

# TRANSITION REPORT

## DOWNTOWN ADVISORY GROUP

JUNE 30, 2015

### PARTICIPANTS:

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# DOWNTOWN ADVISORY GROUP

## INTRODUCTION

Downtown Anchorage offers a unique combination of development that offers citizens and visitors expansive and modern cultural and civic facilities, governmental and private corporation headquarters, first-class lodging, and a superior collection of retail, restaurant, and small business services. It is truly the heart of our community and an essential part of our economic development. Its strong economic base, cultural and historical attractions, natural beauty, and diverse recreational opportunities have always made downtown Anchorage Alaska's premiere civic and cultural destination – an active, walkable, mixed-use cultural and economic urban hub that is an exciting and livable place for residents, workers and visitors alike.

Anchorage Downtown Partnership, Ltd. and several of our stakeholders, members, and partners came together recently to collaboratively identify the challenges and opportunities facing our neighborhood, and to identify recommendations on how to address the challenges for the incoming administration.

## PROCESS

Similar to other transition committees, we utilized the facilitation process from Bill Dann and Doug Johnson at Professional Growth Systems. DAG members split into smaller groups for the preliminary brainstorming work and to identify timelines for the actions, before coming back together to report outcomes. Each group's list was then combined with the others and presented back to the full group for a prioritization exercise. And finally, the group collaboratively refined the top 5 priorities by adding some clarification and combining similar items.



*Downtown Advisory Group (DAG) participants during one of the priority setting exercises.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the course of two separate meetings, DAG members developed a significant number of suggestions for ways to improve downtown. The top 5 recommendations follow this section, while the full list is provided at the end of this document.

One note: the issue of homelessness was very important to the participants, came up many times during discussion, and received the greatest number of “sticker” votes.) In particular, the group discussed “greater transparency” at length and the perceived lack of detailed reporting on federal, state, municipal and/or non-profit funding of homelessness services.

That being said, the DAG felt that – while homelessness certainly impacts downtown more significantly than many other neighborhoods – it is not solely a downtown issue and the transition effort already had a homelessness team in place. For that reason, the group chose to remove it from their final recommendations.

# TOP 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1 MORE MIXED USE & HOUSING DEVELOPMENT 3 YEARS

- Find ways to incentivize this kind of development
- Foster a "can do" attitude at the Municipality (particularly within Planning / Permitting / Bldg Safety Departments) that supports all development
- Protect the ability of and encourage property owners / developers to build high-density commercial, office, and housing projects in the CBD (Title 21)
- East downtown needs love!
- Desired retail types include Whole Foods/grocery, pharmacy, other mixed-use developments that appeal to millennials and retirees/downsizers/empty nesters

## 2 IMPROVED PUBLIC SAFETY 6 MONTHS

- Get more Police in downtown on foot & bike
  - Establish a baseline expectation for Police presence in downtown.
- Ramp up efforts related to bar break safety & security
  - Add additional transportation options for bar patrons at closing
- Get chronic inebriates off the streets and into treatment/housing
- Aggressively pursue the changes recommended in areas that have been used for illegal and unsafe activities in the past
  - Such as the Town Square, Transit Center

## 4 TOWN SQUARE REFORMED AND/OR REIMAGINED VIA TASK FORCE 60 DAYS

- Consider redesigning the park, making it more open, visible, promoting multiple public activities, based on designs from the many successful town squares nationally and in other countries.
  - Reimagining the space to make it safer & more welcoming
  - Consider safety concerns (groups)
  - Improved lighting
  - More amenities like tables/chairs
  - Currently it is a hard space to use and hidden areas make public users uncomfortable.
  - Encourage more activities by groups
  - Explore additional rental options beyond just additional food carts.

