



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

February 25, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Steering Committee Members Present:

Betsy Brenneman
Kirby Day
Daniel Glidmann
Jill Ramiel

Ricardo Worl
Patty Ware
Tahlia Gerger
Iris Matthews

Steering Committee Members Absent:

Karena Perry, Laura Martinson, Nathaniel Dye, Michael Heumann

Staff:

Beth McKibben, Project Manager
Alexandra Pierce, Planning Manager

Assembly Members:

Loren Jones

I. Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 p.m. Due to Ms. Perry's absence, Mr. Day chaired the meeting.

II. Approval of Minutes

a. December 30, 2020 DRAFT minutes, Blueprint Downtown Steering Committee Meeting

Ms. Brenneman asked for a correction on page 5 of the minutes to clarify that she did not recommend compelling greater building height. She had recommended adding more information about compelling greater building height.

MOTION: By Mr. Worl to approve the December 30, 2020 minutes. Ms. Brenneman seconded.

The motion passed with no objection.

III. Public Participation

None.

IV. Steering Committee Updates

Ms. McKibben reported that she had presented during the Alaska chapter of the 2021 American Planning Association conference. Her presentation was called the Tale of Three Downtowns, which talked about the planning processes for Juneau, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. She stated

that there are many similarities between the three cities, including parking, perceptions of personal safety, increased activation of downtown, and introducing CPTED principles.

Regarding the most recent Norwegian Cruise Lines meeting for their proposed dock, Mr. Day said there was a lot of recapping. The community had many questions about housing, as well as about funding sources. Mr. Day said NCL wants to build a dock, parking area and a building within the space. They do not intend to fund building condominiums, daycare centers or beaches.

Ms. Pierce said NCL is looking for development partners. She reported that they had signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Alaska Ocean Center.

V. Priorities

Ms. McKibben gave a brief overview of the memo provided to the Steering Committee. She said she would like to start with the priorities she drafted for them to consider. She hoped that they captured the main ideas in a high-level way.

Ms. Brenneman said the statements do not feel complete to her. The only one that bothers her is "Activate the ground floor."

Ms. Ramiel agreed, stating they want to activate the floors above the ground floor. Unless the Steering Committee recommends a program to incentivize entrepreneurial activities, there is no way to activate a ground floor.

Ms. McKibben recommended revising the language of the priority statement. She reminded the Steering Committee about past discussions regarding sidewalk treatments, engaging pedestrians, and activating the public spaces on the ground floor.

Ms. Brenneman said she considers placemaking to be a greater priority, but it does not appear among the statements.

Ms. Ramiel identified the need to include pedestrians in the priority statements.

Ms. Pierce encouraged the Steering Committee to continue the discussion about activating the ground floor. She said that both walking and biking are prioritized under "Enhance connectivity." She agreed that there needs to be a different heading that more directly prioritizes placemaking and events.

Mr. Worl agreed that it is an issue of semantics. He recalled discussions about seating, lighting, First Fridays and street closures as examples of things to draw people downtown. The ground level is where the action is. He agreed that the terminology is not quite correct, but he liked the conceptual category.

Ms. Ware echoed the sentiment about this priority leaping out at her in a negative way. They have had many discussions about placemaking, and generating excitement and interest in the

downtown area. She stated she feels “Activate the ground floor” and “Enhance connectivity” are duplicative, and suggested combining them. She wanted to greater emphasize walkability, bicycling, and pedestrianization. She also felt “Spur Development” and “Economic Vitality” were duplicative.

Ms. Pierce suggested combining “Activate the ground floor” and “Enhance connectivity” to include all aspects that draw people downtown, as well as changing “Enhance connectivity” to read “Enhance pedestrian connectivity,” for example. This priority would focus on making downtown accessible for pedestrians and other non-vehicle modes of transportation.

Mr. Day agreed with the suggestions.

Ms. McKibben asked the Steering Committee if they prefer that staff use specific terms like CPTED in the priorities rather than broader terms like public safety.

Ms. Brenneman said terminology should be broad and generic. She identified homelessness, safety, and feeling welcome downtown by having clean areas as missing components.

Ms. McKibben said it is difficult to talk about public safety and homelessness because using the correct language is important. She asked the Steering Committee if public safety should be its own key idea.

