



# 1 introduction

**N**owhere else in Alaska is there an urban center that compares to Downtown Anchorage. With a strong economic base, cultural and historical attractions, natural beauty, and diverse recreational opportunities, Downtown Anchorage has long been considered Alaska's civic and cultural destination.

In the first decade of the 21st Century, Downtown Anchorage is at an important crossroads. Construction of the new convention center, expansion of the museum, plus many park and roadway improvements represent the highest level of public investment in the Downtown core in more than twenty years. Thus, now is the time to provide new direction and design standards to guide new growth and transform the city center into a vital, dynamic urban environment with a thriving economy.

Despite these assets, Downtown will only reach its full potential with a strategic planning approach to fully take advantage of this unique time in its history. The Downtown Comprehensive Plan provides a **strategic framework to guide the future development of Downtown**. It outlines a vision for a vibrant Northern city center that serves all of Alaska and welcomes the world—an active, walkable, mixed-use cultural and economic urban hub that is an exciting and livable place for residents, workers and visitors alike.

Central to achieving that vision is **focusing and concentrating limited resources**. Land uses must

be coordinated to achieve their greatest synergy and potential; key facilities and amenities must be strongly linked through streetscape enhancements and good building design; catalytic projects must be developed in the right locations to stimulate additional development; and public improvements must be phased properly so that, when integrated with new development, they create a real sense of place and vitality.

The Anchorage Downtown Comprehensive Plan, coupled with the companion Downtown Land Use Code document, provides the blueprint for achieving success in the coming years.



## THE DOWNTOWN PLAN PROCESS

The Anchorage Downtown Comprehensive Plan process began in August 2005 with the goal of creating a visionary—yet realistic, strategic and action-oriented—plan to guide Downtown’s future. Drawing upon extensive community resources, municipal staff time and energy and consultant team expertise, the planning process was highly collaborative and participatory.

The process included over 60 meetings, including three major public meetings; small group sessions with an extensive range of stakeholders and community leaders; and regular meetings with the citizen-based Downtown Advisory Group,

Mayor, Assembly, Urban Design Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission, and Geotechnical Advisory Commission to guide the plan elements. All of these groups and hundreds of community members were important resources in crafting and refining the Downtown Comprehensive Plan.

The planning process was led by the Municipality’s Planning Department and the Moore Iacofano Goltsman, Inc. (MIG) consultant team. The MIG team was comprised of local and national planners, engineers and economists, including Robert Odland Consulting, Land Design North, RIM Architects, Northern Economics, Kittelson & Associates, Shannon & Wilson, Inc. and Economic and Planning Systems. The Client team



was comprised of the Municipality of Anchorage’s Planning, Economic and Community Development, Parks and Recreation, Project Management and Engineering and Traffic departments; Anchorage Downtown Partnership; Anchorage Parking Authority; and Sheila Selkregg and Associates.

Throughout the process, the consultant team and Planning staff engaged the community at large and worked side by side with stakeholders, community members and city officials to create a comprehensive plan that everyone can embrace.

The process began with a three-day planning session in August 2005, during which time the team met with stakeholders, toured the Downtown area, and met with the Mayor and Assembly members.

Following the initial kickoff session, consultants pursued the existing conditions and site analysis. In October 2005, the team reviewed their progress, met with additional stakeholders and introduced the process to the community at large.

The Mayor, Assembly members and the Downtown Advisory Group (made up of a diverse group of Downtown stakeholders) convened to identify Downtown’s strengths, weaknesses and key opportunities. More than 100 citizens attended the first major public workshop to help identify and articulate community members’ visions and goals for Downtown.

Four other intensive planning sessions took place to develop alternative plans and strategies for Downtown; refine a concept plan and preferred strategies; draft design guidelines; and present the draft Downtown land use and development code. In March 2006 more than 90 people participated in the second community wide workshop. In May 2006, additional large work sessions were held that focused on review of and feedback on the plan and its emerging components.

The plan’s inclusiveness—and the importance placed on hearing all voices and working to build consensus and alignment—will help ensure success during implementation of the plan.





The new Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center is one of many projects that will have a big impact on Downtown's economy and overall levels of activity.

### RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING PLANS AND POLICIES

Projects such as a new Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center, expansion of the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, and transformation of E Street into an active, pedestrian oriented corridor are just a few of the ongoing plans that will enhance the Downtown environment and attract more people to experience its historic and cultural resources.

