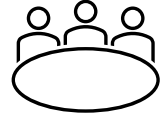




**FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL WORK SESSION AGENDA  
TUESDAY, APRIL 30, 2024 AT 7 A.M.**  
MEETING WILL BE HELD VIA [ZOOM WEBINAR](#)  
AND AT FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
800 CUSHMAN STREET, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

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1. Roll Call
2. [Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan](#)
3. Mayor and Council Member Comments
4. Next Regular Work Session – Tuesday, May 7, 2024
5. Adjournment



## 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 a seasonal bicycle network throughout Downtown to incorporate cycling with other transportation options by looking at several alternatives, such as adding shoulder space where practical to each road improvement project that eventually will make most roads comfortable and welcoming to cyclists while allowing adequate snow storage in the winter.
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.

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## Future Land Use Map Categories

Category	Intended Land Uses	Application Area
<b>Urban Core</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intended to be the employment and activity center for the region, attractive to residents and visitors, creating a live, work and play environment.</li> <li>Walkable, with buildings closer to property lines, continuous building facades with multiple building entries, active streetscape with pedestrian amenities (wide sidewalks).</li> <li>Pedestrian-oriented commercial uses such as food carts or walk-up concessions.</li> <li>Concentration of civic, cultural, entertainment, office, and retail uses.</li> <li>High-density residential, recommended residential density – no less than 13 dwelling units per acre (DU/ac) and no maximum density limit.</li> <li>Minimal off-street parking, reliance on on-street parking and parking garage in business areas.</li> <li>Parks, plazas, and open spaces intended for public use.</li> <li><del>Discourage new industrial uses and surface parking.</del></li> <li>Encourage specialty and locally owned retail on ground floors.</li> <li>Design streets in the Urban Core to emphasize “accessibility” over “mobility.”</li> </ul>	Chena Riverfront and 1 <sup>st</sup> Avenue to commercial corridors along Cushman and Noble Streets, south to 8 <sup>th</sup> Avenue.
<b>Mixed Use Preferred Residential</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>Predominately high-density residential, recommended residential density – between 13 DU/ac to 29 DU/ac.</li> <li>Small scale neighborhood-oriented commercial uses with a local market area that are compatible with downtown residential uses.</li> <li>Encourage specialty and locally owned retail on ground floors.</li> <li>Large commercial uses with a regional market area only along high-volume roads and buffered from residential areas.</li> <li>A mixed reliance on on-street parking and off-street parking.</li> <li>Parks, plazas, and open spaces intended for public use.</li> <li><del>Discourage new industrial uses and surface parking.</del></li> </ul>	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.
<b>Mixed Use Preferred Commercial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intended to provide commercial uses with a regional focus.</li> <li>Predominately mid-scale higher intensity commercial uses with a regional market area.</li> <li>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).</li> <li>Reliance on off-street parking.</li> <li>Parks, plazas, and open spaces intended for public use.</li> <li><del>Discourage new industrial uses.</del></li> </ul>	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.

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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 a diverse economic and cultural hub for the FNSB region and is home to many diverse and marginalized populations. It is also home to diverse residents, including currently and historically marginalized populations such as Seniors and Elders; Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; LGBTQ residents; people with disabilities; immigrant and military families; and households with incomes below the poverty line. This plan acknowledges the harm caused to downtown residents and is committed to ensuring resident and visitor safety, dignity, access, and livelihood. This plan offers recommendations to help create a downtown that is inviting and accessible to everyone. Examples of recommendations included in this plan that

Commented [DS5]: Cleworth

Commented [DS6]: Ringstad: "harm caused" is used but not defined.

Commented [DS7]: Cleworth: Agreed with Community Planning's elimination of this sentence.

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; and improving transportation and mobility options for households without vehicles. The plan offers recommendations for activating and creating safe spaces for everyone while also amplifying the needs of marginalized communities.

Commented [DS8]: Marney: what does this mean?

Commented [DS9]: Marney: Is this section needed?

## Project Area

The project area covers approximately 4.2 square miles (Figure 2) 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 3).

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.

