. McKibben reported that Mr. Worl had commented supporting retention of the Rock Dump as an industrial area until an alternative deep-water port is available. He also had suggested some language for a statement regarding how much time the Committee devoted to evaluating alternatives.

Ms. Brenneman supported adding a statement to show the complexity of the issue.

Ms. Martinson said that changing zoning is an effective way of supporting long-term positive changes. She suggested recommending changing the zoning of the Rock Dump, and allowing the effects to spiral out from there.

Mr. Day said changing the Rock Dump zoning is not feasible until Alaska Marine Lines (AML) has another place to operate.

Ms. McKibben said one of the challenges of changing the zoning of the Rock Dump is a higher likelihood of residential uses, which are incompatible with current uses. She stated she is not comfortable with making that recommendation due to the cost and complications of developing a new deep-water port.

Ms. Pierce wondered if zoning is the right catalyst to drive a new deep-water port. For a deep-water port on the back side of Douglas, there would need to be a lot of public money invested. She said that the Committee needs to think about the implications.

Mr. Dye said that recommending a rezone would not simply make it happen. He referenced Auke Bay as an example of a recommended rezone that has not come to fruition seven years later. If the Committee wants to transition away from industrial uses at the Rock Dump, he said he thinks that it is appropriate to mention it in the document, and not to worry about funding sources or other issues.

Ms. McKibben said there are often conflicts with other uses next to industrial uses, so the transition away from Industrial zoning would be difficult.

Mr. Day said Ms. Matthews had a good suggestion, which is to follow Mr. Worl's suggestion to add a statement about how much they have discussed the issue.

Ms. Martinson said that, because this plan document is so long-term, she supports adding an aspect of timeliness.

Mr. Glidmann said that it is not just the deep-water port; it is also the second crossing to Douglas. Juneau needs to have both in order to be able to change the Rock Dump. He suggested saying that Blueprint supports continuing trying to find an alternative for the downtown as a deep-water port.

Mr. Heumann said an obvious catalyst would be creation of port facilities not owned by AML. He said this would be a public good, as it would keep AML from charging a premium on goods and would allow other shipping companies to tie up to the dock, since there isn't currently room.

Ms. Pierce said that a second crossing, which is further along in the planning process than an alternative deep-water port, is a likely catalyst. When that happens, it might be a good time to consider a rezone.

Ms. McKibben said that Ms. Matthews had suggested moving mention of the Main Street Program earlier in the chapter, since it is one of the core recommendations.

Ms. Matthews said there is a surfeit of data in the chapter, and most of the recommendations are at the end of it.

Mr. Dye said a single lobbyist group is spearheading the Main Street effort in Juneau. He questions how much the Committee wants to highlight it.

Ms. McKibben said it has been one of the core recommendations for implementation throughout the plan. Many funding opportunities come through the Main Street program. She said there are ways to implement the program that are not through the Downtown Business Association. The intention is to capture the spirit of the program with the recommendations.

Ms. Martinson's comments suggested rewording a section about cancelling the cruise season of 2020. She said this year's difficult lesson for the local economy is that the cruise season is the downtown economy. It also supports the hospitality, recreation, and retail sectors.

Ms. McKibben said Ms. Martinson would like to discuss the Business Vitality section further. Ms. Martinson said that downtown has a seasonal economy with tourism, the Alaska Legislature, and fishing, and the Committee needs to talk about how Juneau can embrace a seasonal economy and make it work for the community.

Mr. Heumann agreed with much of what Ms. Martinson said, but all of the community input mentioned desire for a more robust year-round economy. He thinks there can be a balance.

Ms. Brenneman said those who have lived downtown a long time remember what it was like before, and she feels it has lost a lot of the character. She said that it used to be locals who owned and leased the properties downtown, and who wanted to operate their businesses year-round, but that has changed with the growth of the cruise industry.

Ms. Martinson said that the whole economy is not what it used to be, and local businesses are finding it harder to survive.

Mr. Glidmann said one of the things that Ms. Brenneman is remembering is the commercialization of the Valley. The emergence of Fred Meyer's and the other large stores affected the stores that could survive downtown, and tourism just filled in the gaps that were left. Juneau's limited population is what limits downtown's potential. Until we have a lot more people, downtown will be a niche market.

Ms. Pierce said that she wanted to highlight the point Ms. Martinson made that both the Alaska Legislature and fishing are also seasonal. She suggested changing the wording that implies seasonality is bad to focus more on attracting different types of seasonal workers, so that Juneau can fill in the gaps during the other parts of the year.

