



OUR DOWNTOWN

The Heart of Anchorage

A Project to Implement the Downtown Comprehensive Plan

PUBLIC INPUT PLAN

October 1, 2020



OUR DOWNTOWN PUBLIC INPUT PLAN

*Vision: **Our Downtown** is the heart of our community—the site of growth, hope and promise for a bright today and a promising future for generations to come.*

Setting the Stage: OUR DOWNTOWN is a three-step process:

- ‡ **STEP 1:** Reformats the Downtown Zoning Districts (old code) and brings them into current Title 21.
 - ‡ **STEP 2:** Completes a “targeted plan review” of the 2007 Anchorage Downtown Comprehensive Plan (2007 DT Plan).
 - ‡ **STEP 3:** Will update the B2-A, B2-B, B2-C Downtown Zoning Districts to DT-1, DT-2, DT-3.
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***STEP 1:** Reformats the Downtown Zoning Districts (old code) and brings them into current Title 21.*

OVERVIEW

Our Downtown—Step 1 was initiated in October 2019 to reformat the Downtown Zoning Districts (old code) as partial implementation of action item LU-1 in the 2007 DT Plan and implementation of action item 3-2 in the Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan (2040 Plan). Step 1 provides the foundation for an easier-to-use Downtown zoning code consistent with the current Title 21.

Community engagement was an integral component to the successful completion of Step 1. Engagement occurred during public meetings and workshops, including the First Friday at the Anchorage Museum, lunch-and-learns focused on business and property owners, open houses focused on architects and planners, and in several Downtown leadership agencies. Step 1 outreach also provided some discussion on recent housing projects and upcoming development efforts to illustrate big wins.

TIME FRAME

Our Downtown—Step 1 was initiated in October 2019. The Anchorage Assembly adopted Step 1 on April 28, 2020. The reformatted downtown zoning districts became effective May 28, 2020.

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Comments were submitted by email and recorded during each meeting and workshop. Several comments received during the Step 1 may relate more to Steps 2 and 3. These comments have been saved and will be used later as those steps occur. See the project page here, which includes all comments received to date: <http://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/Projects/AnchLandUse/Pages/Action-3-2,-3-9.aspx>

Step 1 included meetings and briefings with the Planning & Zoning Commission, Downtown Community Council, Anchorage Assembly members, the Federation of Community Councils, the Government Hill, Fairview and South Addition community councils, and Downtown partner agencies.

Tools

Websites, presentations, one-on-one meetings, large and small group meetings, open houses, a lunch-and-learn, flyers, postcards, and email were used throughout Step 1.

Step 1 Messaging

- ✓ **What are Downtown Zoning Districts?**
The Downtown Zoning Districts are unique from the other zoning districts adopted into current Title 21, focused on the distinctive architecture and urban context of Downtown Anchorage.

The adoption of a separate new chapter in current Title 21, 21.11: *Downtown* reflects the unique role Downtown Anchorage has within the City.

✓ **Why is this important now?**

The current Title 21 Land Use Code was adopted in 2013. A decision was made at that time to delay the update to the Downtown Zoning Districts. The Planning Department initiated the Step I Downtown Zoning District Reformat (Step I) project in October 2019. The development vision for Downtown Anchorage as envisioned by the Downtown Comprehensive Plan, has been slow to occur for many reasons, including the lack of a modern land use code. Step I provides Downtown with a reformatted land use code consistent with current Title 21 in language and format, provides missing references to other chapters and sections of current Title 21, and gives access to new incentives and streamlined provisions presently available in current Title 21.

✓ **The Downtown Zoning Districts were reformatted to:**

1. Provide development or permitting tools not currently found in old code.
2. Provide a code that is easier to use with new tables and updated references.
3. Create a code consistent with other chapters and sections of current Title 21.
4. Adopt a new Downtown Title 21 chapter similar to Chugiak-Eagle River and Girdwood to maintain the unique development setting found in Downtown.
5. Exempt Downtown from some standards that are not appropriate to Downtown.
6. Better support economic growth with an easier to use code.
7. Allow the Planning Director to approve minor modifications from AMC 21.07.110.
8. Allow Alternative Equivalent Compliance in design from AMC 21.07.110.

Outcomes

Regularly scheduled meetings with elected and appointed officials were held, and others were attended to present to the Downtown Community Council and Downtown partner agencies. Step I received a resolution of support from the [Downtown Community Council](#).

