



Downtown Fairbanks 2040

Public Review Draft

September 5, 2023

Deadline for comments: October 13, 2023

Visit the project website to learn more and submit your comments:

<https://downtownfbx2040.com/>

00 TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 3

Acknowledgements..... 11

Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly Ordinance..... 12

Acronyms 13

Introduction 14

Economic Development..... 26

Land Use 37

Public Safety 52

Transportation 60

Parking 75

Housing 82

Appendices forthcoming

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

Vision

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

Fairbanks values a Downtown that...



Is a vibrant year-round destination for culture and entertainment



Provides a safe, welcoming, and accessible environment



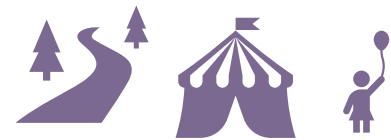
Attracts economic growth and investment



Embraces our long history and diverse cultures



Provides a variety of housing options



Celebrates 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, visitors, and families to events that showcase the best of Fairbanks throughout the year.

Plan Purpose

The Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan ...

...will serve as a community resource and guide.

...offers recommendations to protect what residents value about the area while enhancing quality of life for current and future residents.

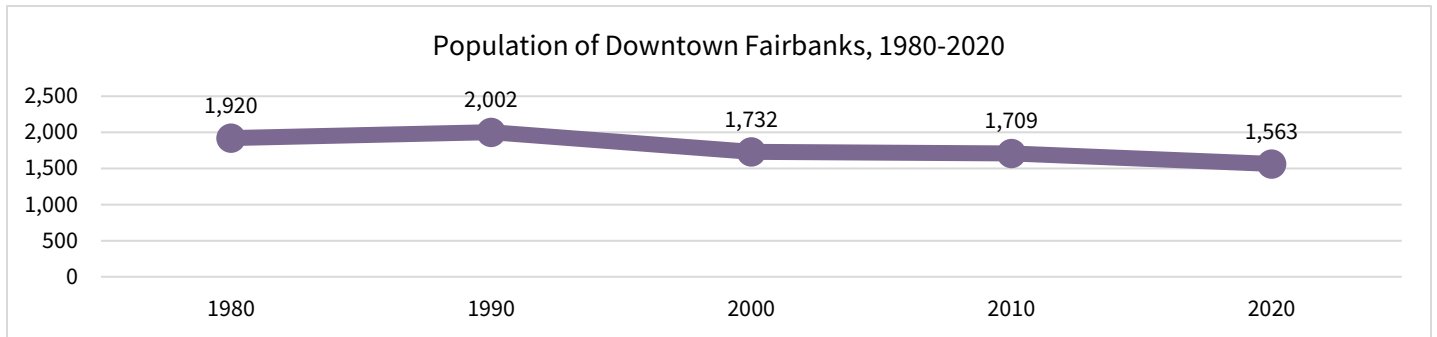
...is a community-driven tool that will provide direction to community leaders, residents, funders, and other partners.

About Downtown Fairbanks

Downtown Fairbanks is an economic, cultural, and historic center of the City, which itself is the hub of Interior Alaska and the nation’s gateway to the Arctic. It is also the seat of local and regional government.



Downtown has been losing population continuously since the 1990s.



Source: United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Census Tract 100

Focus Areas and Strategies



Economic Development

1. Establish Downtown as a center of economic activity in the FNSB and Interior region.
2. Encourage development of vacant/underutilized parcels and buildings.
3. Support local entrepreneurs and small business creation.
4. Increase the availability of downtown workforce opportunities and services that support Downtown residents and workers, such as child care and retail.
5. Reimagine the Polaris Building site as an economic anchor site in Downtown.
6. Create a clear, recognizable brand identity for Downtown.
7. Increase festivals, special events, and activities to draw people to Downtown throughout the year.



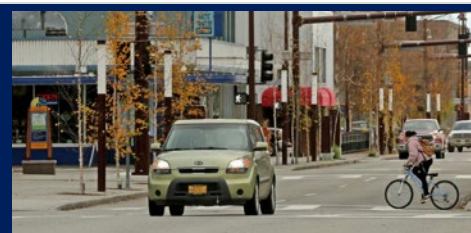
Land Use

1. Create a walkable, accessible, navigable Downtown year-round.
2. Guide location and intensity of land use through implementation of the Downtown Future Land Use Map.
3. Promote enjoyment of parks, trails, public facilities, and other amenities in Downtown.
4. Support implementation of plans to improve human and environmental health Downtown.
5. Maintain the unique character of Downtown and established neighborhoods.



Public Safety

1. Create a safe, welcoming environment through community-focused activities and consistent maintenance.
2. Incorporate safety and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles throughout Downtown.



Transportation

1. Continue building a road system that provides the needed level of mobility and enhances the built environment of Downtown Fairbanks.
2. Develop and implement an adequate year-round bicycle network throughout Downtown to incorporate cycling with other transportation options.
3. Increase walkability and pedestrian comfort in Downtown Fairbanks.
4. Integrate Transit into downtown land use planning and improve mobility.
5. Improve transportation safety and access in Downtown.
6. Define Downtown as a central transportation destination for the region, connected by multiple modes, in all transportation plans.
7. Integrate aesthetic features and make it easier for everyone to find their way within Downtown.



Parking

1. Redevelop existing underutilized surface level parking lots into active spaces.
2. Encourage new development by lessening or eliminating the requirement for new surface level parking Downtown.
3. Manage on-street parking to benefit nearby businesses.
4. Design surface level parking Downtown to increase efficiency and encourage pedestrian activity.
5. Promote existing parking.
6. Increase downtown parking garage usage.
7. Reduce demand for vehicle parking where feasible.



Housing

1. Preserve the residential character of existing neighborhoods and promote investment in existing housing stock.
2. Increase the number of people living Downtown and reduce vacancies.
3. Promote diverse new housing options that serve a variety of lifestyles.
4. Help existing residents age in place and remain living Downtown.
5. Coordinate with organizations to connect people experiencing homelessness with available housing in Downtown.

Future Land Use Map Categories

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 dwelling units per acre (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. • Encourage specialty and locally owned retail on ground floors. • Design streets in the Urban Core to emphasize “accessibility” over “mobility.” 	Chena Riverfront and 1 st Avenue to commercial corridors along Cushman and Noble Streets, south to 8 th Avenue.
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. • Small scale neighborhood-oriented commercial uses with a local market area that are compatible with downtown residential uses. • Encourage specialty and locally owned retail on ground floors. • 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. 	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.
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. 	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.

Category	Intended Land Uses	Application Area
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. 	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.
Parks and Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended to protect and provide for parks, plazas, green space, open space corridors. 	Griffin Park, Golden Heart Plaza, Wien Park, and new parks or open spaces developed over time.
River Corridor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key rivers, wetlands, and riverfront areas. Includes suggested setbacks to protect riparian habitat (actual regulations will vary by location). 	Applies to the banks of the Chena River.

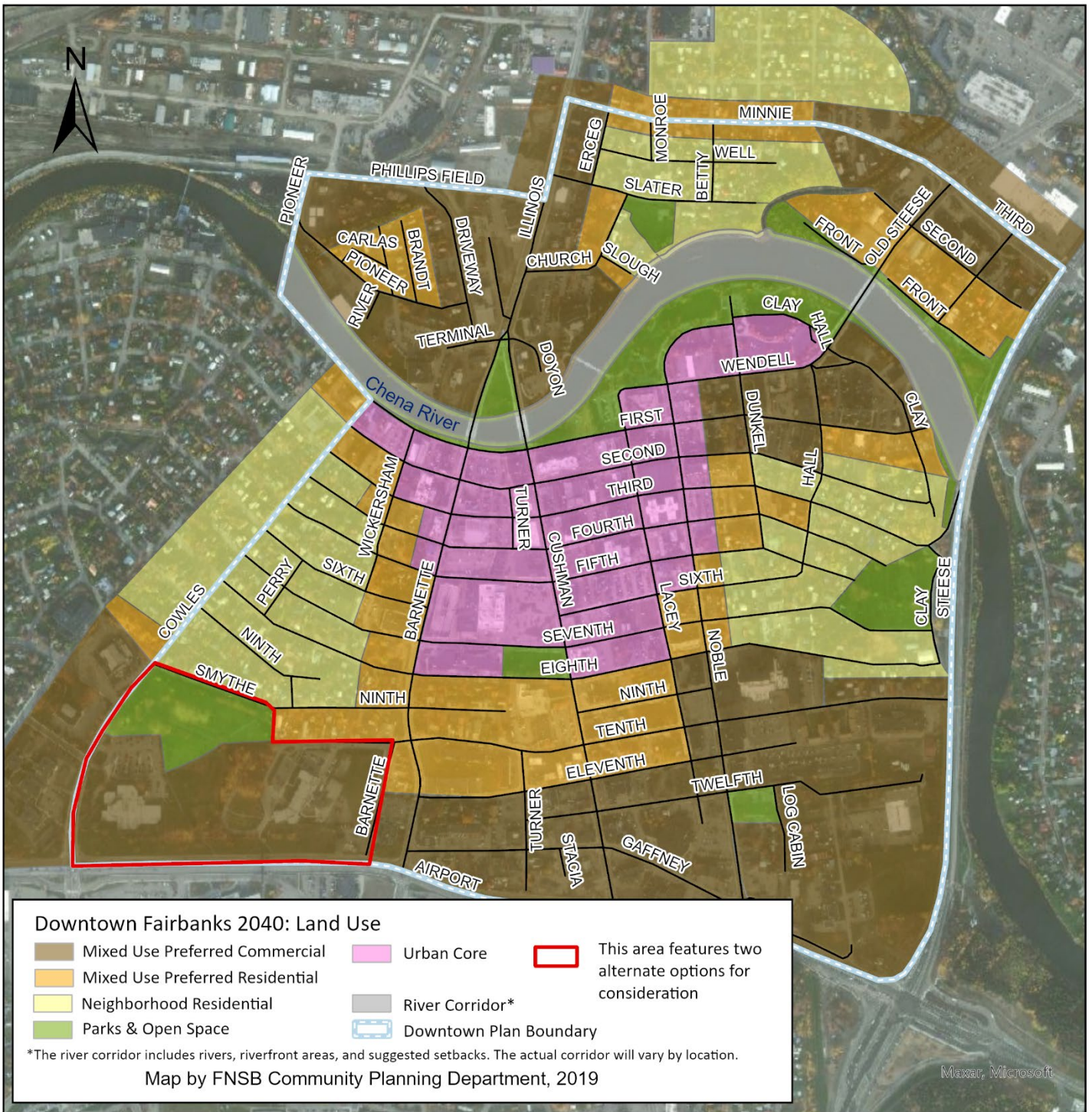
Future Land Use Map

The future land use map identifies broad future intentions for the location and intensity of land use within Downtown Fairbanks. boundaries. The map aligns with existing or desired future use and is intended to support the community’s vision.

Note regarding the future land use map: The neighborhood east of Cowles and south of Smythe has potential to grow and change in different ways. The FNSB Regional Comprehensive Plan currently designates the area of Noel Wien Library and the adjacent greenspace as “Urban,” a broad category that applies to nearly all of downtown. We have the opportunity through the Downtown Plan to use more specific land use categories, to recognize the existing greenspace and plan for the appropriate future land use in this area. Two land use scenarios are presented for the community’s consideration, with one of the two to be included in the final downtown plan.

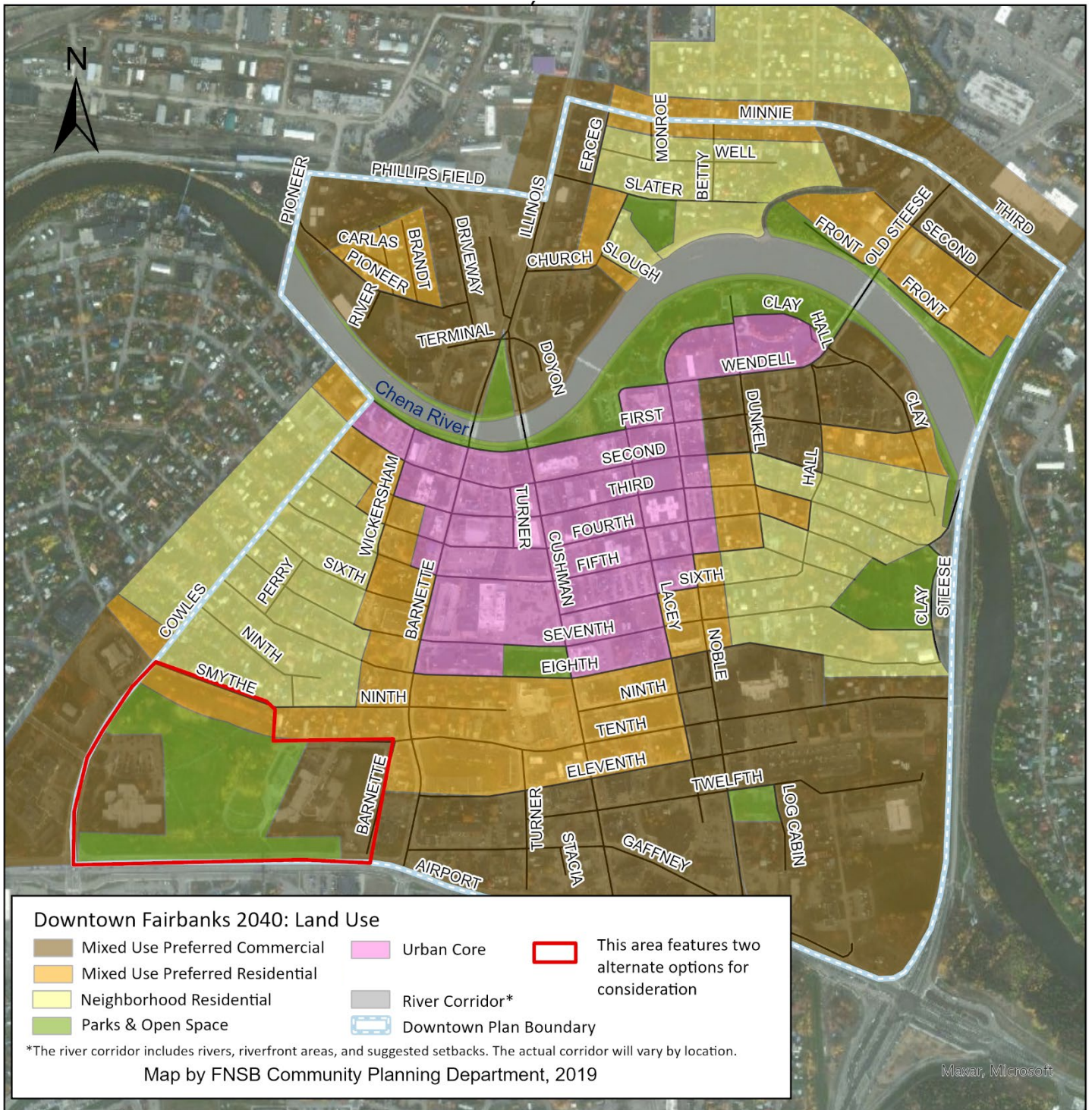
Figure 1. Downtown Fairbanks Land Use Map, Alternative 1 (primarily Mixed Use Preferred Commercial in southwest corner)

Alternative 1 designates the approximately 7.5 acres of existing open space and walking paths north of the library as Parks & Open Space and the greenspace to the east and south of the library (approx.. 11.3 acres) as Mixed Use Preferred Commercial, allowing for a wide variety of compatible residential or commercial development.



Boundary lines in the future land use map are approximate and may out of necessity be changed. It is not the intent to divide lots or specific uses by these boundary lines.

Figure 2: Downtown Fairbanks Land Use Map, Alternative 2 (Features additional Parks and Open Space designation in southwest corner)
Alternative 2 retains about half of the greenspace to the north of the library and designates approximately 4 acres adjacent to Smythe Street as Mixed Use Preferred Residential, recognizing the need for housing in the downtown area and the potential to develop this area with new, energy-efficient housing. In exchange, the greenspace east and south of the library is designated as Parks & Open Space.



Boundary lines in the future land use map are approximate and may out of necessity be changed. It is not the intent to divide lots or specific uses by these boundary lines.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all Fairbanks North Star Borough (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:

Working Group Members (alphabetical order)

- Brenda Riley, downtown resident, former director of the Fairbanks Children’s Museum
- Buki Wright, Aurora Energy, Chena Riverfront Commission
- Chris Miller, downtown business owner and resident
- David van den Verg, Downtown Association of Fairbanks
- Doug Sims, FNSB Planning Commissioner
- Jackson Fox, FAST Planning
- Jerry Cleworth, downtown business owner, City Council member, former city mayor
- Scott McCrea, Explore Fairbanks
- Sharon Hildebrand, formerly Doyon
- Sue Sprinkle, Downtown Association of Fairbanks, downtown resident
- Deb Hickok (former; Explore Fairbanks)
- Geri Simon (former; Doyon)
- Sabrina Binkley (former; school administrator)
- John Jackovich (former; Downtown business owner and resident)

FNSB Assembly (in order of seat)

David Guttenberg	Tammie Wilson	Kristan Kelly	Frank Tomaszewski (former)
Brett Rotermund	Jimi Cash	Aaron Lojewski	Matt Cooper (former)
Mindy O’Neill	Savannah Fletcher	Barbara Haney	

FNSB Planning Commission (in order of seat)

Crystal Tidwell	Kerynn Fisher	Sandra Mota
Shane Koester	Kevin McKinley	Chris Guinn
Doug Sims	Eric Muehling	Joseph Collier

Fairbanks City Council (in order of seat)

Jerry Cleworth	Crystal Tidwell	Valerie Therrien (former)
June Rogers	Lonny Marney	Aaron Gibson (former)
Sue Sprinkle	John Ringstad	Jim Clark (former)

FNSB, Office of the Mayor

Mayor Bryce Ward
 Brittany Smart, Special Assistant
 Krista Major, Executive Assistant

City of Fairbanks, Office of the Mayor

Mayor David Pruhs
 Mayor Jim Matherly (former)
 Michael Sanders, Chief of Staff
In Memoriam, Former Chief of Staff, Mike Meeks

FNSB, City of Fairbanks and Other Agency Staff

FNSB, Community Planning

Kellen Spillman, Director
 Melissa Kellner, Long Range Planner
 Don Galligan, Transportation Planner
 Laura Melotte, Administrative Assistant
 Christine Nelson, former Director

City of Fairbanks

John O’Brien, Environmental Manager
 Andrew Ackerman, Environmental Manager (former)
 Bob Pristash, City Engineer

Randi Bailey, Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
 Olivia Lunsford, Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation (FAST) Planning

Community and Partner Organizations

Downtown Association of Fairbanks
 Explore Fairbanks

Contract Support

Agnew::Beck Consulting, Inc.
 RESPEC

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FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH ASSEMBLY ORDINANCE NO. (INSERT)

(insert screenshot of the full ordinance here, once adopted)

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ACRONYMS

ACS	American Community Survey
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
CDBG	Community Development Block Grants
CEDS	Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
Center ICE	Center for Innovation, Commercialization, and Entrepreneurship (at UAF)
CIP	Capital Improvement Projects
CLG	Certified Local Government
CPTED	Crime Prevention through Environmental Design
CSP	Community Service Patrol
DU/ac	Dwelling units per acre
FAST	Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation
FNSB	Fairbanks North Star Borough
FPD	Fairbanks Police Department
LR	long range
MACS	Metropolitan Area Commuter System
MR	medium range
MTP	Metropolitan Transportation Plan
SR	short range
UAF	University of Alaska Fairbanks

Our Vision

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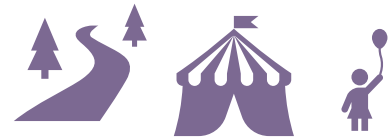
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About the Plan

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% 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 appendices include additional background information including supplemental analysis and detailed results from the community outreach effort.

