



Municipality of Anchorage

Ethan Berkowitz, Mayor

Planning Department
Long-Range Planning Division

SENT VIA EMAIL

May 11, 2017

Chris Zimmerman, Smart Growth America
At: czimmerman@smartgrowthamerica.org

RE: One Year/Final Report

Dear Chris,

We are happy to submit the following as our one year and final report. The report focuses on efforts accomplished on the key action items and recommendations received at the May10, 2016, Smart Growth America Workshop, and are included below. On behalf of the Municipality Leadership and Staff, I cannot thank Smart Growth enough for what your visit to Anchorage, and your recommendations have meant to my community. Weekly we refer to the Smart Growth recommendations. Monthly we track our progress, and now at the end of a very busy year, we have the pleasure and opportunity to share just how far we have advanced. The straightforward Smart Growth recommendations have helped us justify projects, grant applications, and provided an exciting future for new development in our Downtown.

I personally look forward to the day that you and your teammate, Alex Hutchinson can visit Anchorage again, to see how much our fair and beautiful Downtown has changed and succeeded in no small part to your visit and dedication to helping make cities all across America prosperous and livable again.

Focus the Effort

- 1. Publish an Incentives Handbook:** Include all known adopted incentives such as “Deteriorated Properties” tax abatement and Title 21 Floor Area Ratio incentives. Overhaul each of the incentives and enabling State Legislation to ensure that they can be used in an efficient manner reducing costs to the municipality and the development community. *Fund and complete the Incentives Handbook in the next 12 months.*

12-Month Status: *Still on track for completion. An Incentives Handbook is identified as an action item in the 2040 Anchorage Land Use Plan Map project. The Anchorage Community Development Authority (ACDA) is completing an incentives report that includes recommendations for necessary changes in State or Municipal legislation. The Alaska State Legislature is currently in session in Juneau. Municipal staff have worked with legislators and other interested cities across Alaska to help achieve those changes.*

Projects are moving forward using some of the tools identified for the Incentive Handbook, even before its finalization. Those projects are mentioned below in Item #3 and under Other Downtown Progress. The Handbook will be finalized in the next year according to ACDA staff. Additionally, the Anchorage Downtown Partnership, Ltd. is [providing information online](#) regarding the current development incentives.

2. **Create a Redevelopment Authority:** Staff, fund, give bonding authority, and provide the ability to acquire property for development. Require that the Redevelopment Authority report out its progress to the Assembly and the community on a semi-annual or annual basis to determine what progress has been achieved in implementing the Downtown Comprehensive Plan. *Determine necessary actions and implement within 24 months.*

12-Month Status: *This is becoming a shared function between the Anchorage Community Development Authority, who is tasked with economic development projects including the renovation of the Downtown Transit Center, and the Municipal Real Estate Department. Additionally, [the Municipality recently received grant funding from the Rasmuson Foundation](#) for a Chief Housing Officer position to focus municipal efforts on housing. This is a win-win for the community allowing each of these departments to clearly focus on these specific economic and community development elements needed to bring back our Downtown.*



3. **Action Item:** Define a specific redevelopment area that includes the MOA-owned 7th Avenue and I Street property as an anchor for a redevelopment pilot project: Use the existing fiscal tools to incentivize the pilot project. This includes making decisions in a timely manner on tax abatement, utility and infrastructure investments, Return on Investment, Pro Forma, permitting and any other incentives deemed appropriate to the project. The Municipality is committed as a partner in new development. *Complete a Special Area Study to refine recommendations and report out on ROI and Pro Forma within 12 months.*

12-Month Status: *The “Few Good Blocks Project” is underway! The “Few Good Blocks” redevelopment focus area was defined with Mayor Berkowitz in June 2016. GIS analysis was completed to determine property ownership, taxation data, utilities, rights-of-way and other relevant data. The project area was photographed and researched to also develop walkability projects for inclusion in the Municipal Capital Improvements Program. Requests for Proposals were issued on two municipally-owned blocks, one for 3 parcels at 7th Avenue and I Street and for 2 parcels at 9th Avenue and L Street.*

[The Municipality awarded the 7th Avenue and I Street RFP to Cook Inlet Housing Authority for a mixed-use project that will provide housing, takes advantage of the location and surrounding downtown amenities and employment opportunities.](#)



Make Connections to Surrounding Neighborhoods

- 4. Make Downtown a Walkable and Desirable place to live, work, and play:** Fund and complete a feasibility study for the Municipality to assume ownership and management of Downtown Streets. This may include an update to the H2H (Seward Highway to Glenn Highway connector) Environmental Impact Statement and adding construction of H2H back into the 5-year AMATS Transportation Improvement Program. It also may include funding for implementation of the Gambell Street Corridor Plan, the Fairview Neighborhood Plan, and the Downtown Comprehensive Plan.