Staff Memos and Information Explaining the Reformat Process

Staff developed several memos to explain the process used to reformat the code. The memos explain issues such as:

- ✚ How a use that existed in old code was described in current code.
- ✚ How a standard would be applied that is different between old and current code.
- ✚ References incentives available in current code but not found in old code that could now be used.

STEP 2: *Completes the 2020-2021 planning process to review and amend the 2007 DT Plan identified as action item 3-9 in the 2040 Plan, and as described in AMC 21.03.070.B.2. Targeted Plan Review (10-year Intervals):*

The Director shall initiate a targeted review of the plan at least once every 10 years, or in conjunction with an areawide rezoning, in order to make it consistent with economic and demographic trends, recent and proposed land use decisions, and adopted studies and plans.

OVERVIEW

Step 2 is a “targeted review” of the 2007 *DT Plan*. Economic and demographic trends will be updated in the plan. Recent and proposed land use decisions will be studied for their potential impact on downtown development and implementation.

Adopted studies and plans will be reviewed for their action items and how they support the adopted visions, goals, policies, and action items. Step 2 will have a limited scope as a targeted review and will be completed within a 2-year timeframe (2020-2021).

TIMEFRAME

December 2020 is the estimated timeframe for the public outreach kick-off Step 2 planning. Research, analysis and mapping has been ongoing throughout 2020 and will be used during the kick-off. Adoption of an amended plan is anticipated for the end of 2021 or mid-2022.

COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted the Department’s ability to conduct the normal person-to-person outreach and engagement processes that the community has come to expect from our staff. Planning is currently in the process of hiring a public engagement consultant that can help us through the “virtual planning” process. We are confident the public and our partners will have every opportunity they need to participate and be heard during this planning process.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Step 2’s public engagement process will include virtual and in-person workshops, facilitated discussions, lunch-and-learns, interviews, and surveys.

The public’s perception and knowledge regarding implementation of the 2007 *DT Plan* was determined by an online survey in 2017. Fifty-five percent of survey respondents “had a shallow understanding of the Downtown’s Plan implementation.”¹

A primary goal at the initiation of the planning process is to ensure the public understands the following:

- ✚ What 2007 DT Plan Chapter 8 Implementation Strategies and the Strategy Diagram were completed in the last 13 years.
- ✚ The latest and best Economic and Demographic information found in the 3-year Economic Outlook developed by AEDC – To be included in a separate Trends Report.
- ✚ The Agnew::Beck Housing Study and Pro Forma information.

An overview of what action items were implemented will guide a facilitated discussion on the success of the Visions, Goals, Objectives, and Implementation Strategies. This discussion will help the Planning Team, TAC and public determine if the Visions, Goals, Objectives, and Action Items were on track or should be updated.

Meetings and Presentations

Step 2 will include meetings and presentations to the Planning & Zoning Commission, Downtown Community Council, Anchorage Assembly members, the Federation of Community Councils, Fairview and South Addition community councils, and Downtown partner agencies.

¹ Burkhead, C.A. (2017). *Exploring a Process to Evaluate Municipal Plan implementation that Incorporates Citizen Input*. (Unpublished Master’s Project). University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage, AK

These will be scheduled throughout the planning process and include reports as milestones and deliverables are completed.

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC)

Downtown agencies and partners will be asked to serve on the advisory committee. The TAC will be used throughout the planning and adoption process. The TAC review studies, survey results, survey information, and GIS mapping to enable them to make recommendations to staff and share information with the public.

Tools

As noted above, much of the initial outreach will be virtual. Websites, social media, presentations, one-on-one meetings, large and small group meetings, open houses, and lunch-and-learn, flyers, postcards, and email will be used throughout Step 2.

Messaging

This targeted plan review will allow the community to look back at accomplishments and implemented action items, consider current conditions, and create objectives for the future. The following messaging was developed for Step 2:

- ✓ MESSAGE #1: *This is the status of the implementation actions.*
 - ✚ Chapter 8 Actions and the Strategy Diagram.