## 3 PEDESTRIAN AMENITIES TASK FORCE 60 DAYS

- Repair and replace crumbling sidewalks and curbs
- Pedestrian safety improvements such as additional pedestrian crosswalks, slowing speed on 5th and 6th Ave.
- Clean up alleys, making them safe, pedestrian-friendly, interesting and explore commercial opportunities
- Focus on better/more lighting
  - Street lights all in disrepair
- Develop wayfinding & signage
- Bike amenities like bike lockers/racks, bike share programs
- Pursue public (for a fee) restrooms
- Public drinking water (fountains)

## 5 TRANSIT CENTER REFORMED AND/OR REIMAGINED VIA TASK FORCE 60 DAYS

- Reimagine the space
  - Make it safer & welcoming
  - Build from existing efforts with EasyPark and APD
- Use transit "nodes" instead of transit hubs
  - Parking outside core with buses into downtown e.g. Mulcahey loop
  - Move the Transit Center?
- Increase transit options within downtown, between downtown midtown
  - Circulator bus in downtown, between downtown & midtown?
  - Free bus fare within CBD only?

## NEXT STEPS



The DAG is interested in remaining engaged in the progress on and outcomes from their work. Through Anchorage Downtown Partnership, Ltd., it is hoped that the DAG can receive updates on these items during the next several years. Additionally, the DAG wanted to express their interest in being a resource for your administration in the future.

# FULL LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

STICKERS	60 DAYS	6 MOS	3 YRS	ITEM	NOTES
12	X			Transparent homelessness reporting (funding, results) + comprehensive plan to address homelessness & panhandling	<i>who, how, what?</i>
10			X	More mixed use & housing development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentivize development</li> <li>• Planning / Permitting / Bldg Safety Dept "can do" attitude that supports development</li> <li>• Protect &amp; encourage ability to build high-density in CBD (Title 21)</li> </ul>	<i>East downtown needs love, Whole Foods/Grocery, Pharmacy - desired retail types, Mixed Use Devel., Retirees/Downsizers/Empty Nesters</i>
10		X		PUBLIC SAFETY: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More Police in downtown on foot &amp; bike</li> <li>• Chronic Inebriates</li> <li>• Bar break safety &amp; security</li> <li>• Add add'l transportation options for bar break</li> </ul>	<i>Safety of Homeless &amp; Residents</i>
10	X			Town Square reformed/reimagined via Task Force <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reimagine the space</li> <li>• Make it safer &amp; welcoming</li> </ul>	<i>Safety Concerns (groups), more amenities like tables/chairs, over hauled/redesigned, mounds &amp; fountain no good, hard space to use, encourage activities (permit fees), rentable kiosks, entrepreneurs, lighting</i>
10	X			Pedestrian amenities Task Force - better/more lighting, wayfinding & signage, public restrooms for a fee, bike amenities	<i>Public restrooms (for small charge), public drinking water, bike lockers/racks, bike share programs, money exchange for visitors, sidewalks, curbs, street lights all in disrepair, pedestrian crosswalks, control of 5th &amp; 6th Ave + slow speeds down, Clean up alleys, make safe, pedestrian friendly, interesting, fun art and galleries</i>
8	X			Transit Center reformed/reimagined via Task Force <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reimagine the space</li> <li>• Make it safer &amp; welcoming (60 Days)</li> <li>• Move the Transit Center?</li> <li>• Use "nodes" instead of transit hubs</li> <li>• Parking outside the core w/ circulator e.g. Mulcahey looper</li> </ul>	<i>Use more "nodes" for bus routes</i>
4		X		Bike lanes and parking and bike rental and covered bike parking	
3	X			Stronger late night enforcement at bar - break and evening	
2	X			Keep city and government services downtown	
2			X	Update 2020 Comp Plan	
2	X			Beautification - more flowers!!	<i>Protect the "City of Flowers" program started by Mayor Mystrom</i>
2			X	Downtown shuttle or cable car/trolley or light rail - free or cheap	
2			X	Downtown Looper for parking outside core	
2				Be aware of increased costs to tourists to keep them coming to Anchorage	<i>Additional costs of doing business in ANC impact tourism</i>
1		X		Turn headed sidewalks on	<i>Other cities parking changes at night to angled parking</i>
1		X		Getting more people downtown - Light Brigade (positive events),	<i>Assets - Town Square, More Activities, Add more character to downtown</i>
1	X	X		Incentives to redevelop surface parking	
		X		Beautification - more flowers!!	
		X		Downtown shuttle or cable car/trolley or light rail - free or cheap	
		X		Downtown Looper for parking outside core	
	X	X	X	Business Community - Be aware of increased costs to Tourists (Cruise Lines) and keep them coming to Anchorage	
			X	Turn headed sidewalks on	
			X	Getting more people downtown - Light Brigade (positive events),	
		X		Incentives to redevelop surface parking	
	X			Public relations/media campaign to dispell myths about lack of parking	
		X		Incentives and program for business owners for street level activity & beautification of store fronts (façade improvement)	
		X		Deal with seismic overlay district	
			X	Slow traffic on 5th and 6th potential MOA control	