We acknowledge the Alaska Native nations upon whose ancestral lands the Fairbanks community resides - the Dena people of the lower Tanana River.<sup>1</sup> We also acknowledge the explorers and prospectors who established an economic base from which Fairbanks was established.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. <https://www.uaf.edu/diversity/land-acknowledgement.php>

## Who and What Make Up 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.

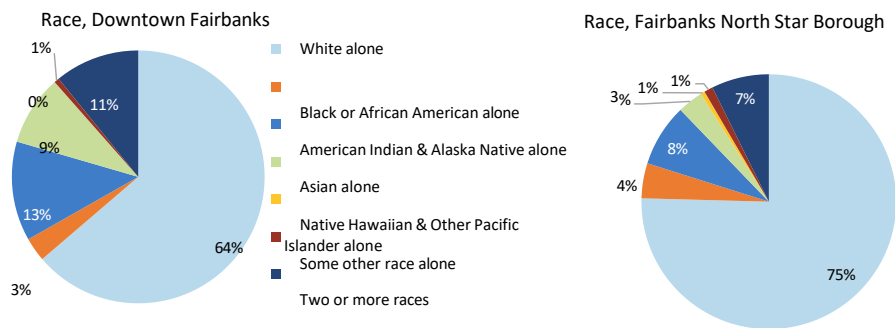
**Renters** Over **70%** of downtown households are renters and pay less than \$1,000 per month in gross rent.<sup>2</sup> Over **60%** of households are rent-burdened, paying at least 30% of monthly income in rent.

**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.

**Commented [DS11]:** Marney: 34% of downtown residents have a disability? Where did that data come from?

Figure 4: 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 5). The total number of households and housing units have also decreased over the past ten years.

<sup>2</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, gross rent is the contract rent plus the estimated average monthly cost of utilities (electricity, gas, water, sewer) and fuels (oil, coal, kerosene, wood, etc.) if these are paid by the renter (or paid for the renter by someone else).  
FNSB Downtown Fairbanks 2040 Plan: Final Draft, March 2024

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 and Threats
<p><b>City Center:</b> Downtown is the heart of Fairbanks.</p> <p><b>Housing:</b> Downtown includes several historic neighborhoods and a variety of housing types.</p> <p><b>Public Spaces:</b> Downtown has welcoming open spaces, parks, and beautiful public areas.</p> <p><b>Walkability:</b> Downtown is walkable and offers a mix of restaurants, bars, and retail.</p> <p><b>Culture:</b> Downtown has many cultural institutions, a strong presence of Alaska Native organizations, and an arts and entertainment scene.</p> <p><b>Historic:</b> Downtown Fairbanks has unique character that celebrates the community’s past.</p> <p><b>Camaraderie:</b> Downtown business owners know and support one another.</p>	<p><b>Parking Challenges:</b> Parking is a frequent complaint for customers and visitors; public parking is difficult to find, and enforcement is strict.</p> <p><b>Lack of Activity:</b> 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><b>Undesirable Behaviors:</b> Problems such as substance drug and alcohol use, littering, and vandalism negatively impact public spaces and business. These issues also make Downtown less attractive to visit.</p> <p><b>Aging Buildings:</b> 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><b>Road Improvements:</b> Recent street upgrades have improved walking, biking, and road safety, with more planned to create Complete Streets for all.</p> <p><b>Improve Navigation:</b> Many people get lost Downtown. Better wayfinding and signage can help people find their way.</p> <p><b>Polaris Building Redevelopment:</b> 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><b>Shared Maintenance Responsibility:</b> 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><b>Riverfront Activity:</b> The Chena River and Riverwalk project are major assets to Downtown and can be a focal point for commercial and public activities.</p> <p><b>Strong Partnerships:</b> The Downtown Association of Fairbanks, businesses, and property owners are invested into creating a thriving Downtown, through this plan.</p>

Commented [DS12]: Cleworth

Commented [DS13]: Marney: How do we fix undesirable behaviors?

Commented [DS14]: Ringstad: By the time most of our Borough residents get to high school age, they know their way around downtown.

Commented [DS15]: Ringstad: Update all Polaris references.

## 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.

**Commented [DS1]:** Ringstad: Downtown is *one* of the hubs.

- **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.<sup>3</sup>

**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.

**Commented [DS2]:** Ringstad: Not only a “winter city” but year-round.

<sup>3</sup> Learn more about the FNSB CEDS at <https://fnsbceds.com/>



## Supporting Visitors and Residents

Figure 10: Summer event in Griffin Park



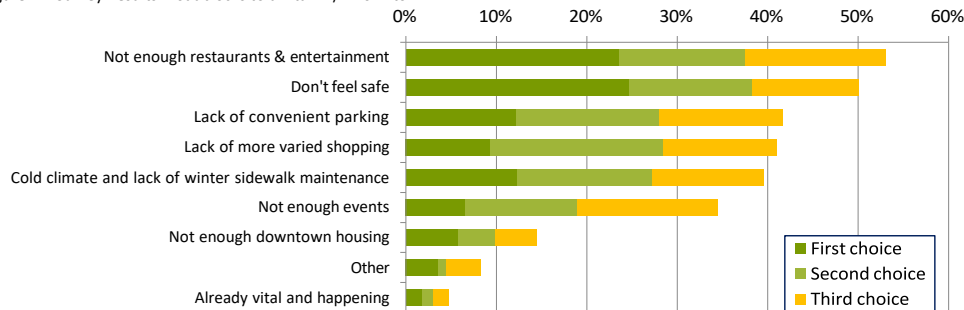
"We're not Seattle, people are not accustomed to using parking garages. In the winter, folks would rather drive 30 minutes in a warm car to a place where they can park and walk right in. From October to April, if people can't find parking right away, they go somewhere else."