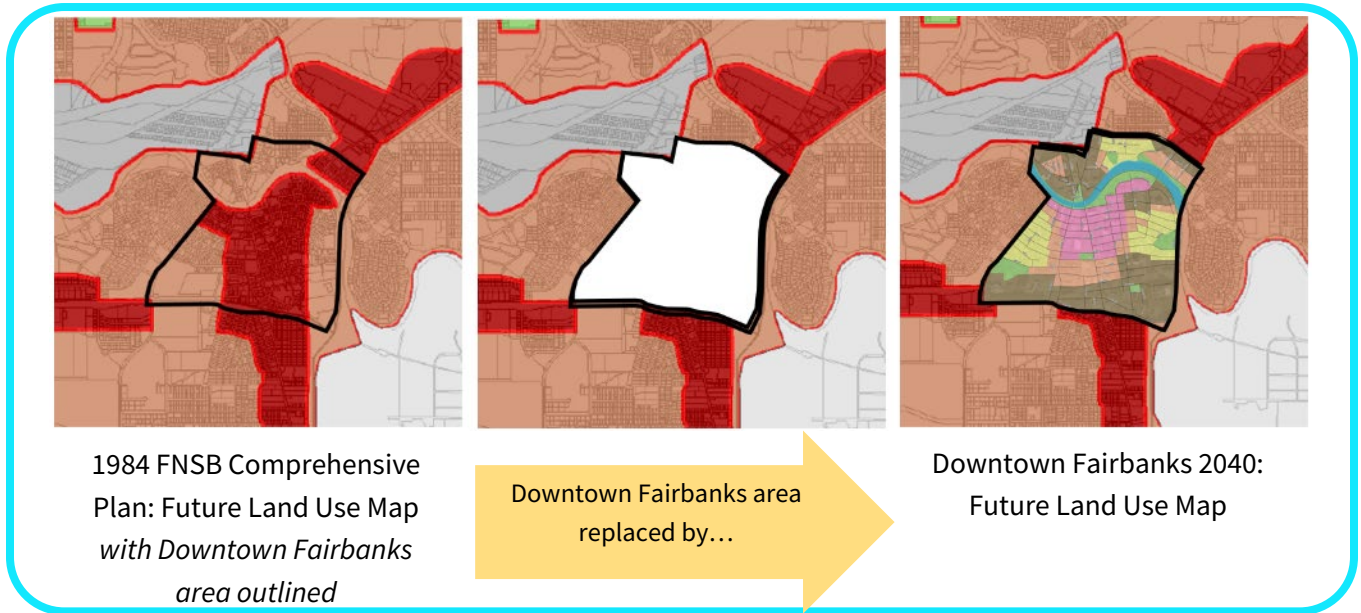
How does this Downtown Plan relate to the 2005 FNSB Regional Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map (adopted 1984, amended 1990)?

The 2005 FNSB Comprehensive Plan and accompanying 1984 future land use map provide broad direction and guidance for the entire FNSB. Recognizing the unique landscapes, community characteristics, and needs of residents in different areas of the borough, the FNSB is implementing an area versus boroughwide approach to comprehensive plan updates. The broad provisions of the Regional FNSB 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 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 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 the FNSB will be jointly responsible for policy actions that implement this plan and have distinct jurisdiction and authority for these policies. The FNSB is responsible for planning and zoning boroughwide, 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 the breakdown of responsibilities between the FNSB and the City of Fairbanks.

Fairbanks North Star Borough Responsibilities	City of Fairbanks Responsibilities
Air Quality	Building Inspections
Borough Code Enforcement	City Code Enforcement
Library	Emergency Response
Parks and Recreation	Fire
Plan Implementation	Garbage Collection
Planning	Parking Enforcement
Platting and Subdivisions	Plan Implementation
Transit	Police
Zoning	Public Works
	Right of Way Management & Permitting
	Snow Removal
	Street Maintenance

The following agencies and partners will join the FNSB and the City to work together to implement the plan.

Agencies and Other Partners	
Downtown Association of Fairbanks	Golden Heart Parking
Doyon, Ltd.	State of Alaska, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
Explore Fairbanks	Tanana Chiefs Conference
Fairbanks Economic Development Corporation	Private and public sector partners
Fairbanks Native Association	<i>The Whole Community!</i>
FAST Planning (formerly FMATS)	
Festival Fairbanks	

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 City Council, FNSB Planning Commission, Chena Riverfront Commission, Rotary, Historic Preservation Commission, Economic Development Commission, Interior Tourism Conference ❖ <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 University of Alaska Fairbanks (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 the following:

- 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 plan
- Projects carried out by the FNSB, City, and partners
- 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, City, and the other partners a broad vision and direction to work toward in the coming years. 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 focus areas; also includes the future land use map.



Full Plan

(this document)

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



Appendices

(forthcoming)

Includes background information such as data, community feedback, and related studies used to inform plan policies and maps.

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 the Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan if you are a...

Resident	Community Planner	City or FNSB Official
Use as an advocacy tool to protect or improve the things you love about the area; for example, to propose a bike lane, or to promote or discourage different types of development.	Guide decision-making on land use changes such as zoning, and permitting; identifies needed policy changes and enforcement priorities.	Official guiding document for Planning Commission, Assembly, and City Council members when making decisions, rulings, and creating policy in the project area.
Property Developer	Business Owner	Grantwriter
Identifies areas where different types of growth are encouraged/discouraged and summarizes housing, transportation, and commercial needs.	Use to advocate for needed improvements to preserve and support businesses Downtown; help guide the work of the Downtown Association of Fairbanks by identifying broadly supported priorities.	Use to demonstrate communitywide support for key priorities in the project area when applying for funding from state, federal, and other sources.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Downtown Fairbanks is an economic and cultural hub for the FNSB region. It is also home to diverse residents, including historically marginalized populations such as seniors, Persons of Color, and households with incomes below the poverty line. This plan offers recommendations to help create a downtown that is inviting and accessible to everyone. Examples of recommendations included in this plan that support marginalized groups include improving accessibility for individuals with disabilities; increasing the availability of quality and affordable housing; incorporating Indigenous place names that celebrate the Alaska Native heritage of the area; improving transportation and mobility options for households without vehicles. The plan offers recommendations for activating and creating safe spaces for everyone, while also considering the unique needs of disadvantaged groups.

Project Area

The project area covers approximately 4.2 square miles (Figure 3) in the FNSB and serves as 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 (Figure 4).

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 3: Downtown Fairbanks Project Area Boundaries

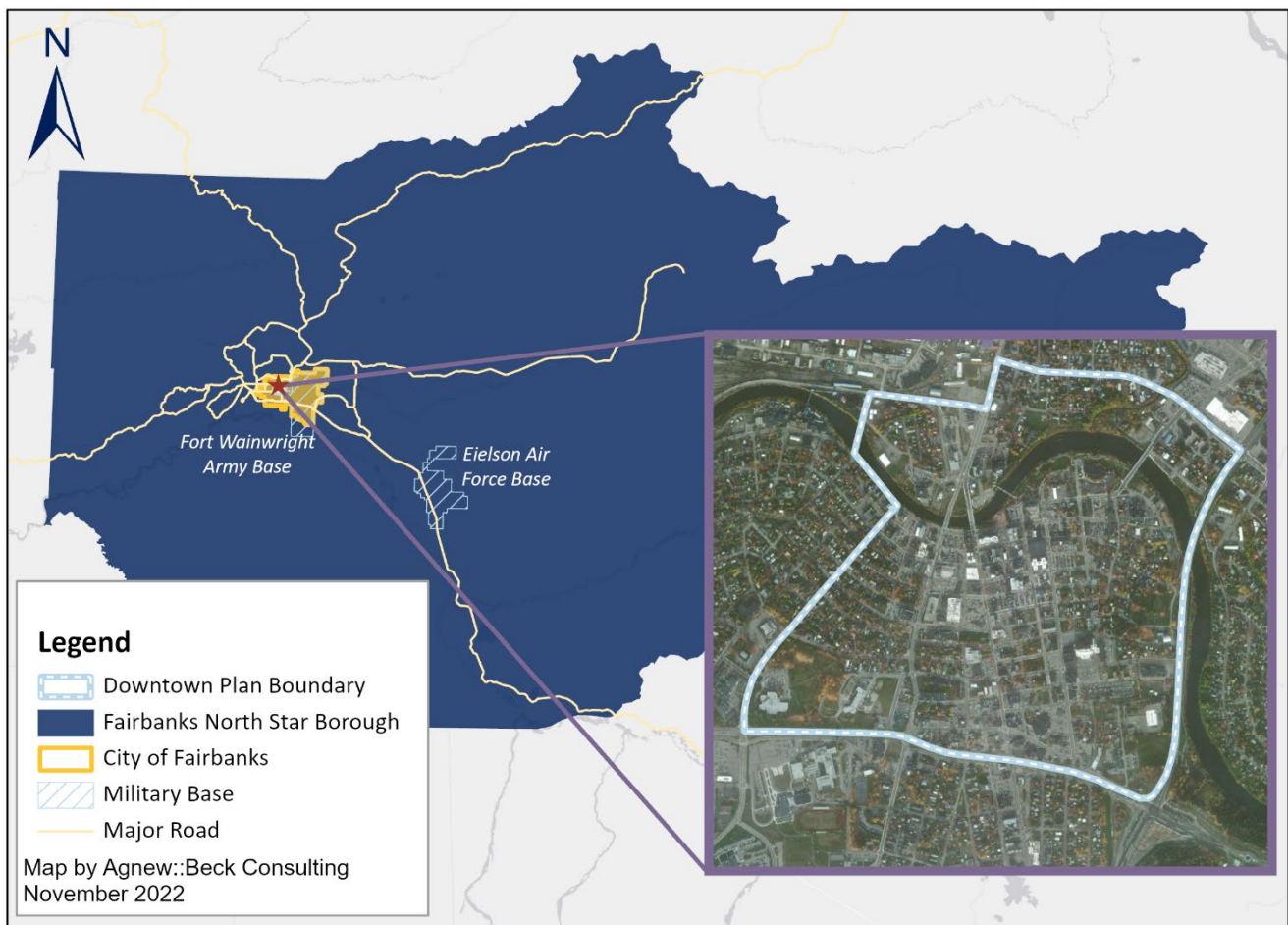
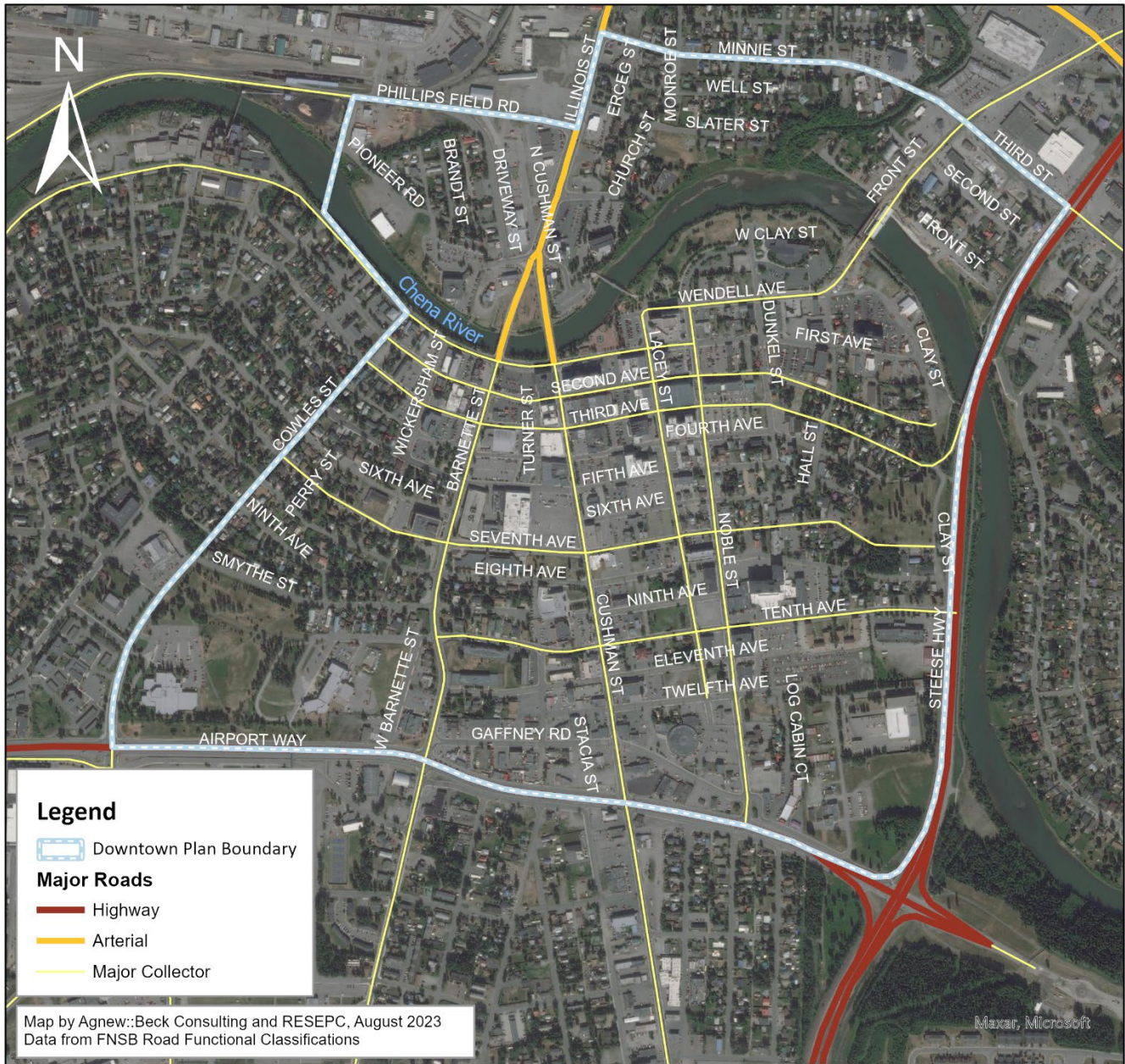


Figure 4: Detailed Downtown Fairbanks Project Map



What does Downtown Fairbanks look like?

Who Lives in Downtown Fairbanks?

Disabilities
Downtown residents are more likely to have a disability: 34% have a disability compared with 12% for the FNSB overall. Most common disabilities include cognitive (18%), independent living (12%), and ambulatory (9%).

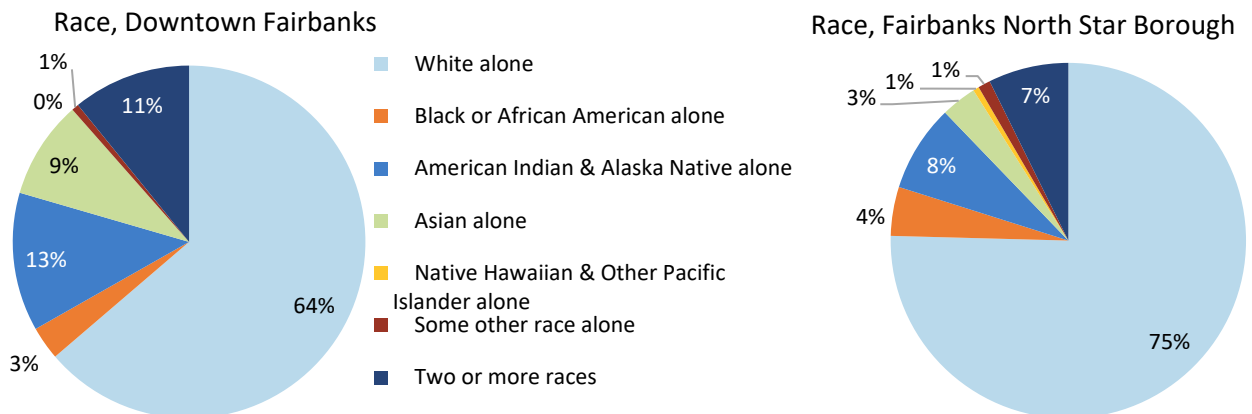
Elders Over **40%** of households include individuals age 60+ years, a large share of the FNSB’s senior population. **3 out of 4** live alone.

Renters Over **70%** of downtown households are renters 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 **40%** of households Downtown don’t have access to a vehicle, compared with only 5% of households in the 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.

Figure 5: Race, Downtown Fairbanks and Fairbanks North Star Borough Overall



SOURCE: United States Census Bureau, 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates. Downtown 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. Since analyzing this information, 2016-2020 data has been released, although it does not show major shifts from the trends cited above.