STICKERS	60 DAYS	6 MOS	3 YRS	ITEM	NOTES
		X		Covered walkways	
		X		Structured parking by city/ACDA	
			X	Link development of MOA land to ADP goals	
X				More police (foot patrols and bikes) present downtown	<i>Too much surface parking, high prices, utilize AKRR &amp; Mulcahey</i>
			X	Legislative changes for incentives like TIF	
			X	Promotional video about our wonderful downtown	<i>with Museum? In Atrium of Transit Ctr?</i>
			X	Cover street north of convention center	<i>Mixed Use Development</i>
	X			Parklets - fenced in areas to create opportunity for outside seating in front of businesses	
			X	Allow more food vendors (food trucks)/kiosks in downtown	
	X			Commuter Rail connection with Valley to downtown	
			X	Letter/Position Established KABATA (if it happens) should terminate at Ingra/Gambell	<i>Does not match existing zoning</i>
			X	Parking as part of res/comm. Development	<i>Current funding is limited, State to approve I District improvement loans</i>
X				Downtown Cultural Learning Center/Library	<i>30 days</i>
X				Ship Creek needs to be developed & encouraged	
X				Planning started cooperation with other entities like AKRR	
			X	Homelessness - legal campsite & amenities	
			X	Start Developing the Salt Lake UT housing First Model	
			X	Downtown Comp Plan - Expand & innovative incentives	
X				Borrow funds at a preferred rate for downtown	<i>from builders perspective costs are their problem not utilities</i>
			X	Change perceptions of downtown	<i>Future funding from administrations continuity</i>
X				More cabs on the street when bars close	<i>App for street parking - done advertise</i>
		X		Better communication on road closures	
			X	Parking structure versus surface parking	<i>Venice Beach, playground in Girdwood an asset</i>
			X	Redevelopment existing retail	<i>lighting energy efficiency</i>
X				New development office & retail	<i>street painting - better mix of businesses</i>
			X	Utility Accountability, lack of vision, failing systems today, patch problems	
X				Best City in the nation for homelessness - funding from Native Corps and Faith Based Groups	<i>reassess specialty parking</i>
			X	Garages - bike parking & bathrooms	
			X	Winter beautification & activities	<i>Look at Comp Plan</i>
				Skateboarding is a positive turn it around	<i>Cruise Guests can bypass Anchorage -when revenue sharing goes down what will get hit</i>
				Incentives for getting businesses to want improvements & penalties for not meeting standards	<i>Ft. Worth, TX downtown created own police force proactively</i>
				Empower people to make changes to downtown first, incentives to bring midtown businesses back downtown	<i>Events at PAC nightly for visitors - Native shows - Rasmuson Foundation</i>
				Vacant properties are a problem - encourage & enforce façade improvements	<i>Sat. Market Review - changed from original concept</i>
X				On Street parking/spot by spot - less on street parking/loading spots back at night	<i>reassess specialty parking</i>
			X	Parking for the Performing Arts Center	
			X	Look at new traffic patterns 3rd and 9th	<i>Look at Comp Plan</i>
					<i>Cruise Guests can bypass Anchorage -when revenue sharing goes down what will get hit</i>
					<i>Ft. Worth, TX downtown created own police force proactively</i>
					<i>Events at PAC nightly for visitors - Native shows - Rasmuson Foundation</i>
					<i>Sat. Market Review - changed from original concept</i>