Ms. Martinson said that everyone wants to incentivize local businesses, whether they are seasonal or not.

Ms. Brenneman said the session limits on the Alaska Legislature means that Legislature families do not move to Juneau anymore. In addition, she highlighted the need to incentivize keeping State employees in Juneau. Plans for the waterfront would also help to incentivize local fishing.

Mr. Day said he is not sure that CBJ can incentivize local businesses versus non-local.

Ms. McKibben said Ms. Martinson made a good distinction in that local is more important than year-round. Not all of the seasonal activity overlaps, such as the Legislature and the tourism seasons.

Ms. Brenneman thought the Juneau Economic Development Council could do more outreach outside of Juneau for businesses that locals need. The malls used to have many specialty stores, which now are mostly big box stores.

Ms. Martinson said the section on resiliency in Chapter 4 could use more recommendations. What does the downtown area need to do to be more resilient, especially regarding this year's loss of revenue?

Ms. Pierce said that resiliency is diversity, which is what the Steering Committee has been recommending.

Ms. Brenneman wanted to add that Juneau is a top-ranked arts community, as well as the fact that the historic character, natural environment, and placemaking all contribute to the economy. She suggested that CBJ commit greater resources to compliance, since there is only one compliance officer.

Ms. Pierce said that having only one officer is a problem, but there is also an issue with a lack of political will on the Assembly's part to change that.

Ms. McKibben suggested adding language that says compliance and enforcement needs to be improved, and which identifies the value of enforcement.

Ms. Martinson said increasing convention visitors year-round would be helpful. Mr. Day suggested mentioning Travel Juneau's role in bringing travelers to the community.

Ms. Brenneman said that is something on which the Juneau Arts and Humanities Council has been working. Centennial Hall can only hold so many people, and Travel Juneau has had to turn some conventions away.

Ms. McKibben said weather is also a challenge, as it often interferes with flying into Juneau.

Ms. Martinson said that redoing Centennial Hall is going to be a future community discussion, so it might be helpful to have recommendations to help guide that discussion.

Ms. Pierce said a lot of the discussion about Centennial hall is whether it is a community center or a convention center. Regardless, there is a travel market on which Juneau is missing out.

Mr. Day said Travel Juneau has been talking about developing programs for wintertime independent travel around current events, like the Juneau Public Market or Wearable Arts.

Chapter 5: Land Use, Neighborhoods & Housing

Ms. Brenneman asked if CBJ can weigh in on where the liquor stores and the bars are located, in response to Mr. Worl's comments that they are all in one place and there is a co-relation between this and behavior that leads to police calls.

Ms. McKibben said CBJ can make comments, but it cannot regulate them differently than other retail establishments.

Mr. Glidmann said the Steering Committee is at conflict with its own policy by suggesting limiting bars and having year-round establishments. There are many fewer bars in the downtown area now than there used to be. He said the reason most of that changed was when the drinking and driving laws went into effect. He is not sure how much the bars affect the quality of life downtown.

Ms. Matthews said she thought Mr. Worl's comment was more about highlighting the public safety aspect.

Ms. Martinson said that she disagrees with the comment that the reason locals do not come downtown is overcrowding. She said locals were not coming downtown this summer either, when it was not crowded.

Ms. McKibben said she has known many people and Committee members who will not come downtown in the summer. This issue was brought up during the visioning process. This is an issue for some, but for others it does not matter how crowded it is if there are shops they want to go to or programming they want to see.

Ms. Brenneman suggested adding definitions for overlay districts, naming the subdistricts mentioned, adding more information on the waterfront subdistrict, adding more information about compelling greater building heights, and reordering sections. She suggested being honest about the issues with homelessness downtown, which informs why the downtown area is not very inviting and why placemaking becomes an issue.

Ms. Martinson said that increased programming and placemaking naturally dispels some of the negative behaviors.

Ms. Brenneman suggested they recommend gathering data after the Glory Hall move.

Mr. Dye asked to clarify the discussion on compelling building height.

Ms. McKibben said that there have been opportunities to have higher buildings, but the costs did not work out. She suggested the possibility of recommending incentives.

Mr. Dye said the cost of development changes past four or five stories.

Mr. Heumann said that no one builds anything beyond four stories Juneau, for good reason: no one knows how to build past that height, so it is a risky endeavor.