*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 10). Other residents shared they do not regularly go Downtown; Figure 11 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.** For example, 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.

**Commented [DS16]:** Marney: FNSB/MACS transit terminal; Porta Potties; Riverwalk; Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center

Figure 11. Survey Results: Roadblocks to a vital 24/7 Downtown



*SOURCE: Resident Survey, 2017*

Figure 14. 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 14). 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.

**Commented [DS17]:** Ringstad: FNSB should reduce barriers. So should the City of Fairbanks.

**Commented [DS18]:** Cleworth: This statement needs to either be heavily modified or eliminated to reflect current monitoring data.

Marney: Agreed

**Commented [DS19]:** Ringstad: DEC and FNSB officials have said that Downtown Fairbanks meets air quality standards?

## 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?*

### 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.
- Collaborate with building owners to add more murals downtown.

### 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 database<sup>4</sup> 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.
- d. Update the City of Fairbanks code to allow for the issuing of citations for problem properties.

**Commented [DS3]:** Ringstad: This is already being developed. An updated reference may be needed.

<sup>4</sup>Development Opportunities in Downtown Fairbanks. Maintained by the Downtown Association of Fairbanks. Available at <https://fastplanning.maps.arcgis.com/apps/insight/media/index.html?appid=e9048bd03d0d4c9b841e1b2cf01c8abb>

- e. 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.*

#### **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.

**Commented [DS4]:** Ringstad: This was done last winter and is already planned to be continued.

#### **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 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, **historical mining, and strong military presence** in the physical design, place names, art installations, infrastructure, and

##### *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, farmer's markets, and other 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.*

Commented [DS20]: Cleworth

## 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?*

*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 **where appropriate**, 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 22).

- 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.*

Commented [DS21]: Cleworth

- 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)

**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.<sup>5</sup>
- 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.*

**Commented [DS5]:** Ringstad: This is already in process.

**Commented [DS6]:** Ringstad: This sounds contradictory.

<sup>5</sup> Learn more about preventing light pollution and implementing responsible outdoor lighting from the International Dark Sky Association: <https://www.darksky.org/>

Downtown Fairbanks Land Use Map Categories

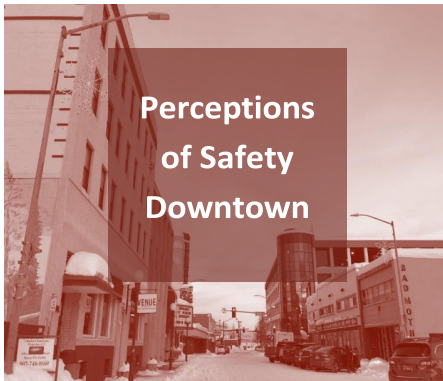
The Downtown Fairbanks Land Use Map is the key tool for implementing the Comprehensive Plan. Land use actions such as rezoning and conditional use approvals as well as many types of development projects must align with these land use designations.

Land Use Category	Intended Land Uses	Application Area
<div>Urban Core</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intended to be the employment and activity center for the region, attractive to residents and visitors, creating a live, work and play environment.</li><li>• Walkable, with buildings closer to property lines, continuous building facades with multiple building entries, active streetscape with pedestrian amenities (wide sidewalks).</li><li>• Pedestrian-oriented commercial uses such as food carts or walk-up concessions.</li><li>• Concentration of civic, cultural, entertainment, office, and retail uses.</li><li>• High-density residential, recommended residential density – no less than 13 dwelling units per acre (DU/ac) and no maximum density limit.</li><li>• Minimal off-street parking, reliance on on-street parking and parking garage in business areas.</li><li>• Parks, plazas, and open spaces intended for public use.</li><li>• Discourage new industrial uses and surface parking.</li><li>• Encourage specialty and locally owned retail on ground floors.</li><li>• <del>Design streets in the Urban Core to emphasize “accessibility” over “mobility.”</del></li></ul>	<p>The Urban Core is the center of downtown activity and commerce, from the Chena Riverfront and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue to commercial corridors along Cushman and Noble Streets, south to 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue.</p>
<div>Mixed Use Preferred Residential</div> <div></div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li><li>• Predominately high-density residential, recommended residential density – between 13 DU/ac to 29 DU/ac.</li><li>• Small scale neighborhood-oriented commercial uses with a local market area that are compatible with downtown residential uses.</li><li>• Encourage specialty and locally owned retail on ground floors.</li><li>• Large commercial uses with a regional market area only along high-volume roads and buffered from residential areas.</li><li>• A mixed reliance on on-street parking and off-street parking.</li><li>• Parks, plazas, and open spaces intended for public use.</li></ul>	<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>