How has Downtown Fairbanks Changed Over the Decades?

Downtown has been losing population continuously since the 1990s (Figure 6). Total number of households and housing units have also decreased over the past ten years.

Figure 6: Population and Household Trends in Downtown Fairbanks (Census Tract 100)

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Population	1,920	2,002	1,732	1,709	1,563
Households	n/a	n/a	923	1019	900
Housing Units	n/a	1,243	1,116	1,210	1,132

Source: United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census

How does Downtown Fairbanks Compare to Similar Cities?

Figure 7: Comparison of Downtown Fairbanks with Similar Cities

	Population	Area (sq. mi.)	Average Commute (minutes)	Percent Below Poverty Line	Density
Fairbanks, Tract 1	1,078	0.6	13.9	10.7%	2.81 people/acre
Fairbanks North Star Borough	99,072	7,329.6	18.6	5.9%	.002 people/acre
Anchorage, Tract 11	895	0.5	13.5	19.5%	2.80 people/acre
Boise, Tract 1	3,695	1.6	14.2	26.9%	3.60 people/acre
Salt Lake City, Tract 1025	3,714	0.3	17.8	24.3%	19.34 people/acre

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

Downtown is Home to Many Businesses and Organizations

<p>Commerce and Trade Associations</p> <p>Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce Downtown Association of Fairbanks (66 members) Explore Fairbanks</p>	<p>Tribal Organizations</p> <p>Denakkanaaga Doyon, Limited Fairbanks Native Association Tanana Chiefs Conference</p>
<p>Cultural Institutions</p> <p>Fairbanks Ice Museum Fairbanks Children's Museum Fairbanks Community Museum Morris Thompson Cultural Center Noel Wien Library Old Federal Building</p>	<p>Civic Institutions</p> <p>Fairbanks City Hall Fairbanks Fire Department 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</p>

What did we hear from the community?

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 Highlights

- 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

Figure 8. Group discussion at community workshop, September 2017



surveys, and visitor surveys through Explore Fairbanks.

- 266 comments on an interactive map-based survey.
- Over 30 meetings and work sessions with the Downtown Working Group members.
- Work sessions with FNSB Assembly, FNSB Planning Commission, and the 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.

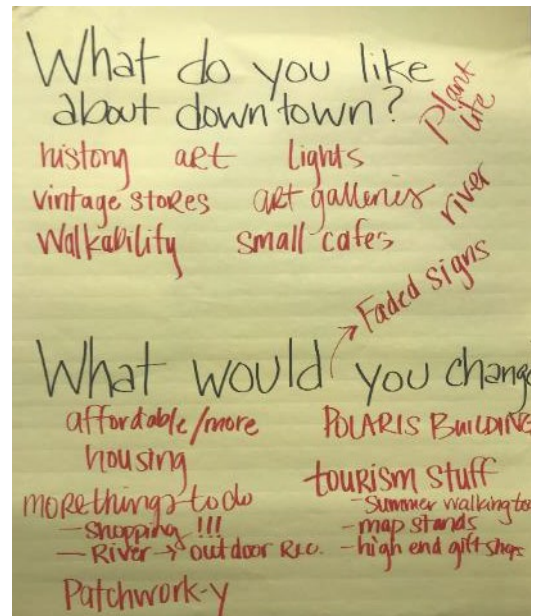
Figure 9. Outreach Board, Noel Wien Library, 2017



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.

Figure 10. High school student workshop, May 2018



Stakeholders want to see Downtown succeed. The overall goals and sets of strategies in this plan are a roadmap to achieve the vision of a prosperous, welcoming, and safe place Downtown for everyone.

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, a 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>Comaraderie: 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 perceive 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>Agging Buildings: Many buildings need significant repairs and upgrades. Construction costs and building codes 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 to remove this blighted property and create a site ripe for a future redevelopment.</p>	<p>Shared Maintenance Responsibility: The Downtown Association of Fairbanks 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 of Fairbanks, businesses, and property owners are invested into creating a thriving Downtown, through this plan.</p>

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



Heart of Fairbanks

“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 local and regional government, and has the highest density of historical buildings. It’s also the cultural center of the city. As a key destination for visitors, Downtown also hosts a variety of lodging options.
- The Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) guides economic development in the region.** The FNSB maintains a CEDS, with recommendations for sustaining and growing the regional economy. The CEDS is relevant to Downtown, with 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 recommendations such as revitalizing the bike share program, redeveloping deteriorated properties, and supporting small businesses and future entrepreneurs to own and grow businesses downtown.¹

Fairbanks is a Winter City: The northern climate, easy access to outdoor recreation, and desirable attractions such as aurora viewing create 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.

¹ Learn more about the FNSB CEDS at <https://fnsbceds.com/>



Figure 11: Summer event in Griffin Park

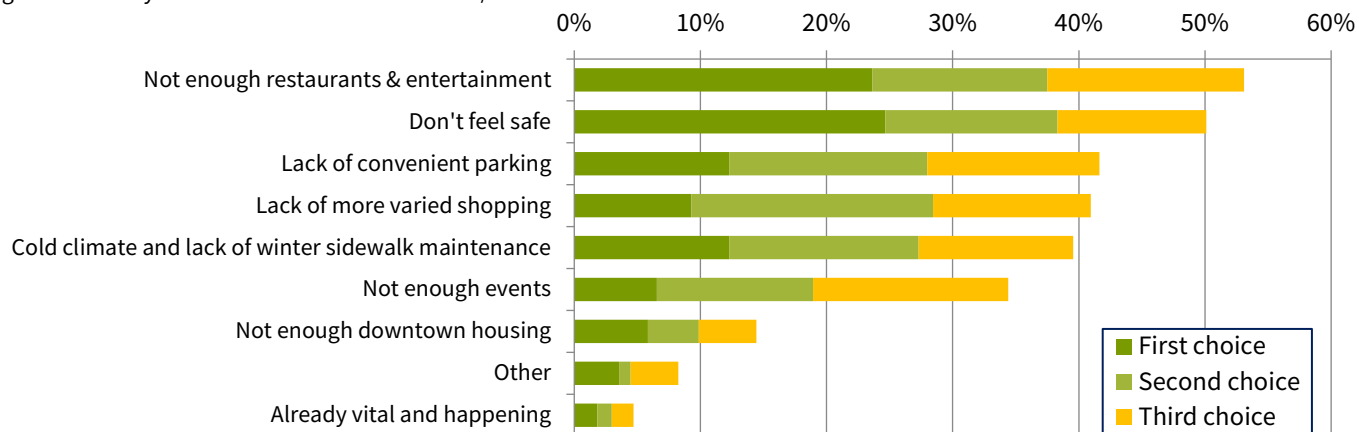


“We’re not Seattle, people are not accustomed to using parking garages. In the winter, folks would rather drive 30 minutes in a warm car to a place where they can park and walk right in. From October to April, if people can’t find parking right away, they go somewhere else.”

Downtown Business Owner Interview, 2021

- **Downtown Fairbanks is a destination.** In addition to hosting workers and visitors, Downtown is home to residents that shop, dine, and recreate in the area. Downtown is also a destination for special events (Figure 11). Other residents shared they do not regularly go Downtown; Figure 12 identifies barriers to a 24/7 Downtown, based on a 2017 survey.
- **Coordinated marketing would help promote Downtown.** Multiple organizations market Downtown; there is room for better alignment of promotion efforts and unified branding.
- **Downtown needs improved amenities.** Restrooms are not readily available Downtown. Businesses report frequent requests for people to use their facilities. More public restrooms would serve all populations Downtown.
- **Everyone benefits from access to essential services.** Increasing the availability of services like restrooms, parking, child care and caregiving makes easier for workers, aging residents, and families to live and work downtown.

Figure 12. Survey Results: Roadblocks to a vital 24/7 Downtown



SOURCE: Resident Survey, 2017



Supporting 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

- **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 FNSB better engage and collaborate with businesses in planning and decision making around navigation, wayfinding, zoning, permitting, policing changes, and construction plans. This could include expanded engagement with the Downtown Association of Fairbanks.
- **Downtown could benefit from additional businesses and tenants.** By attracting new tenants, redeveloping deteriorated properties, and filling vacant spaces, the area could 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.
- **Activities and events give people reasons to spend time Downtown.** How can the community encourage more people to visit, and give downtown workers 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 keep visitors longer, including evenings and weekends. Across the FNSB overall, the entertainment and recreation labor sector has seen a 4% increase since 2016.
- **Downtown needs more indoor recreation options.** Increasing year-round recreation opportunities is a regional priority in the 2022-2027 CEDS, including completing the North Star Community Recreation Center.

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 13: Crowd at Golden Heart Plaza during Golden Days



During Downtown planning efforts, residents expressed a desire for new indoor recreation options Downtown, including indoor playgrounds and gyms for residents, and entertainment venues that are available year-round.

- **Festivals and special events attract people from across the region and beyond.** Key events draw people to enjoy Downtown (Figure 13). There is also opportunity to attract new audiences: for example, events targeted to UAF students, or military personnel and their families. Students shared ideas for free or low-cost activities, such as summer movies or concerts in the park. The nonprofit Festival Fairbanks helps facilitate various events downtown, including celebrations of historic anniversaries and hosting activities in the Golden Heart Plaza.
- **There is interest in creating more cultural facilities Downtown.** Community outreach during this planning process, as well as for updating the FNSB CEDS, identified Downtown as a potential site for a convention center and prioritized further connecting sites along the entire Chena Riverfront and greenbelt.

Figure 14: Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center



Credit: Explore Fairbanks

Infill and Redevelopment Opportunities

The downtown property 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

- **Downtown is a center of local culture.** Golden Heart Plaza and other public spaces host many community events. Historic buildings and neighborhoods, as well as attractions such as the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center (Figure 14) provide connections to the past. Many civic institutions such as Noel Wien Library and City Hall are located Downtown, along with offices for Tribal organizations like Tanana Chiefs Conference and Doyon, Limited.
- **Downtown should better recognize Indigenous culture and presence.** There are many opportunities to incorporate Alaska Native cultures into the Downtown experience: place names, design elements in signage, art installations, and programming.
- **Downtown Fairbanks has many vacant properties.** These buildings create safety hazards and make the area less attractive to visit. These properties are a great opportunity for redevelopment.
- **Removing the Polaris Building will create a redevelopment opportunity.** Multiple attempts to remodel the property have failed, and the site is now one of the most common locations Downtown for police response calls. 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. The annex has already been demolished, with the rest of the building contracted to be

Figure 15. Many vacant buildings need repairs or upgrades.



demolished by November 2024. A strategic redevelopment of the site would bring growth and activity Downtown.

- **Underused spaces create an opportunity for new businesses and business models.** The availability of vacant space Downtown creates opportunities for revitalization (Figure 15). 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, the FNSB should consider how to reduce barriers and collaborate with property owners to overcome challenges with redevelopment.

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.

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

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

- a. Attract businesses to Downtown: value-added products, manufacturing, offices, hospitality, entrepreneurship, and retail.

Example projects:

- Conduct targeted recruitment efforts to encourage businesses to relocate or expand to Downtown.
- Promote locally owned and operated tourism and hospitality businesses in Downtown.
- 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.

See other ideas in the callout box at the end of this chapter.

- b. Expand the number of culturally and historically relevant activities Downtown that celebrate the cultural and historic heritage and diversity of FNSB residents.

Example projects:

- Bring temporary or rotating exhibits to Downtown.
- Incorporate Native place names, design elements, and visual features into public projects.
- Create a cultural tourism plan to better integrate and connect visitors and residents with cultural learning and retail opportunities in the community, including Downtown.

2. Encourage development of vacant/underutilized parcels and buildings.

- a. Assess vacant commercial land.
- b. Update and maintain map of available parcels for sale in the Development Opportunities in Downtown Fairbanks property database² and identify potential opportunity sites for redevelopment.
- c. Create a financial feasibility model for potential developments to understand which types of projects are feasible, and which have financing gaps.

²Development Opportunities in Downtown Fairbanks. Maintained by the Downtown Association of Fairbanks. Available at <https://fastplanning.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/media/index.html?appid=e9048bd03d0d4c9b841e1b2cf01c8abb>

- d. Create development incentives for new construction and adaptive reuse of vacant residential, vacant commercial, and vacant office space.

Example projects:

- Leverage Downtown Fairbanks' designation as an Opportunity Zone and Military Facility Zone to spur private investment (see callout at end of this chapter for details).
- Incentivize residential property maintenance and improvements.
- Increase awareness of incentives for owner-occupied residences.

See the Parking chapter for related recommendations to redevelop underutilized parking lots.

See related recommendations regarding vacant and underutilized parcels in the Land Use chapter.

3. 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. Improve City services to encourage businesses to locate Downtown, such as improved snow removal and implementation of parking improvements. *See the Parking chapter for related recommendations on improving parking access, signage, and education. See the Land Use chapter for related recommendations regarding snow removal.*
- c. Establish cooperative business spaces, such as small business startup spaces, pop-ups, and workspaces.

4. Increase the availability of downtown workforce opportunities and services that support Downtown residents and workers, such as child care and retail.

- a. Engage and support military households in seeking local employment, workforce training, and local business creation Downtown.
- b. Encourage retail businesses who provide staple goods and services to locate Downtown, such as a grocery store or retail pharmacy. Conduct a feasibility study on the viability of a grocery store and implement recommendations to recruit a store. *A grocery store could spur new development and infill; see related recommendations in the Housing chapter.*
- c. Co-locate or coordinate downtown-based workforce development activities, programs, and events such as job fairs with the State Employment Services office.
- d. Make Downtown more accessible to the workforce by reducing barriers and providing solutions such as a commuter vanpool and improved transit service. *See related transit recommendations in the Transportation chapter.*
- e. Recruit and/or incentivize new child care centers or home-based care options to locate in Downtown.
- f. Install or remodel public restrooms, including single-occupancy design for safety.

5. Reimagine the Polaris Building site as an economic anchor site in Downtown.

- a. 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. *See related recommendations regarding vacant and underutilized parcels in the Land Use chapter.*

6. Create a clear, recognizable brand identity for Downtown.

- a. Emphasize the boundaries of the core commercial area through signage, maps, design of lighting and street furniture, and other features in the commercial core. *See related wayfinding recommendations in the Transportation chapter and historic and recreation wayfinding recommendations in the Land Use chapter.*
- b. Celebrate and incorporate the cultures of Alaska Native peoples in the physical design, place names, art installations, infrastructure, and facilities of Downtown.

Example project:

- Collaborate with Interior Tribes and Native corporations to identify themes, language, and design components.

- c. Implement the new brand identity across marketing and visitor materials.

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

- a. Develop a convention center or similar public facility that can be a focal point for economic and cultural activities Downtown, including facilities to host UAF research gatherings and hosting International events focused on Arctic topics.
- b. Hold events Downtown that attract and represent the diversity and history of the FNSB community, such as military appreciation days, UAF-sponsored activities, events celebrating Alaska Native heritage, and other cultural activities.
- c. Establish additional year-round activities and events that attract a variety of audiences, such as youth, families with children of all ages, military personnel, and seniors beyond the peak summer season.
- d. 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. *See related recommendations regarding transit improvements in the Transportation chapter.*

Potential Future Redevelopment Tools



Tax exemptions and property tax relief. The FNSB passed a Multi-Family Housing tax exemption in 2022 whereby multi-unit housing developments can receive a time-limited tax exemption from property taxes for new housing units, with the length of the exemption increasing as units increase.



Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs). CDFIs can be used to provide loan products to support construction, rehabilitation, and other activities that promote economic growth and meet community needs such as quality, affordable housing. Fairbanks Neighborhood Housing Services historically maintained a CDFI loan fund and has indicated plans to reactivate the CDFI.



Public purpose designation. The FNSB could identify a list of foreclosed properties and their locations, refining the list to those in especially desirable redevelopment locations. The Assembly could designate one or more of these properties with a public purpose designation, taking steps to dismiss past taxes due and investing funds in cleanup. The FNSB could then put the property(ies) out for a competitive bid with proposed designation for a specified purpose such as housing or a mixed-use development.



Incentives for cleaning up properties. Downtown partners could implement creative clean up incentives such as establishing community cleanup days in designated areas with free dump access, dumpsters, and assistance with removal of derelict vehicles on a rotating schedule in priority locations. This could also include waiving property taxes for deteriorated properties that are actively being improved through a tax abatement strategy.



Opportunity Zone (OZ). A census tract within Downtown Fairbanks was established as one of 25 Opportunity Zones (OZ) in Alaska in 2018. The OZ program was created by the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. In areas with the OZ federal designation, investors can take advantage of a tax credit for eligible investments made in the area.



Military Facility Zone (MFZ). The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) designated the City of Fairbanks a MFZ in October 2022. This allows investors to take advantage of AHFC's Military Facility Zone Program, which provides an additional loan financing option for building housing in the area. The goal of the program is to expand infrastructure to support military and civilian residents in areas close to military installations. The program runs through June 2024.

Examples of Business Development Incentives to Encourage Businesses to Move Downtown



Discounted utility rates. Establish a utility incentive program that offers discounted utility rates (electricity, water, sewer) for businesses that are relocating or starting up Downtown.



Discounted permit fees. Reduce or waive permitting fees for redevelopment that enables a business to relocate or establish Downtown.



Downtown Improvement District. Establish a Downtown Improvement District in the commercial core of Downtown Fairbanks to help maintain a positive environment for businesses and visitors. For example, the non-profit Anchorage Downtown Partnership manages a downtown improvement district for Anchorage. The municipality collects property taxes for properties within the district. The Anchorage Downtown Partnership oversees programs such as maintenance ambassadors, safety ambassadors, hosts community events such as a weekly live music series in summer, provides tourism information, and assists with snow removal.

