



Downtown Fairbanks 2040

Adopted *(date)* by
Ordinance No. *(insert)*

(insert funding source, if appropriate)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all FNSB and City of Fairbanks residents, businesses, organizations, and other local, regional, state, and federal partners who have contributed to the Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan development process. Key individuals include:

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Community and Partner Organizations

Downtown Association of Fairbanks
Explore Fairbanks

Contract Support

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RESPEC

**Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly Ordinance No.
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(insert screenshot of the full ordinance here, once adopted)

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Our Vision

Downtown Fairbanks is a prosperous, welcoming, and safe place for everyone.

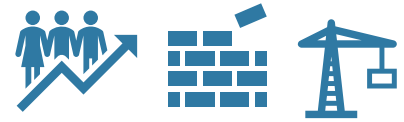
Fairbanks values a Downtown that...



Is a vibrant year-round destination for culture and entertainment



Provides a safe, welcoming, and accessible environment



Supports economic growth and investment



Embraces our long history and diverse cultures



Provides a variety of housing options



Celebrate the Chena Riverfront and Golden Heart Plaza as community focal points

Our Goals

1. **Revitalize Downtown** with a thriving mix of businesses, housing choices, public amenities, and activities that bring people to Downtown.
2. **Redevelop Downtown** by encouraging new construction and reuse of vacant properties, filling in gaps and updating aging buildings.
3. **Reconnect Downtown** as a central destination in the region, with roads, trails, and clear wayfinding to guide people to and within the district.
4. **Refresh Downtown** with improved lighting, public art, visual improvements, and design strategies to make the district feel safe, welcoming, and vibrant.
5. **Rediscover Downtown** by attracting residents and visitors to events that showcase the best of Fairbanks throughout the year.

About the Plan

Purpose

The Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan will serve as a community resource and policy guide for economic development, land use, housing, transportation, parking, public safety, and quality of life. The plan offers recommendations that protect what FNSB residents value most about Downtown Fairbanks, while benefiting and enhancing the quality of life for current and future downtown residents, business owners/tenants, and visitors. This area plan should be revised every 20 years and/or when the population changes by 20 percent or more. Core components of the plan include:

- A vision and goals for the area that identify what type of growth is supported by the community.
- A list of policies and activities to implement the vision and goals for Downtown Fairbanks.
- A summary of key issues guiding the plan goals, strategies, and actions for each focus area.
- A future land use map that shows what types of land uses will be prioritized in which areas.

The appendix includes additional background information including supplemental analysis and detailed results from the community outreach effort.

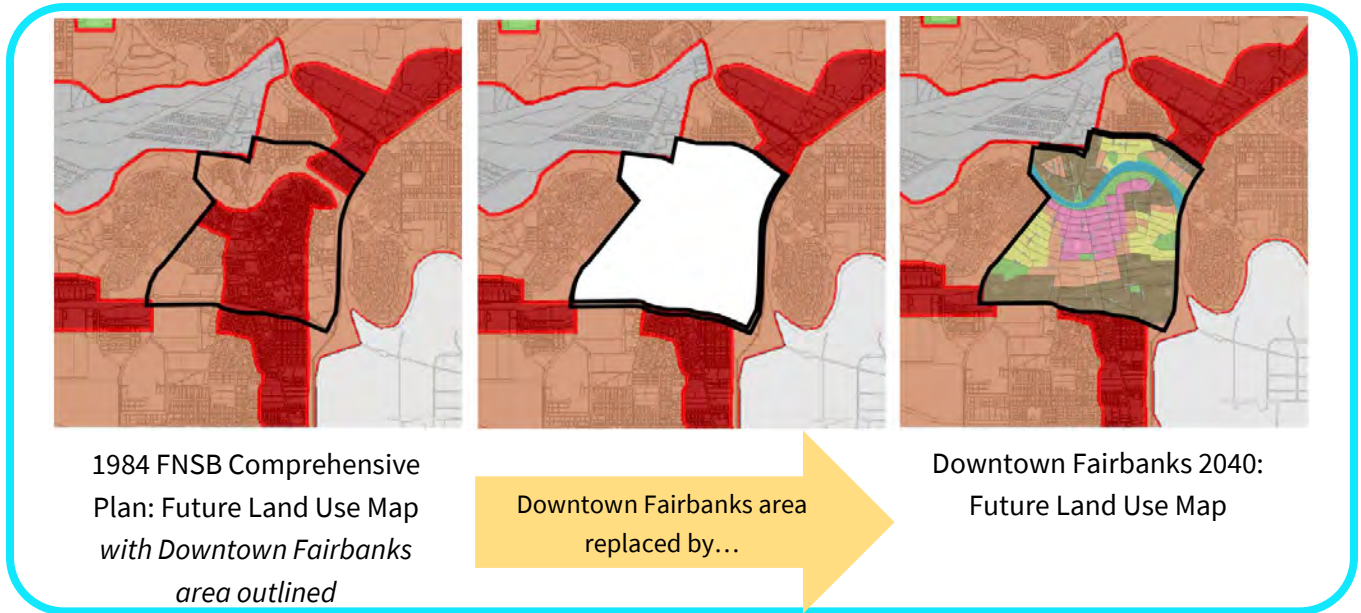
How does this Downtown Plan relate to the 2005 FNSB Regional Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map (adopted 1984, amended 1990)?

The 2005 FNSB Comprehensive Plan and accompanying 1984 future land use map provide broad direction and guidance for the entire borough. Recognizing the unique landscapes, community characteristics, and needs of residents in different areas of the borough, FNSB is implementing an area versus boroughwide approach to comprehensive plan updates. The broad provisions of the Regional Comprehensive Plan still apply, but the Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan offers more specificity for this focus area.

Like the 2005 Plan, the centerpiece of the Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan is a future land use map. (See *land use chapter* for details.)

A future land use map DOES:	A future land use map DOES NOT:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anticipate development needs.• Identify development issues, opportunities constraints.• Identify suitable/unsuitable types of development.• Makes recommendations for how an area should develop.• Establish policies and standards to guide development.• Recommend improvements to zoning codes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Act as a regulatory or zoning document.• Make changes to existing zoning codes.• Apply retroactively.

Once the Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan is approved, the area plan future land use map, and related land use categories and policies, will replace the Regional Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map (adopted 1984, amended 1990) for the project area (*illustration below*) and supplement the 2005 Regional Comprehensive Plan.



How does this Plan relate to Zoning and other land use regulations?

Land use maps identify broad future intentions for an area. Zoning is a regulatory framework or policy that describes how land can be used in the present. It provides some overarching restrictions to ensure land uses within a designated area do not conflict. Zoning codes are a way to implement and enforce land use within a specified area. The future land use map in this area plan aligns with existing and/or desired future land use in the project area. The plan and the associated future land use map will not immediately result in zoning changes. Rather, the proposed land use categories and recommended zoning improvements in this plan provide categories and tools to guide growth and development in a way that aligns with the vision for the area, promotes planning best practices, and considers local context. If there are proposed rezones in the project area, the future land use map will guide the zoning actions. Boundary lines in the land use plan map are approximate and may need to be changed. It is not the intent to divide lots or specific uses by these boundary lines.

Who is responsible for implementing land use policies?

Both City of Fairbanks and Fairbanks North Star Borough will be jointly responsible for policy actions that implement this plan and have distinct jurisdiction and authority for these policies. FNSB is responsible for planning and zoning borough wide, including within city limits, and regulates land

use through Title 18 (zoning), Title 17 (subdivision), and Title 15 (floodplain management). The City has building and public works authority within city limits. The table below illustrates responsibilities of FNSB and the City, agencies and other entities who will work together to implement this plan.

Borough Responsibilities	City Responsibilities	Agencies and Other Partners
Planning	Police	Fairbanks Native Association
Platting and Subdivisions	Fire	Tanana Chiefs Conference
Zoning	Public Works	Doyon, Ltd.
Code Enforcement	Building Inspections	FAST Planning (formerly FMATS)
Parks and Recreation	Street Maintenance	State of Alaska, Department of
Transit (MACS)	Snow Removal	Transportation & Public Facilities
Library	Parking Enforcement	Fairbanks Downtown Association
Air Quality	Garbage Collection	Explore Fairbanks
Plan Implementation	Emergency Response	Private sector partners
	Plan Implementation	<i>The Whole Community!</i>

Methodology

This plan was developed with robust input from residents, stakeholders, and regional leaders and included the following activities:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Downtown Working Group meetings ❖ Presentations and conversations with the FNSB Assembly, City of Fairbanks Council, FNSB Planning Commission, Chena Riverfront Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Economic Development Commission, Interior Tourism Conference, Rotary ❖ <i>Fairbanks Daily News-Miner</i> coverage ❖ Interviews with Downtown residents, workers, and business owners 	<p><i>Surveys and data collection:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Community-wide survey ❖ Explore Fairbanks visitor questions ❖ Interactive map-based comment collector, with location-specific comments ❖ Workshops with high school (West Valley, Lathrop, Monroe) and UAF Collaborative Resources Planning classes ❖ Student survey at the UAF Pub ❖ Street surveys at Downtown locations ❖ Outreach booth at two Third Thursday fairs
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How to Use This Plan

This plan serves as a basis and rationale for other community policies and actions, including: site-specific and neighborhood plans; specialized plans addressing transportation, economic development, housing, and other topics; ordinances and other policies carrying out the goals of the area plan; projects carried out by FNSB staff; and a tool for communicating priorities and funding requests to state and federal government or other funders, such as the Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) list, neighborhood-initiated rezones or special legislative appropriations.

The goals of this plan give the FNSB and the community a broad vision and direction to work toward in the coming years. Preliminary priority strategies are identified, either as the most important issues for the FNSB, residents, and partners to address, or areas where there can be immediate positive impact. A key element of this plan is the future land use map, which offers broad guidance on preferred future land use and growth and will inform future changes to zoning, subdivisions and other land uses, housing, transportation, and recreation-related policy decisions.

There are three components to the Downtown Plan:



Executive Summary

Offers a graphic, condensed summary of the plan, including goals and strategies for each of the three focus areas; also includes the future land use map.



Area Plan

(this document)

Includes additional information on the process, area, and key issues that were used to inform the goals and strategies.



Appendix

Includes background information, context and discussion used to inform the future land use map and related plan goals and strategies, and details on plan policies and implementation.

All photos were taken by the planning team in the past 5 years or credited from its original source.

Most importantly, this plan should serve as a key tool for community leaders and residents in their short-term and long-term planning and decision-making. The Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan, in conjunction with more detailed plans and current information, should be the backdrop and foundational reference for all FNSB Planning Commission and Assembly meetings and rulings regarding the project area, and for FNSB departments in their daily operations. The table on the following page shows a specific breakdown of how different stakeholders might use the plan.

How to use this Plan if you are a...

Resident

Use as an advocacy tool to protect or improve the things you love about the area; for example, to propose a trail connection, or to promote or discourage different types of development.

Community Planner

Guide decision-making on land use changes such as zoning, and permitting; identifies needed policy changes and enforcement priorities.

City or Borough Official

Official guiding document for Planning Commission, Assembly, and City Council members when making decisions, rulings, and creating policy in the project area.

Property Developer

Identifies areas where different types of growth are encouraged/discouraged and summarizes housing, transportation and commercial needs.

Business Owner

Use to advocate for needed improvements to preserve and support businesses downtown; help guide the work of the Downtown Association by identifying broadly supported priorities.

Grantwriter

Use to demonstrate communitywide support for key priorities in the project area when applying for funding from state, federal and other sources.

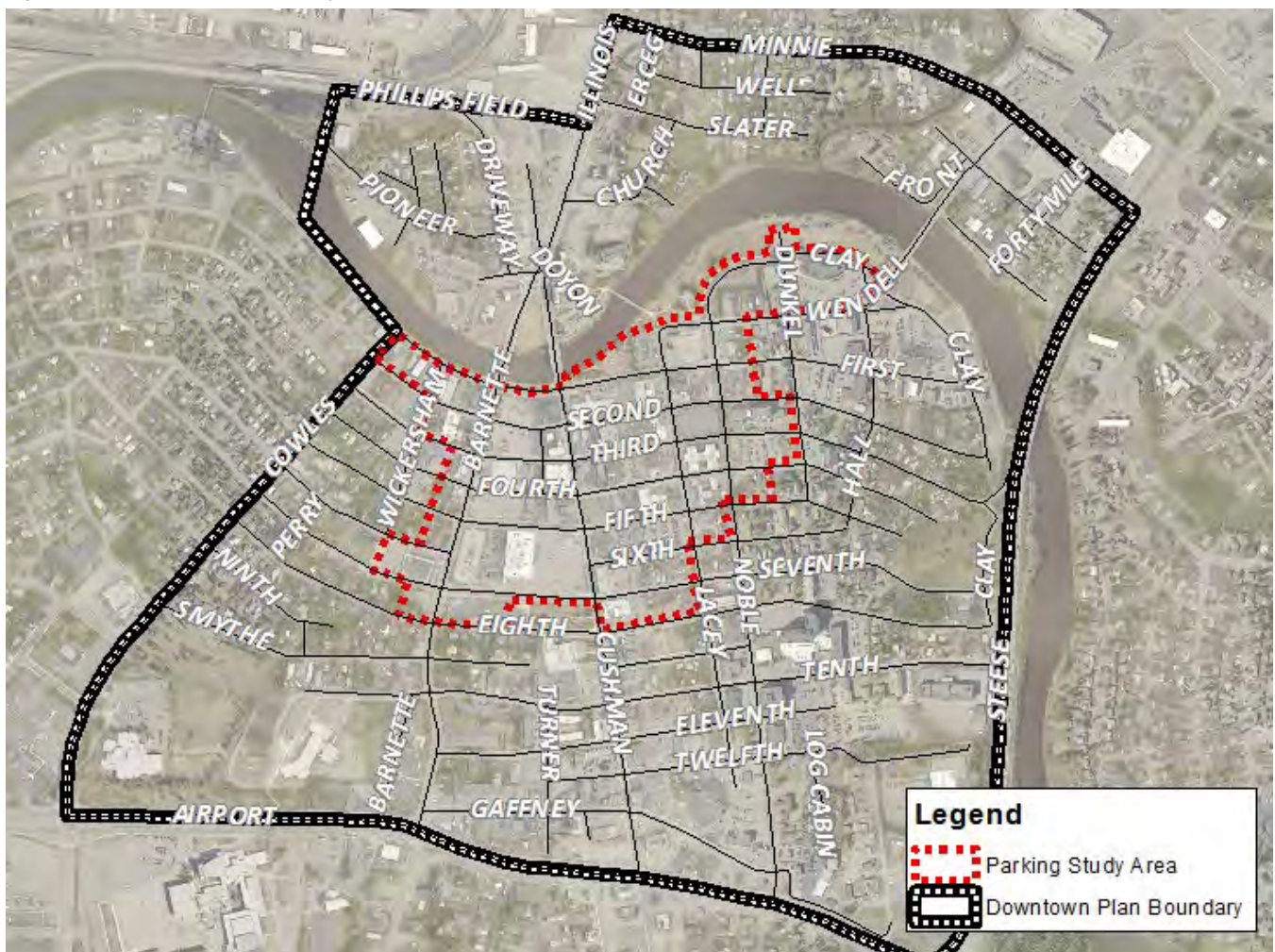
Project Area

The project area covers approximately 4.2 square miles (Figure 1) in Fairbanks North Star Borough, and the historic center of the City of Fairbanks. The Downtown area, including the commercial core and surrounding residential neighborhoods, is bordered by Noyes Slough and Minnie Street to the north, the Steese Highway to the east, Airport Way to the south, and Cowles Street to the west.

Downtown includes churches, schools, shops and services, government and business offices, residential neighborhoods, and critical community facilities such as the city fire station and transit center. It draws tourists and locals alike who visit the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors' Center, museums, eating and drinking establishments and shops, and attend special events at Golden Heart Plaza. The Chena River runs through the center of downtown; its waterway and greenbelt are highly valued for recreation year-round.

What are the project boundaries?

Figure 1: Downtown Fairbanks Project Area Boundaries



What does Downtown Fairbanks look like?

See Appendix for demographic analysis

Who Lives in Downtown Fairbanks?

Downtown is Diverse

Downtown residents are more likely to be Alaska Native, Asian or identify as multiple races than the overall Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) population.

Elders Over **40%** of households have person age 60+ years, a large share of FNSB’s senior population. **3 out of 4** live alone.

Renters Over **70%** of households rent Downtown and pay less than \$1,000 per month. Over **60%** of households are rent-burdened, paying at least 30% of monthly income in rent.

Fewer Cars **2 in 5** households don’t have access to a vehicle, compared with only 5% of households in FNSB overall.

Challenged Housing Market Almost **80%** of housing units are 40+ years old. **1 in 6** are vacant. Most units are small: **4 out of 5** units have two or fewer bedrooms; **1 in 5** are studios.

SOURCE: United States Census Bureau, 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates. Population data is limited to Census Tract 1, which excludes the small residential area to the north of the Chena River in the project area.

How does Downtown Fairbanks Compare to Similar Cities?

	Population	Area (sq. mi.)	Average Commute (minutes)	Percent Below Poverty Line	Avg. Winter Temp. January (High/Low °F)
Fairbanks, Tract 1	1,078	0.6	13.9	10.7%	0°/-15°
Fairbanks North Star Borough	99,072	7,329.6	18.6	5.9%	2°/-25°
Anchorage, Tract 11	895	0.5	13.5	19.5%	23°/14°
Boise, Tract 1	3,695	1.6	14.2	26.9%	39°/22°
Salt Lake City, Tract 1025	3,714	0.3	17.8	24.3%	39°/27°

SOURCE: United States Census Bureau, 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates. The comparison downtowns shown (Salt Lake City, Utah; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Boise, Idaho) were chosen because they also have a cold winter climate; have recently adopted Downtown plans.

Downtown is Home to Many Businesses and Organizations

<p>Commerce and Trade Associations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce Downtown Association of Fairbanks (66 members) Explore Fairbanks 	<p>Tribal Organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Denakkanaaga Doyon, Limited Fairbanks Native Association Tanana Chiefs Conference
<p>Cultural Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairbanks Ice Museum Fairbanks Children's Museum Fairbanks Community Museum Morris Thompson Cultural Center Noel Wien Library Old Federal Building 	<p>Civic Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairbanks City Hall Fairbanks North Star Borough Fairbanks Police Department State of Alaska Employment Services Alaska Court System, Rabinowitz Courthouse U.S. District Court and Federal Offices UAF Community and Technical College

What did we hear from the community?