A major goal of the Downtown Comprehensive Plan is to provide strategic direction for development and growth, while embracing livability and a sense of place. In doing so, the planning process coordinated with all major ongoing projects and plans. The team worked to fully integrate these initiatives, with the goal of collectively strengthening Downtown Anchorage and firmly positioning it as Alaska's civic, cultural and economic heart.

#### The Anchorage 2020 Plan

The Municipality initiated a series of planning efforts to provide the city, and the Downtown specifically, with a clear direction to strengthen its standing as a regional destination. The Anchorage Bowl 2020 Comprehensive Plan (The Anchorage 2020 Plan) and the Downtown Development

Framework were developed through these efforts. The Anchorage 2020 Plan is the adopted policy framework for guiding growth and development within the Anchorage Bowl. The Anchorage 2020 Plan outlines policies that are designed to shape Downtown into a vibrant northern city center. Three Anchorage 2020 Plan policies and their supporting strategies focus on Downtown and have been incorporated in this plan:

#### Anchorage 2020 Policy #18:

Strengthen the Central Business District's role as the regional center for commerce, services, finance, arts and culture, government offices, and medium- to high-density residential development.

#### Anchorage 2020 Policy #19:

Locate municipal, state and federal administrative offices in the Central Business District.

#### Anchorage 2020 Policy #23:

Downtown is a designated major employment center.

These policies call for a year-round walkable, urban setting with attractive and diverse housing, retail, cultural facilities, art, open space and business development.

Together with the Downtown Development Framework, the Anchorage 2020 Plan sets the stage for the Downtown Comprehensive Plan and Downtown land use code. These documents further articulate the vision for Downtown Anchorage and identify how Downtown should best enhance its civic, cultural and natural resources through coordinated guidelines and regulations for land use, zoning, economic development and design.

## Title 21

The primary regulatory instrument affecting the Downtown area of Anchorage is Title 21 Land Use Planning of the Anchorage Municipal Code (Title 21). Although many sections of Title 21 are applicable to the Downtown, the principal sections are those that address the three central business zoning districts: B-2A, B-2B, and B-2C. Draft revisions of all portions of Title 21 except for these three zoning districts have been prepared as part of a separate project and, at the time of the development of this plan, are undergoing continued revision for public review. A major implementation strategy recommended in the Anchorage 2020 Plan was the revision of Title 21. The three Downtown zoning districts were not a part of the initial revision of Title 21 because municipal officials believed they should be integrated into the Downtown Comprehensive Plan project to provide a closer link between policy and implementation.

Therefore, an additional document entitled Downtown land use code accompanies this plan and addresses the zoning districts within the Downtown area.

## Downtown Market Study

In the fall of 2005, the Municipality and the Anchorage Downtown Partnership hired a marketing and branding firm to conduct a Downtown Market Study to determine the best approach for attracting future visitors and residents to Downtown Anchorage. The impetus for this study was the fact that although Anchorage draws more visitors than any other city in Alaska, most visitors make only a brief stop in Anchorage and spend more time in other parts of Alaska.

The study analyzed what the community, visitor and business perceptions of Downtown Anchorage are today; what visitors are looking for when they visit Downtown Anchorage; and where these visitors are coming from. To gauge the perceptions of local residents, the study also analyzed who currently lives in Downtown; which segments of Anchorage's population would like to live Downtown; and which activities currently attract locals to the city center. The recommendations of this study support the goals identified in the Downtown Comprehensive Plan to continue to embrace the attraction of Downtown for all users.



Anchorage 2020/Anchorage Bowl  
Comprehensive Plan

## INTRODUCTION



Numerous references and links to Anchorage's history are found throughout Downtown, such as this monument overlooking Ship Creek paying tribute to the historic "Tent City" (above). Picturesque Ship Creek (below) is a source of livelihood and central gathering space for the city's fishermen and outdoor recreationalists, as well as tourists.