Ms. Ramiel said people feeling unsafe downtown is a byproduct of not enough housing. If they focus intently on more housing downtown, some of the other problems will be alleviated.

Ms. Pierce suggested language focusing on incentivizing housing opportunities, creating a vibrant and safe downtown by providing housing for vulnerable populations, and by reducing crime through environmental design and programming that draws people downtown.

Ms. McKibben suggested that public safety become its own key idea, including a statement similar to Ms. Pierce’s suggested language.

Mr. Glidmann cautioned against assuming that certain actions will lead to known results. He has experienced an increase in disruptive behaviors from homeless and vulnerable populations during the summer months, when downtown is full of people. He is in favor of developing and providing more housing downtown for many reasons, but there are many communities with lots of housing downtown as well as lots of homelessness. He stated he thinks it would be an excellent exercise for the community and the Steering Community to come up with a word or phrase to define those specific underprivileged populations in a way that highlights the lack of opportunities they face.

Mr. Day suggested using a phrase like “welcoming to families” in this priority statement to infer that there will not be any aggressive encounters downtown. He agreed it needs to be addressed, as did several other Steering Committee members.

Ms. Matthews suggested “vulnerable people or populations” as a descriptive phrase. She said she likes the idea of the key priorities. She had a different reaction to the statement about activating the ground floor, since it was one of the most active statements. The language of the priority statements needs to be stronger and more specific.

Ms. Brenneman agreed with Ms. Matthews that the statements need more verbs that are active.

Ms. Matthews said she thought some of the other key points could be more specific. These priorities are the actions to achieve the main vision for downtown.

Ms. Ramiel said that the priority about activating the ground floor is truly unique; they have not seen it in any other plans. They should look at all of the key ideas through that lens and hone them to be unique to the Blueprint plan.

Mr. Day said the priority related to housing needs an active verb, since it is the only one without one.

Mr. Glidmann said that the recommendation for more housing of all types might provide an opportunity to address the homelessness issue.

Ms. Ramiel suggested adding a recommendation to hire a downtown coordinator under the priority “Create a downtown for everyone.”

Ms. Matthews asked what the big ideas that feel critical are. She stated she loves the 18/365 idea, and thinks there are many ways to achieve this goal, so that is her personal key priority. Ms. Ware agreed with elevating that key point.

Ms. McKibben said hiring a coordinator is just a step to achieving the priority rather than a priority itself. This is more of a key action.

Ms. Pierce asked the Steering Committee what they would like the ultimate outcome of hiring a coordinator to be.

Ms. Ramiel listed a lack of open storefronts, events every week, a positive atmosphere, etc. as desired outcomes.

Ms. Brenneman suggested revising the statement to recommend providing more funding and resourcing to make downtown for everyone, as well as encouraging collaboration between entities that influence downtown.

Ms. Matthews said they could identify hiring a coordinator as essential to achieving this vision for downtown.

Ms. Brenneman suggested “Spur Economic Vitality” for a heading.

Mr. Worl said they need to be mindful of issues like funding. They do not want a document full of fluff because of a lack of funding or agreement. Regarding the homelessness issue, there is a need to change the community attitudes in order to affect real change. The community also needs to change its expectations about parking and traffic. The Steering Community needs to acknowledge the tradeoffs, and that things will take money and time.

Ms. McKibben said a good place for that is the Implementation chapter. There is a broad range of action items; some are essentially free and can be done right away, while some are very expensive and will take years. The implementation chapter could include a top five list of immediate actions and a top five list of long-term actions so that it is clear that there are a range of achievable goals.

Ms. Brenneman expressed concern about the placement of historic preservation. She thinks it fits better in Economic Vitality as opposed to Land Use. If it does stay in chapter five, she would like the title amended to include historic preservation. Additionally, the title for chapter seven needs to more explicitly include Natural Resources.

VI. Draft Goals

Regarding the goal about enhancing economic vitality with more residents, Mr. Day asked whether that means more people living downtown or just coming downtown.

Ms. McKibben replied that it was intended to mean more people living downtown.

Ms. Brenneman said that she thought it meant both.

Ms. Matthews thought it meant more residents and businesses. The Steering Committee wants more people living downtown, but also more active business.