See Appendix for more details

This plan was developed after a multi-phase process of thoughtful outreach and engagement with the community, including many groups and individuals who live, work, or spend time Downtown.

Community Engagement Process

- Participation in and presentations at over 20 community events and leadership meetings.
- A community-wide survey with 2,435 comments shared by 889 respondents.
- Additional surveys and outreach to specific populations: University of Alaska Fairbanks students, street surveys, visitor survey questions through Explore Fairbanks.
- 266 comments on an interactive map-based survey.
- Over 30 meetings and work sessions of the Downtown Working Group members.
- Work sessions with FNSB Assembly, FNSB Planning Commission, Fairbanks City Council to provide updates on plan progress and draft policies.
- Presentations to the Chena Riverfront Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Economic Development Commission and at the Interior Tourism Conference.
- Workshops with students at West Valley, Lathrop, and Monroe High Schools, and with a UAF Collaborative Resources Planning class.
- Interviews with Downtown residents, workers, and business owners.

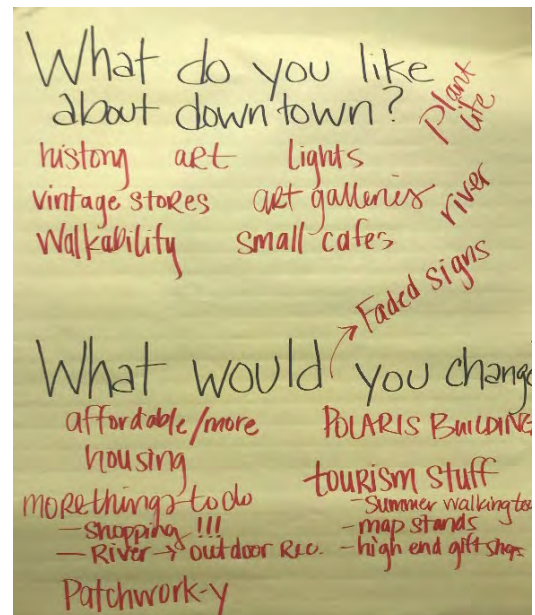
Figure 4. Group discussion at community workshop, September 2017



Figure 2. Outreach Board, Wien Library, 2017



Figure 3. High school student workshop, May 2018



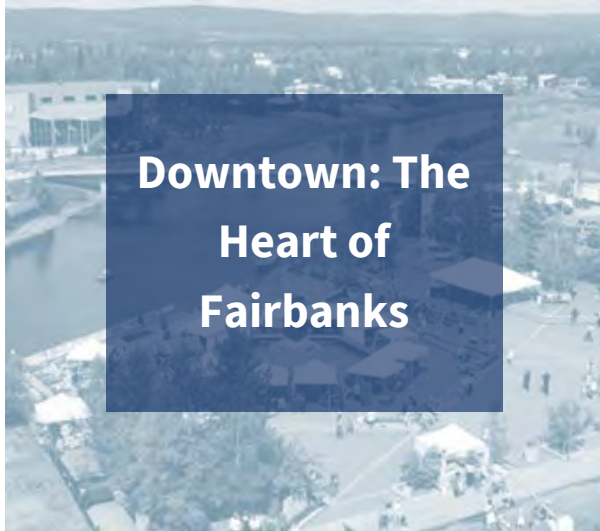
Themes from Community Engagement

Community feedback about Downtown was consistent: Downtown has many good features, well-loved local businesses and public spaces, and many opportunities to bring more life and activity to the area. However, Downtown continues to face persistent challenges that keep many people from spending time there regularly, as well as physical and built environment issues that make it difficult to bring change through redevelopment and renovation.

Strengths	Challenges
<p>City center: Downtown is the heart of Fairbanks.</p> <p>Housing: Downtown includes several historic neighborhoods and a variety of housing types.</p> <p>Public spaces: Downtown has welcoming open spaces, parks and beautiful public areas.</p> <p>Walkability: Downtown is walkable and offers a mix of restaurants, bars and retail.</p> <p>Culture: Downtown has many cultural institutions, strong presence of Alaska Native organizations, and an arts and entertainment scene.</p> <p>Historic: Downtown Fairbanks has unique character that celebrates the community’s past.</p> <p>Camaraderie: Downtown business owners know and support one another.</p>	<p>Parking Challenges: Parking is a frequent complaint for customers and visitors; public parking is difficult to find, and enforcement is strict.</p> <p>Lack of Activity: People visit Downtown to dine, for entertainment, or to attend special events. However, many people see Downtown as having “nothing to do,” or do not visit regularly.</p> <p>Undesirable Behaviors: Problems such as substance use, littering and vandalism negatively impact public spaces and business. These issues also make Downtown less attractive to visit.</p> <p>Aging Buildings: Many buildings need significant repairs and upgrades. Construction costs, along with restrictive building code, make it difficult to make needed updates to the area.</p>
Opportunities for Supporting Revitalization	
<p>Road Improvements: Recent street upgrades have improved walking, biking and road safety, with more planned to create Complete Streets for all.</p> <p>Improve Navigation: Many people get lost Downtown. Better wayfinding and signage can help people find their way.</p> <p>Polaris Building Redevelopment: Recently secured federal funding for the costly demolition needed will remove this blighted property and create a site ripe for a future redevelopment, such as an arts center.</p>	<p>Shared Maintenance Responsibility: The Downtown Association and City of Fairbanks have already developed standards for snow removal and need more property owners to participate.</p> <p>Riverfront Activity: The Chena River and Riverwalk project are major assets to Downtown and can be a focal point for commercial and public activities.</p> <p>Strong Partnerships: The Downtown Association, businesses, and property owners are invested into creating a thriving Downtown, through this plan.</p>

Stakeholders want to see Downtown succeed, including the Working Group who spent many hours developing strategies for revitalizing the area, and are hopeful that this plan and efforts to implement it will catalyze new investments, remove barriers, and inspire more people to rediscover Downtown’s many assets. The overall goals and sets of strategies, organized by topic, in this plan are a roadmap to achieve the vision of a prosperous, welcoming, and safe place Downtown for everyone.

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



Credit: Explore Fairbanks

Survey: What Does Downtown Need?

Asked for “roadblocks to a vital Downtown,” residents identified what needs to improve:

1. Not enough restaurants and entertainment
2. Don't feel safe
3. Lack of convenient parking
4. Lack of more varied shopping
5. Cold climate, lack of winter sidewalk maintenance
6. Not enough events
7. Not enough housing

SOURCE: Community Survey, 2017

“Downtown has undergone some recent changes, I like the wider sidewalk on Cushman for example. But there is still an empty feeling through much of downtown. I go there when I have an errand or a store I wish to go to.”

Community Survey, 2017

- **Downtown Fairbanks has many strong urban features to build from.** Downtown is the traditional urban, commercial, and civic center of the City of Fairbanks, and a focal point of Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB). The history, design and built environment of Downtown are positive assets that can be improved to promote a thriving area:
 - Walkable streets and easy-to-navigate grid.
 - Historic buildings, popular local businesses.
 - Parks and public spaces along Chena River.
 - Vacant lots and empty spaces for lease, ripe for updates, reuse, or redevelopment.
 - District heating system, serving some facilities and sections of Downtown.
- **Some growth and change have happened, but more life and activity are needed to attract people to Downtown.** In recent years, new businesses such as tasting rooms and small entertainment venues have attracted new populations and activity after business hours. However, Downtown continues to struggle with filling vacant commercial spaces.
- When asked what people think of Downtown, residents, business owners, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) students and others consistently say it feels empty, vacant, outdated, in need of more activity and more reasons to go there. Many residents avoid the area; those who go Downtown regularly list dining, shopping, and special events as the primary draws. Several commented they miss “the heyday of Downtown” (which most identified as being between the 1960s and 1990s).



Credit: Explore Fairbanks

“The life has been taken out of downtown.”

“I love the direction everything is going in: lighting, new hip businesses, etc.”

“Some elements are beginning to wake up our sleepy downtown. But we are far from ‘vital and happening.’”

Community Survey, 2017

Figure 1. Downtown Fairbanks was largely built during a time before car-oriented city design. Many buildings follow a traditional design: adjacent to the sidewalk, with ground-floor commercial uses with front-facing windows. Some buildings also have housing on upper floors, known as “mixed use.”



- **Downtowns thrive when they provide a pleasant, walkable, and lively experience.** Many features people identified as what they like about Downtown, or remember about how Downtown used to be, are created through land use policy: buildings with activity and uses at ground floor and visible from the street, such as restaurants and shops with front windows (Figure 1). Blocks with wide sidewalks and room for outdoor dining, displays, and seating. Buildings that line the sidewalks, with gaps filled by small parks, public spaces, or seating areas, not surface parking lots. All these features create an environment where people want to spend time and money and gather.
- **Clear priorities for revitalizing Downtown:** residents and the working group consistently identified types of desired development:
 - **Infill development**, including new uses in existing vacant buildings as well as converting existing parking lots to more economically productive uses (buildings).
 - **Mixed use:** having properties with both residential and commercial uses, with a variety of densities in neighborhoods.
 - **New retail, dining, and entertainment opportunities** that reflect current community and visitor desires, such as outdoor dining along the river; brew pubs and food trucks; farmers’ markets and weekend bazaars that attract customers.
 - **Services and retail that meet basic needs** of downtown residents, workers, and visitors, including a pharmacy, grocery store and department store.



Credit: Explore Fairbanks

Figure 2. Alaska House Art Gallery and historic property



Figure 3. Along the Chena Riverwalk



Credit: Alaska.org

- Incorporate arts, culture, and history.** Dining, shopping, entertainment, and special events are significant draws for residents and visitors, contributing to Downtown’s identity as a place for local culture (example shown in Figure 2). Building on existing strengths, Downtown could become a regional arts and cultural center. Strengthening the arts and culture sector could include large projects such as a proposed performing arts center, or encouraging artists, galleries, and cultural organizations to co-locate downtown and form an Arts District. Cultural elements, such as Indigenous place names and recognition of the community’s many cultures could be incorporated into Downtown’s branding, signage, and public facilities.
- Preserving and enhancing historic character.** As the oldest part of Fairbanks, Downtown is home to several historic residential neighborhoods. National Register-recognized historic sites are scattered throughout Downtown, including the Illinois Street National Historic District and twelve National Historic Places. While revitalization and new development is needed, preserving and adapting historic properties is important for maintaining Downtown’s character.
- Reconnecting Downtown with the Chena River.** The Chena River flows through Downtown, a natural boundary between the commercial core and neighborhoods to the north. In addition to improving connections with the Chena Riverwalk (Figure 3), residents and businesses want riverfront-oriented uses Downtown such as dining, commercial, and event spaces with scenic river views.



Addressing Nuisance Properties

“It comes down to enforcement. We don’t enforce laws on the books. It’s on the city and borough to enforce these things.”

Downtown Working Group Meeting, 2022



Improving Downtown in a Winter City

Credit: Explore Fairbanks

“Please incorporate sustainable building practices into development of new buildings and renovations of old facilities. More windows and access to light for the winter.”

Downtown Planning Workshop, 2018

- **Vacant properties can become bigger problems.** Vacant, under-utilized, and deteriorating properties cause people to see Downtown as “run down,” but they can also create serious safety issues: buildings may collapse or be unsafe to occupy, attract visible issues like graffiti and vandalism, and serve as sites for illegal or unwanted activity. The biggest example is the former Polaris Building (*see Economic Development*).
- **Existing city and borough codes need to be enforced.** The need for code enforcement and addressing problem properties was a consistent theme from business owners and the Downtown Association. The City adopted Ordinance 6161, Enforcement of Nuisance Buildings. Consistent, proactive action through existing nuisance laws is necessary.
- **Winter poses special land use issues, from cold temperatures to snow management.** Being a year-round Downtown means addressing unique needs of Fairbanks as a winter city: residents and visitors are unlikely to walk long distances in extreme cold; solar access during limited daylight is important; and land use planning needs to account for snow removal and storage in the design and maintenance of public and private property.
- **The City and Downtown Association’s Snow Removal Standard works.** This policy helps keep sidewalks, parking lots and public spaces promptly cleared in winter. Snow storage should be coordinated and moved away from the busiest areas and most desirable parking.
Snow removal and winter maintenance are also addressed in Parking and Transportation.

Strategies *What policies or other types of strategies or tools will assist residents, the FNSB, and other partners with achieving their vision and goals for the project area?*

These strategies and actions will help achieve the vision and goals for Downtown.

1. Encourage and promote mixed-use buildings and properties where residents and visitors live, work and play.

- a. Encourage specialty and locally owned retail on ground floors.

2. Create a walkable and accessible Downtown year-round.

- a. Update the zoning code to achieve a more walkable Downtown, especially regarding setbacks, street infrastructure, parking standards, etc.
- b. Encourage pedestrian-friendly building design, including active windows facing the sidewalks, street furniture and other interactive spaces
- c. Update/create/adopt right-of-way design standards for increased pedestrian access and flow.
 - i. Prioritize funding for sidewalk and driveway improvements.
 - ii. Incorporate best practices for sidewalk design, specifically regarding widening for accessibility, including removal of power and telephone poles and other obstructions from the sidewalks.
- d. Improve timely wintertime maintenance of downtown sidewalks.
 - i. Develop a community-based volunteer force to clear sidewalks of snow.

3. Increased availability, quality, and variety of housing units. *See also Housing.*

- a. Preserve, revitalize and infill established low-density residential neighborhoods.
- b. Encourage and promote mid- to high-density residential development in and adjacent to commercial areas.
- c. Identify areas for residential density transitions.
- d. Reduce residential vacancies.
 - i. Increase awareness of incentives for owner-occupied residences.
 - ii. Incentivize residential property maintenance and improvements.

4. Encourage development of vacant and underutilized parcels.

- a. Reduce surface-level parking requirements.
- b. Disincentivize surface-level parking.
- c. Utilize surface-level parking for commercial and cultural events.
- d. Provide development incentives for new construction.
- e. Opportunity Zone.

5. Encourage adaptive reuse of salvageable buildings.

- a. Create a long-term policy to prevent and manage condemned, unsafe, vacant and abandoned buildings.
- b. Enforce zoning and building codes on nuisance properties.
- c. Streamline to reduce the timeline for code-enforcement actions.
- d. Provide incentives to promote adaptive reuse of vacant commercial and office space.

6. Minimize incompatible land uses.

- a. Evaluate and revise existing zoning regulations to determine appropriate uses in the Downtown.
- b. Establish buffering criteria for incompatible uses.
- c. Develop effective code-enforcement strategies.

7. Sufficient retail and services that meet daily needs within walkable distance from housing and employment centers.

8. Greater utilization of existing public spaces. *See also Quality of Life.*

- a. Evaluate why these spaces are not being more fully used.

9. Guide location and intensity of land use through implementation of the Downtown Future Land Use Map.

- a. Define the Urban Core and outlying commercial areas.
- b. Define established residential neighborhoods.
- c. Reevaluate land use regulations and policies to align with the Downtown vision.
- d. Establish rezone criteria based on the Downtown vision and evaluate all rezone requests by those criteria.

10. Increased employment opportunities in Downtown. *See also Economic Development.*

- a. Offices
- b. Tourism-centered
- c. Entrepreneurship
- d. Retail

11. Improve public safety and help people feel safe. *See also Public Safety.*

- a. Utilize environmental design best practices to create public spaces that feel safe and help prevent crime.

12. Address parking and car storage to encourage economic activity. *See also Parking.*

13. Public utilities and infrastructure.

- a. District heat.

Additional Proposed Strategies and Actions

[Standalone actions to relocate under existing strategies]

- a. Incorporate best practices for winter city development into zoning and building codes.
Examples: adequate snow storage, protecting solar access for renewable energy installations. See applicable strategies in Transportation and Parking for snow storage and winter sidewalk maintenance, and Quality of Life for winter lighting compatible with aurora viewing.

Recommend adding to Strategy 2, after existing Action a.

- b. Collaborate with the Fairbanks Downtown Association to monitor available parcels for sale in the property database and identify potential opportunity sites for redevelopment.
- c. Collaborate with Fairbanks Economic Development Corporation (FEDC) to create a financial feasibility model for potential developments to understand which types of projects are feasible, and which have financing gaps.
- d. Explore feasibility of creating a redevelopment agency with authority and tools to execute redevelopment projects. This organization could serve as a resource for property owners and developers in accessing financing and other resources.

Recommend moving to Strategy 4, after existing Action a.

- e. Encourage enforcement of City Ordinance 6161 (Abatement of Dangerous Buildings) to demolish or repair buildings deemed dangerous under section 302 and enforce applicable building codes on nuisance properties that pose health and safety risks.

Recommend replacing language of existing Strategy 5, replacing Action b.

- f. Ensure that zoning code revisions and new developments are compatible with requirements and anticipated impacts of military operations at Fort Wainwright, such as building height limits within flight paths.

Recommend adding to Strategy 9, after existing Action d.

- g. Support efforts to make natural gas heat available to Downtown Fairbanks properties.