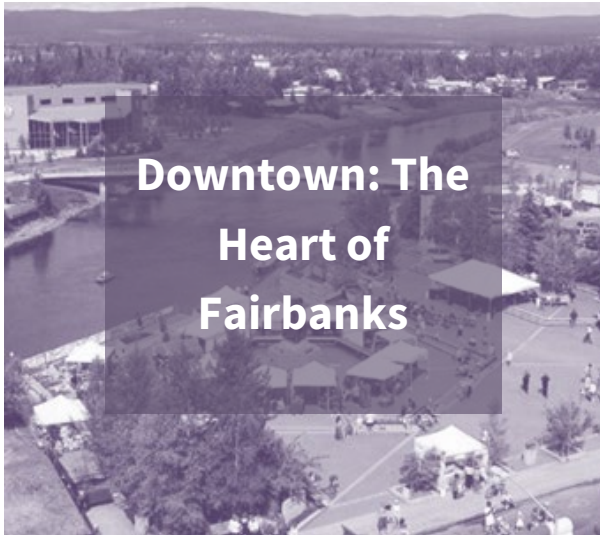


Façade and Exterior Improvement Program. Establish a program to offer financial incentives to commercial businesses located within Downtown Fairbanks that are implementing aesthetic and structural improvements such as painting, awnings, or new doors/windows. It could include some accommodations or preferences for maintaining historic character, when appropriate. This program could be operated through a Downtown Improvement District.



Rent/Lease Assistance Incentive. Establish a program to offset the cost of the initial monthly lease rate for the first few months of business operation. This could help new businesses get established Downtown. This program could be operated through a Downtown Improvement District.

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



Credit: Explore Fairbanks

Figure 16: Frank's Menswear and Audrey's Womenswear, contained inside a historic property



Figure 17: Festival of Native Arts Performance



Credit: Sherman Hogue, Explore Fairbanks

- **Downtown Fairbanks has many strong urban features to build from.** Downtown is the urban, commercial, and civic center of the City of Fairbanks, and a focal point of the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB). The history, design, and built environment of Downtown are positive assets that can be further improved to promote a thriving area:
 - Walkable streets and a grid layout.
 - Historic buildings, popular local businesses (Figure 16).
 - Parks and public spaces along Chena River.
 - Vacant lots and empty spaces primed for updates, reuse, or redevelopment.
 - District heating system that serves some facilities and sections of Downtown.
- **Some growth has happened, but more activity is 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 to the area. However, Downtown continues to struggle with filling vacant commercial spaces.
- **There is an opportunity to better celebrate the diversity of Downtown Fairbanks.** Many groups and people call Fairbanks home, contributing to the city's local culture. Showcasing diverse cultures with design installations, programming, Indigenous place names, and other strategies could further enhance Downtown's character (Figure 17).



Credit: Explore Fairbanks

Figure 18. 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. Some buildings also have housing on upper floors, known as “mixed use.”



“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

- **Downtowns thrive when they provide a pleasant, walkable, and lively experience.** Many features about Downtown that people identified as “likable,” such as buildings with retail, dining, or entertainment uses on the ground floor, are created through land use policy. The presence of wide sidewalks, opportunities for outdoor dining, and small parks all help create an environment where people want to spend time.
- **Downtown could be revitalized by prioritizing specific types of development.** Residents and the working group consistently identified the following types of desired development:
 - **Infill development**, including new uses in vacant buildings as well as converting parking lots to more productive uses (buildings).
 - **Mixed use**: properties with both residential and commercial uses, with a variety of densities in neighborhoods (Figure 18).
 - **New retail, dining, and entertainment opportunities** that reflect community and visitor desires, such as outdoor dining along the river; brew pubs and food trucks; farmers’ markets and weekend bazaars.
 - **Retail that meet basic needs** of residents, workers, and visitors, including a pharmacy, grocery store, and department store.
- **Preserving and enhancing Downtown’s historic character remains important.** As the oldest part of Fairbanks, Downtown is home to several historic neighborhoods. National Register-recognized historic sites are scattered throughout Downtown, including the Illinois Street National Historic District and twelve National Historic Places. While revitalization is needed, it should be balanced with preservation of historic properties.



Figure 19. Along the Chena Riverwalk



Credit: Alaska.org



Credit: Explore Fairbanks

- **The Chena River is a community asset.** The Chena River flows through Downtown, a natural boundary between the commercial core and neighborhoods to the north. In addition to linking the existing Chena Riverwalk shared use path with other destinations (Figure 19), residents and businesses would like to see more commerce and activity oriented toward the river.
- **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 stronger activation and better maintenance of what exists now. Trash, graffiti, and discarded needles make public spaces less desirable to spend time in.

“Would be amazing if there was a central courtyard square downtown, more parks and greenery.”
Resident Survey, 2018

Winter poses specific land use needs, from cold temperatures to snow management. Being a year-round Downtown means addressing the needs of Fairbanks as a winter city: people 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.

“Please incorporate sustainable building practices into development of new buildings and renovations of old facilities. More windows, access to light for the winter.”
Downtown Planning Workshop, 2018



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

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

Figure 20: A burned out garage along 9th Avenue



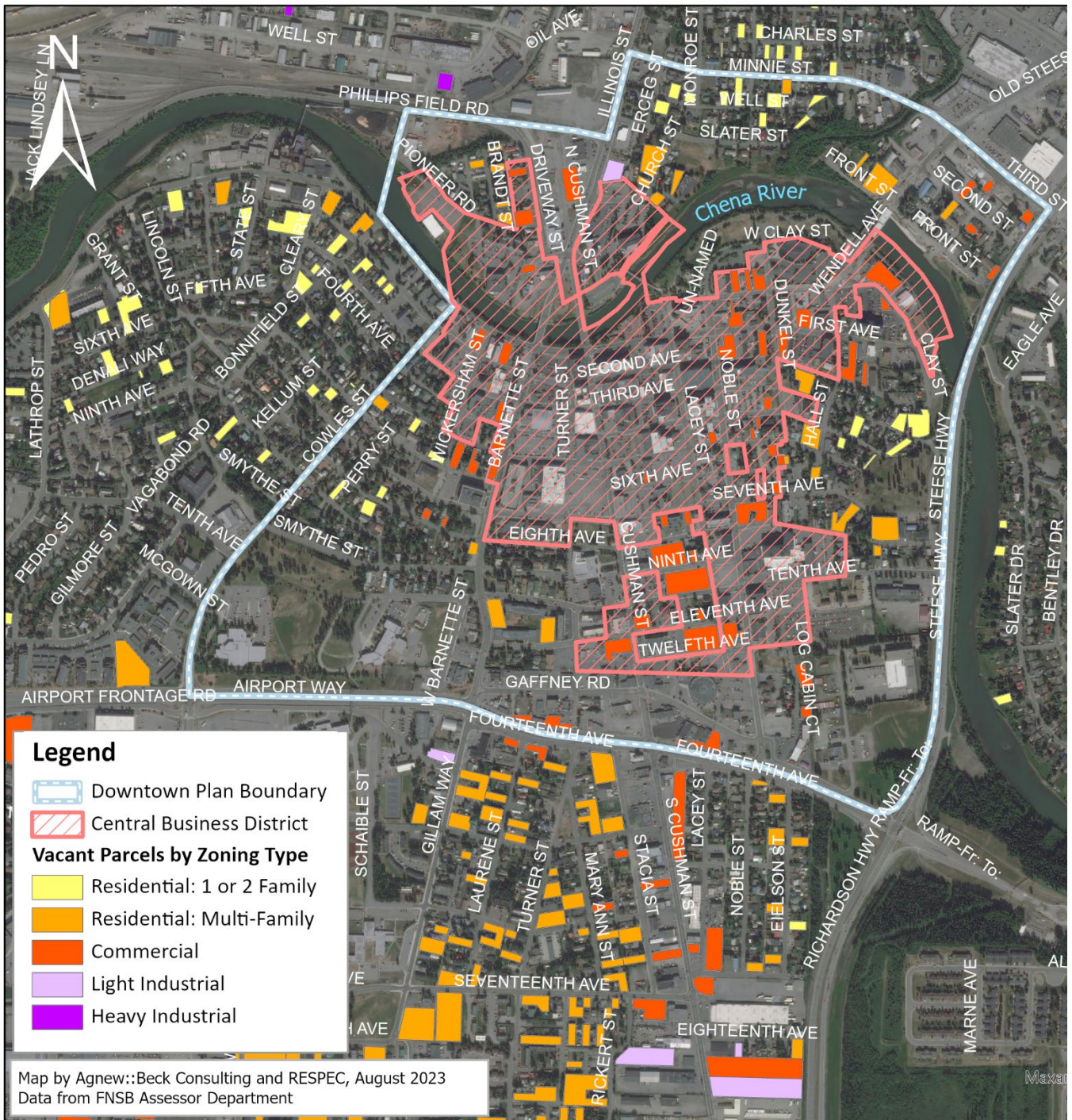
Credit: David van den Berg

- **Vacant properties can develop into bigger problems.** Vacant and deteriorating properties cause people to perceive Downtown as “run down,” and 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 (Figure 20). See Figures 21 and 22 for a map of Downtown vacant parcels by zoning type.
- **The community wants to see increased activity.** 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. 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).
- **Major gatherings bring people and business to Fairbanks.** Events such as the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) Convention help showcase the community and attract residents and visitors alike to the Downtown area.
- **Existing city and FNSB codes need to be enforced.** The need for code enforcement and addressing problem properties was a consistent theme in conversations with business owners and the Downtown Association of Fairbanks. Consistent, proactive action through existing nuisance laws is necessary.

“Downtown has undergone some 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

Figure 21: Vacant Parcels by Zoning Type, Downtown Fairbanks



Identifies parcels categorized as “vacant,” as defined by FNSB Assessor’s Department database. Parcels are color coded by the type of zoning. As seen on the map, there are vacant parcels throughout Downtown, including in areas zoned for residential and commercial use.

Figure 22: Vacant Parcels by Zoning Type, Central Business District



Building Trends Downtown

The total number of buildings has been decreasing Downtown since early 2000s. Many buildings have been redeveloped into surface level parking.

	2003	2012	2027	2020
Total Buildings	1,311	1,005	993	977

Source: FNSB Community Planning Department



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?*

For actions with potential leads identified, potential leads are included in parentheses following the action.

1. Create a walkable, accessible, navigable Downtown year-round.

- a. Update the zoning code to achieve a more walkable Downtown, especially regarding setbacks, street infrastructure, parking standards, and winter city adaptations (e.g., snow storage, protecting solar access for renewable energy). *See the Transportation chapter for other relevant winter design recommendations.*
- b. Encourage pedestrian-friendly building design, including active windows facing the sidewalks, street furniture, and other interactive spaces.
- c. Prioritize funding for sidewalk and driveway improvements.
- d. Create right-of-way design standards for increased pedestrian access and flow. *See Transportation chapter for specific width recommendations.*

Example project:

- Incorporate best practices for sidewalk design, specifically regarding widening for accessibility and removal of obstructions such as telephone poles from the sidewalks.
- e. Improve timely wintertime maintenance of downtown sidewalks.

2. Guide location and intensity of land use through implementation of the Downtown Future Land Use Map (Figure 23 and Figure 24).

- a. Reevaluate and update zoning standards to align with the downtown vision and Future Land Use Map.
- b. 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.
- c. Encourage and promote mixed-use buildings and properties where residents and visitors live, work, and play. *See the Economic Development chapter for related recommendations to encourage and grow the availability of retail and services Downtown (e.g., a grocery store), and for specific examples of redevelopment tools.*

Housing Case Study: Cook Inlet Housing Authority's Mountain View Investment

[Cook Inlet Housing Authority](#) (CIHA), the Tribally Designated Housing Entity for the Cook Inlet region, in partnership with the Mountain View Community Council and the Anchorage Community Land Trust, has invested in multiple housing redevelopment efforts in Anchorage's Mountain View community that have contributed to neighborhood revitalization.

At the turn of the millennium, the Mountain View neighborhood had substandard rental housing and was seeing commercial divestment and high rates of crime. Between 2004 and 2014, CIHA worked with local partners to remove more than 130 deteriorated structures and created 280 high quality, affordable housing units for both renters and homeowners. CIHA achieved this by blending different funding sources including its Indian Housing Block Grant funds, paired with low-income housing tax credits from the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation. The Anchorage Community Land Trust led commercial revitalization alongside CIHA's housing investments. The success of these investments can be documented via changes in the visual appeal of the neighborhood, along with tangible outcomes such as reduced resident turnover, lower vacancy rates, and improved high school graduation rates. In 2014, CIHA received the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary's Opportunity and Empowerment Award for their work in the neighborhood.

Learn more at https://www.huduser.gov/portal/casestudies/study_09082014_1.html

- d. Increase the availability, quality, and variety of housing units Downtown using land use planning tools. *See related recommendations in the Housing chapter.*

Example projects:

- Preserve homes and encourage infill in established low-density residential neighborhoods.
- Encourage and promote mid- to high-density residential development in and adjacent to commercial areas.

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

- a. Activate existing parks and greenspaces through year-round programming and events.

Example project:

- Promote Golden Heart Plaza as a central Downtown landmark and premier community event, family, and activity space.

- b. Complete all phases of the Chena Riverwalk as an important connection to and amenity in Downtown.
- c. Coordinate with the Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation (FAST) Planning Project Enhancement Committee on selection, design, and placement of public art and other elements incorporated into downtown transportation projects.
- d. Incorporate park and trail destinations into wayfinding signs and maps. *See the Economic Development chapter for branding recommendations and the Transportation chapter for wayfinding recommendations.*
- e. Develop additional indoor recreation facilities and programming Downtown.

- f. Strategically create more green spaces, such as “pocket parks,” public seating areas, edible landscaping, and pollinator gardens, in the Urban Core on parcels where redevelopment is less feasible.
- g. Prioritize graffiti and trash removal in public spaces. (Potential Lead: City Public Works Department and FNSB Parks Department)

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

- a. Create a long-term policy to prevent and manage condemned, unsafe, vacant, and abandoned buildings. *See the Economic Development chapter for related recommendations to encourage development and redevelopment of vacant/underutilized downtown parcels.*
- b. Improve and increase enforcement of existing code enforcement strategies.

Example projects:

- Enforce applicable zoning and building codes on nuisance properties that pose health and safety risks.
- Streamline the current code enforcement process to reduce the timeline for action.

- c. Implement the FNSB Air Quality Comprehensive Plan.
- d. Implement the FNSB Chena Riverfront Plan.
- e. Apply urban forestry management principles, prioritizing the care and stewardship of trees and landscaping Downtown.
- f. 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.³
- g. Create spaces to provide comfort and protection during winter months (warming shelters, wind breaks, etc.).

See Public Safety chapter for relevant public safety recommendations, including environmental design best practices. See Economic Development chapter for other recommendations including installing public restrooms.

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

- a. Incorporate recognition and interpretation of historic districts, buildings, and resources into Downtown wayfinding, signage, and branding efforts. *See the Economic Development chapter for branding recommendations and the Transportation chapter for wayfinding recommendations.*

³ Learn more about preventing light pollution and implementing responsible outdoor lighting from the International Dark Sky Association: <https://www.darksky.org/>

- b. Identify available funding and support for maintaining and restoring historic properties.

Example project:

- The FNSB is a Certified Local Government (CLG), eligible for federal and state matching grants for historic preservation activities.

- c. Identify and implement tools to help preserve historic properties.

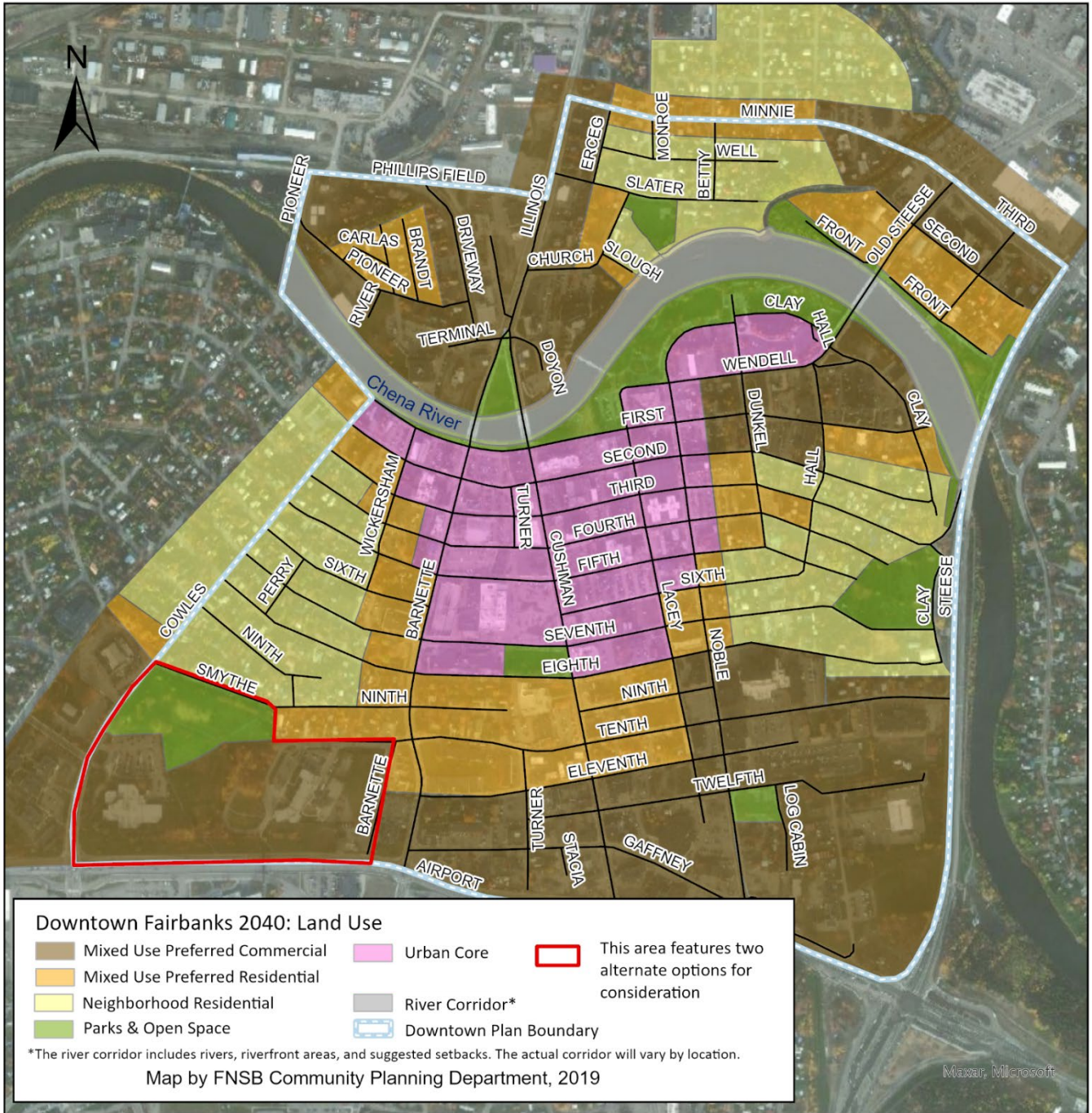
Example projects:

- 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.
- Investigate the feasibility of adopting tax incentives, code provisions, and design guidelines, which encourage maintaining the architectural character of historic buildings.