Ms. Gerger said drug-use addiction laws have changed in many other places and it has become recognized as a healthcare issue, which leads to treatment of more people. If Alaska were to adopt this mindset in the laws, this might lower rates of drug use and addiction downtown.

Mr. Day said that perhaps the Steering Committee needs to revisit how the document addresses the challenge.

Ms. Martinson said it might be worth mentioning that municipal ordinances regarding health and social issues directly affect every area of downtown vitality.

Ms. Matthews said there needs to be a cohesive vision throughout the plan for how homelessness can be improved.

Chapter 6: Downtown Activities & Tourism

Ms. Matthews wanted to make sure the core recommendations are emphasized in this chapter.

Ms. Brenneman suggested moving the discussion on the Willoughby District Plan to the end of the arts/culture/entertainment section. She also identified sections that needed to be updated or clarified.

Ms. Brenneman asked why Marine Park had its own section.

Ms. Pierce said the Committee had previously had a major discussion identifying Marine Park as a town square. The discussion does not necessarily have to be included in this chapter.

Ms. Brenneman said many other things, like downtown trails, are not mentioned. Ms. McKibben agreed that some of the other sections need to be expanded.

Chapter 7: Parks, Open Space & Recreation

Ms. Brenneman summarized her suggestions, including discussion regarding food carts in Marine Park.

Mr. Day said Bernadette's has turned into a restaurant rather than a food cart, since they now have tables and have taken up a significant portion of Marine Park. He identified this as a management problem.

Ms. McKibben said they had recommend having centralized permitting for food carts in another chapter, since there are currently multiple CBJ departments that work with vendors.

Ms. Brenneman said she had thought the committee had discussed not having much commercialization along Mayor Bill Overstreet Park. Ms. Martinson said she wondered if they could include something about programming. Ms. Brenneman said that a small ice rink maintained by volunteers would be a good programming opportunity. Ms. Martinson said we seem to keep coming back to programming with existing spaces.

Ms. Matthews said this chapter and chapter 6 are important chapters, and she is struggling with the way they are organized. She thinks the recommendations always come back to economic opportunity. She wondered how the Committee could make each recommendation in service of the bigger vision of having a vibrant downtown. She does not think they are quite getting at the links between the chapters with all of these recommendations.

Ms. Pierce said the plan document needs to tie the recommendations to broader concepts while still calling them Park Amenities in order to ensure that their importance is recognized for funding reasons.

Ms. Matthews suggested recommending that all of the downtown entities work together and coordinate so they reinforce each other's work to build a stronger downtown.

Ms. Martinson said the community organizations need to find a way to work efficiently towards their goals.

Ms. McKibben said all the past plans identify the need for a coordinator or single point of contact.

Ms. Pierce said part of the issue with the way they are currently approaching the Main Street program is that it is only progressing through the Downtown Business Association. Since Juneau has a fragmented environment with many different groups, having a centralized position would help facilitate progress on these community goals.

Mr. Dye's criticism of Main Street is not the program or the DBA; Main Street is not universally accepted as the solution for downtown.

Chapter 8: Transportation, Streetscape & Parking

Ms. Brenneman asked why the 2017 traffic information is no longer included. Staff said the chapter was massive, and that the information was moved to an appendix.

Ms. Brenneman noted that much information about Egan Drive had been cut, and that she thought it was important to include that the Alaska Department of Transportation has no plans to amend speed limits or street layout between 10th Street and Norway Point.

Ms. Brenneman questioned a sentence that recommends increasing downtown parking. The Steering Committee agreed that they had not recommended that, and had supported implementing the 2010 Parking Management Plan. They had also discussed changing

perceptions about parking downtown and enhancing management in the parking structures and for existing on-street parking.

Ms. Brenneman said asked why recommendations about bike lanes to Thane and better bike storage were removed. Mr. Day agreed, saying that the plan needs the recommendations if the Steering Committee is going to encourage ways of making downtown more bike-friendly.

Ms. Brenneman said that the plan needs heavy recommendations for snow removal and prioritizing sidewalks in order to prioritize pedestrianization.

Ms. McKibben said that Ms. Ramiel had high-level comments about how focused attention on one problem (the need for more housing, empty buildings, traffic congestion) would alleviate so many others.

V. Committee Comments

Ms. McKibben said the next meeting for the Steering Committee would most likely be a long Saturday meeting instead of two shorter ones on consecutive weekdays. They might be able to have a hybrid meeting with some in-person participants and some on Zoom webinar.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Next Meeting Date: To be determined.