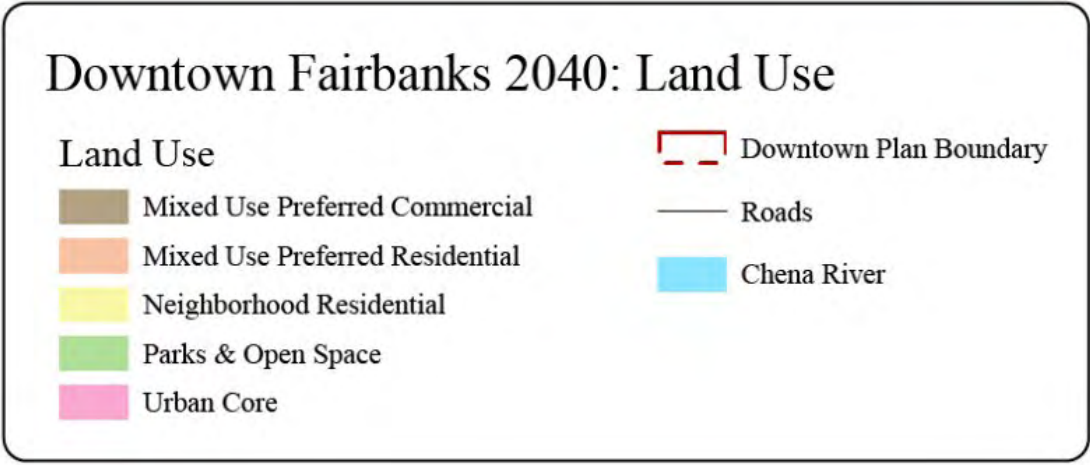
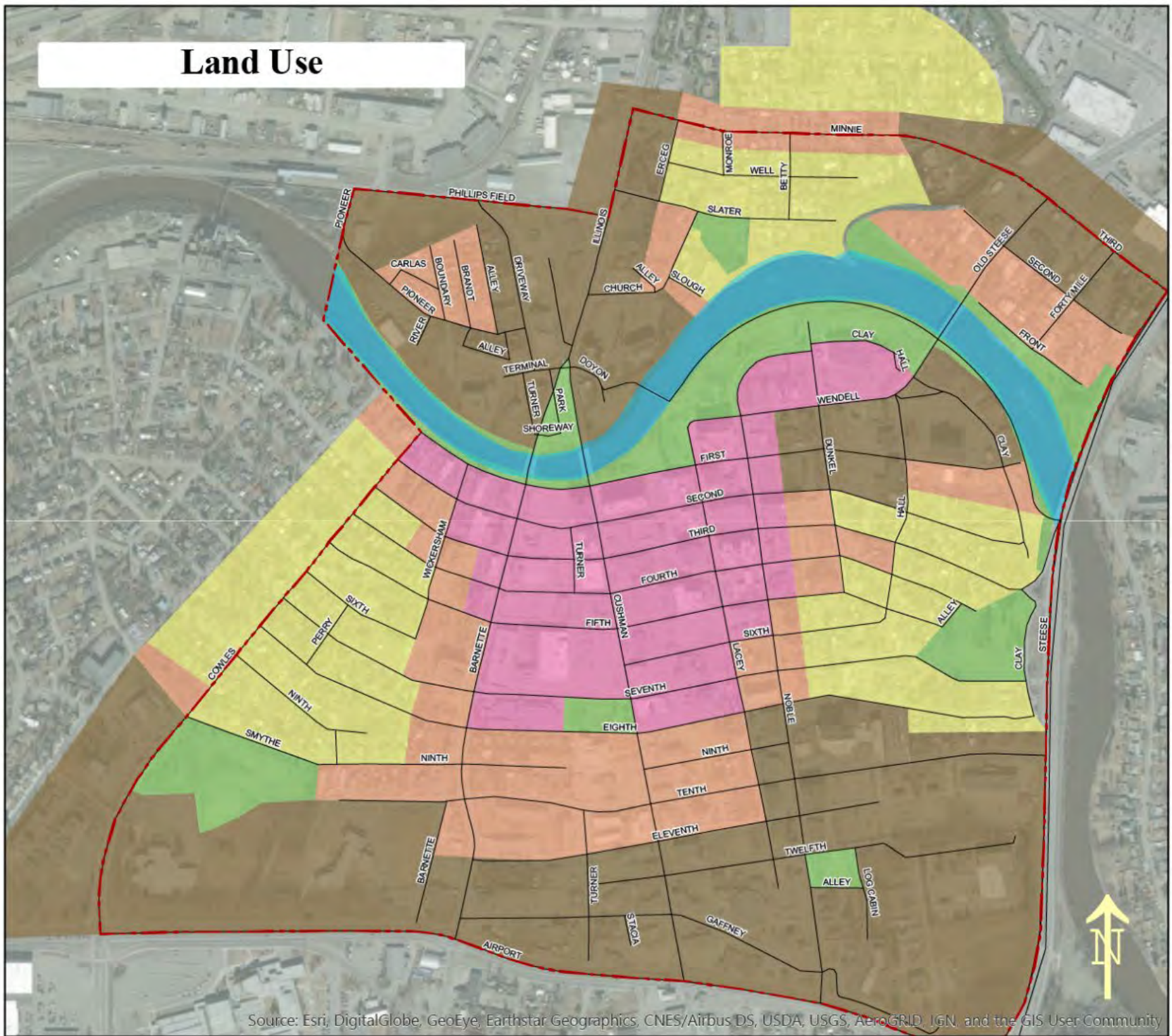
Recommend adding to Strategy 13, after existing Action a.

14. Maintain the unique character of Downtown and established neighborhoods.

Recommend adding as a new Strategy 14, Actions a-e.

- a. Incorporate recognition and interpretation of historic districts, buildings, and resources into Downtown wayfinding, signage, and branding efforts.
- b. Educate the community about the value of historic properties.
- c. Identify available funding and supports for maintaining and restoring historic properties.
Example: Fairbanks North Star Borough is a Certified Local Government (CLG), eligible for federal and state matching grants for historic preservation activities.
- d. When replacement or significant alteration of an older property is necessary, encourage compliance with Section 106 and/or Secretary of Interior standards for preservation; encourage strategic reuse of key elements such as building façade, unique design elements, and other components to retain its character.
- e. Investigate the feasibility of adopting tax incentives, code provisions, and design guidelines, which encourage maintaining the architectural character of historic buildings.

Figure 4. Downtown Fairbanks Land Use Map



A more detailed scale of the future land use map is available at the FNSB Community Planning Department and posted online.

How the Plan Guides Land Use Policy

This plan sets general directions for future land use policy and will guide implementation actions following the adoption of this plan. For example, the plan identifies needed improvements to current zoning policy, such as updating Downtown’s zoning districts, while also setting policies that encourage mixed-use developments and buildings that contribute to an urban, walkable feel. While the plan sets the general direction that will be used to modify existing zoning and subdivision policies, the plan does not make changes to these codes or set specific locations where they are applied. Those steps require a separate, subsequent process, including public review and Planning Commission and Assembly action. These changes typically occur slowly over time; it can take years or decades to fully implement a plan.

Downtown Fairbanks Land Use Map Categories

The Downtown Fairbanks Land Use Map is the key tool for implementing the Comprehensive Plan. Land use actions such as rezones and conditional use approvals as well as many types of development projects must align with these land use designations.

Land Use Category	Intended Land Uses	Application Area
Urban Core	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended to be the employment and activity center for the region, attractive to residents and visitors, creating a live, work and play environment. • Walkable, with buildings closer to property lines, continuous building facades with multiple building entries, active streetscape with pedestrian amenities (wide sidewalks). • Pedestrian-oriented commercial uses. • Concentration of civic, cultural, entertainment, office and retail uses. • High-density residential, recommended residential density – no less than 13 DU/ac and no maximum density limit. • Minimal off-street parking, reliance on on-street parking and parking garage in business areas. • Parks, plazas and open spaces intended for public use. • Limited new industrial uses and surface parking. 	<p>The Urban Core is the center of Downtown activity and commerce, from the Chena Riverfront and 1st Avenue to commercial corridors along Cushman and Noble Streets, south to 8th Avenue.</p>
Mixed Use Preferred Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended to act as transition areas between the intense commercial uses and Downtown residential areas. Providing opportunities for high-density residential growth with compatible small-scale commercial uses. • Predominately high-density residential, recommended residential density – between 13 DU/ac to 29 DU/ac (dwelling units per acre). • Small scale neighborhood-oriented commercial uses with a local market area that are compatible with Downtown residential uses. • Large commercial uses with a regional market area only along high-volume roads and buffered from residential areas. • A mixed reliance on on-street parking and off-street parking. • Parks, plazas, and open spaces intended for public use. • Limited new industrial uses and surface parking. 	<p>This category supports relatively high density residential along the blocks between the Urban Core and existing residential neighborhoods to the east and west, and commercial uses along Airport Way and north of the Chena River.</p>

Land Use Category	Intended Land Uses	Application Area
Mixed use Preferred Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended to provide commercial uses with a regional focus. • Predominately mid-scale higher intensity commercial uses with a regional market area and with less pedestrian focus. • High-density residential, land use impacts such as noise, activity, light, and traffic are expected on residential uses, recommended residential density, at least 13 DU/ac with no maximum density (dwelling units per acre). • Reliance on off-street parking. • Parks, plazas, and open spaces intended for public use. • Limited new industrial uses. 	<p>This category recognizes existing large-format commercial uses along Airport Way, the Steese Highway and along the north bank of the Chena River, as well as the Tanana Chiefs Conference site directly east of the Urban Core.</p>
Downtown Neighborhood Residential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended to protect established Downtown residential neighborhoods. • Single-family, duplexes and accessory dwelling units, recommended residential density between 5 DU/ac and 13 DU/ac (dwelling units per acre). • Other residentially compatible uses. • Parks, plazas, and open spaces intended for neighborhood focus. 	<p>This category applies to three existing residential areas: west of the Urban Core, between Wickersham and Cowles Streets; east of the Urban Core, between Clay and Dunkel Streets; and north of Chena River along Noyes Slough.</p>
Parks and Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended to protect and provide for parks, plazas, green space, open space corridors. 	<p>This acknowledges existing greenspaces such as Griffin Park, Golden Heart Plaza and Wien Park, and new parks or open space amenities developed over time within Downtown.</p>

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



“There are many old houses that are poorly built and burn wood. This makes the air quality very bad in winter. Many houses should be torn down, or the owner should be forced to clean up.”

“I think the #1 need is QUALITY rental housing. There appears to be an adequate supply, but of poor quality.”

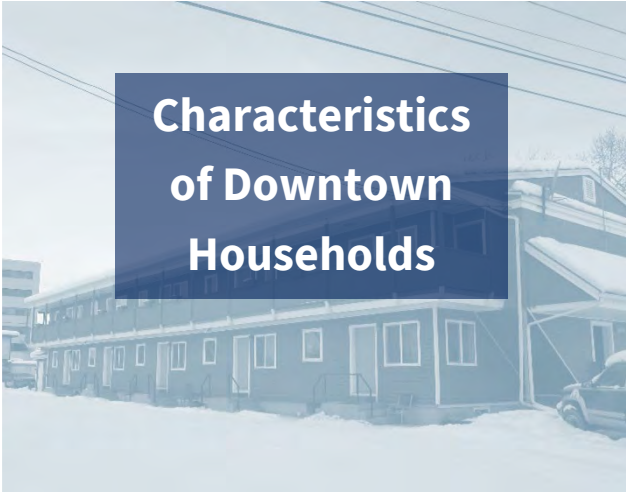
“Downtown needs higher quality, even expensive housing that will draw young professionals looking to spend money at the local shops. Right now, everything is so run down that people with money live elsewhere. If expensive, trendy housing were available that capitalized on Downtown’s more urban vibe, it would jumpstart the Downtown economy.”

Community Survey Responses, 2017

- **Downtown Fairbanks has a significant housing stock**, with 813 occupiable housing units. For comparison, downtown Anchorage only has 600 housing units.
- **The housing stock is outdated.** Roughly 72 percent of housing units in downtown Fairbanks were built in the 1970s or earlier, and less than 1 in 10 of existing units were constructed in the last 20 years. Assessor data indicates many of these older units are lower quality.
- **Downtown Fairbanks has limited multi-family housing.** Forty-four percent of downtown Fairbanks housing is single-family or duplexes, including many historic homes. There are many existing multi-unit apartments (Figure 1). More multi-family housing would increase the residential density, using the limited Downtown land more efficiently.
- **Downtown Fairbanks has many low-cost units.** Downtown Fairbanks has a higher percentage of lower cost rental housing than the Borough overall (FNSB). About 79 percent of occupied residential units in downtown Fairbanks have monthly rent under \$1,000.

Figure 1. Multi-unit housing in Downtown neighborhood





Characteristics of Downtown Households

How does Downtown Fairbanks compare to other downtowns?

In February 2021 the project team prepared a housing demographic analysis to summarize residential and demographic characteristics of Downtown Fairbanks. Downtown Fairbanks was compared to Anchorage, Alaska; Salt Lake City, Utah; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Boise, Idaho. All have a northern climate, similar density, and have recently implemented redevelopment plans focused on creating a more urban downtown. The comparison found:

- Downtown Fairbanks has a **higher percentage of elder residents** than other downtowns.
- Downtown Fairbanks is **equally or more diverse** than other downtowns.
- Downtown Fairbanks has a **higher concentration of low-income residents** than FNSB. The most similar comparison city is Salt Lake City.
- Downtown Fairbanks has a **lower percentage of vehicle ownership**.
- Downtown Fairbanks has a **high vacancy rate** of 16.8 percent. Of the comparison cities, the next highest was Boise at 9 percent.

See Appendix for the full demographic analysis.

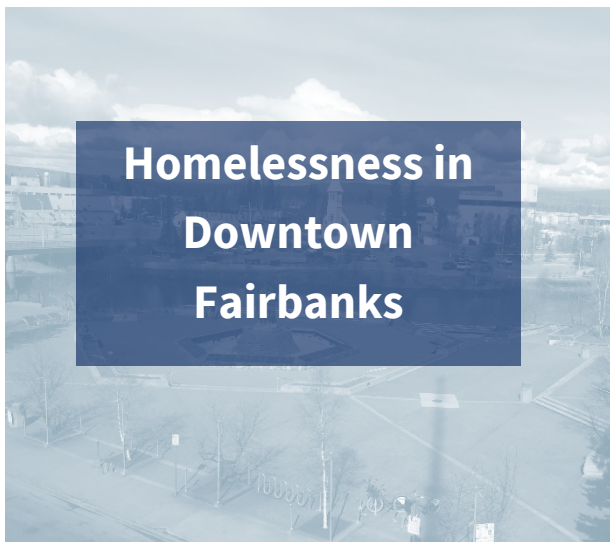
SOURCE: FNSB Downtown Demographic Analysis and Benchmarking Summary, 2021

- **Most residents rent.** The majority of housing units (72 percent) in downtown Fairbanks are renter occupied. This contrasts with the FNSB, where 59 percent of units are owner-occupied.
- **Downtown Fairbanks is more diverse than FNSB overall.** Downtown has a larger share of Alaska Native people and residents identifying as two or more races compared to the FNSB.
- **More than half of Downtown residents do not have cars.** Recent Census data shows that only 41 percent of Downtown residents own a vehicle, a lower rate of vehicle ownership than even many large metropolitan downtowns such as San Francisco and Seattle. This means many Downtown residents do not use or impact available parking in the area; it also reinforces the importance of maintaining a walkable Downtown and access to transit options.
- **Market demand.** Downtown Fairbanks has a larger share of low-income households than the FNSB and other downtown areas, but also has a higher share of middle-class households (annual household income between \$50,000 and \$75,000). This indicates Downtown is an important area for affordable housing due to the availability of lower cost units (many of which are lower cost due to age). Newer, higher-cost units Downtown would serve a different market than is generally being served today.
- **Many renters are cost burdened.** Over half of renters in Downtown Fairbanks are cost burdened, meaning a household spends 35 percent or more of their monthly income on housing. Any housing improvements should consider how to maintain affordability and seek to find ways not to displace existing residents, who may have few other housing options.

“Seniors will go to what’s most comfortable and convenient! They’re also more likely to spend their money locally to support Fairbanks instead of Amazon!”

“Every great downtown has people who live and work there, more upscale housing. As it is, most downtown housing is for seniors or low income, neither of which has the disposable income to sustain a vital downtown core.”

Community Survey Responses, 2017



How would you characterize the look and feel of Downtown Fairbanks?

“I love downtown, but it does have a slightly lonely/abandoned feel.”

“The feel is sort of lifeless. There are vacant buildings. Building maintenance is poor.”

“Sketchy at night, empty in the winter, quaint otherwise.”

“Charmingly outdated.”

Univ. of Alaska Fairbanks Survey Responses, 2018

- **Downtown has an aging resident population.** Downtown Fairbanks has a high number of aging residents with 42 percent of households include one or more people 60 years or older, the majority of whom (nearly 74 percent) were living alone. The high concentration of residents 60 years and older is likely connected to the high number of cost-burdened households. Going forward it will be important to help seniors age in place and remain downtown.
- **People congregating.** People experiencing homelessness tend to congregate Downtown. There is no day shelter in Fairbanks for people experiencing homelessness, so in the mornings, people experiencing homelessness are removed from shelters and often spend the day downtown. There are some organizations and churches providing services Downtown, drawing people experiencing homelessness.
- **Lack of vibrancy.** People congregating Downtown, including housed and unhoused people, stand out due to the quiet nature of downtown. Limited commercial and social activities, high numbers of vacant spaces, and low volumes of foot traffic moving through Downtown on a given day mean that people congregating Downtown draw more attention.
- **Perception.** Interview participants say it is common to see people publicly consuming drugs and alcohol Downtown. Police and other stakeholders confirmed that most of the individuals engaging in these behaviors are not people experiencing homelessness. However, people who are less familiar with the realities of downtown often conflate the two issues and assume people experiencing homelessness are the main source of this problematic behavior.



Updating and Expanding Housing Downtown

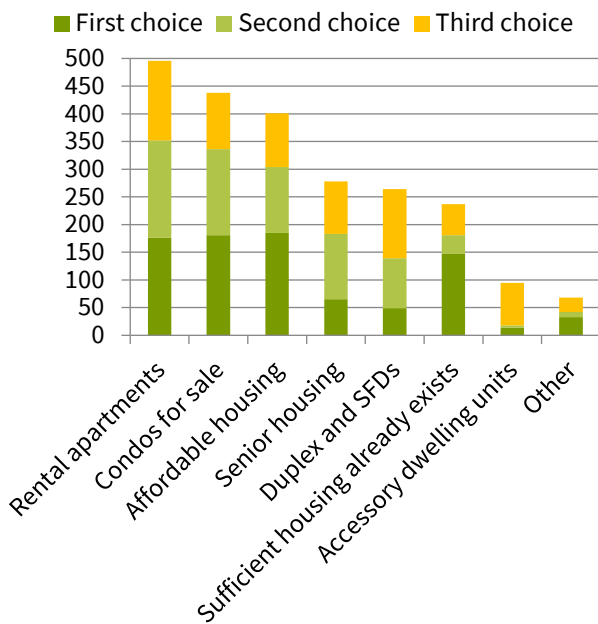
“I have been seeking housing downtown for some years, haven’t found anything suitable.”

“Needs condos/housing units with retail below. Currently no good luxury apartment options in downtown.”

“I think we have adequate housing. We just need to clean up/update the complexes already in use.”