Future Land Use Map

Note regarding the future land use map: The neighborhood east of Cowles and south of Smythe has potential to grow and change in different ways. The FNSB Regional Comprehensive Plan currently designates the area of Noel Wien Library and the adjacent greenspace as “Urban,” a broad category that applies to nearly all of downtown. We have the opportunity through the Downtown Plan to use more specific land use categories, to recognize the existing greenspace and plan for the appropriate future land use in this area. Two land use scenarios are presented for the community’s consideration, with one of the two to be included in the final downtown plan.

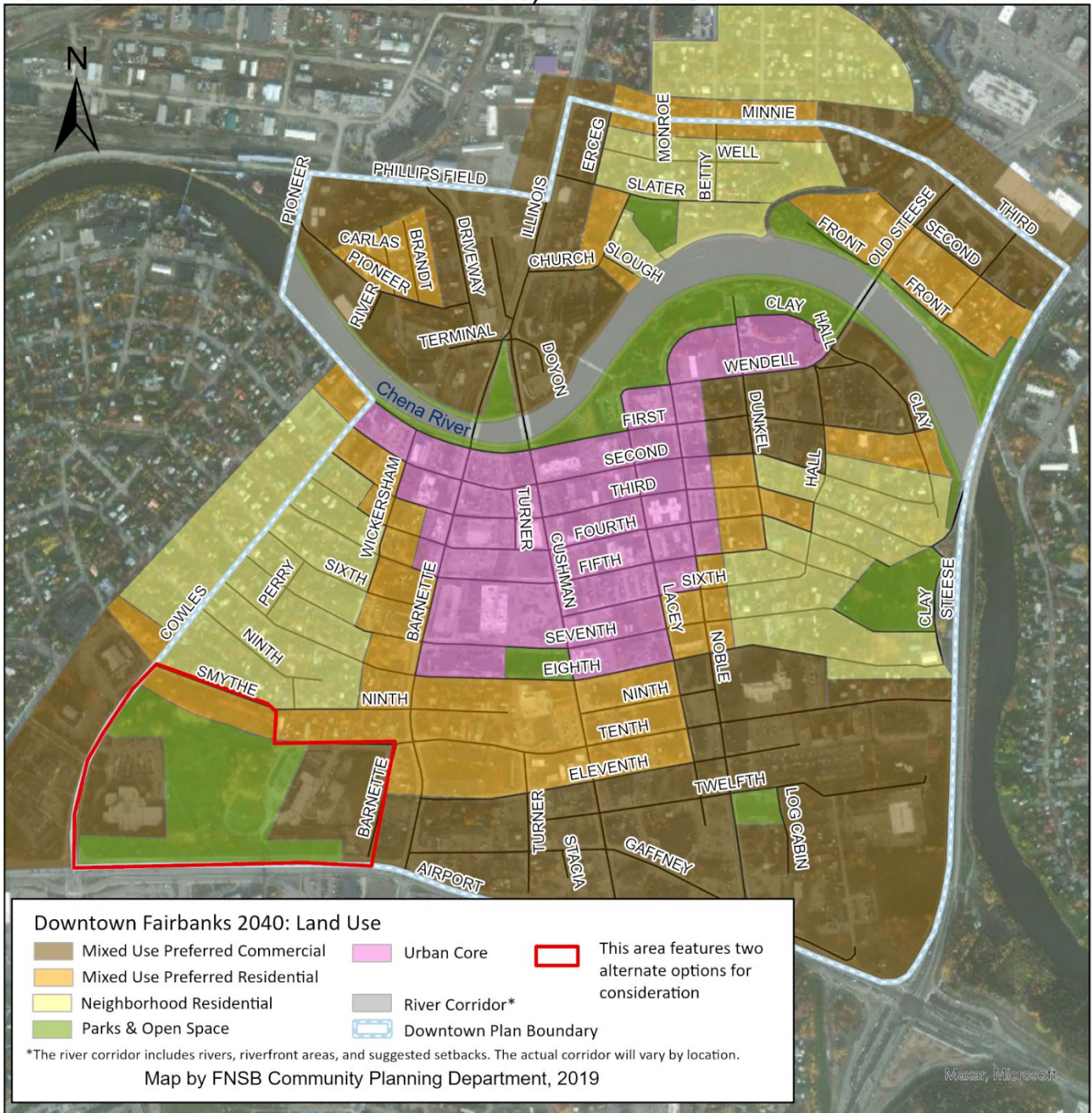
Figure 23. Downtown Fairbanks Land Use Map, Alternative 1 (primarily Mixed Use Preferred Commercial in southwest corner) *Alternative 1 designates the approximately 7.5 acres of existing open space and walking paths north of the library as Parks & Open Space and the greenspace to the east and south of the library (approx.. 11.3 acres) as Mixed Use Preferred Commercial, allowing for a wide variety of compatible residential or commercial development.*



Boundary lines in the future land use map are approximate and may out of necessity be changed. It is not the intent to divide lots or specific uses by these boundary lines.

Figure 24: Downtown Fairbanks Land Use Map, Alternative 2 (Features additional Parks and Open Space designation in southwest corner)

Alternative 2 retains about half of the greenspace to the north of the library and designates approximately 4 acres adjacent to Smythe Street as Mixed Use Preferred Residential, recognizing the need for housing in the downtown area and the potential to develop this area with new, energy-efficient housing. In exchange, the greenspace east and south of the library is designated as Parks & Open Space.





Boundary lines in the future land use map are approximate and may out of necessity be changed. It is not the intent to divide lots or specific uses by these boundary lines.

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 rezoning 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
<p>Urban Core</p> 	<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 dwelling units per acre (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. • Encourage specialty and locally owned retail on ground floors. • Design streets in the Urban Core to emphasize “accessibility” over “mobility.” 	<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>
<p>Mixed Use Preferred Residential</p> 	<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. • Small scale neighborhood-oriented commercial uses with a local market area that are compatible with downtown residential uses. • Encourage specialty and locally owned retail on ground floors. • 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
<p data-bbox="147 254 574 285">Mixed use Preferred Commercial</p> 	<ul data-bbox="602 254 1273 722" 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 data-bbox="1289 254 1529 701">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>
<p data-bbox="147 888 469 953">Downtown Neighborhood Residential</p> 	<ul data-bbox="602 888 1273 1173" 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 data-bbox="1289 888 1529 1373">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>

Land Use Category	Intended Land Uses	Application Area
<p data-bbox="147 254 423 285">Parks and Open Space</p> 	<ul data-bbox="602 254 1276 321" style="list-style-type: none"> • Intended to protect and provide for parks, plazas, green space, open space corridors. 	<p data-bbox="1292 254 1533 632">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>
<p data-bbox="147 947 326 978">River Corridor</p> 	<ul data-bbox="602 947 1260 1052" style="list-style-type: none"> • Key rivers, wetlands, and riverfront areas. Includes suggested setbacks to protect riparian habitat (actual regulations will vary by location). 	<p data-bbox="1292 947 1471 1041">Applies to land alongside the Chena River.</p>

Key Issues Guiding the Plan

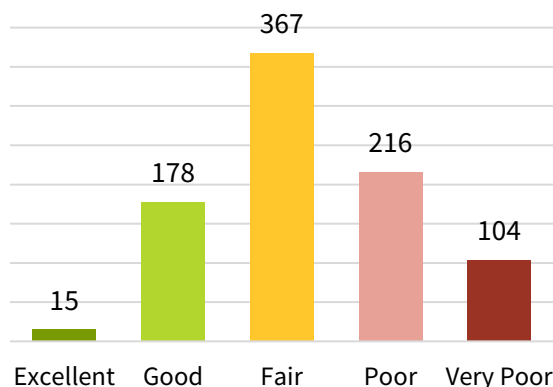


Community Service Patrol in Downtown Fairbanks

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

SOURCE: CSP Interview, 2022

Figure 25. Responses to Survey Question: “Rate Downtown on These Attributes: Safety”



SOURCE: Community Survey, 2017

- **Residents and visitors want to feel safe Downtown.** People feel safe in attractive, lively, and busy spaces; vacant buildings, empty lots, and lack of activity can make people feel unsafe, even if no real threats are present. This chapter offers strategies to better activate spaces and generate pedestrian 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.** Low foot traffic, litter, physical design limitations, and darkness can all contribute to make public spaces seem empty, reducing feelings of safety, and may discourage potential visitors. In a 2017 community survey, 33% of respondents reported feeling unsafe Downtown (Figure 25). In comparison, most participants who work Downtown said they feel safe, and few have experienced a crime.
- **Negative behaviors in public spaces impact perception of safety.** The visibility of public intoxication Downtown 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 can discourage visitors from visiting Downtown, cause disturbances, and in some cases, contribute to issues like littering or trespassing. Related, many individuals experiencing substance use issues are the same individuals experiencing homelessness and co-occurring mental health challenges. These



Crime in Downtown Fairbanks

“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

- challenges are better mitigated by increased access to housing, programs, and services, in Downtown and other areas of the borough. Today, Downtown hosts a variety of essential services such as a youth shelter, crisis response center, food pantry, and needle exchange.
- **Bars and nightlife bring people and activity but have 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 data illustrates other impacts. For example, there are more calls for alcohol-related incidents and disturbances, especially during evening hours. See *Figure 27 for more discussion of police data.*
- **Most downtown criminal activity is related to property crimes.** Police dispatch data shows moderate levels of property and violent crimes in Downtown; most calls are for disturbances, trespassing, and theft (Figure 27). 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.



Creating a Safer Space

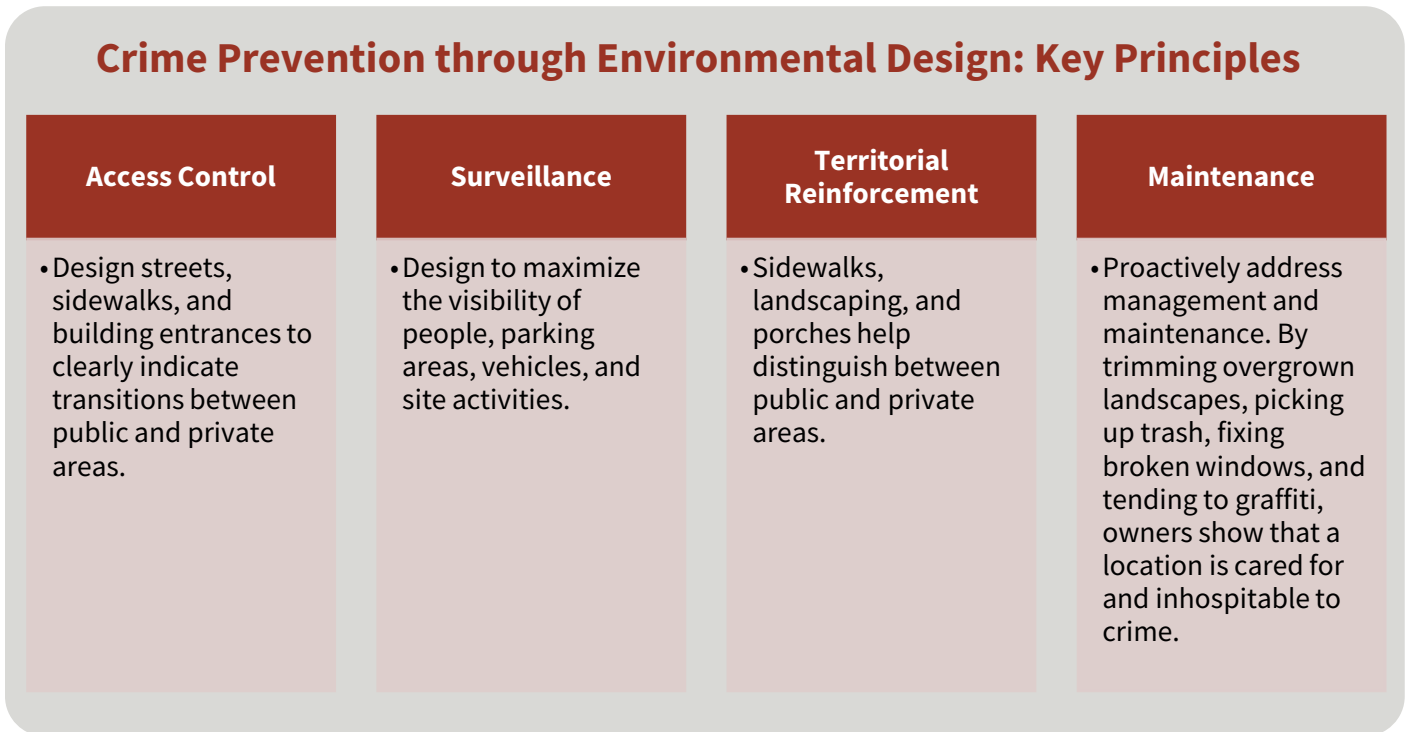
- **Downtown lacks indoor public spaces.** Many crimes such as trespassing happen more during the day, when people try to find a place indoors to warm up. The lack of public indoor spaces and restrooms likely contributes to the number of trespass calls into dispatch.

“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

- **The physical environment influences whether people feel safe.** Both the design and maintenance of spaces matters. Overgrown bushes, poor lighting, buildings, and unmaintained paths 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 26). Using lighting, visibility, managing access, and other strategies, communities can reduce problem behaviors and make Downtown feel safer and more attractive.

Figure 26. Principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)



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

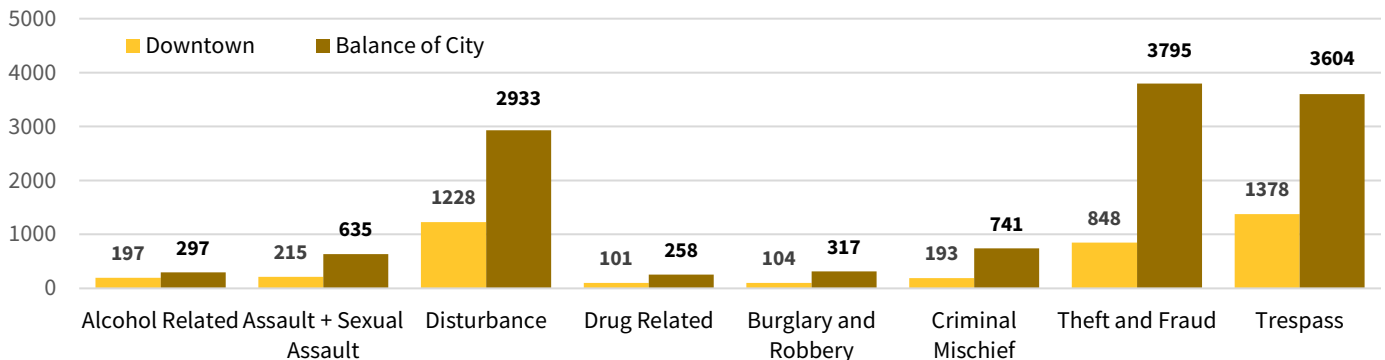
To analyze Downtown’s public safety climate, Fairbanks Police Department (FPD) provided five years of call data (2017-2021). After filtering out non-relevant call types (e.g., welfare checks, general inquiries), sorting calls by category,⁴ and mapping incidents citywide, a complex picture emerges.

The two most common incidents Downtown are Disturbances and Trespass, followed by Theft (Figure 27). Trespass is more likely to happen during the day, Disturbance is more common at night.

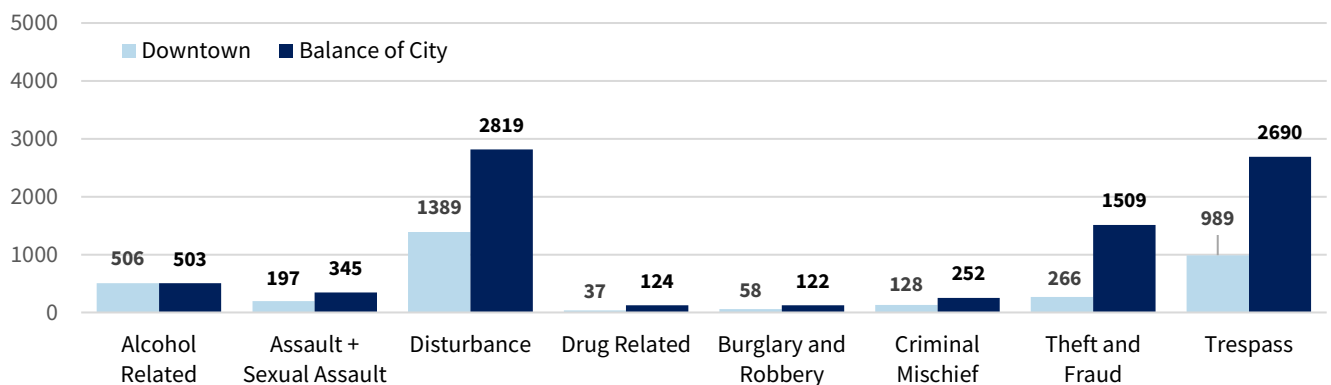
Downtown, as a commercial center and home to over 1,000 residents, has a disproportionate number of police calls: the geographic area of Downtown makes up less than 10% of the FPD's jurisdiction, but 27% of the calls they receive originate there.⁵ However, the data includes calls without a specified 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 28 and Figure 29), 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.