12-Month Status: *The Municipality continues to engage in discussions about the Downtown roadways in question. The AK Department of Transportation submitted comments on this action item to the Municipality in June. A follow-up meeting with the Municipality and Department of Transportation was held mid-July 2016. There are many issues to be resolved with this action item. However, the AMATS Technical Advisory Committee approved a resolution at their August 2016, meeting to request that the AK Department of Transportation [provide funding and restart work on the Seward to Glenn Highways Environmental Impact Statement](#). Additionally, on May 8, 2017, [Alaska Governor Bill Walker announced that he was closing out the controversial Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority project](#), freeing up approximately \$40 million in earmarked federal funds to be used for other transportation projects.*

Resolve Outstanding Issues to Stabilize the Neighborhoods

- 5. Fund and Implement Community Homeless Plan:** The Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness works jointly with the Municipality of Anchorage to design, create, and lead implementation for the [Anchorage Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#). The plan was finalized in the fall of 2015 and has a timeline of five years. Also work with and support the Downtown Partnership, Ltd. in their efforts to mitigate some of the issues that they manage on a daily basis. Apply for grants, and consider sales tax or other alternatives for funding within 18 months to begin plan implementation.

12-Month Status: *Substantial strides have been made on this issue including the launching of Project Homeless Connect. The Anchorage Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness was designed to feed up into both the state and federal plans. Anchorage chose five themes to structure the work of the next five years around, and those themes are: Education and Policy, Prevention, Supportive Services, Housing Development, and Data.*

6. **Make Downtown Safe:** Complete research on impacts to Downtown caused by several reasons including; late night bar patrons, camping in public areas, mitigate known drug use areas, increase lighting, patrols, etc. Update code and regulations to manage these issues within the next 18 months.

12-Month Status: *Several new Anchorage Police officers have been hired and increased Anchorage Community Service Patrols are on the streets. Citizen patrols initiated by neighborhoods adjoining Downtown have seen successes. Additionally, [the Town Square Park Master planning effort is underway](#) and will help reimagine this central public space as a true economic anchor and enhancement for downtown commerce and cultural exchange. Town Square Park was first developed in the 1980's to provide an oasis from urban activities in Alaska's largest and most metropolitan city. Recent efforts to improve visibility and public safety have been implemented.*



Other Downtown Progress

- Members of the community [continue their grassroots effort to save the 4th Avenue Theatre](#) and requested a special hearing (held 4/24/17) with the Alaska State Historical Commission to request State designation as “historically significant” and increase pressure on the property owner to preserve the Theatre. The 4th Avenue Theatre building is listed for its iconic architecture on the National Register of Historic Places.
- The municipal Historic Preservation Plan** kicked off in March 2017 with the public hearing draft slated for publishing in June 2017. This plan brings together the various neighborhood and district plans to tell the story of Anchorage’s development from 1915 forward and advocates for reuse, repurposing, and restoration of existing historic properties. Historic property redevelopment is occurring on various properties within downtown that include new restaurants and small business start-ups including legal marijuana.

- **Alaska Railroad** is [*advancing its Ship Creek condominium project the Downtown Edge located in The Rail a new 11-acre neighborhood.*](#) The project is currently designed and progressing through permitting. Interest is high and units have already been sold.



- **The Anchorage Museum's** [*\\$24 million expansion is nearing completion*](#) and will open September 2017. The project was funded through grants and donations and the 25,000 sq. ft. addition will showcase Alaska's northern artists and house new gallery and event spaces.



- **The Real Estate Department** secured authorization from the State of Alaska to serve as agent for the State in pursuing development on nearly one whole block of State-owned property on 9th Avenue across from the Delaney Park Strip. The Department issued an RFP for redevelopment of the site and will be evaluating proposals in the coming month.
- **The Project Management & Engineering Department** issued an RFP to complete a water rehabilitation project for East 3rd Avenue from Latouche Street to Ingra Street. This water rehabilitation project will support new development in the east Downtown area.

Our mantra in the Long Range Planning Department is “Planning Works!” and the technical assistance that we received through Smart Growth America has been a critical tool for advancing our mission in downtown Anchorage. We hope that you enjoy our 12-month update and look forward to continuing the work started with SGA.

Warmest regards,

Hal H. Hart

Hal H. Hart, AICP
Planning Director

Cc: Christopher M. Schutte, Director *Office of Economic & Community Development*
Kristine Bunnell, Senior Planner *Planning Department*
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