Community Survey Responses, 2017

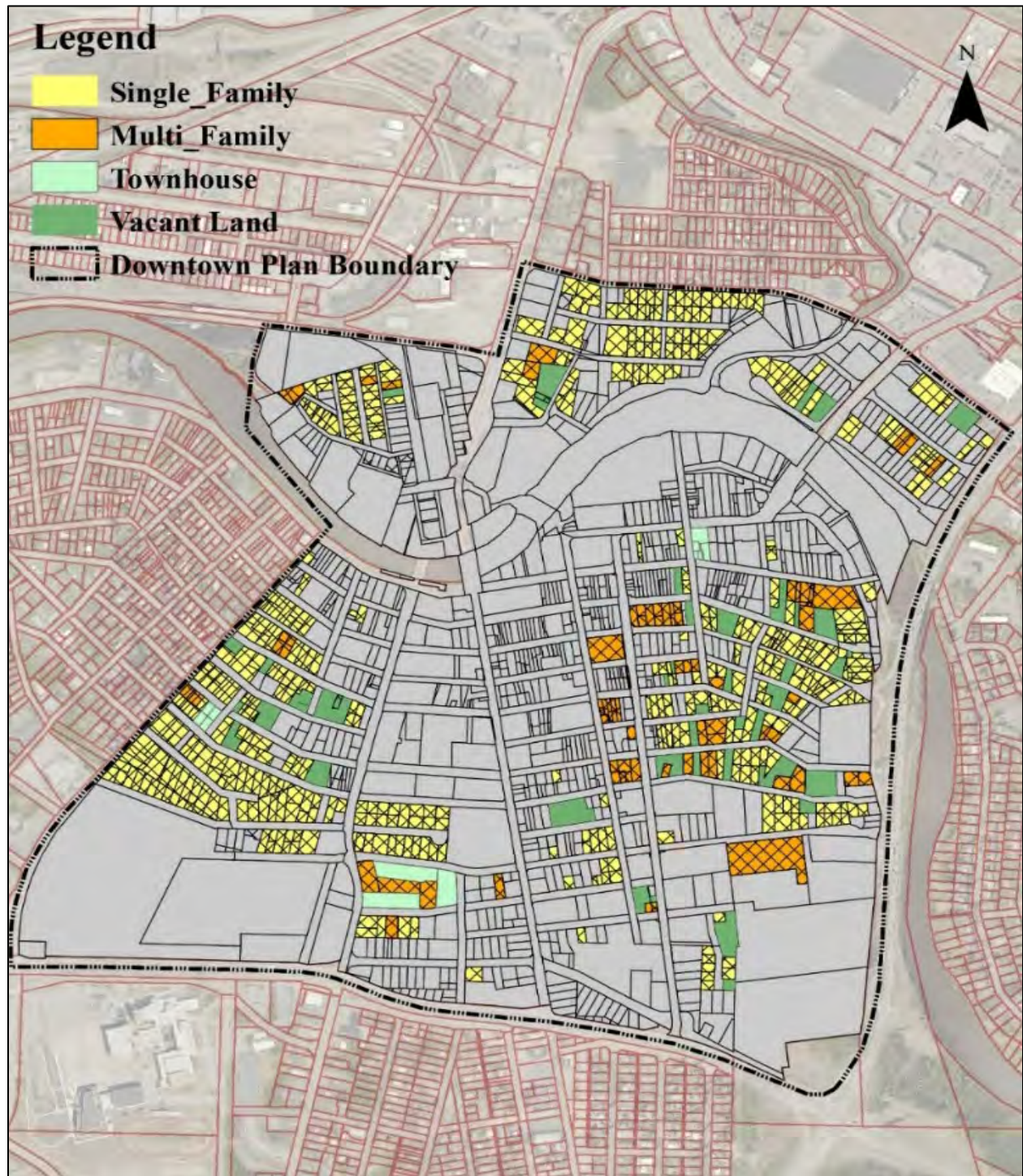
Figure 2: Survey: Desired Types of Downtown Housing



SOURCE: Community Survey, 2017

- **Much of the current housing stock requires updates.** Assessor’s data categorizes most downtown residential units as being “low-quality.” Many of the housing units need to be updated due to aging and deteriorating conditions, which likely contribute to the high vacancy rate (17%) seen Downtown today.
- **The region needs more housing.** Due to population growth driven by military expansion and other trends, FNSB needs more housing units. The borough has limited undeveloped land that is serviced by public water, wastewater, roads, and other infrastructure. Downtown could help meet some of this need through infill development and rehabilitation of existing properties.
- **Diversifying the housing market could attract new residents Downtown.** This could be housing for students, military families, and workers, who would live, shop and potentially find jobs Downtown. Mixed-use developments (housing and commercial) create symbiotic relationship between tenants and businesses, attract more people to the area including residents, workers and visitors, and bring more economic and social activity to that will help revitalize downtown. More opportunities for homeownership would also help diversify Downtown’s population; the 2017 resident survey indicated there is potential demand for these types of units (Figure 2).
- **Downtown can absorb additional housing.** Downtown’s vacant buildings could be redeveloped into housing or mixed-use spaces. There are also vacant parcels that could be developed, as zoning allows. A 2019 analysis of existing housing Downtown (Figure 3) indicates there is significant room for more units, such as townhomes and condos.

Figure 3. Housing Units in Downtown Fairbanks by Type, 2019



SOURCE: FNSB Downtown Housing Study, 2019

Strategies *What policies or other types of strategies or tools will assist residents, the FNSB, and other partners with achieving their vision and goals for the project area?*

These strategies and actions will help achieve the vision and goals for Downtown.

- 1. Preserve the residential character of existing neighborhoods.**
- 2. Promote diverse housing options that serve a variety of lifestyles.**
 - a. Increase density by allowing accessory dwelling units where appropriate.
- 3. Promote investment in repairs, maintenance, and energy efficiency of existing housing stock.**
 - a. Utilize the incentives of the Opportunity Zone designation to promote housing development Downtown.
 - b. Utilize available funding, such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and other sources, to promote housing.
 - c. Explore revolving loan funds, low-interest loans and tax incremental financing for housing in Downtown.
 - d. Simplify compliance issues for residential structures in Downtown to allow more streamlined redevelopment.
 - e. Establish a redevelopment organization to serve as a resource for property owners and developers in accessing financing and other resources.
- 4. Reconsider the boundaries and standards of the Central Business District to encourage a variety of housing.** *See also Land Use.*
- 5. Amend the zoning code to allow for compatible mixed-use residential uses in appropriate neighborhoods.** *See also Land Use.*
 - a. Identify criteria for compatible commercial uses in residential zones or neighborhoods.
 - b. Create buffer criteria or zones between residential and commercial uses.
- 6. Promote adaptive reuse of vacant and abandoned buildings.** *See also Land Use.*
- 7. Promote infill of empty lots.** *See also Land Use.*
- 8. Increase the number of people living Downtown and decrease vacancy rates.**
- 9. Increase the percentage of owner-occupied residences.**

Additional Proposed Strategies and Actions

[Standalone actions to relocate under existing strategies]

- a. Develop rental housing that serves the needs of University of Alaska Fairbanks, personnel stationed at Fort Wainwright, senior population, workers employed at Downtown-based businesses, and other populations.
- b. Support creation of additional accessory dwelling units (ADUs) through expansion of where ADUs are allowed and incentives for properties owners.
- c. Establish Downtown as an attractive residential area for seniors.

Recommend adding to Strategy 2, after existing Action a.

- d. Provide opportunities for small-scale home ownership, including condominiums, town homes, and cottage homes.

Recommend adding to Strategy 9, after existing Action a.

10. Complete a Housing Needs Assessment for the borough, with a focus on current Downtown inventory and projected future market demand for all housing types.

Recommend adding as a new Strategy 10, Actions a-b.

- a. Identify Downtown-specific trends in residential vacancies and priority areas to rehabilitate or replace.
- b. Engage with landlords and property owners to encourage upgrade, rehabilitation, or redevelopment of their properties.

11. Help existing residents age in place and remain living Downtown.

Recommend adding as a new Strategy 11, Actions a-b.

- a. Develop more senior and ADA-accessible housing.
- b. Encourage home modification loans or grants to retrofit homes for accessibility and safety (e.g., ramp access).

12. Coordinate with organizations to connect people experiencing homelessness with available housing in Downtown.

Recommend adding as a new Strategy 12, Actions a-d.

- a. Support implementation of the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness and strategic plans by the Fairbanks Housing and Homeless Coalition and other community partners to prevent and reduce homelessness in Fairbanks.
- b. Support continued operations of organizations based in Downtown (Bread Line Inc., The Door youth shelter, etc.) who serve people experiencing homelessness.
- c. Identify properties or units suitable for supportive housing or workforce housing with subsidies.
- d. Support projects that provide opportunities for stable housing and living independently.

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



The community survey about Downtown asked how to strengthen connections between Downtown and the Chena River. Along with more amenities and activities overlooking the river, residents prioritized **safe walking and biking connections**:

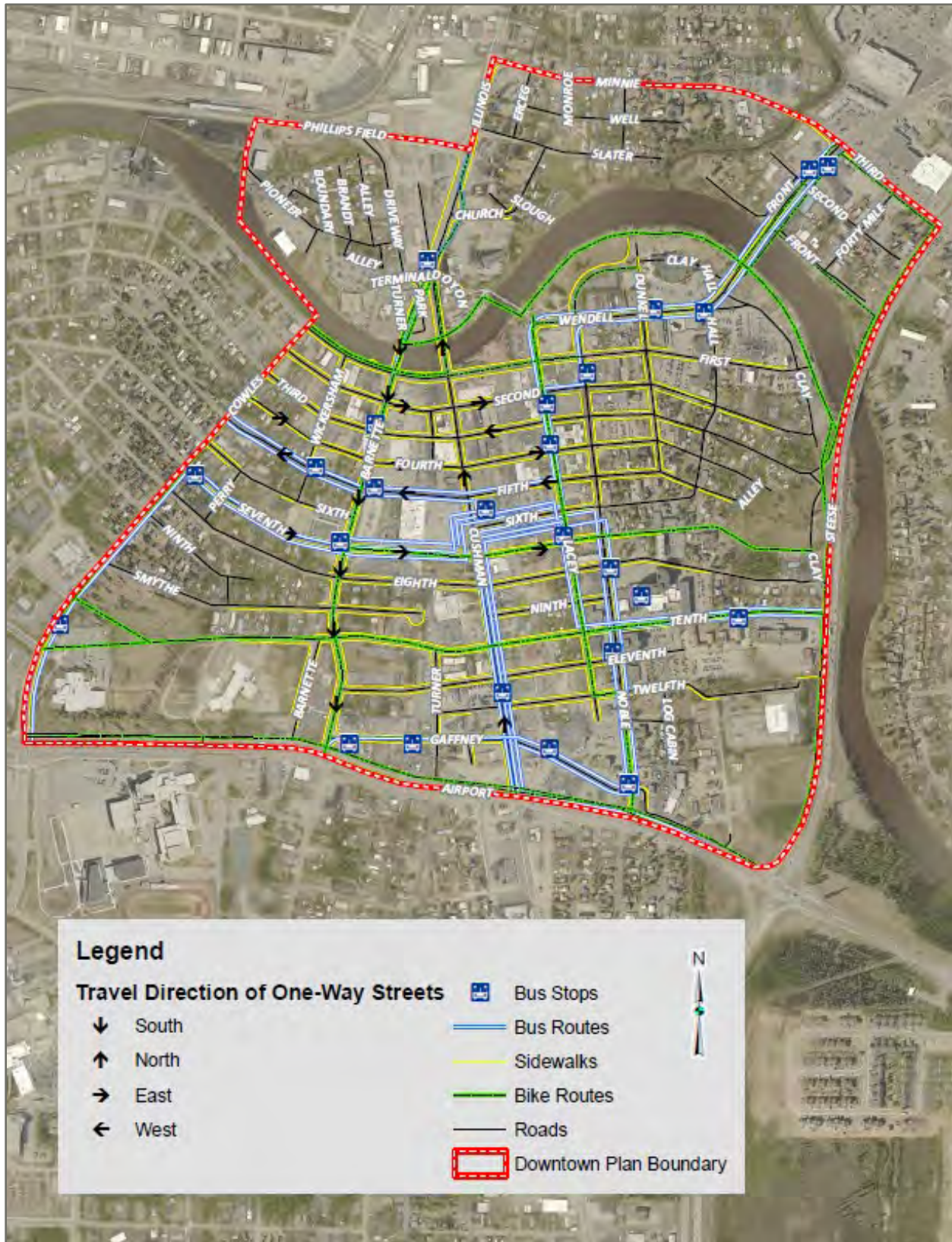
Top 3 responses

- **Riverfront dining, shops, and activities**
- **Increased bike and pedestrian safety on roads leading to the Chena River**
- **Better bike and pedestrian access to and crossing the Chena River**

SOURCE: Community Survey, 2017

- **Downtown has many base features to create a more walkable, easy-to-navigate destination.** Downtown is one of the best transportation-served areas in the city, with a traditional grid layout, relatively short blocks, sidewalks on most streets, and many local destinations that with strategic improvements could be easily reachable on foot and by bike. The Transit Center is also located downtown and serves as a hub for the Metropolitan Area Commuter System (MACS).
- Defining Downtown as a “destination” means making transportation decisions that promote access from the rest of the borough, and easily navigating within the area. This also means designing roads for slower speeds and prioritizing non-motorized uses. Reducing vehicle traffic on roads improves safety for all transportation users and makes for a better experience on Downtown streets and sidewalks.
- The map in Figure 1 shows the network of roads, sidewalk, bike routes, bus routes and stops. Cushman and Barnette Streets are the main gateways into Downtown, with heaviest traffic along the Steese Highway to the east and Airport Way to the south.
- Downtown’s transportation network still has gaps, especially for cycling and transit. The 2019 Circulation Network Analysis recommends projects to close gaps.

Figure 1. Existing Transportation Network, All Modes in Downtown Fairbanks



SOURCE: Fairbanks North Star Borough, Downtown Transportation Network Analysis, 2019



Figure 2. Improvements along Cushman Street



Downtown Projects in 2045 Fairbanks MTP

Recently Completed Projects

- Cushman Street Bridge Rehabilitation
- Noble Street Upgrade
- Wendell Avenue Bridge replacement

Planned Projects, by Priority Timeframe

- Cowles Street Reconstruction (SR)
- Barnette Street Improvements (MR)
- Minnie Street Reconstruction (MR)
- Wendell Avenue connection analysis (MR)
- 5th Avenue Reconstruction (MR)
- 7th Avenue Sidewalk Construction (MR)
- 7th Avenue Bikeway (LR)

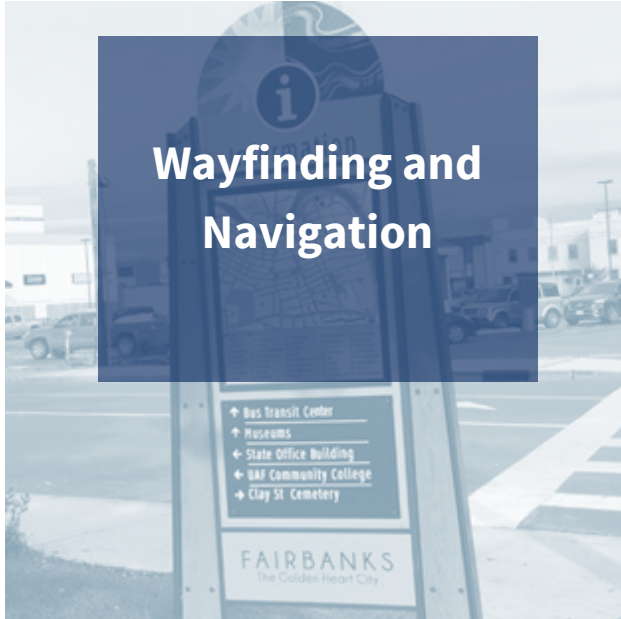
Priority: SR = Short Range | MR = Medium Range | LR = Long Range

- **Investing in Complete Streets promotes walking and biking.** Since adopting a Complete Streets policy in 2015, Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation (FAST) Planning completed upgrades of several Downtown streets, such as Cushman Street (Figure 2).
- **Complete Streets designed for everyone.** This design has features for people walking, biking, driving, and using transit; it prioritizes accessibility and safety for all. This design can be adapted for local road conditions.
- **Road upgrades have made a difference.** Local business owners report seeing more people walking and biking Downtown.
- **However, road closures are disruptive in the short term.** Narrow streets and short construction season can create access issues for businesses during the summer season. While Downtown benefits long-term from upgraded streets and sidewalks, it is critical to coordinate with businesses to mitigate disruptions.
- **Complete Street designs also improve the experience of walking on the street.** Street trees, landscaping, street furniture (benches, covered shelters) and lighting. Where possible, widening sidewalks creates more space for people to linger, and allows for businesses such as restaurants and cafés to offer outdoor dining and seating.
- **Green Streets**, incorporating landscaping into street design, improves drainage as it provides short-term storage for water runoff.

“The new Cushman Street improvements are great! Thank you for the wider sidewalks and the lights make it really welcoming in winter!”

“I regularly walk down Lacey Street, why doesn't it get a pedestrian route like Noble?”

Comments on Downtown Fairbanks Story Map, 2019



Downtown has directional signs like the one above, but the placement and content of existing signage is not meeting people’s needs. A review of current wayfinding, identifying the most popular destinations and attractions that people have difficulty locating, and reconfiguring the network of signage may make it easier to navigate Downtown.

Figure 3. Utility poles placed in the middle of sidewalks make it difficult to walk safely.



Figure 4. Street furniture such as planters adds visual interest and greenery to streets, but also makes snow clearing more difficult.



- **Difficult to navigate.** Residents, businesses, and survey respondents consistently say it is hard to find your way within Downtown:
 - Too many one-way streets
 - Narrow sidewalks
 - Poor lighting in winter
 - Many sidewalks not ADA accessible
 - Bicyclists use sidewalks illegally
 - Not enough guiding signage for routes between destinations (Chena Riverwalk, Carlson Center, Pioneer Park)
 - Hard to find parking (*see Parking chapter*).
- **Current design is challenging for pedestrians.** Downtown is compact, with a connected grid of streets and sidewalks. Some streets have had sidewalk and ADA accessibility improvements. Many people say walkability, especially for people with mobility issues, is a big barrier (Figure 3).
- **Winter maintenance impacts navigation.** Snow clearance is a transportation issue: snow on sidewalks, paths and roads make it challenging to get around in the winter. Following City’s Downtown Snow Removal Standard helps snow clearing happen quickly and consistently and improves safety. Prompt snow clearance by businesses and property owners should also be a priority.
- **Pros and cons of street amenities.** Some people are also frustrated with the amenities installed on new, wider sidewalks (Figure 4). While street amenities such as planter boxes, benches and bike racks add value to the walking experience, they also take up limited sidewalk space and make clearing snow difficult. Balancing the positives and downsides of these features is important.