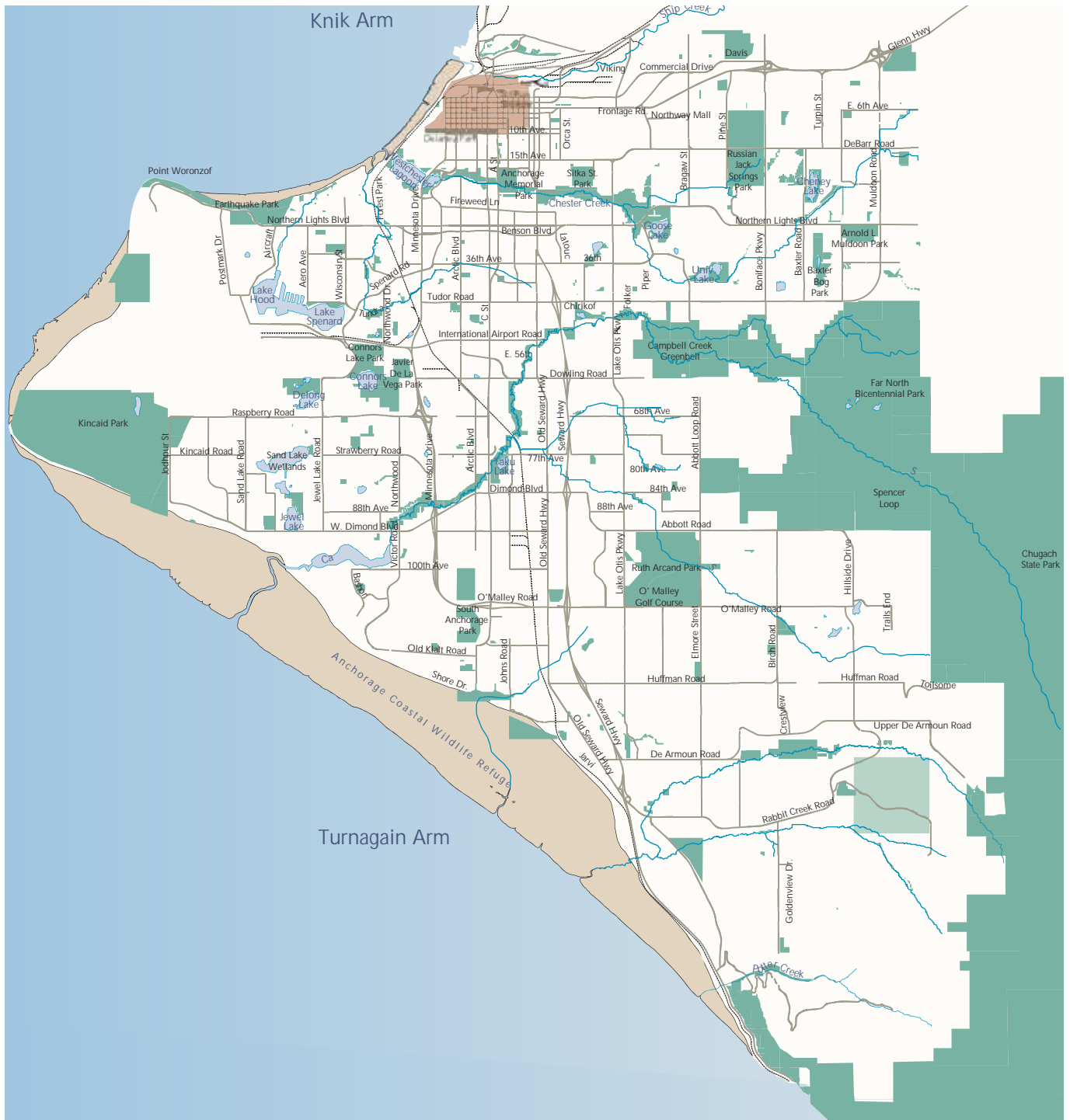
### HISTORY AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

Anchorage has a rich history serving as the state's transportation and trading hub. The area surrounding Ship Creek, just north of what is considered Downtown today, became a temporary tent camp when construction of the Alaska Railroad began. In 1915, this "Tent City" was relocated to a permanent town site on the relatively flat plain above the south side of Ship Creek and in 1920, the new town became incorporated as the City of Anchorage. Growing from these early roots, Anchorage now comprises a metropolitan area of more than 270,000 people spread out across the Anchorage Bowl and in smaller communities along Knik Arm and Turnagain Arm.

Unlike most urban environments, Downtown Anchorage is surrounded by stunning views and connections to regional open space. It is also home to some of the region's most popular cultural and entertainment facilities and annual events. The historic character of Downtown reminds residents and visitors of the diverse culture and rich history of the city.

Downtown Anchorage truly serves as the heart of the region. Its diverse population, services and amenities continue to attract Alaskans and visitors from all over the world. The planning of Downtown must take this regional context and significance into account, coordinating with the interests of the entire Anchorage Bowl to best meet the needs of all.





Legend

- Downtown Study Area
- Parks and Open Space
- Major Water Bodies
- Mud Flats
- Primary Roads and Highways
- Railroad

Regional Context Diagram



UNCLE JOE'S  
Pizzeria



DIAS  
Selling  
BELL  
Coke  
SUN

UNCLE JOE'S  
Pizzeria  
PIZZA  
By the Slice