Figure 27. Downtown Fairbanks Police Calls by Category, Total Calls over Five Years (2017-2021)

Incidents by Type (Police Calls), Day; 2017-2021



Incidents by Type (Police Calls), Night, 2017-2021

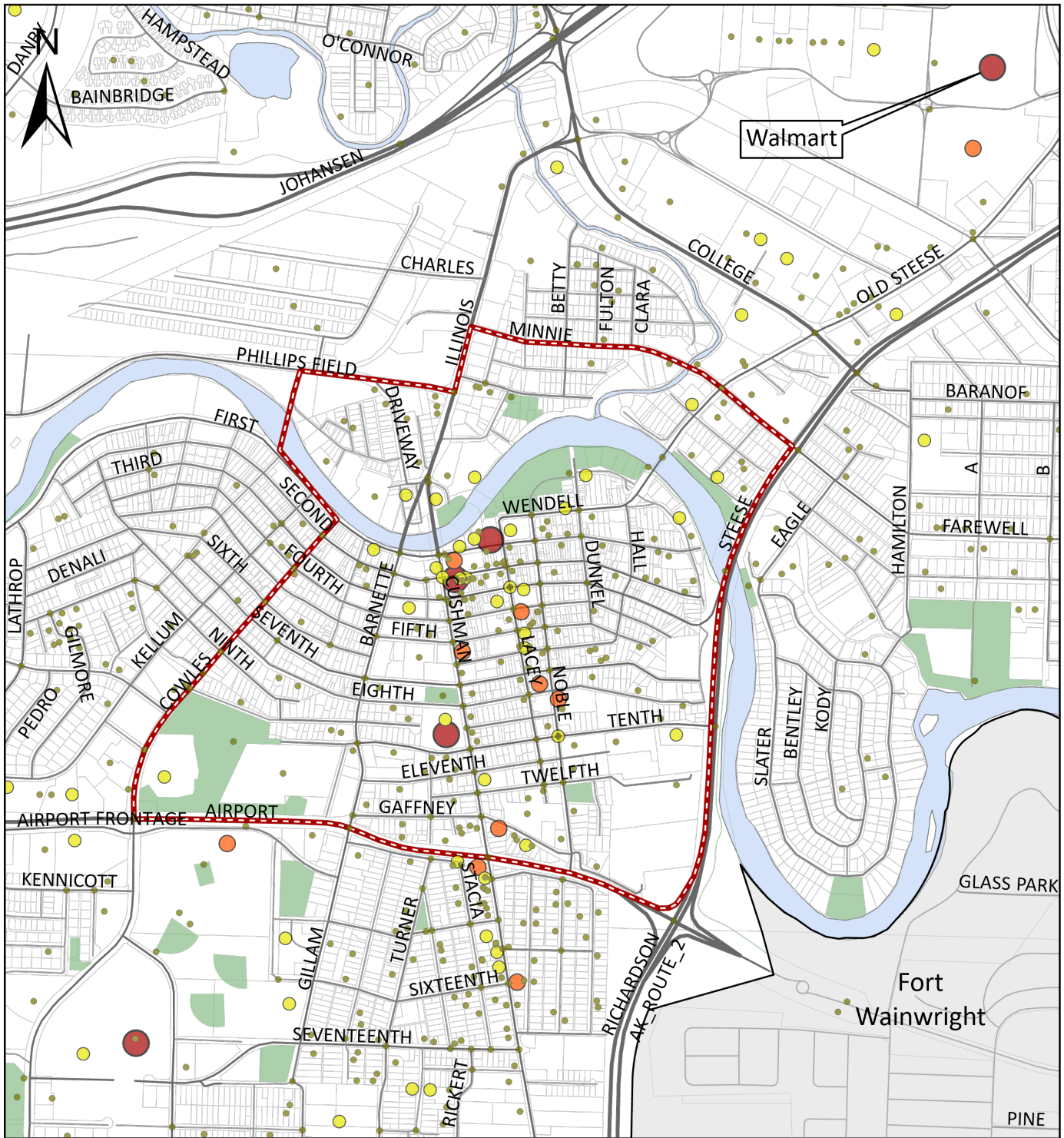


SOURCE: City of Fairbanks Police Department. The reported data is calls; incidents did not necessarily result in a charge or arrest.

⁴ The two categories are “person” crimes, meaning harm to an individual (e.g., assault, behavioral issues), and “property” crimes, meaning harm to property (e.g., trespassing or theft).

⁵ This analysis excludes land within the Fort Wainwright and the University of Alaska boundaries; it does not consider population density.

Figure 28. Analysis: Fairbanks Police Department Calls over 5 Years; Downtown Fairbanks and Surrounding Area - Personal Crime Calls (2017-2021)



Legend

Number of Crime call events

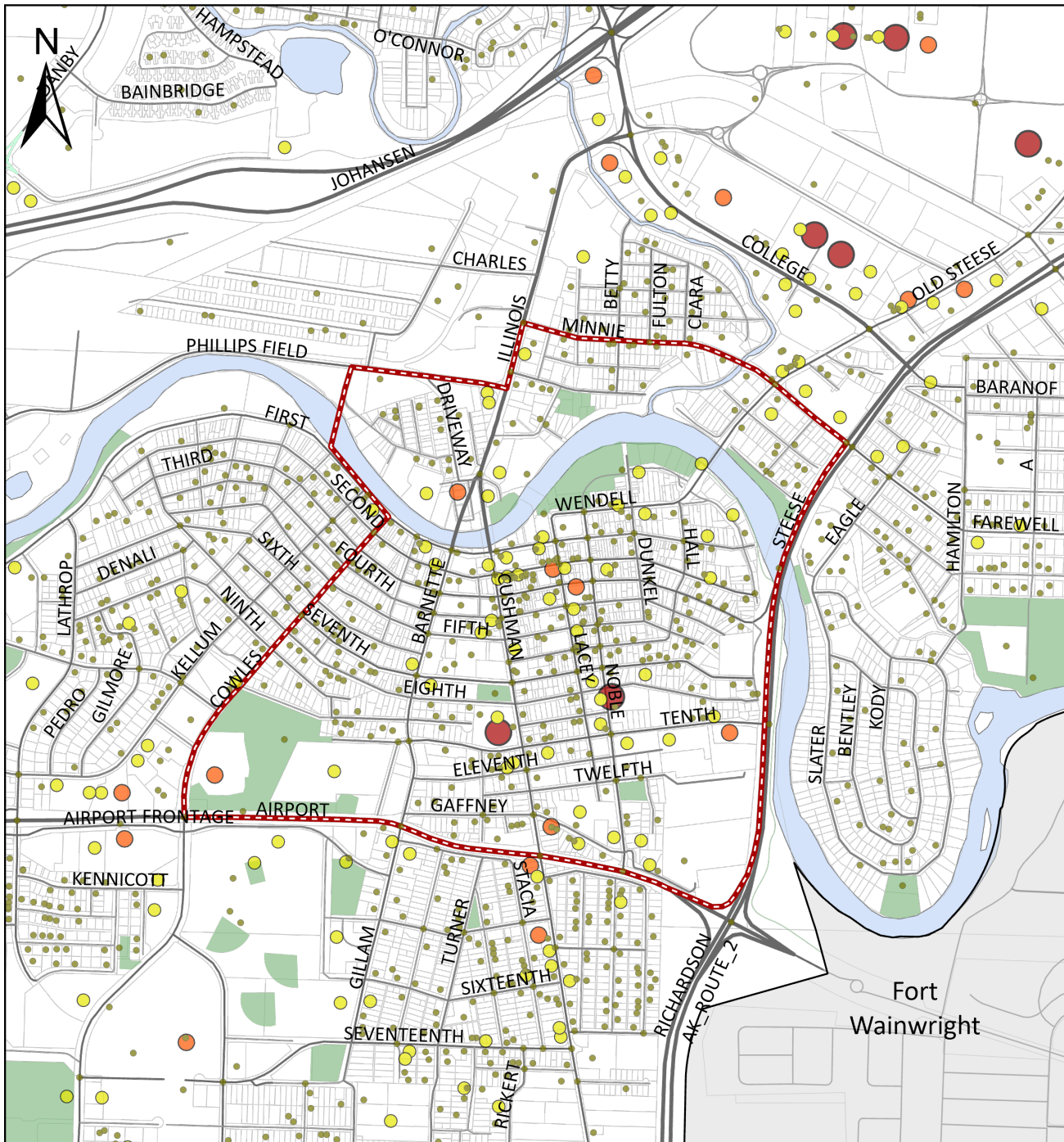
- 1 - 5
- 5 - 25
- 26 - 50
- 51 - 260

Downtown Plan Boundary

Data from Fairbanks Police Department

Map by RESPEC; May 2022

Figure 29: Analysis: Fairbanks Police Department Calls over 5 Years; Downtown Fairbanks and Surrounding Area - Property Crime Calls (2017-2021)



Legend

Number of Crime call events

- 1 - 5
- 5 - 25
- 26 - 50
- 51 - 260

▭ Downtown Plan Boundary

Data from Fairbanks Police Department
Map by RESPEC; May 2022

Strategies and Actions *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?*

1. Create a safe, welcoming environment through community-focused activities and consistent maintenance.

- a. Collaborate with property owners, businesses, police, private security, service providers, and other stakeholders to create a Downtown Safety Plan.

Example plan strategies:

- Keep buildings in good repair.
- Maintain foliage and landscaping for visibility.
- Improve exterior lighting.

- b. Promptly address safety and nuisance issues due to blighted buildings, facilities in disrepair, and vandalism.
- c. Support ongoing operations of human services organizations in Downtown such as food distribution centers, the needle exchange program, crisis stabilization programs, and other services to meet basic needs.
- d. Work with social service providers, police, and local businesses operating Downtown to effectively serve clients.

Example project:

- Create a public safety task force.

- e. Maintain or increase consistent presence of police and security Downtown through CSP, foot, and bicycle patrols, focused on any “hot spots” with safety concerns.

See the Economic Development chapter for recommendations on how to better activate and improve the vibrancy of Downtown.

See the Housing and Land Use chapters for recommendations to increase residential units and reduce vacant and underutilized downtown properties, and for more information about crisis response in Fairbanks.

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.

Example projects:

- Implement controlled access to private properties.
 - Improve 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 into design of all transportation projects.

See Transportation chapter for other transportation design recommendations.

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



**Transportation
Destination**

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

What does the transportation network look like today?

See Figure 30 to view 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 has many features to create a more walkable, easier-to-navigate destination.** Downtown is one of the best transportation-served areas in the city, with sidewalks on most streets, short blocks, and many local destinations. The Transit Center is also located Downtown, a hub for the Metropolitan Area Commuter System (MACS).
- **Establishing Downtown as a destination requires the promotion of access to and navigation within the area.** Roads should be designed to promote slower speeds and prioritizing non-motorized uses. Reducing vehicle traffic on roads improves safety for all users and makes for a better experience on downtown streets and sidewalks.

Downtown Projects in 2045 Fairbanks Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)

Recently Completed Projects

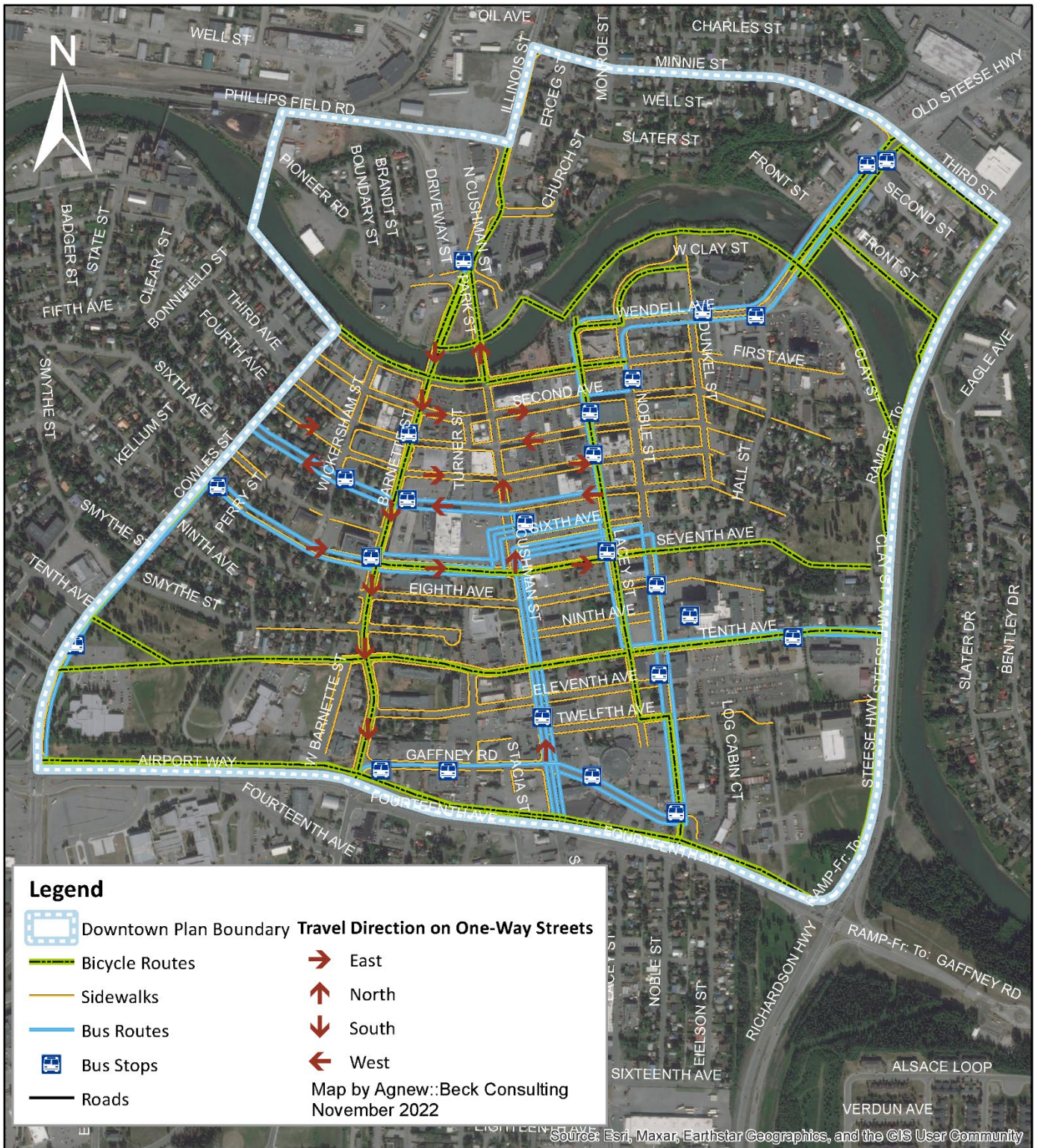
- Cushman Street Bridge Rehabilitation
- Noble Street Upgrade
- Wendell Avenue Bridge replacement

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)
- Lacey Street Reconstruction MR)
- Bike Lane Signing and Striping (MR)

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

Figure 30. Existing Transportation Network, All Modes in Downtown Fairbanks



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



Figure 31. Improvements along Cushman Street



“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’s transportation network still has gaps, especially for cycling and transit** (Figure 30). Bikes are not allowed on downtown sidewalks but there are limited road shoulders for safe travel. The 2019 Circulation Network Analysis recommends projects to address identified gaps.
- **Investing in Complete Streets promotes walking and biking, where appropriate.** Since adopting a Complete Streets policy in 2015, Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation (FAST) Planning has completed upgrades of several downtown streets, such as Cushman Street (Figure 31). Complete Streets host features for non-motorized users, vehicles, tour buses, and transit services, prioritizing accessibility and safety for all modes of transportation.
- **Complete Street designs also improve the experience of walking on the street.** For example, widened sidewalks create more space for people to linger and allow for businesses such as restaurants and cafés to offer outdoor dining and seating.
- **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 seasons create access issues for businesses during the summer. While Downtown benefits long-term from these upgrades, it is critical to coordinate with businesses to mitigate disruptions.



Downtown has directional signs like the one above, but the placement and content of existing signage is not meeting people’s needs.

Figure 32. Utility poles placed in the middle of sidewalks make it difficult to walk safely.



Figure 33. Street furniture such as planters adds visual interest and greenery to streets, but also makes snow clearing more



- **Incorporating landscaping into street design has many benefits.** Applying “Green Street” concepts can improve drainage while providing short-term storage for water runoff.
- **Downtown Fairbanks can be difficult to navigate.** Residents, businesses, and survey respondents consistently say it is hard to find your way in and around Downtown due to:
 - Narrow sidewalks
 - Poor lighting in winter
 - Many sidewalks not accessible by Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards
 - Bicyclists using sidewalks illegally
 - Not enough guiding signage for routes between destinations
 - Hard to find parking (see *Parking chapter*)
 - One-way streets
- **The current sidewalk design is challenging for pedestrians.** Some streets have had sidewalk and ADA accessibility improvements. However, many people say walkability, especially for people with mobility issues, remains a barrier (Figure 32).
- **Winter maintenance impacts navigation.** Snow clearance is a transportation issue: snow on sidewalks and roads make it challenging to get around in the winter. Improving implementation and adherence to the City’s Downtown Snow Removal Standards could help snow clearing happen quickly and consistently. Timely snow clearance by businesses and property owners should also be a priority.
- **Street amenities have pros and cons.** Some people expressed frustration with features installed on new, wider sidewalks (Figure 33).

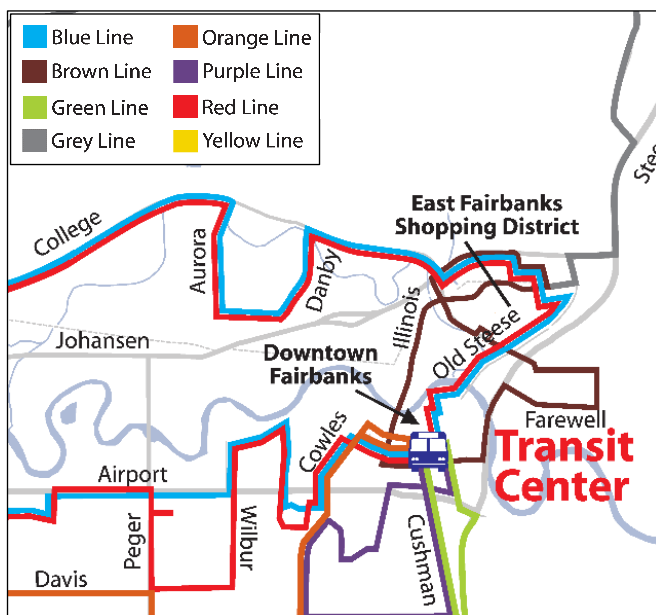


Public Transit and Buses

Figure 34. Lyons Transit Center is a hub for many MACS



Figure 35. MACS System Map, Downtown service (detail)



While amenities such as planter boxes add value to the walking experience, they also take up limited space and make clearing snow difficult. Balancing the positives and negatives of these features is important.