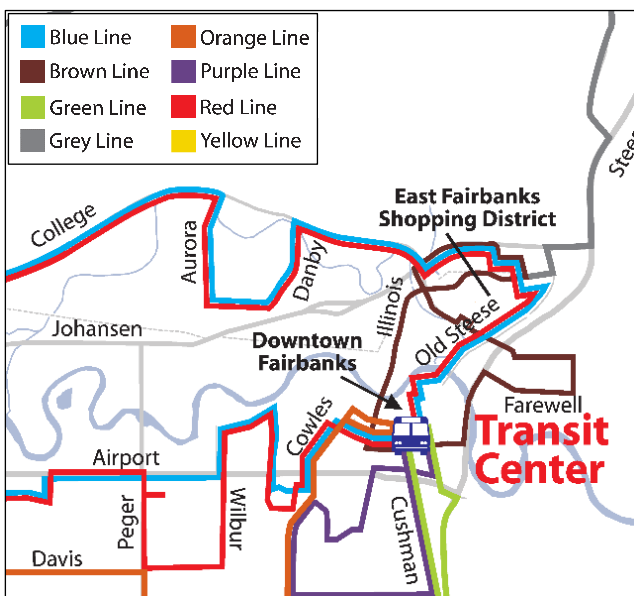


Public Transit and Buses

Figure 5. Lyons Transit Center is a hub for many MACS routes.



Figure 6. MACS System Map, Downtown service (detail)



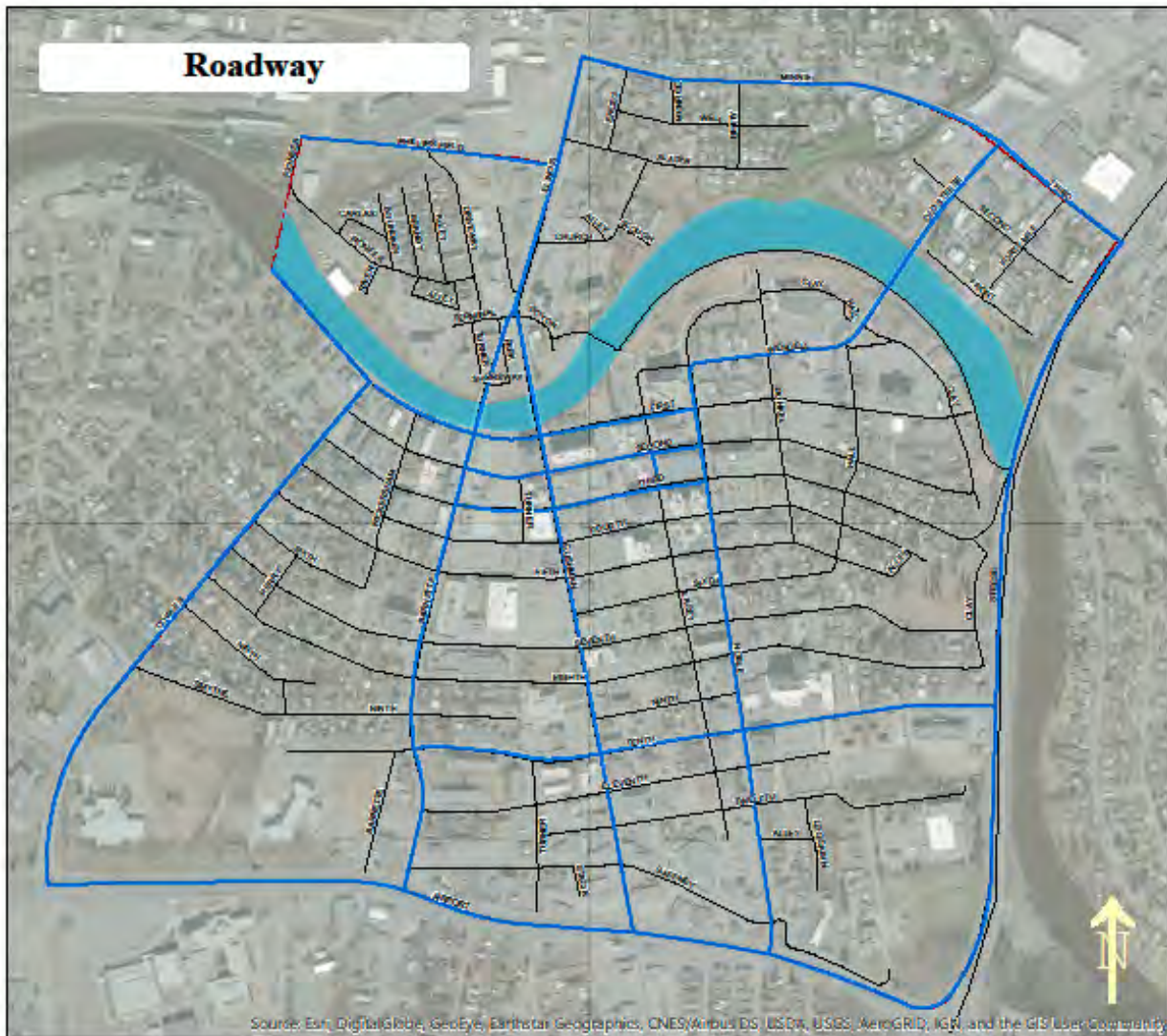
- Having transportation choices is important for Downtown residents:** More than 40% of Downtown residents do not own a vehicle—a rate almost 10 times higher than the borough overall, where only 4.3% of households don't have access to a vehicle.
- Better network and connections needed among existing Downtown routes.** The Metropolitan Area Commuter System (MACS) serves most of Fairbanks North Star Borough, with a transit center in Downtown (Figure 5). All but two of the fixed-route lines go to the Transit Center, with hourly service. Few lines (only Red, Blue, and Orange) run within Downtown (Figure 6). Shifting existing routes with more stops in the commercial core would connect with more of Downtown.
- MACS has limited weekend and evening service.** Hours of service also make it more difficult to use transit to access Downtown: for example, there is currently no regular Sunday service, which limits people without car access from accessing Downtown on weekends. Late-night service has also been identified to increase transit access.
- Circulation service within Downtown.** Several residents and businesses suggested a small circulating route, a public- or privately-operated trolley, to help visitors reach common destinations more easily, and increase exposure and traffic to businesses.
- Bus traffic and congestion during summer months.** Private operators routinely bring buses of visitors Downtown, unloading passengers at destinations along First Avenue. Better coordination of pickup and drop-off locations would reduce congestion.

Figure X. Proposed Transportation Circulation Network for Downtown Fairbanks

[INSERT NEW MAP IMAGE, COMBINED ALL MODES; INSERT CROSS REFERENCE IN TEXT]

SOURCE: Fairbanks North Star Borough, Downtown Transportation Network Analysis, 2019 + Updated 2022

Figure 7. Proposed Roadway Circulation Network in Downtown Fairbanks



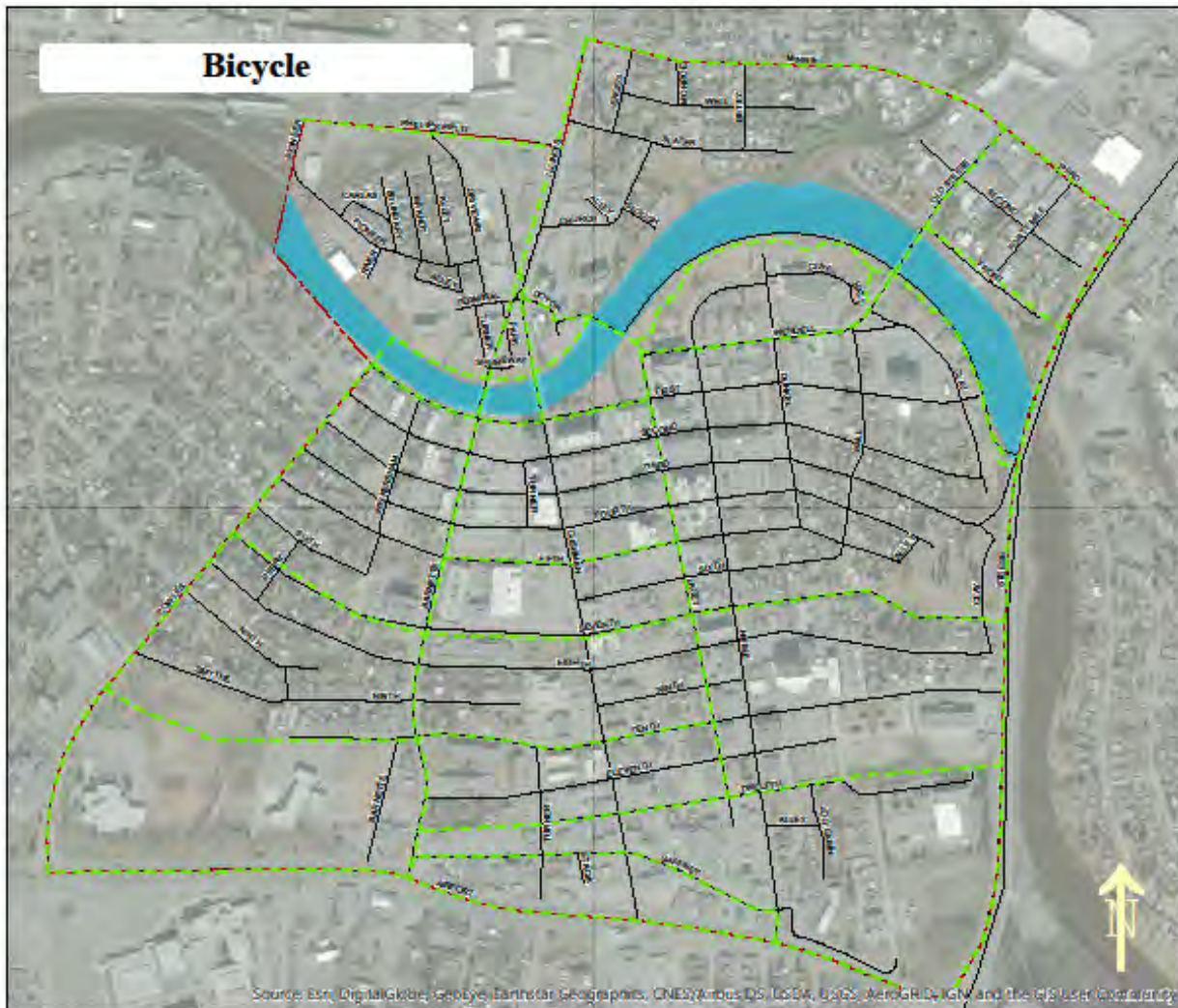
**Downtown Fairbanks 2040:
Transportation**

- Roadway
- Downtown Plan Boundary
- Roads
- Chena River

- Signal progression
- Capacity
- Limited access
- Encourage fast moving traffic to the arterials—Airport Way and Steese Expressway.
- Cushman and Barnette are gateway streets into and out of the downtown.
- Cushman and Barnette should be functionally classified as major collectors and function to bring traffic into and out of the downtown and serve local freight needs.
- Consider connecting Clay St. to 3rd Avenue.
- Consider connecting 4th and 5th Avenues on the east by cemetery.

SOURCE: Fairbanks North Star Borough, Downtown Transportation Network Analysis, 2019 + Updated 2022

Figure 8. Proposed Bicycle Circulation Network in Downtown Fairbanks



**Downtown Fairbanks 2040:
Transportation**

- - Bicycle
- Downtown Plan Boundary
- Roads
- Chena River

Currently there are no on-street bicycle accommodations in downtown Fairbanks. The following are suggested policies and treatments to go along with a proposed bicycle circulation network:

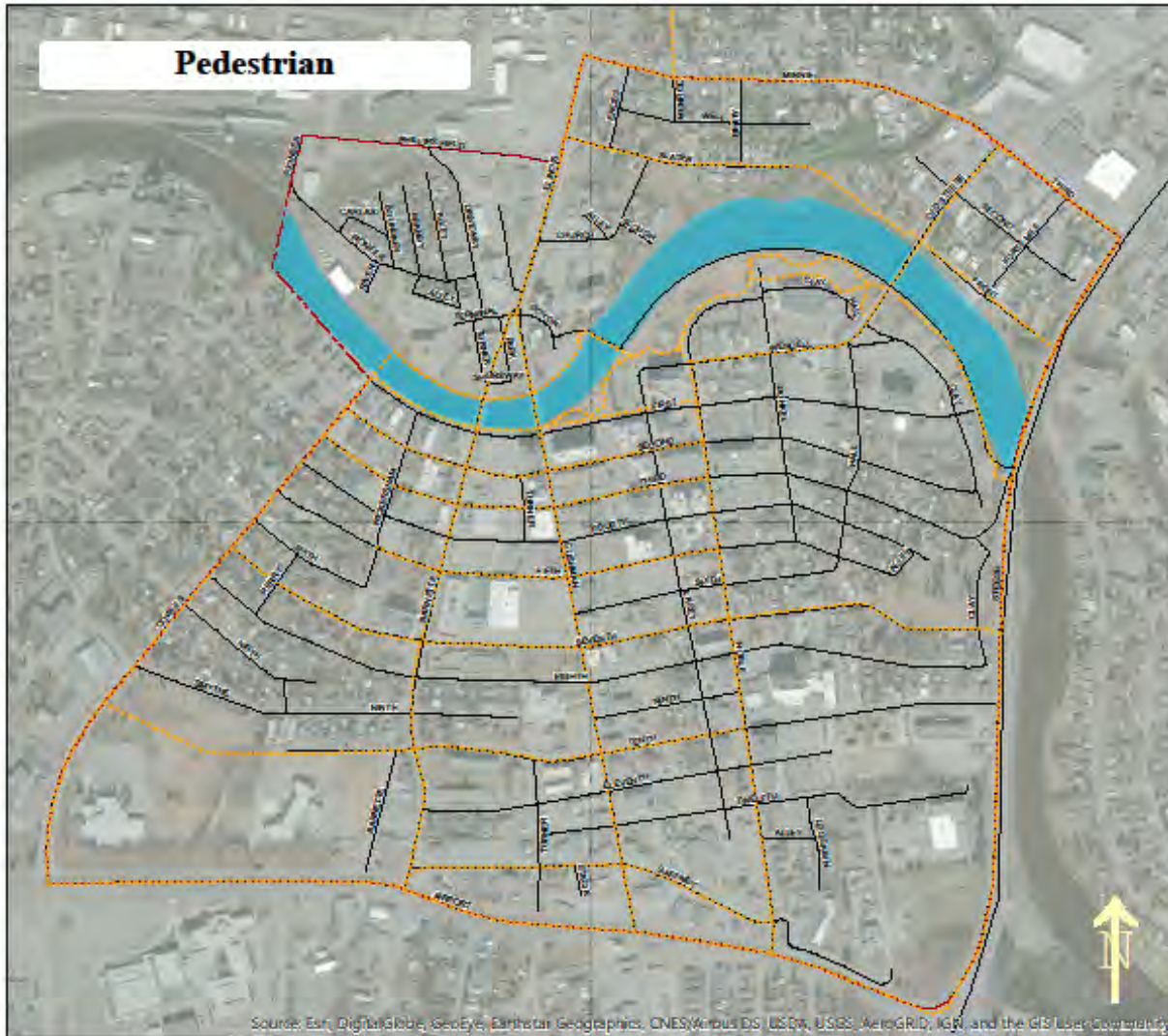
- On-street marked lanes
- Sharrows
- Separated pathways
- No shared sidewalks!
- Alaska generally allows bicycles on sidewalks, but no person may ride a bicycle upon a sidewalk in a business district or where prohibited by an official traffic-control device.

Source: Alaska Admin. Code tit. 13 §02.400(g)

- 12th is proposed as a new connection to the path along the Steese Expressway.
- If a sidewalk is 10 feet or wider it is identified as a shared use pathway in areas where bicycle routes are designated.