Ms. Pierce suggested adding “with a variety of residents and businesses to serve them.”

Ms. Brenneman suggested “Juneau residents” instead of just “residents,” as that implies only downtown residents. She suggested amending the economic vitality statement to including “living and visiting downtown.”

Mr. Day suggested using the word “frequent” instead of “visit.” In the third paragraph, he suggested using “residents” instead of “locals.”

Ms. Brenneman said if they agree that historic preservation belongs in the Economic Vitality chapter, they would need to change that paragraph relating to it.

Regarding the Transportation, Streetscape and Parking goal, Ms. Ramiel said there is nothing that explicitly talks about walkability. She suggested having one goal for walkability and streetscape, and another for transportation and parking. One goal for all of them seems too much.

Ms. Matthews agreed. There is nothing in the Transportation chapter that excites her since the projects, while important, are all in other plans. She stated that she values the recommendations for encouraging livable, walkable neighborhoods and streetscaping. She does not think that parking should be a main vision, and rather should be included as a means to an end.

Ms. McKibben said she has realized that walking and biking aren't included in the goal related to connectivity. She recognized the Steering Committee's desire to focus less on vehicular traffic and more on pedestrianization.

Mr. Glidmann emphasized the importance of walkability and bike-ability downtown. He also stressed the importance of considering the needs of Juneau residents who do not live downtown, considering they make up the bulk of the population. That population needs to be reasonably confident they will be able to find a place to park.

Ms. Matthews stated she thinks that this is a messaging issue. Her experience is that parking is not an issue downtown.

Mr. Glidmann said this is a seasonal issue. It is most difficult to park downtown in the summer during the tourist season, which is when Juneau residents want to visit downtown.

Ms. Brenneman said that better parking management is the vision for this issue.

Ms. Pierce stated the need for greater clarity regarding implementation of parking management. Downtown parking has a perception problem. She thinks this issue can be addressed more succinctly by mentioning the Downtown Juneau Parking Management Plan and reiterating its key points. Lowering parking barriers to development is important as well. Fixing parking is a building block for a better downtown. Hiring a coordinator is not going to be the only action needed to fix it.

Mr. Glidmann said the parking issue has a strong age demographic component. Older people have more issues with parking.

VII. Visioning Report Priorities & Actions

Ms. McKibben said the Visioning Report process was robust, with extraordinary public participation. Many, but not all, of the recommendations are incorporated. Some of the recommendations from the Visioning Report process still need Steering Committee discussion, such as the future of the Rock Dump, the downtown circulator, and view sheds.

Ms. Brenneman emphasized the need for clean streets and sidewalk clearing. She asked why the recommendation prioritizing year-round downtown housing over seasonal rentals was not included.

Ms. McKibben stated the need for the Steering Committee to discuss that topic.

Ms. Brenneman emphasized the importance of providing safe, clean public restrooms. She said that she still supports the idea of having a Gastineau Avenue/South Franklin Street bypass, although she recognized that she might be in the minority.

Ms. Ramiel asked if the Steering Committee decided not to advocate for a business improvement district.

Ms. McKibben said that recommendation is in the action table, as well as in the Economic Vitality and Land Use, Neighborhoods & Housing chapters. She clarified that these recommendations were what arose from the visioning meetings with the community.

Ms. Pierce said these recommendations are in the action tables, but they are not given special importance. Staff wanted to ensure that the actions from the Visioning Report were all still relevant.

Ms. Ramiel asked how much weight the public's recommendations received in the plan.

Ms. McKibben said figuring that out is the desired outcome of the discussion.

Ms. Matthews suggested refining Visioning Report priorities included in the action tables. She feels that the Visioning Report priorities have been reflected in the plan document.

Ms. Brenneman suggested discussing trash and composting at a later date.

Mr. Day agreed the circulator needed to be discussed more. Some people think it will decrease congestion and he disagrees.

VIII. Committee Comments

Ms. McKibben said staff would need some time to put together the materials needed for the next meeting. She asked if the Steering Committee would accept meeting again in about a month.

Ms. Pierce alternately suggested reconvening in a few weeks and work on the most important issues. The Steering Committee supported that suggestion.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Next Meeting Date: March 18, 2021 at 6:00 p.m, virtual only.