- **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 Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) overall, where only 4.3% of households don't have access to a vehicle.
- **Downtown connectivity improvements are desired.** MACS serves most of the FNSB, with a transit center in Downtown (Figure 34). 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 35). Shifting existing routes to include more stops in the commercial core could help improve transit connectivity within 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 are currently no regular Sunday or late evening services, which limits people without car access from accessing Downtown on weekends.
- **Bus traffic contributes to congestion during summer months.** Private operators bring buses of visitors Downtown, unloading passengers at destinations along First Avenue. Better coordination of pickup and drop-off locations would reduce congestion.

Source: FNSB Transportation Department

Strategies and Actions *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?*

The circulation maps in Figure 37 (Roadway), Figure 38 (Bicycle), Figure 39 (Pedestrian), and Figure 40 (Transit) illustrate proposed connections and policies for each mode.

1. ROADS: Continue building a road system that provides the needed level of mobility and enhances the built environment of Downtown Fairbanks. See Figure 37.

- a. Implement safety and mobility features in the downtown road network.

Example projects:

- Signal progression, where appropriate.
 - Encourage fast-moving traffic to use major arterials (Airport Way, Steese Expressway).
 - 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.
 - Consider connecting Clay St. to 3rd Avenue.
 - Consider connecting 4th and 5th Avenues on the east by cemetery.
- b. Apply Complete Streets principles where appropriate.⁶
 - c. Conduct a speed study and update speed limits as appropriate.
 - d. Engage representative stakeholders in the planning of downtown road projects (see 5th Avenue example at the end of this chapter).

2. BICYCLES: Develop and implement an adequate year-round bicycle network throughout Downtown to incorporate cycling with other transportation options. See Figure 38.

- a. Implement the proposed bicycle circulation network in Figure 38, with the following support policies and treatments.
 - Use on-street marked lanes on roadways with more than 1,000 average daily traffic.
 - Use sharrows (shared lane markings that indicate cyclists and vehicles share a lane) on roadways with less than 1,000 average daily traffic.
 - Install separated pathways that connect through parks and green spaces.
 - Construct a new bike-accessible connection between 12th Avenue and shared-use pathway along the Steese Expressway.

⁶ Learn more about Complete Street policies at the U.S. Department of Transportation website: <https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/complete-streets-policies>

- Identify all paths 10 feet or wider as a shared-use pathway along designated bicycle routes.
- b. Provide bicycle parking/storage in appropriate and safe locations.
- c. Install signage and enforce cycling prohibition use of sidewalks in the Urban Core.⁷
- d. Revitalize the bike share program.

3. PEDESTRIANS: Increase walkability and pedestrian comfort in Downtown Fairbanks. See Figure 39.

- a. Improve connectivity of the sidewalk system throughout Downtown and ensure that all streets a) identified as collectors, and b) within the Urban Core, have sidewalks.
- b. Incorporate street furniture into Downtown. *See Economic Development chapter for related recommendations regarding streetscape design.*

Example projects:

- Install furniture to buffer pedestrians on sidewalks from car traffic where applicable and where it will not impede pedestrian mobility or snow removal.
- Install pedestrian bars for leaning and resting.

- c. Develop a specific recommended width within the Urban Core. 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.
- d. Assess sidewalk width and widen sidewalks, where appropriate.

Example projects:

- 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.

- e. Connect Downtown to surrounding areas with pedestrian bridges over waterways.

Example projects:

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

- f. Review and update pedestrian delay times for crosswalks, especially in winter, to give travelers more time to safely cross while navigating snow, ice, and other winter obstacles.

⁷ 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)

4. TRANSIT: Integrate Transit into downtown land use planning and improve mobility. See Figure 40.

- a. Ensure that Transit stops are appropriately located in Downtown.

Examples of potential new transit connections:

- First Avenue
- Second Avenue in the Slaterville neighborhood
- Third Avenue
- Cowles Street north of Fifth Avenue
- North Noble Street north of Sixth Avenue
- Barnette Street between Seventh Avenue and Airport Way
- Minnie Street

- b. Establish Sunday service and nighttime routes between Downtown and popular destinations.
- c. Identify and implement incentives for improving transit service and utilization within Downtown, such as a dedicated circulating bus route or trolley within the Urban Core, bus passes for tour groups, and reduced or free fare options for target populations such as low-income households and students.

See Economic Development chapter for related recommendations regarding providing transit options to Downtown for special events.

5. SAFETY and ACCESSIBILITY: Improve transportation safety and access in Downtown.

- a. Upgrade and maintain sidewalks to be ADA compliant and increase mobility for all users.

Example projects:

- Consider traffic calming features to slow traffic and improve safety where needed.
- Relocate utility poles away from sidewalks.

- b. Improve sight distances by conducting a sight distance audit and implementing the resulting recommendations.⁸
- c. Improve pedestrian lighting and light placement in the Urban Core area of Downtown.

See related public safety recommendations, including Crime Prevention through Environment Design principles, in the Public Safety chapter.

See related sidewalk snow removal recommendation in the Land Use chapter.

⁸ A sight distance audit evaluates sight distances at intersections where buildings and other landscaping abut the right-of-way.

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

- a. Include Downtown as a priority for transportation improvements in MTP and other FAST Planning projects, programs, and 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.

7. AESTHETICS: Integrate aesthetic features and make it easier for everyone to find their way within Downtown.

- a. Incorporate continuity in streetscape look and feel, including consistent design elements such as lighting, planters, street trees, etc. See the Economic Development chapter for additional branding and design recommendations.
- b. Use decorative highway fencing, as opposed to chain-link, where highway fencing is required, such as Airport Way and the Steese Expressway.
- c. Improve and add wayfinding signage, maps, and other visual strategies to guide people toward commercial areas, green spaces, historic districts, and other points of interest (see Figure 36 for example of current signage). See related identity and branding recommendations in the Economic Development chapter. See parking-related wayfinding recommendations in the Parking chapter.

Figure 36: Existing Downtown Signage



Example projects:

- Work with FAST Planning to integrate Downtown brand identity and design elements as part of consistent design standards for Downtown transportation projects.
- Coordinate with public and private parking operators to advertise and provide wayfinding from the closest available parking to common attractions and destinations. See related visibility and lighting recommendations in the Land Use chapter.

Figure 37. Proposed Roadway Circulation Network in Downtown Fairbanks



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

Figure 38. Proposed Bicycle Circulation Network in Downtown Fairbanks

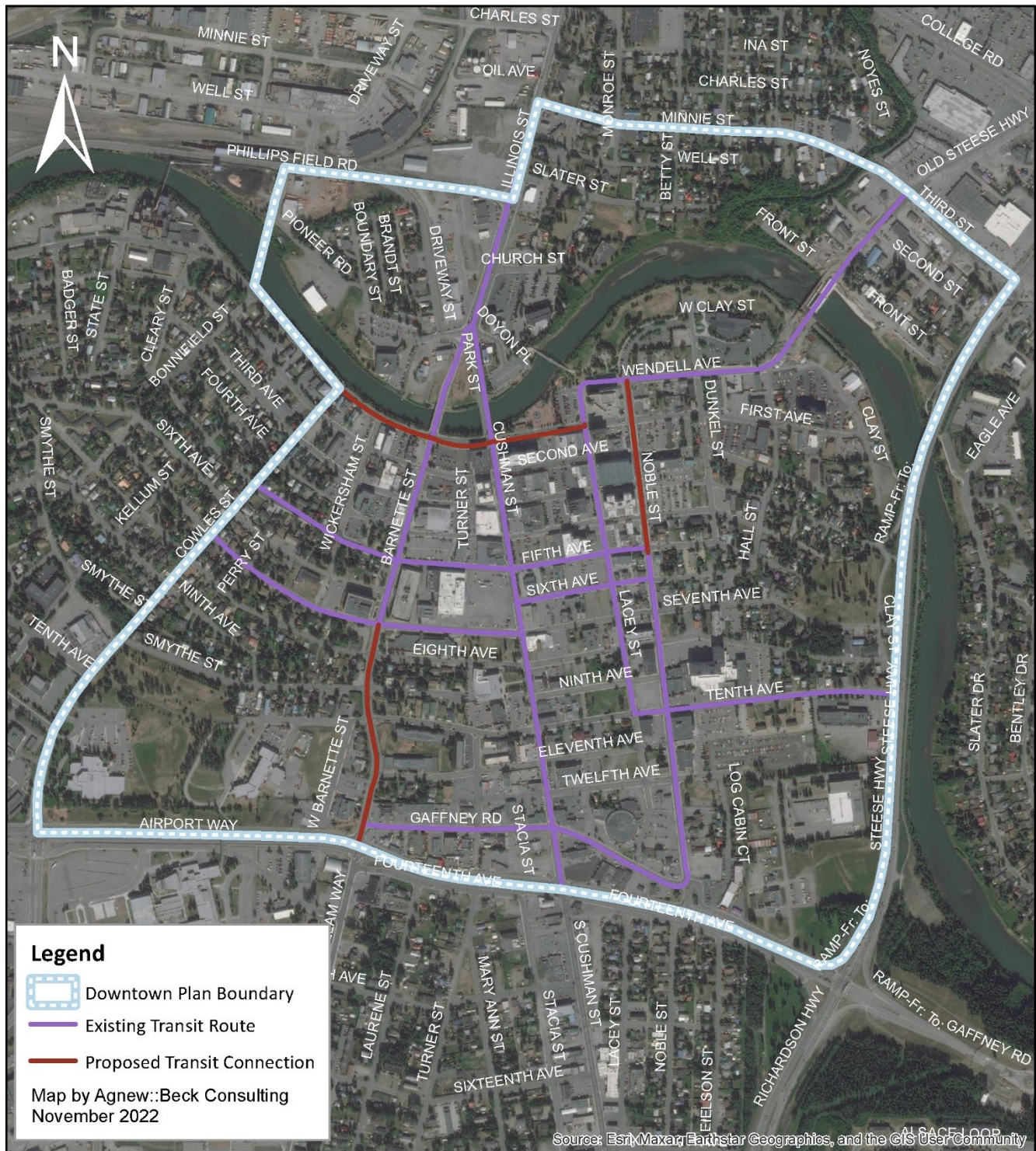


Figure 39. Proposed Pedestrian Circulation Network in Downtown Fairbanks



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

Figure 40. Proposed Transit Circulation Network in Downtown Fairbanks



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

5th Avenue: An Example of a Successful Collaborative Transportation Planning Effort Downtown

The City of Fairbanks proposed an update to 5th Avenue, which needed rehabilitation. The road had subsided in several areas, the drainage was inadequate for the roadway, and the sidewalks were broken and had utility poles in the middle of the sidewalk, making it very difficult for people in wheelchairs or other mobility issues to negotiate the area as a pedestrian.

The project was proposed for inclusion in the FAST Planning Transportation Improvement Program. With its state of disrepair, it easily made it into the program as the year's top-rated project. There were many opinions around what the redesign of 5th Avenue should be: one-way road or two-way road, parking on street or no parking on street, how wide the sidewalks should be, possibility of burying overhead power and communication lines, and whether to install a mid-block crosswalk at the School District building.

Seeing this community-wide disagreement about the redesign of 5th Avenue, FAST Planning approached the city about forming and hosting a stakeholder group to give the city meaningful input on how to approach the redesign and some features that were important to the community. The city accepted and FAST began to pull together a group of stakeholders that included area business, community leaders, planners, and engineers that would give feedback to the redesign of the roadway.

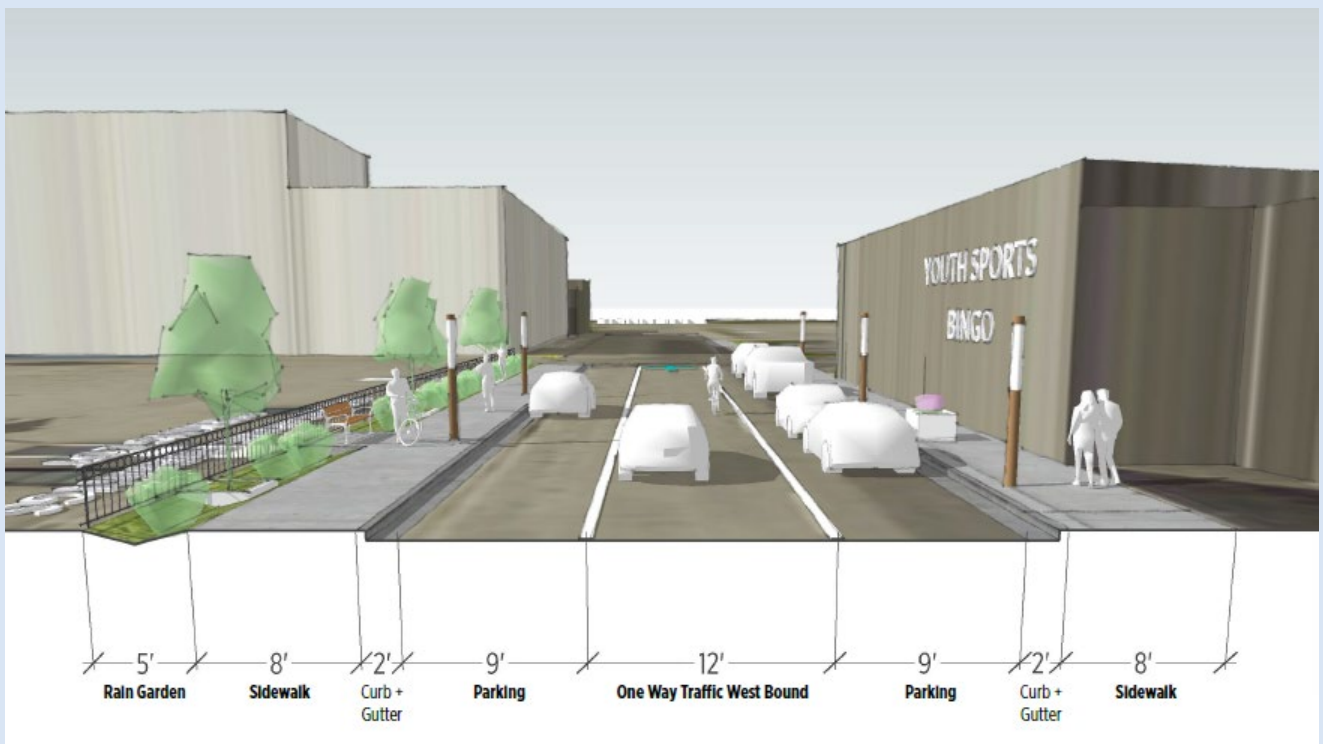
Over the course of eight weeks there were a total of four Steering Committee meetings held in the FAST Planning office. During those meetings, participants looked at the roadway right-of-way width and options for lane configurations. Options were different for all blocks of the improvement due to varying right-of-way widths. In areas where the right-of-way was narrow, options were more limited than in locations where there was enough right of way to be creative. However, the road did need to function in a uniform manner for drivers and pedestrians. It needed to feel seamless.



Roadway configurations were discussed in a charrette to narrow down options and ultimately come to a set of recommendations the city could combine to produce the final project design.

Ultimately this is a city road, and the city needed to choose an alternative that met most of the desires of the group and worked for the city from an operations standpoint. The city chose a one-lane, one-way travel lane with parking on-street. By eliminating one of the travel lanes, extra width was available to provide widened sidewalks with other thematic elements including water retention swales with seasonal plantings, thematic lighting that matches those already in use throughout the downtown, benches, downtown wayfinding signs, and street trees.

Ultimately the process worked, and the city got feedback that helped with the design of the project. The committee never came to consensus on whether the road should be a one-way road or a two-way road, so at the end of the day the city chose to keep it as a one-way facility.



Key Issues Guiding the Plan

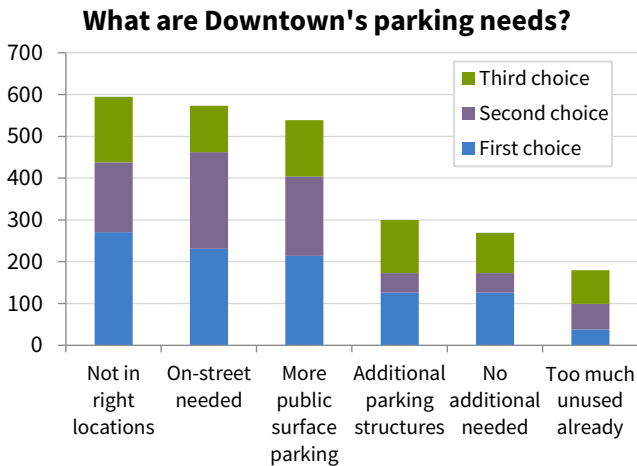


“We need to educate business owners on how valuable parking places are in front of their businesses. Business owners and staff need to get off the street, free up spaces for customers.”

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

Survey of Downtown Business Owners, January 2021

Figure 41. Resident Survey (2017), Parking Needs Downtown



- **Adequate, safe, accessible parking is important for a thriving Downtown.** The issue of parking continues to be a focus for all stakeholders in Downtown. 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 topic of discussion 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 41).
- **Parking Downtown could be improved with better management of existing capacity.** Demand is highest during peak summer months and special events. A parking study and surveys suggest encouraging better utilization of existing parking as one important solution. For example, parking garages will likely continue to see lower occupancy when free or low-cost street spaces are available.



Optimizing Parking Supply to Meet Demand

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.

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.”