SOURCE: Fairbanks North Star Borough, Downtown Transportation Network Analysis, 2019 + Updated 2022

Figure 9. Proposed Pedestrian Circulation Network in Downtown Fairbanks



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community

Downtown Fairbanks 2040: Transportation

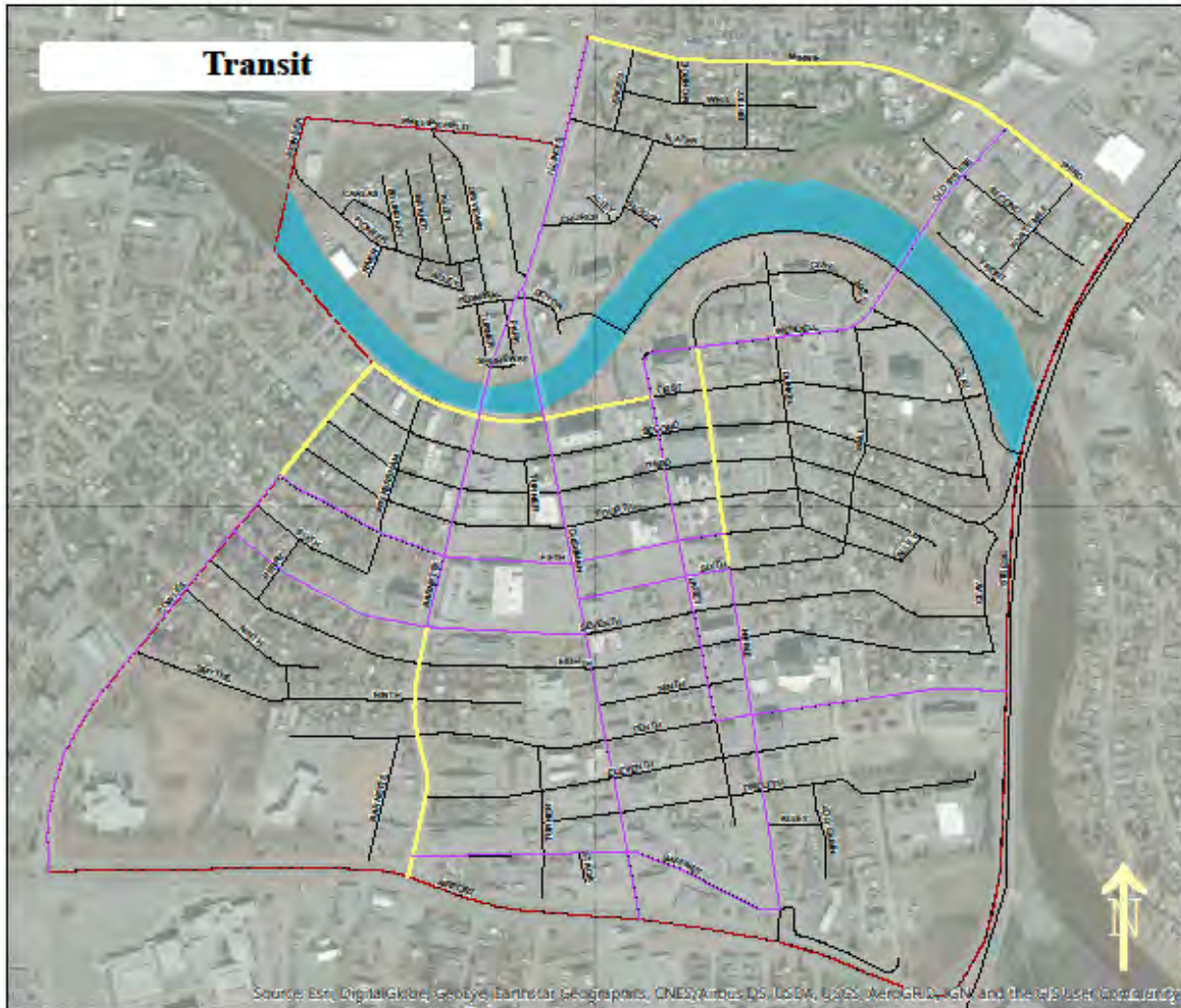
- - - Pedestrian
- Downtown Plan Boundary
- Roads
- Chena River

Downtown Fairbanks has the most complete sidewalk network in the borough. However, there is much room for improvement of the pedestrian environment. The following are policies and suggested treatments for the identified pedestrian network:

- 7-12 ft. sidewalks on all identified corridors in network where width permits.
- One couple walking abreast and another pedestrian walking in the opposite direction should be able to pass one another (minimum width to achieve this is 7 feet).
- Street furniture where appropriate
- Pedestrian bars for leaning and resting
- Pedestrian lighting
- Ped bridge at Cowles over Chena River
- Ped bridge over Noyes Slough
- All sidewalks ADA accessible

SOURCE: Fairbanks North Star Borough, Downtown Transportation Network Analysis, 2019 + Updated 2022

Figure 10. Proposed Transit Circulation Network in Downtown Fairbanks



**Downtown Fairbanks 2040:
Transportation**

Transit

- Existing Connections
- Proposed Connections
- Downtown Plan Boundary
- Roads
- Chena River

There are already many transit connections in the downtown. The following proposes new and existing circulation network to have a broader coverage for transit in the downtown:

- o North Noble above 6th Avenue
- o Minnie Street
- o 3rd Street
- o Cowles north of 5th Avenue
- o 1st Avenue
- o Barnette 7th to Airport

SOURCE: Fairbanks North Star Borough, Downtown Transportation Network Analysis, 2019 + Updated 2022

Transportation Vision

Downtown Fairbanks has a safe transportation system that meets the needs of all users.

Strategies *What policies or other types of strategies or tools will assist residents, the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB), and other partners with achieving their vision and goals for the project area?*

These strategies and actions will help achieve the vision and goals for Downtown. The circulation maps in Figure 7 (Roadway), Figure 8 (Bicycle), Figure 9 (Pedestrian), and Figure 10 (Transit) illustrate proposed connections and policies for each mode.

Roads: *Continue building a road system that provides the needed level of mobility and enhances the built environment of Downtown Fairbanks. See Figure 7.*

1. Implement the following features in the Downtown road network:

- a. Signal progression, where appropriate.
- b. Encourage fast-moving traffic to use major arterials (Airport Way, Steese Expressway).
- c. Define Cushman and Barnette Streets as primary gateway streets into and out of Downtown and serving local freight needs. Functionally classify both streets as major collectors.
- d. Consider connecting Clay St. to 3rd Avenue.
- e. Consider connecting 4th and 5th Avenues on the east by cemetery.

2. Design and upgrade roads to fit in their surroundings and employ Complete Streets principles where appropriate.

3. Set speed limits are set appropriately for the amount of multimodal traffic through Downtown, after conducting a speed study.

Aesthetics: *Integrate aesthetic features into the Downtown landscape.*

4. Incorporate continuity in streetscape look and feel, including consistent design elements such as lighting, planters, etc.
5. Maintain streetscape long-term.
6. Where fencing or screening is required, require decorative highway fencing and prohibit use of chain-link fence, such as along Airport Way and the Steese Expressway.
7. Explore Dark Sky lighting.

Bicycle: Develop and implement an adequate year-round bicycle network throughout Downtown to incorporate cycling with other transportation options. See Figure 8.

8. Implement the proposed bicycle circulation network, with the following support policies and treatments:

- a. Use on-street marked lanes on roadways with more than 1,000 average daily traffic.
- b. Use sharrows on roadways with less than 1,000 average daily traffic.
- c. Install separated pathways that connect through parks and green spaces.
- d. Construct a new bike-accessible connection between 12th Avenue and shared-use pathway along the Steese Expressway.
- e. Identify all paths 10 feet or wider as a shared-use pathway along designated bicycle routes.

9. Use signage and striping to identify seasonal bicycle network.

10. Provide adequate bicycle parking (appropriate safe locations).

11. Support shared bicycle facilities in Downtown.

Pedestrian: Increase walkability and pedestrian comfort in Downtown Fairbanks. See Figure 9.

12. Improve connectivity of the sidewalk system throughout Downtown.

- a. Ensure that all streets identified as collectors and all streets within the Urban Core have sidewalks.

13. Incorporate street furniture into Downtown, especially to buffer pedestrians on sidewalks from car traffic.

- a. Install street furniture where appropriate.
- b. Install pedestrian bars for leaning and resting.

14. Determine which sidewalks should be widened; develop a specific recommended width within the Urban Core.

- a. Establish the minimum recommended sidewalk width as 7 feet, defined as the width allowing two people walking abreast to pass another person without needing to step out of the way.
- b. Install sidewalks and shared-use pathways that are between 7 and 12 feet wide on all identified corridors in network, where there is sufficient right-of-way width.

15. Improve pedestrian lighting in the Urban Core area of Downtown.

- a. Relocate utility poles away from sidewalks.
- b. Make sidewalks wide enough for commercial use in high traffic areas in the Urban Core.

16. Connect Downtown to surrounding areas with pedestrian bridges over waterways.

- a. Construct a pedestrian bridge at Cowles over Chena River.
- b. Construct a pedestrian bridge over Noyes Slough.

Transit: Integrate Transit into Downtown land use and mobility. See Figure 10.

17. Ensure that Transit stops are appropriately located in Downtown.

- a. Consider transit connections on First Avenue, Second Avenue in the Slaterville neighborhood, and Minnie Street.
- b. Have comfortable transit stops where appropriate throughout Downtown.
- c. Proposed new transit connections:
 - i. North Noble Street north of Sixth Avenue
 - ii. Minnie Street
 - iii. Third Avenue
 - iv. Cowles Street north of Fifth Avenue
 - v. First Avenue
 - vi. Barnette Street between Seventh Avenue and Airport Way

18. Development of Sunday service between Downtown and popular destinations.

Safety: Improve transportation safety in Downtown.

19. Install signage and enforce cycling prohibition use of sidewalks in the Urban Core.¹

20. Accommodate cyclists off of sidewalks.

21. Upgrade sidewalks to be ADA compliant.

22. Design streets in the Urban Core to emphasize “accessibility” over “mobility.”

23. Consider traffic calming features slow traffic and improve safety where needed.

¹ Per Alaska regulation, bicycles are prohibited on sidewalks in business districts such as Downtown. “Alaska generally allows bicycles on sidewalks, but no person may ride a bicycle upon a sidewalk in a business district or where prohibited by an official traffic-control device.” 13 AAC 02.400(g)

24. Improve site distances. Conduct a site distance audit at intersections where buildings abut the right-of-way.

Maintenance: Improve snow removal throughout Downtown.

25. Long-term maintenance and operations must be planned for in roadway design and construction.

Additional Proposed Strategies and Actions

26. Define Downtown as a central transportation destination for the region, connected by multiple modes, in all transportation plans.

Recommend adding as a new Strategy 1, Actions a-c. (Existing #1 becomes Strategy 2).

- a. Include Downtown as a priority for transportation improvements in future Metropolitan Transportation Plans (MTP) and other FAST plans.
- b. Increase bike and pedestrian infrastructure throughout Downtown, consistent with Envision 2045 MTP and Connect Fairbanks Non-Motorized Transportation Plan.
- c. Continue implementing Green Streets Plan improvements identified in Downtown to improve drainage and aesthetic appeal of priority corridors.

Wayfinding: Make it easier for everyone to find their way within Downtown.

Recommend adding additional Wayfinding header, with new Strategies 27, 28 and 29.

27. Improve wayfinding signage, maps, and other visual strategies to guide people toward commercial areas, green spaces, and points of interest.

- a. Coordinate Downtown brand identity development with wayfinding and materials development. *See Economic Development Strategy 6.*
- b. Work with FMATS to integrate Downtown brand identity and design elements as part of consistent design standards for Downtown transportation projects.

28. Explore incentives for utilizing transit within Downtown, such as a dedicated circulating route within the Urban Core or bus passes for tour groups.

29. Coordinate with public and private parking operators to advertise and provide wayfinding from the closest available parking to common attractions and destinations.

Key Issues Guiding the Plan

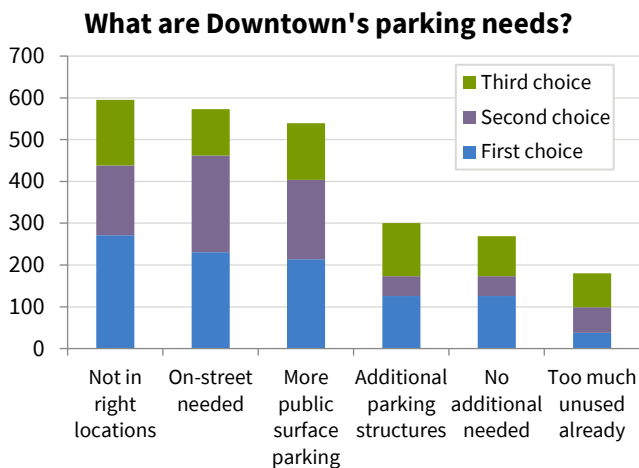


“We need to educate business owners on how valuable parking places are in front of their businesses. Business owners and staff need to get off the street, free up spaces for customers.”

“Parking is a commodity. Businesses on the street have a responsibility to keep inventory moving.”

Survey of Downtown Business Owners, January 2021

Figure 1. Resident Survey (2017), Parking Needs Downtown



In a survey of University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) students (2018), a majority found Downtown parking “accessible,” while others said it is “plentiful, but in the wrong places.”

- Adequate, safe, accessible parking is important for a thriving downtown.** The issue of parking continues to be a focus for all stakeholders in Downtown, and currently not working well for many. The “right” amount of parking means meeting parking demands, while optimizing land use for parking and reducing empty spaces that make the area feel less compact and walkable.
- Parking is a resource not being coordinated or managed efficiently in Downtown.** Parking has been a focus of discussion about improving Downtown for decades, but there are differing ideas about what is needed.
- “Not enough parking” means inaccessible, inconvenient, or off-limits to the public.** In the 2017 resident survey, “Convenient Parking” was priority #3 among desired amenities Downtown, after “Restaurants, bars and entertainment” and “Retail and personal services.” However, when asked about specific parking needs, many identified the problem as not enough parking in the right places, more on-street and/or public surface parking is needed (Figure 1). A smaller number thought supply was enough or too much.
- Parking Downtown could be improved with better management of existing capacity.** Demand is highest during peak summer months and special events, but the study and surveys suggest better using existing parking is one important solution. For example, parking garages will likely continue to see lower occupancy when free or low-cost street spaces are available.

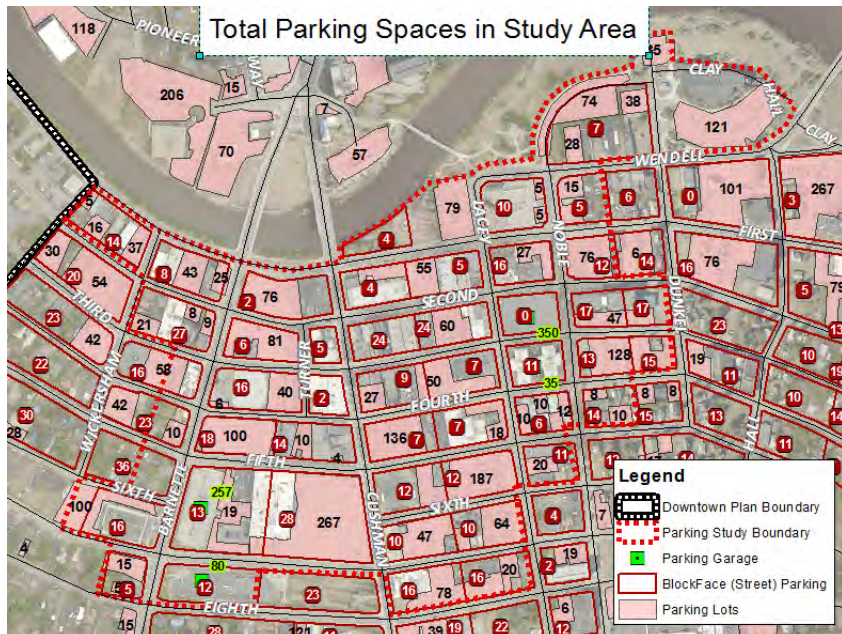


Downtown Parking Study Findings (2019)

1. Supply of parking exceeds typical demand.
2. Parking spaces are rarely utilized for multiple purposes throughout a day or week (example: shared use between offices and restaurants).
3. Demand for parking is uneven and localized: e.g., one lot is full, with adjacent lots empty.
4. There is ample on-street parking, but existing spaces could be better utilized.

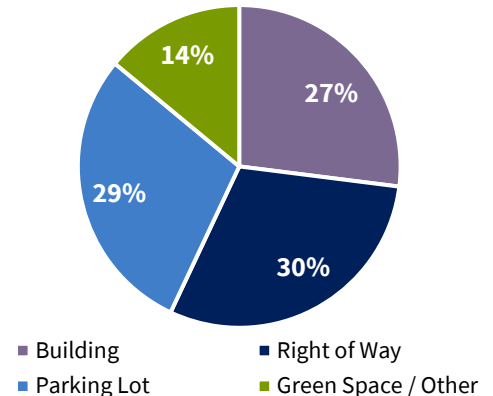
- **Almost 60% of land area in Downtown’s commercial core is pavement.** The Borough’s spring 2019 parking study, focused on parking use in the commercial core (Figure 2). This includes rights of way (roads, sidewalks) and surface parking lots. The parking study area was analyzed by surface use (Figure 3).
- **There is a disconnect between perception and supply of available parking Downtown.** The parking study found Downtown has almost 3,900 total spaces available in 3 structures (garages), on-street parking along most blocks, and over 2,500 spaces in surface parking lots. Many lots are privately owned or have signage that can discourage public use.
- Based on observations over multiple days, average parking occupancy was 27%; the highest demand for parking was during weekdays, with typical occupancy around 30% of spaces and peak occupancy of 35% at midday. There was no significant difference in demand by type (on-street, lot, garage).

Figure 2. Downtown Fairbanks Inventory of Parking Spaces



Parking Type	Spaces
Structure (Garage)	722
On-Street (Curbside)	640
Off-Street (Surface Lot)	2,509
Total Spaces	3,871

Figure 3. Downtown Area by Surface Use



SOURCE: Fairbanks North Star Borough, Downtown Fairbanks Parking Study (2019)



Maintenance and Enforcement

- **Downtown users consistently report that confusion about available public parking and enforcement are barriers to enjoying time Downtown.** Enforcement was a theme of parking issues throughout this process, which gives would-be patrons of Downtown businesses and services a bad experience and can keep them from returning. Many comments focused on frustration with Golden Heart Parking Services as a reason to avoid Downtown. Business owners report this reputation has continued to grow in the community, presenting a challenge to attracting more people to Downtown.
- **Snow removal and management is a parking issue.** People also express frustration with inconsistent snow removal during winter months, when snow reduces available parking spaces. Identifying high demand lots to prioritize snow removal would keep more of the most convenient parking available year round.
- **Creating improved signage and wayfinding could improve the parking experience.** The Downtown Association could take the lead in a wayfinding and communications strategy, creating a parking map brochure and user-friendly signage for businesses to share. *See Transportation.*

“The Parking Authority issues citations for minor infractions that do not directly affect parking downtown. For example: Registration stickers in the wrong place on the license plate. This does not affect parking in any way. The fines are steep. The fines triple over the course of a month. The employees ticket every offense. It angers people, and these stories spread like wildfire.”

Borough-wide Residents Survey, 2017

“Customers can’t find a place to park and when they do, they don’t know the rules, get a ticket and proclaim they are never coming downtown again.”

Survey of Downtown Business Owners, January 2021

Improving Downtown’s Parking Experience

Changing negative perception of parking Downtown could go a long way to bring residents back.

- **Reducing strict enforcement:** Residents receive tickets for parking outside the lines in winter months, having expired tags and other issues not directly related to where they’ve legally parked.
- **Offer customer-focused amenities that add value:** Offering services to make parking Downtown a better experience may bring would-be customers to Downtown. For example, EasyPark in Downtown Anchorage provides free tire inflation, jump starts and safety escorts.
- **Explore automation technologies to increase use:** Many cities have adopted technologies to better manage parking resources, such as automated entry and exit gates to surface lots and structures. Automation makes it feasible to offer customers 24/7 access to and easy payment for garage parking.

Strategies *What policies or other types of strategies or tools will assist residents, the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB), and other partners with achieving their vision and goals for the project area?*

These strategies and actions will help achieve the vision and goals for Downtown.