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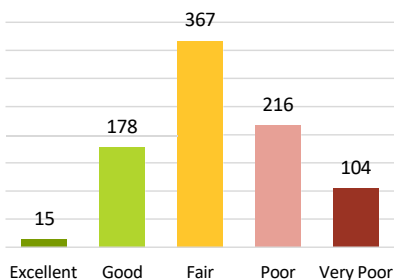
## Key Issues Guiding the Plan



### 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 23. 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 23). 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

**Commented [DS23]:** Ringstad: CSP is likely to be replaced soon.

**Commented [DS24]:** Marney: CSP is non-existent; update. Other items include public safety involvement, Doyon Security, and TCC Security.

**Commented [DS25]:** Ringstad: This is not what the FPD has said.



"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 25 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 25). 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.
- **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.

**Commented [DS7]:** Ringstad: 100 per year doesn't sound moderate.

**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:*

- o Keep buildings in good repair.
- o Maintain foliage and landscaping for visibility.
- o 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:*

- o 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.*

**Commented [DS8]:** Ringstad: Police presence is already being increased and CSP may be changed.



## Wayfinding and Navigation

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

Figure 30. Utility poles placed in the middle of sidewalks make it difficult to walk safely.



Figure 31. Street furniture such as planters adds visual interest and greenery to streets, but also makes snow clearing more difficult.



- **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 30).
- **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 31).

**Commented [DS9]:** Ringstad: Comes across as very negative. Could this be reworded?

**Commented [DS10]:** Ringstad: Comes across as very negative. Could this be reworded?

## 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 35 (Roadway), Figure 36 (Bicycle), Figure 37 (Pedestrian), and Figure 38 (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 35.

- 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.<sup>8</sup>
- c. Conduct a speed study and update speed limits as appropriate.
- d. Engage representative stakeholders in the planning of downtown road projects (see 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue example at the end of this chapter).

### 2. BICYCLES: Develop a seasonal bicycle network throughout Downtown to incorporate cycling with other transportation options. See Figure 36.

- a. "Provide bicycle parking and storage in appropriate and safe locations. Use of on-street signs, marked lanes, or other markings will be determined and developed by and with the maintenance authority of the roadway.
  - 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 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and shared-use pathway along the Steese Expressway.

Commented [DS26]: Cleworth

<sup>8</sup> Learn more about Complete Street policies at the U.S. Department of Transportation website: <https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/complete-streets-policies>

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

**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.~~

Commented [DS27]: Cleworth

**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 34 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 34: Existing Downtown Signage



*Example projects:*

- o Work with FAST Planning to integrate Downtown brand identity and design elements as part of consistent design standards for Downtown transportation projects.
- o 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.

"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*

## Homelessness in Downtown Fairbanks

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.

**Commented [DS28]:** Marney: What is the Borough doing about homelessness?

### 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*



## Other General Comments

(This page is not a part of the Fairbanks Downtown 2040 Plan)

- Marney: How current is the data in the Plan? Police Chief Dupee indicated the last time the Fairbanks Police Department provided information for the Plan was when Eric Jewkes was the Police Chief.
- Marney: I like page 79 RE: parking garage usage!
- Marney: Create incentives for building downtown, such as lowering building permit prices to \$1,000? Or providing tax breaks?
- Ringstad: The plan seems to gloss over the 100,000 people living around the downtown area and why they don't go downtown: 1) safety – 50% of respondents listed it and 78% rated safety as fair to very poor, and 2) there is nothing downtown for them.
- Ringstad: The plan seems to suggest major costs for the City of Fairbanks and its taxpayers.
- Ringstad: History and culture must include mining, military, U of A, and oil.
- Ringstad: With the current resident in the project area being largely single, elderly, and low-income, the plan seems to imply that this is the target market. The project boundaries don't discuss the impacts the thousands of people that live within a mile of the area, much less the entire FNSB.