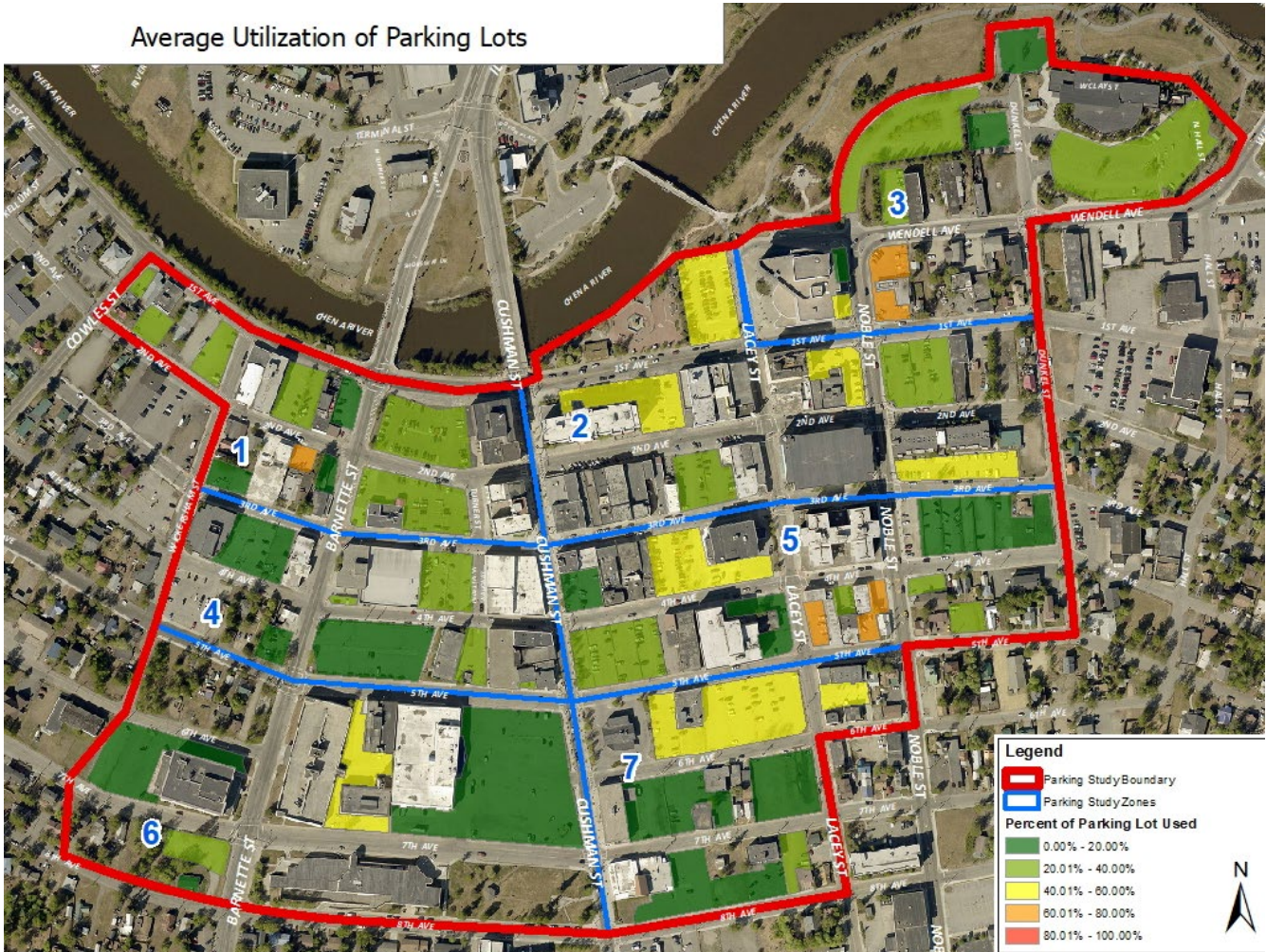
- **Almost 60% of land area in Downtown’s commercial core is pavement and/or parking.** The Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB)’s 2019 parking study focused on parking use in the commercial core (Figure 43). The parking study area was analyzed by surface use (Figure 45). The 60% estimate includes rights of way (roads, sidewalks) and surface parking lots.
- **There is a disconnect between perception and supply of available parking Downtown.** The parking study found the Downtown core 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 (Figure 44). Many lots are privately owned or have signage that discourages public use. Based on observations recorded over multiple days, the parking study found the following:
 - 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).

See Figure 43 for the average utilization of downtown parking lots. The full Downtown Fairbanks Parking Study is available as an appendix to this plan.

Figure 42. Existing Parking Signs, Discouraging Public Use



Figure 43: Downtown Fairbanks Average Utilization of Parking Lots



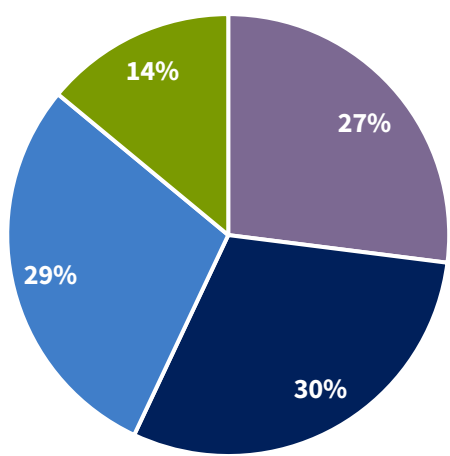
SOURCE: Fairbanks North Star Borough, Downtown Fairbanks Parking Study (2019)

Figure 44: Parking Lot Spaces by Parking Type

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

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

Figure 45: Downtown Area by Surface Use



- Building
- Right of Way
- Parking Lot
- Green Space / Other

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



Maintenance and Enforcement

“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

- **Downtown users consistently report that confusion about available public parking and parking enforcement are barriers to enjoying time Downtown.** Many expressed frustrations with parking enforcement 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 contributes to the parking issue.** People also express frustration with inconsistent snow removal, when snow reduces available public parking. Identifying high demand lots and street parking areas 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 and Fairbanks Area Surface Transportation (FAST) Planning could take the lead in a wayfinding and communications strategy, perhaps by creating a parking map brochure and user-friendly signage for businesses to share to help address misconceptions about parking.

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 and Actions *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?*

1. Redevelop existing underutilized surface level parking lots into active spaces.

- a. Establish incentives to encourage redevelopment of underutilized surface level parking lots.

2. Encourage new development by lessening or eliminating the requirement for new surface level parking Downtown.

- a. Revise existing off-street parking regulations to require less parking.

Example projects:

- Require much less off-street parking for each use.
- Encourage up to 100% shared parking for new development where high use peak hours do not overlap, or for under occupied public lots.
- Evaluate new surface lots to be open to the public for parking during off hours.
- Reduce requirements for uses that:
 - Are close to transit or the parking garage
 - Have on-street facilities
 - Provide bicycle parking, or
 - Have sidewalks that serve the business

- b. Remove the requirement for off-street loading facilities for businesses in Downtown.
- c. Discourage large, standalone parking lots.

Example projects:

- Establish maximum number of parking spaces per lot.
- Establish maximum number of overall parking spaces per business or building.
- If a standalone parking lot is approved, consider including a sunset clause.

- d. Expand the no-required parking zone.

3. Manage on-street parking to benefit nearby businesses.

- a. Design angled parking where the right-of-way is of ample width.
- b. Manage parking limits to encourage turnover in high-traffic areas.

Example project:

- Reevaluate time limits and locations to encourage high turnover in high-density commercial areas.

- c. Encourage employees/residents to use surface lots and parking garages and leave street parking for customers.

4. Design surface level parking Downtown to increase efficiency and encourage pedestrian activity.

- 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. Develop a program to encourage public and private parking lots to share spaces and signs.
- b. Encourage businesses with private lots to allow public access during non-business hours and promote with uniform signage.
- c. Develop a public access program to educate the public about parking areas Downtown.

Example projects:

- Produce an easy-to-understand parking map for the public.
- Create a downtown parking brochure to hand out with tickets, in shops, etc.
- Develop technology to communicate parking usage and availability, such as a phone app.

6. Increase downtown parking garage usage.

- a. Develop and implement a program for local businesses to provide parking validation.
- b. Reduce or eliminate fees for parking garage use for short-term, high-turnover parking.
- c. Improve signage throughout Downtown directing people to the parking garage.
- d. Better promote the downtown parking garage.

Example projects:

- Promote 24-hour occupancy of the parking garage.
- Advertise garage availability during evening and weekend activities.

- e. Introduce incentives to encourage business owners and their employees to use the garage.

Example projects:

- Free parking for employees in the downtown core.
- Reduced parking rates for downtown employees.

- f. Track occupancy data for the parking garage.

7. Reduce demand for vehicle parking where feasible.

- a. Encourage people to use other modes of transportation to and within Downtown. *See Transportation chapter for recommendations to improve walkability, cycling, and transit connections from Downtown to other destinations, reducing the demand for vehicle parking. See Economic Development chapter for recommendation on providing specialized transit options during large events and festivals.*

Key Issues Guiding the Plan



Figure 46. Multi-unit housing in downtown neighborhood



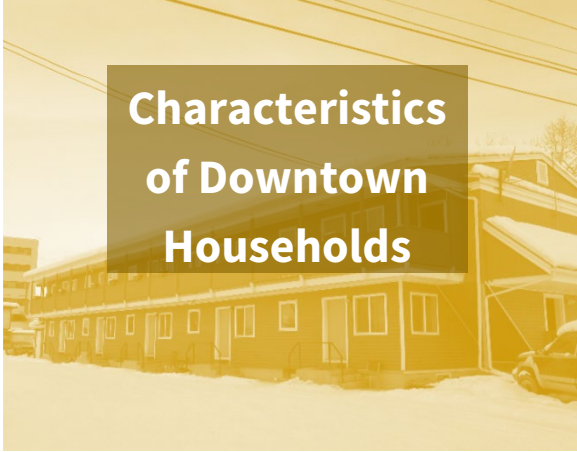
- **Downtown Fairbanks has a significant housing stock.** There are 813 housing units located in Downtown. For comparison, Downtown Anchorage has 600 housing units.
- **The housing stock is outdated.** Roughly 72% of housing units in Downtown Fairbanks were built in the 1970s or earlier, and less than 1 in 10 of existing units were constructed in the last 20 years. Assessor data indicate 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 47). More multi-family housing would increase the residential density, using the limited downtown land more efficiently.
- **Downtown has many low-cost units.** According to Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) data, Downtown has a higher percentage of lower cost rentals than the FNSB overall. About 79% of occupied downtown residential units have monthly rent under \$1,000.

“There are many old houses that are poorly built and burn wood. This makes the air quality very bad in winter.”

“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



Characteristics of Downtown Households

How does Downtown Fairbanks compare to other downtowns?

In February 2021 the project team prepared a housing analysis to summarize residential and demographic characteristics of Downtown Fairbanks. Downtown Fairbanks was compared to Anchorage, Alaska; Salt Lake City, Utah; 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 the 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%. Of the comparison cities, the next highest was Boise at 9%.

SOURCE: FNSB Downtown Demographic Analysis and Benchmarking Summary, 2021

- **Most downtown residents rent.** Most housing units (72%) in Downtown Fairbanks are renter occupied, compared to 41% renter-occupied residences in the FNSB.
- **Downtown Fairbanks is more diverse than the FNSB overall.** Downtown's population includes 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.** Census data shows only 41% of downtown residents own a vehicle, a lower rate of vehicle ownership than even many large downtowns such as San Francisco and Seattle. This means many downtown residents do not impact the availability of parking. It also reinforces the importance of maintaining a walkable Downtown and access to transit.
- **Downtown is an important area for affordable housing.** 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 (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 would serve a different market than is being served today.
- **Many downtown renters are cost burdened.** Over half of renters in Downtown Fairbanks are cost burdened, meaning a household spends 35% or more of their monthly income on housing. Any housing improvements should consider how to maintain affordability and seek to find ways not to

“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



displace existing residents, who may have few other housing options.

- **Downtown has an aging resident population.** Forty-two percent of households include at least one person 60 years or older, the majority of whom (nearly 74%) are living alone. The high concentration of older residents 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 experiencing homelessness tend to congregate Downtown.** There is no day shelter in Fairbanks for people experiencing homelessness, so these individuals often spend the day Downtown. Downtown organizations and churches provide services for these individuals.
- **People congregating Downtown, including both housed and unhoused people, can stand out due to the quiet nature of Downtown.** Limited activities, high numbers of vacant spaces, and low foot traffic mean people congregating Downtown draw more attention.

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.”

University of Alaska Fairbanks Survey Responses, 2018



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

- **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, the FNSB needs more housing. The region has limited undeveloped land that is serviced by public water, wastewater, roads, and other infrastructure.
- **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 work Downtown. Mixed-use developments can attract more people to the area, bringing economic and social activity that can help revitalize Downtown. More homeownership opportunities 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.
- **Downtown lacks a grocery store.** This makes it harder to live Downtown, especially for residents without vehicles, and may contribute to Downtown being a less desired location to live.

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?*

1. Preserve the residential character of existing neighborhoods and promote investment in existing housing stock.

- a. Utilize the incentives of the Opportunity Zone⁹ designation to promote housing development.
- b. Utilize available funding, such as Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and other sources, to fund repairs, maintenance, and energy efficiency improvements of existing housing stock.
- c. Explore revolving loan funds, low-interest loans, and other options renovate housing Downtown.
- d. Establish a redevelopment organization to serve as a resource for property owners and developers in accessing financing and other resources.
- e. Engage with landlords and property owners to encourage upgrade, rehabilitation, or redevelopment of their properties.

See the Land Use chapter for related recommendations to preserve residential and historic character in existing residential neighborhoods.

See Economic Development chapter for a callout box highlighting potential redevelopment tools.

2. Increase the number of people living Downtown and reduce vacancies.

- a. Complete a Housing Needs Assessment for the FNSB, with a focus on current downtown inventory and projected future market demand for all housing types.

Examples of topics to explore in the Assessment:

- Identify downtown-specific trends in residential vacancies and priority areas to rehabilitate or replace.
- Assess the impact of short-term rentals on the housing market and consider policies to limit short-term rentals, if appropriate.

- b. Increase the percentage of owner-occupied residences by providing opportunities for small-scale home ownership, including condominiums, town homes, and cottage homes.

See the land use chapter for housing-related recommendations regarding infill, adaptive reuse of buildings, and recommended updates to the zoning code.

⁹ A census tract within Downtown Fairbanks was established as one of 25 Opportunity Zones (OZ) in Alaska in 2018. The OZ program was created by the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. In areas with the OZ federal designation, investors can take advantage of a tax credit for eligible investments made in the area.

3. Promote diverse new housing options that serve a variety of lifestyles.

- a. Increase density by allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) where appropriate.

Example Projects:

- Expand where ADUs are allowed.
 - Create incentives for property owners to develop ADUs.
- b. Develop rental housing that serves the needs of University of Alaska Fairbanks, personnel stationed at Fort Wainwright, workers employed at downtown-based businesses, and other populations.

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

- a. Establish Downtown as an attractive residential area for seniors.
- b. Develop more senior and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible housing.
- c. Encourage home modification loans or grants to retrofit homes for accessibility and safety (e.g., ramp access).

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

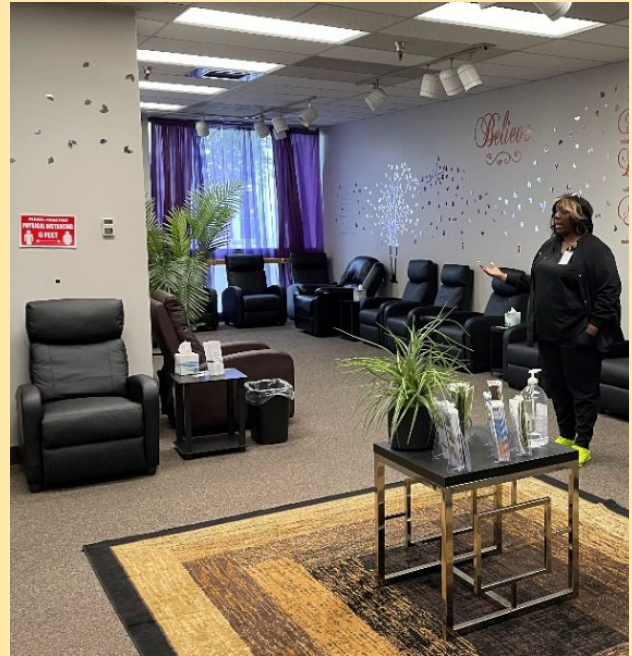
- a. Implement the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness¹⁰ and strategic plans by the Fairbanks Housing and Homeless Coalition and other community partners to prevent and reduce homelessness in Fairbanks.
- b. Continue operations of organizations based in Downtown (Bread Line Inc., The Door youth shelter, etc.) who serve people experiencing homelessness.
- c. Identify properties or units suitable for supportive housing or workforce housing with subsidies.
- d. Encourage projects that provide opportunities for stable housing and living independently.

¹⁰ Fairbanks Housing and Homeless Coalition: “Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness.” Updated July 2013. Available at <https://www.fairbankshomeless.org/ten-year-plan-to-end-homelessness.html>

Crisis Care in Fairbanks – What’s Available Today

Fairbanks has limited options for individuals experiencing homelessness or crisis. However, crisis care is actively expanding in the region. Fairbanks is one of three Alaska regions implementing Crisis Now, with the goal of creating a more collaborative and complete behavioral health crisis response system.

Essential concepts of Crisis Now include a crisis call center, Mobile Crisis Team, and 23-hour short-term stabilization resources. The City of Fairbanks is helping bring the Crisis Now model in Fairbanks, with support from various funders including the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. The Fairbanks Mobile Crisis Team launched in fall 2021, which includes a clinician and a peer support specialist. Refine Crisis Stabilization Center (<https://refinecrisis.org/>) also opened a crisis stabilization center in downtown Fairbanks in early 2022. Refine defines their center as “a walk-in facility for people feeling overwhelmed by mental health, substance use, or other life issues, such as emotional distress, anxiety, depression, family issues, addiction, or intoxication.” The center provides a support team to help the person in crisis to get back on their feet, with the option of a short-term stay.



A tour inside Refine’s Crisis Stabilization Center

The goal is that continued implementation of the Crisis Now project will improve care coordination and establish tools to match those in need of help with the right level of treatment.

To learn more, visit <https://www.fairbanksalaska.us/crisis>.