- 1. Redevelop existing underutilized surface level parking lots into active spaces and new development by creating incentives.**
- 2. Encourage new development by lessening or eliminating the requirement for new surface level parking Downtown.**
 - a. Revise existing off-street parking regulations to:
 - i. Require much less off-street parking for each use.
 - ii. Encourage up to 100% shared parking for new development where high use peak hours do not overlap, or for under occupied public lots.
 - iii. Reduce requirements for uses that:
 - 1) Are close to transit or the parking garage;
 - 2) Have on-street facilities;
 - 3) Provide bicycle parking; or
 - 4) Have sidewalks that serve the business.
 - iv. Evaluate new surface lots to be open to the public for parking during off hours.
 - b. Remove the requirement for off-street loading facilities for businesses in Downtown.
 - c. Encourage well designed small, accessory parking lots, when justified, to develop Downtown.
 - d. Discourage large, standalone parking lots.
 - i. Establish maximum number of parking spaces per lot.
 - ii. Establish maximum number of overall parking spaces per business or building.
 - iii. If a standalone parking lot is approved, consider including a sunset clause.
 - e. Expand the no-required parking zone.
- 3. Manage on-street parking to benefit nearby businesses.**
 - a. Encourage angled parking where the right-of-way is of ample width.
 - b. Reevaluate time limits and locations to encourage high turnover in high-density commercial areas. Manage parking limits to encourage turnover in high-traffic areas.
 - c. Encourage employees/residents to use surface lots and the parking garages and leave street parking for customers.

4. Design surface level parking Downtown to increase efficiency and encourage pedestrian activity (e.g., remove “dead space”)

- a. Reevaluate screening/landscaping requirements to buffer parking lots from adjacent uses.
- b. Allow for compact car spaces.
- c. Reduce excessive curb cuts that create a hazardous pedestrian environment and reduce available on street parking.
- d. Establish standard for year-round visibility and accessibility, including clear uniform signage and maintenance. Including hours of public availability.
- e. Develop standards for surface parking drainage and maintenance, including dust mitigation.

5. Promote existing parking.

- a. Work out a program to encourage public and private parking lots to share spaces and signs.
- b. Encourage public access to private lots during non-business hours and uniform signage indicating such availability.
- c. Develop a public access program to educate the public about parking areas Downtown.

Figure 4. Existing Parking Signs, Discouraging Public Use



- i. Produce an easy-to-understand parking map for the public.
- ii. Create a Downtown public parking brochure that can be handed out with tickets, in shops, etc.
- iii. Encourage the development and use of technology to communicate usage and availability, such as a parking availability app.
- d. Develop a program for private parking lots to be available for public use.

6. Increase Downtown parking garage usage.

- a. Encourage providing parking validation from local businesses.
- b. Reduce or eliminate fees for parking garage use for short-term, high-turnover parking.
- c. Have better signage throughout Downtown and on the parking structure directing people to the structured parking.
- d. Provide ticket forgiveness if people use the parking garage within a period of receiving ticket.
- e. Encourage business owners and their employees to use structured parking, considering the following options:
 - i. Employee free parking.

- ii. Reduced parking rates for Downtown employees.
- f. Track occupancy data for the parking garage. Promote 24-hour occupancy.
- g. Advertise garage availability during evening and weekend activities seasonally.

Additional Proposed Strategies and Actions

7. Reduce demand for vehicle parking where feasible.

Recommend adding as a new Strategy 7, Actions a-c.

- a. Encourage people to use other modes of transportation to and within Downtown.
- b. Support other land use and transportation policies that encourage walkability.
- c. Support transit connections from Downtown to other destinations, particularly for high-demand periods such as special events.

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



Heart of Fairbanks

“Downtown Fairbanks is continually changing but doesn’t necessarily seem to grow. Almost like the little plant growing up through the concrete. There is a tenacity that keeps it here.”

Downtown Business Owner Interviews, 2021

“What do you like about Downtown Fairbanks?”

Top responses from high school students in 2018:

Restaurants	Seasonal decorations
Coffee shops	Streetlights
Local stores	The history
Art and murals	The fountain
Events and activities	Places to walk
Close to the river	Trees and plants

SOURCE: High school student workshops, 2018

- Downtown is an economic and historic center.** Downtown Fairbanks is the economic hub of the city, which itself is the hub of Interior Alaska and the nation’s gateway to the Arctic. Downtown is the oldest part of Fairbanks, the seat of City and Borough government, and has the highest density of historical buildings. It’s also the cultural center of the city, where most community events take place. Downtown is also a destination and key lodging area for visitors.
- FNSB CEDS guides economic development throughout the region, including in Downtown.** FNSB maintains a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), with recommendations for sustaining and growing the region’s economy. The CEDS is highly relevant to Downtown, with proposed actions to develop and retain businesses, support workers, and increase quality of life. It also recognizes the economic, cultural, and historic value of downtown Fairbanks, with relevant recommendations such as revitalizing the bike share program, redeveloping deteriorated properties, creating a new Convention and Arts Center downtown, and growing locally owned small businesses and future generations of entrepreneurs that own and operate their businesses downtown.¹

¹ Learn more about the Fairbanks North Star Borough Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (FNSB CEDS) at <https://fnsbceds.com/>



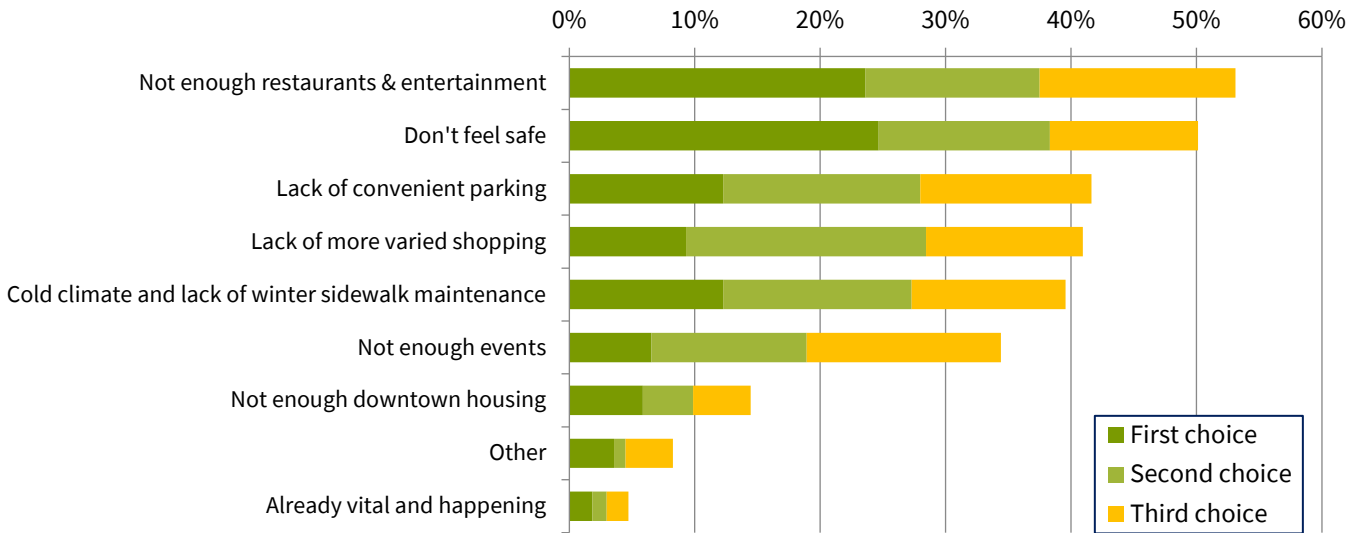
Destination for Visitors and Residents

“We’re not Seattle, people are not accustomed to using parking garages. In the winter, folks would rather drive 30 minutes in a warm car to a place where they can park and walk right in. From October to April, if people can’t find parking right away, they go somewhere else.”

Downtown Business Owner Interview, 2021

- Downtown Fairbanks is a destination for local fun.** In addition to hospitality, entertainment and other activities for visitors, Downtown is a popular place for residents that live, work, shop, dine, and recreate in the area. Other residents shared that they do not regularly go Downtown, but are interested in seeing more entertainment, arts, and cultural offerings. Figure 1 illustrates the barriers residents identified to a fully activated, 24/7 Downtown.
- Coordinated marketing would help promote Downtown amenities.** Multiple organizations engage in marketing and promotion for Downtown and visiting local businesses; aligning these efforts could amplify a clear brand and strategies for marketing Downtown.

Figure 1. Survey Results: Roadblocks to a vital 24/7 Downtown



SOURCE: Resident Survey, 2017



Support New and Existing Businesses

Survey: What do residents want Downtown?

The top three desired types of retail included **grocery, specialty retail, and clothing stores.**

The top three desired entertainment and recreation amenities include **live entertainment, parks and recreation facilities, and restaurants.**

SOURCE: Resident Survey, 2017

“Businesses are often overlooked during these types of projects and I’m glad to see that’s being recognized. Everyone in the community needs a voice.”

“Invite change... Support local... Listen and try and act on the requests of the owners who spend time vocalizing their issues.”

Downtown Business Owner Interviews, 2021 and 2022

Fairbanks is a Winter City

Northern climate, easy access to outdoor recreation and desirable attractions such as aurora viewing, mean opportunities to celebrate and promote a year-round destination. Winter conditions also create important challenges to address: lighting managing snow removal, sidewalk clearing, and accessible parking.

- **Downtown business owners want to be better engaged in policy changes, updates, and events.** Downtown business owners would like to see the City and the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) better engage and collaborate with businesses in planning and decision making around navigation, wayfinding, zoning, permitting, public safety policing changes, and construction plans. This could include expanded engagement with the Downtown Association of Fairbanks.
- **Attract new businesses and tenants Downtown.** By attracting additional tenants and filling vacant spaces Downtown, the area could further grow as a destination and mutually generate increased business, foot traffic, and opportunities for those who reside in the area. This could include creative business models such as co-operative spaces or incubators, potentially in partnership with the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). The community could encourage private investment by crafting policies and incentives to lower the barrier to entry for new businesses.
- **Better activate Downtown.** One of the top reasons residents visit Downtown is to go to restaurants, shops, and events. The number and frequency of these visitors plays a critical role in the viability of Downtown businesses. How can the community encourage more people to visit, and give workers with offices Downtown a reason to stay longer? While a “24-hour” Downtown may not be realistic, the community could work toward being an “18-hour” Downtown with activities that attract and keep visitors longer, including evenings and weekends.



Vacant and Dilapidated Properties

The Downtown database managed by the Downtown Association of Fairbanks shows:
312,000 square feet of commercial space for lease
50,000 square feet of commercial space for sale
SOURCE: Downtown Association Property Database, 2022

Figure 2. Many vacant buildings are awaiting new tenants but may need repairs or upgrades.



- **Vacant properties.** Downtown Fairbanks has many vacant buildings, which create safety hazards and make the area less attractive to visit. These properties are a great opportunity for renovation for new businesses.
- **New opportunity for Polaris Building site.** The Polaris building, the tallest in Fairbanks, was built in 1952 as apartments and later became a hotel. The hotel closed in 2000 and has been vacant since. Multiple attempts to remodel the property have failed, and the site is now one of the most common locations Downtown for police response calls. The Polaris Building needs to be safely torn down, with careful handling and disposal of hazardous materials. Removing the building will be a net positive for Fairbanks: demolition alone is projected to put \$15.5 million back into the economy, with \$10 million in direct impacts and \$5.5 million of indirect impacts. In March 2022, a federal spending bill included \$10 million earmarked for demolition of the building. A strategic redevelopment of the site would bring growth and activity Downtown.
- **Underutilized spaces create an opportunity for new businesses and business models.** The availability of vacant space Downtown creates opportunities for revitalization (Figure 2). However, Downtown has many older and historic buildings situated on small lots; as a result, renovations can be expensive, time intensive and logistically complex. To encourage redevelopment, FNSB should consider how to reduce barriers and collaborate with property owners to overcome challenges with redevelopment.

Strategies *What policies or other types of strategies or tools will assist residents, the FNSB, and other partners with achieving their vision and goals for the project area?*

These strategies and actions will help achieve the vision and goals for Downtown.

1. Establish Downtown as a center of economic activity in the Borough and Interior region.

- a. Emphasize growth of local, small- to medium-scale industries and increase employment opportunities by bringing businesses and workers to Downtown that play to its strengths: value-added products, manufacturing, offices, hospitality, entrepreneurship, and retail.
- b. Embrace the cultural and historic heritage of the community and diversity of residents as economic strengths.
- c. Create a cultural tourism plan to better integrate and connect visitors and residents with cultural learning and retail opportunities in the community, including Downtown.
- d. Emphasize and support the expansion of cultural and historic economic development opportunities.

Example: Explore partnership with UAF's Museum of the North to bring temporary or rotating exhibits to Downtown.

2. Support local entrepreneurs and small business creation.

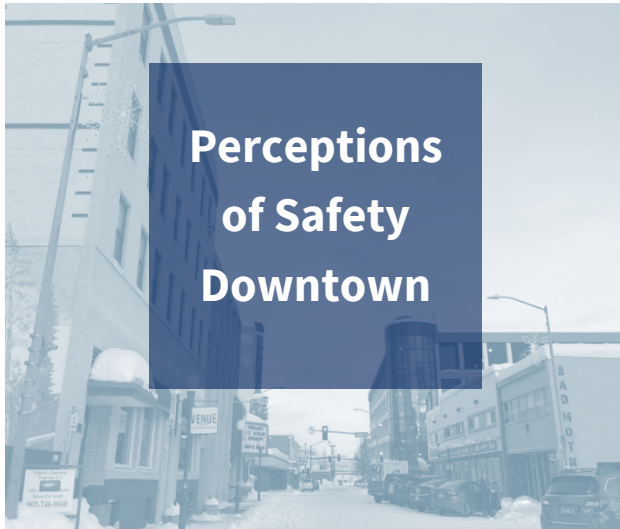
- a. Support establishment and growth of entrepreneurs and businesses who face additional barriers to starting businesses, such as young adults and People of Color.
- b. Support cooperative business spaces.
- c. Use publicly owned or under-utilized properties to host small business incubators, pop-ups, and workspaces.
- d. Work with City of Fairbanks and other agencies to reduce regulatory and other barriers to locating businesses Downtown.
- e. Create partnerships with University Alaska Fairbanks to locate Alaska Center for Innovation, Commercialization, and Entrepreneurship (Center ICE) offices and/or activities in Downtown.
- f. Create partnerships with Explore Fairbanks, Fairbanks Downtown Association, and private sector visitor industry organizations to promote locally owned and operated tourism and hospitality businesses in Downtown.

3. Increase workforce opportunities and services that support workers, such as child care and retail, available in Downtown.

- a. Create partnerships with Fort Wainwright and Eielson AFB to engage and support military households in seeking local employment, education and workforce training, and new local business creation.

- b. Conduct targeted recruitment efforts to encourage businesses to relocate or expand to Downtown.
 - c. Encourage retail businesses who provide staple goods and services to locate Downtown, such as a grocery store or retail pharmacy.
 - d. Co-locate or coordinate Downtown-based workforce development activities, programs and events such as job fairs with the State Employment Services office.
 - e. Reduce barriers for workforce across the region accessing Downtown, such as a commuter vanpool.
- 4. Support development of a convention center, performing arts center, or similar public facility that can be a focal point for economic and cultural activities Downtown.**
- 5. Reimagine and reuse the Polaris Building site as an economic anchor site in Downtown.**
- a. Use federal funding to demolish the Polaris Building.
 - b. Develop a realistic, community-driven plan for reuse of the Polaris Building site, whether as a community facility or a public-private partnership development.
- 6. Create a clear, recognizable brand identity for Downtown.**
- a. Define boundaries of the core commercial area and emphasize this identity through signage, maps, design of lighting and street furniture, and other features in the commercial core. See *Transportation Strategy 27*.
 - b. Work with the Downtown Association, Explore Fairbanks, and other partners to implement the new brand identity across marketing and visitor materials.
 - c. Engage residents and businesses in defining and branding other areas within Downtown based on unique character.

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



Perceptions of Safety Downtown

Public Alcohol and Drug Consumption in Downtown Fairbanks

- Since 2018, Emergency Service Patrol has responded to 5,000-6,000 calls per year for public intoxication. For years, demand has exceeded capacity to respond.
- ESP responds citywide, but calls are concentrated Downtown.
- In frigid temperatures, this service saves lives.

SOURCE: Emergency Service Patrol Interview, 2022

“Without people coming in and out of stores, all you see are the 50 people loitering. But if there were more people shopping and everything else, you wouldn’t notice them.”

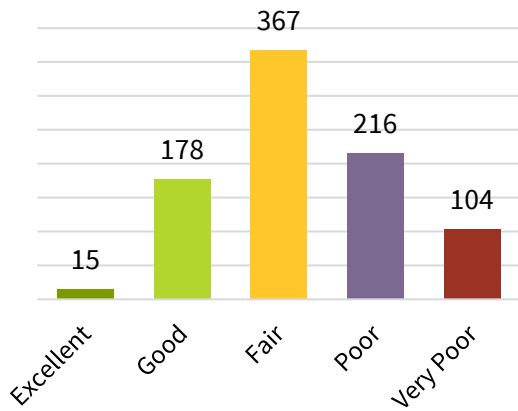
“I’d like to see more patrols and better maintenance. Cleaner streets, cleaner sidewalks, lights that work. A lot of the lights are off. Make it nice and clean, address vandalism right away.”

Stakeholder Interviews, 2022

- **Perception of safety is critical to a thriving Downtown.** People feel safe in attractive, lively, and busy spaces; vacant buildings, empty lots, and lack of activity makes area feel people unsafe, even if no real threats are present. This chapter offers strategies to better activate spaces and generate positive traffic that, when combined with more robust community policing, could help make Downtown feel safer for all.
- **Lack of activity in parts of Downtown creates a perceived lack of safety.** Perceptions of safety are a consistent deterrent for residents and visitors. Low foot traffic, physical design limitations, litter, and darkness in winter in are all environmental characteristics that make public spaces seem empty, reduce feelings of safety, and may discourage potential visitors. In a 2017 community survey, 33 percent of respondents reported feeling unsafe Downtown (Figure 1). Most participants who work Downtown said they feel safe, and few have experienced a crime.
- **Challenging behaviors in public spaces and businesses also impact perception of safety.** The frequency and visibility of public intoxication in Downtown Fairbanks was a frequent theme in project interviews and surveys. Individuals under the influence of alcohol or drugs rarely pose a safety risk to others but can be at risk of harm; these behaviors also tend to discourage visitors from visiting Downtown, can lead to conflicts and disturbances, and in some cases, exacerbate issues like littering and trespassing.

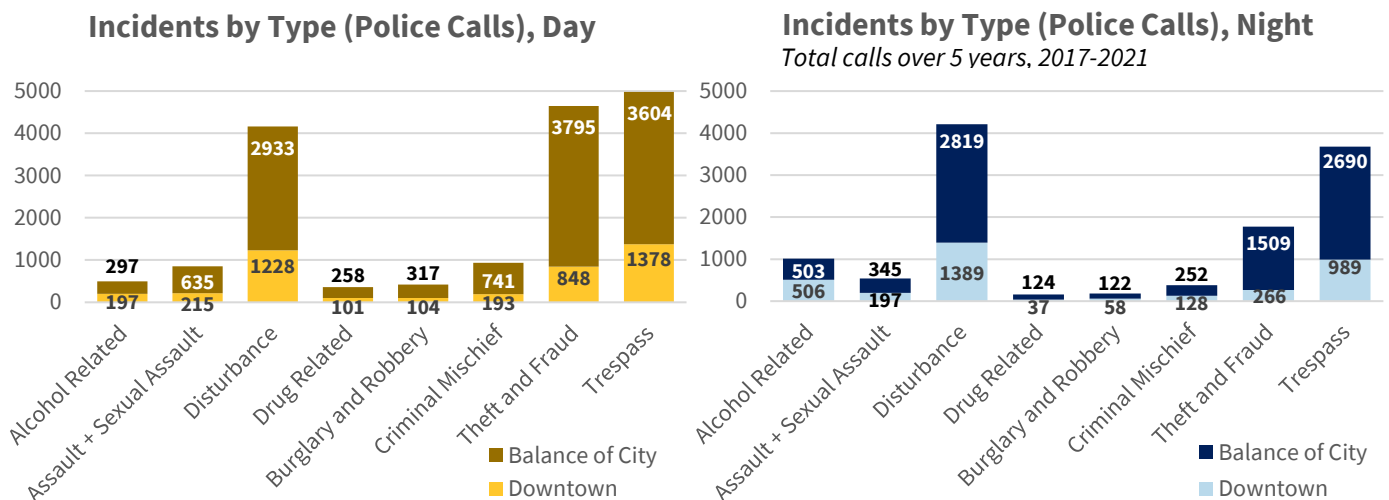


Figure 1. Responses to Survey Question: “Rate Downtown on These Attributes: Safety”



SOURCE: Community Survey, 2017

Figure 2. Downtown Fairbanks Police Calls by Category, 2017-2021



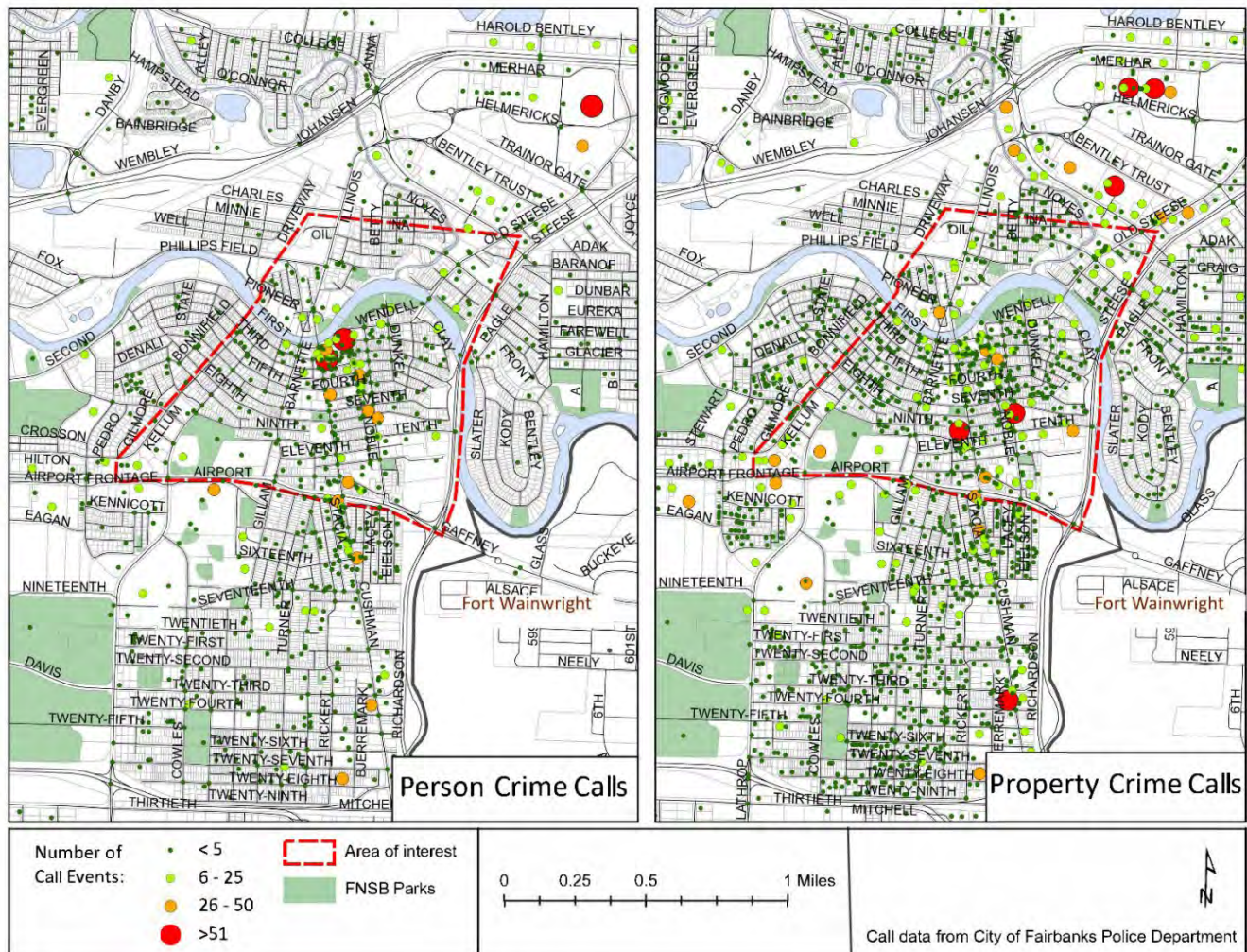
SOURCE: City of Fairbanks Police Department. The reported data is calls; incidents did not necessarily result in a charge or arrest.

- **Bars and nightlife bring people and activity but has public safety trade-offs.** Downtown is a popular destination for dining, entertainment, and nightlife, with long-established bars as well as newer venues. However, police call data illustrates other impacts: there are more calls for alcohol-related incidents and disturbances, especially during evening hours. *See following page for more discussion of police data.*
- **A majority of Downtown public safety concerns and criminal activity are related to property crimes.** City of Fairbanks police dispatch data shows moderate levels of property and violent crimes in Downtown (Figure 2); most calls are for disturbances, trespassing and theft. While most do not pose an immediate threat of harm, these incidents have a detrimental impact on businesses who must invest time and resources in reporting, clean-up, and fatigue responding to incidents.
- **Lack of indoor public spaces.** Many crimes such as trespassing happen more during the day, when people try to find a place indoors to warm up. The lack of public indoor spaces and restrooms likely contributes to the number of trespass calls into dispatch. *See also Quality of Life.*

Does Downtown Fairbanks have a crime problem? Here’s what the data show.

Understanding crime data is complicated. To analyze Downtown’s public safety climate, Fairbanks Police Department (FPD) provided five years of call data (2017-2021). After filtering out non-relevant call types (e.g., welfare checks, general inquiries), sorting calls by category,¹ and mapping incidents citywide, a complex picture emerges. Downtown, as a commercial center and home to over 1,000 residents, does have a disproportionate number of police calls: it is less than 10% of FPD’s jurisdiction in terms of geographic area, but originates about one-quarter of calls. However, the data includes calls without a specified location, which are coded to FPD headquarters Downtown. Calls do not necessarily equal crimes, and do not always result in a charge or arrest. Comparing citywide data (Figure 3), Downtown has higher rates of person-related calls, specifically for assault and alcohol. There are comparable rates of property-related calls, which are common citywide. Overall, these patterns reflect the community’s consistent responses about perceptions: safety is a concern, incidents occur, but empty spaces and lack of activity are what often make people feel unsafe.

Figure 3. Analysis: Fairbanks Police Department Calls over 5 Years, 2017-2021



¹ The two categories are “person” crimes, meaning harm to an individual, such as assault, or related to an individual’s behavior; and “property” crimes, meaning harm to property, such as trespassing or theft.



- **The physical environment influences whether people feel safe.** Both the design and maintenance of spaces matters. Overgrown bushes, poor lighting, buildings, and paths in disrepair all make people feel less safe, especially when they can't see what's around them.
- **There are specific design strategies to address safety concerns.** The Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) framework reduces crime by incorporating safety in the built environment (Figure 4). Using lighting, visibility, managing access, and other strategies, communities can reduce problem behaviors and make Downtown feel safer and more attractive.

“We have been discussing (CPTED) for 15 years. The problem is getting energy behind it to do something.”

From Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Working Group Member

Figure 4. Principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design: Key Principles

Access Control

- Design streets, sidewalks, and building entrances to clearly indicate transitions between public and private areas.

Surveillance

- Design to maximize the visibility of people, parking areas, vehicles, and site activities.

Territorial Reinforcement

- Sidewalks, landscaping, and porches help distinguish between public and private areas.

Maintenance

- Proactively address property management and maintenance. Trimming overgrown landscaping, picking up trash, fixing broken windows, and painting over graffiti signals a location is cared for, and would be inhospitable to crime.

Strategies *What policies or other types of strategies or tools will assist residents, the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB), and other partners with achieving their vision and goals for the project area?*

These strategies and actions will help achieve the vision and goals for Downtown.

1. Create a safe, welcoming environment through positive activities and consistent maintenance.

- a. Collaborate with property owners, businesses, police, private security, service providers, and other stakeholders to create a Downtown Safety Plan.
Examples: keep buildings in good repair; maintain foliage and landscaping for visibility; improve exterior lighting.
- b. Encourage a culture of mutual respect and stewardship of community spaces.
- c. Promptly address safety and nuisance issues due to blighted buildings, facilities in disrepair, and vandalism.
- d. Work with social service providers operating Downtown to effectively serve clients.
- e. Maintain consistent presence of police and VIP Downtown through foot and bicycle patrols, focused on any “hot spots” with safety concerns.

2. Incorporate safety and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles throughout Downtown.

- a. Incorporate CPTED principles into zoning, landscaping, and building code for new developments and adaptive reuse of existing sites.
Examples: Controlled access to private properties; improved lighting, in public and private spaces; align building fronts with sidewalks; avoid poor visibility around corners and “dead end” spaces.
- b. Educate property owners, businesses, police, and private security on CPTED principles and best practices and encourage proactive maintenance.
- c. Conduct CPTED review and incorporate strategies during design phase of all transportation projects.

3. Improve the public safety perception of Downtown by making it a more vibrant district.

- a. Activate public spaces throughout the day, night and at all times of year, to bring desired activities to Downtown.
- b. Implement other chapter goals, such as land use, housing, and economic development, to bring more residential units and commerce to Downtown.

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



Survey: Recreational Activities Downtown

Residents favored many different ideas:

1. Live entertainment (concerts, performing arts)
2. Restaurants and dining
3. Parks, playgrounds, and recreation programs
4. Movie theater
5. Festivals and special events
6. Nightclubs, bars, and lounges
7. Art galleries and exhibits
8. Other: family-centered activities, fitness center

SOURCE: Community Survey, 2017

Figure 1. Crowd at Golden Heart Plaza during Golden Days



- **Activities, events, and fun things to do give people reasons to spend time Downtown.** Across all methods of community outreach about Downtown, feedback was consistent: residents, businesses and visitors are most likely to go Downtown to enjoy the community. Many attend special events, such as Golden Days and the Midnight Sun Festival; local restaurant or bars are also popular. Across the Borough overall, the entertainment and recreation sector has grown even during the state recession, a four percent increase since 2016. Over 500 respondents chose “more bars, restaurants and entertainment” as what’s needed Downtown, specifically live entertainment such as concerts.
- **Festivals and special events attract people from across the region and beyond.** Large events take planning and resources, and cannot happen every day—however, key events throughout the year draw people to enjoy Downtown (Figure 1). There is also opportunity to attract new audiences: for example, events targeted to University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) students, military personnel and their families, and seniors may bring crowds to experience the area. This gives people a positive, fun experience Downtown. Students shared ideas for free or low-cost activities, such as summer movies or concerts in the park.
- **Activity creates a positive feedback loop.** Groups and activity attract more people, more customers and discourage risky and challenging behaviors in public spaces. See also *Public Safety*.



Celebrating the Cultures of Fairbanks

Figure 2. Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center, an important attraction and gathering space Downtown.



Credit: Explore Fairbanks

Figure 3. Festival of Native Arts Performance



Credit: Sherman Hogue, Explore Fairbanks

- **Downtown is a center of local culture.** Golden Heart Plaza and other public spaces Downtown are the location for many community and cultural events year round. Historic buildings and neighborhoods, as well as attractions such as the Morris Thompson Center (Figure 2), Ice Museum, and historic buildings provide connections to the past. Other civic institutions, such as Noel Wien Library and City Hall, are also located Downtown.
- There is interest in creating more cultural facilities Downtown: community outreach during this planning process, as well as for updating the borough’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), identified Downtown as a potential site for a convention center and prioritized further connecting sites along the entire Chena Riverfront and greenbelt.
- **Recognize Indigenous culture and presence.** There are many opportunities to incorporate Alaska Native cultures into the Downtown experience: place names, design elements in branding and signage, art installations, and programming and events. Celebrating Native cultures not only builds community but is good for business: after wildlife and nature viewing, cultural activities are popular with visitors, as people seek uniquely Alaskan experiences during their time in state (Figure 3).
- **Celebrate diversity and inclusivity.** Many groups and people call Fairbanks home, contributing to the city’s local culture. Showcasing diverse cultures with design installations, programming and other strategies can enhance Downtown’s character. *See Land Use about arts and cultural districts.*

“[How would you characterize the look and feel of Downtown?] So. Much. Potential.”
Resident Survey, 2018



Parks, Trails, and Public Amenities

“Would be amazing if there was a central courtyard square downtown, more parks and greenery.”

Resident Survey, 2018



Meeting People’s Essential Needs

Environmental Health

Fairbanks continues to work toward improving air quality, protecting natural areas and wildlife, and strategies in areawide plans to create a healthy environment. Air quality continues to be a challenge Downtown year-round.

- **The Chena River is a community asset.** The riverfront Downtown offers a unique public access point and natural amenity in the urban core. In addition to linking the Riverwalk with other destinations, residents and businesses would like to see more commerce and activity oriented toward the river. *See Transportation.*
- **More indoor recreation options.** Increasing year-round recreation opportunities is a priority in the 2022 CEDS engagement process, from indoor playgrounds and gyms for residents to entertainment venues that are available year-round.
- **Public spaces are well-loved but need consistent and sustainable maintenance.** Residents share equal appreciation and concern for Downtown’s public spaces, from walking paths to parks and plazas: they want to see more of these amenities throughout the commercial core, as well as better maintenance of what exists now. Trash, graffiti, and discarded needles make public spaces undesirable to spend time in.
- **Public restrooms and basic amenities.** Restrooms are a necessity, but not easily available throughout Downtown. Businesses frequently report requests for people to use their facilities. Having more public restrooms would serve all populations who spend time Downtown.
- **Caregiving and other services are important.** Growing the human services sector increases options for workers, aging elders, and all people who benefit from caregiving services, such as child care. There are several existing services Downtown – youth shelter, food pantry, needle exchange and public benefits. These critical services help Fairbanks residents thrive and increase quality of life in the community.

Strategies *What policies or other types of strategies or tools will assist residents, the FNSB, and other partners with achieving their vision and goals for the project area?*

These strategies and actions will help achieve the vision and goals for Downtown.

1. Promote enjoyment of parks, trails, public facilities, and other amenities in Downtown.

- a. Activate existing parks and greenspaces through year-round programming and events.
- b. Promote Golden Heart Plaza as a central Downtown landmark and premier community event and activity space.
- c. Advocate for completion of all phases of the Chena Riverwalk as an important connection to and amenity in Downtown.
- d. Coordinate with the FAST Planning Project Enhancement Committee on selection, design and placement of public art and other elements incorporated into Downtown transportation projects.
- e. Incorporate park and trail destinations into wayfinding signs and maps.
- f. Develop additional indoor recreation facilities and programming Downtown.
- g. Strategically create more green spaces, such as “pocket parks” and public seating areas, in the Urban Core on parcels where redevelopment is less feasible.
- h. Work with the City Public Works Department and FNSB Parks Department to prioritize graffiti and trash removal in public spaces.

2. Celebrate and incorporate the cultures of Alaska Native peoples in the physical design, infrastructure, and facilities of Downtown.

- a. Collaborate with Interior Tribes and Native corporations to identify themes, language, and design components.
- b. Incorporate Native place names, design elements and visual features into transportation, park, and other public projects.

3. Expand entertainment and hospitality businesses in Downtown.

- a. Encourage growth of businesses that serve or attract clientele likely to frequent Downtown: university students, military personnel and families, visitors, and other key demographics.
- b. Support cottage industries and small-scale vendors, such as food trucks, street vendors, and informal businesses, to use Downtown as a “test market” and potentially scale up.
- c. Support businesses with a mix of indoor and outdoor amenities, allowing for economic and social activities throughout the year.

4. Increase festivals, special events, and other activities to draw people to Downtown throughout the year.

- a. Hold events Downtown that attract and represent the diversity of the FNSB community, such as military appreciation days, Alaska Native and other cultural events.
- b. Partner with University of Alaska Fairbanks to host community events Downtown.
- c. Focus on “year-round” events to attract residents and visitors beyond peak summer season.
- d. Support activities and events that attract a variety of audiences, such as youth, families with children of all ages, military personnel, and seniors.
- e. Encourage activities and events recognizing local cultures and history.
- f. Arrange for transit options from Downtown to other destinations to increase access to community activities during large events and festivals, such as from Golden Heart Plaza and Pioneer Park to other residential areas, North Pole, etc.

5. Promote services and resources Downtown that support human needs of residents and visitors.

- a. Encourage new child care centers or home-based care options to locate in Downtown.
- b. Support ongoing operations of human services organizations in Downtown such as food distribution centers, the needle exchange program, and other services to meet basic needs.
- c. Install or remodel public restrooms, including single-occupancy design for safety.

6. Support implementation of plans to improve human and environmental health Downtown.

- a. Support implementation of the FNSB Air Quality Comprehensive Plan.
- b. Support implementation of the FNSB Chena Riverfront Plan.
- c. Support efforts for effective urban forestry, the care and stewardship of trees and landscaping Downtown.
- d. Balance the need for safety and visibility improvements, such as better lighting in winter months, with efforts to reduce light pollution and promote aurora viewing opportunities Downtown.