- ✓ MESSAGE #2: *This is our current economic situation and 3-year economic outlook, latest information on demographics, trends in housing and commercial development, and anticipated COVID-19 impacts.*
 - ✚ 2020 3-Year Economic Outlook Report
 - ✚ Residential Housing Study and Pro Forma
 - ✚ Stakeholder Interview Report
 - ✚ Any relevant surveys
 - ✚ Downtown Community Council member interviews
 - ✚ State of the State
 - ✚ State of the Municipality
 - ✚ Mapping and Mapping Analysis Narrative

- ✓ MESSAGE #3: *This is a Crosswalk between the Downtown Comprehensive Plan and recently adopted plans, studies and Assembly actions in support of revitalization and development in Downtown.*
 - ✚ The Crosswalk was developed from Assembly actions, municipal department planning, and partner agency efforts (2012-2020) and includes adopted plans, land use decisions, and completed studies and reports. The Crosswalk explains what actions have been adopted to assist Downtown redevelopment, new and proposed developments, and any other actions to support community or economic development in Downtown.

OTHER INFORMATION TO BE SHARED:

- I. A “targeted plan review” is a 10-year look at the plan to ensure the plan meets both present circumstances and future community desires. This effort amends the 2007 plan using the most up-to-date information available. The Downtown District Plan will provide for changing demographics, economic factors, development opportunities, and those desired services and amenities that make Our Downtown a great place to live, work, play, and invest.

2. There are many success stories to be told about Our Downtown. This planning effort will spotlight businesses, new development, conventions booked, cultural and historic properties, the taxable value of Downtown and its contribution to the overall community, etc.
3. COVID-19 Impacts on our economy and how our economy is expected to recover.
4. Initial information made available during the kick-off will also include:
 - a. Report on the comments received during Step I.
 - b. Downtown property tax base.
 - c. Mapping of brown field sites, parking lots, historic resources and potential historic districts.
 - d. Existing conditions of the transportation system.
 - e. View sheds.
 - f. Seismic zones.
 - g. Step I – Code Update.
 - h. Social services.
5. We need to make sure we have the right zoning and development standards in Downtown to promote housing and economic development as well as have alternative modes of travel including walking, biking and transit, important to having a safe and healthy community, are considered in all roadway project proposals.
6. What can we celebrate?
 - ✚ Residential tax abatement.
 - ✚ New Anchorage Police Department’s headquarters.
 - ✚ Elizabeth Place mixed-use project.
 - ✚ Multiple RFPs for downtown redevelopment issued by ACDA.
 - ✚ Alaska Railroad housing project – The Edge.
 - ✚ Port of Alaska projects and improvements.
 - ✚ Ship Creek Trail and interpretive project.
 - ✚ Grandma Olga Ezi Interpretive project.
 - ✚ Town Square Park Master Plan.
 - ✚ Performing Arts Center accessibility planning.

Desired Outcomes

A robust and engaging public outreach process that ensures the public, property owners, agencies, departments, and the state and federal governments will support the adoption of an updated plan that contains visions, goals and implementation items that reflect the current market and demand for housing, retail, business, and tourism, that reflect the unique cultural and historic resources of Downtown Anchorage.

STEP 3: *Will Complete a comprehensive update to the downtown zoning regulations, establishing new DT districts, as part of a targeted plan review and update to the Downtown Comprehensive Plan with an analytical report of issues and conditions. (Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan – Action Item 3-9)*

OVERVIEW

The update will adopt a Downtown Code consistent with Title 21 that responds to the needs and realities of the Downtown Central Business District while reflecting the input of community, Downtown users, organizations, property owners, developers, and tourism providers.

TIME FRAME

Step 3 will begin upon the completion of Step 2.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Step 3's public engagement will include workshops, facilitated discussions, lunch-and-learns, and open houses. A Step 3 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will provide direction to the code update.

Meetings and Briefings

Step 3 will include meetings and briefings with the Planning & Zoning Commission, Downtown Community Council, Anchorage Assembly members, the Federation of Community Councils, Fairview and South Addition community councils, and Downtown partner agencies.

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC)

Municipal staff will participate as the technical advisory committee. The TAC will be used throughout the planning and adoption process.

Tools

Websites, social media, presentations, one-on-one meetings, large and small group meetings, open houses, and lunch-and-learns, flyers, postcards, and email will be used throughout Step 3.

Draft Messaging

The updated Downtown Zoning Districts will enable more good development in Downtown.

Desired Outcomes

Completed update and transformation of Downtown Zoning Districts to reflect the “recommended land use strategies, design guidelines and proposed downtown district recommendations,” as identified in the *Downtown Comprehensive Plan* and through public input received throughout this update project.

STAY INFORMED:

Visit the project webpage:

<https://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/Projects/AnchLandUse/Pages/Action-3-2%2c-3-9.aspx>

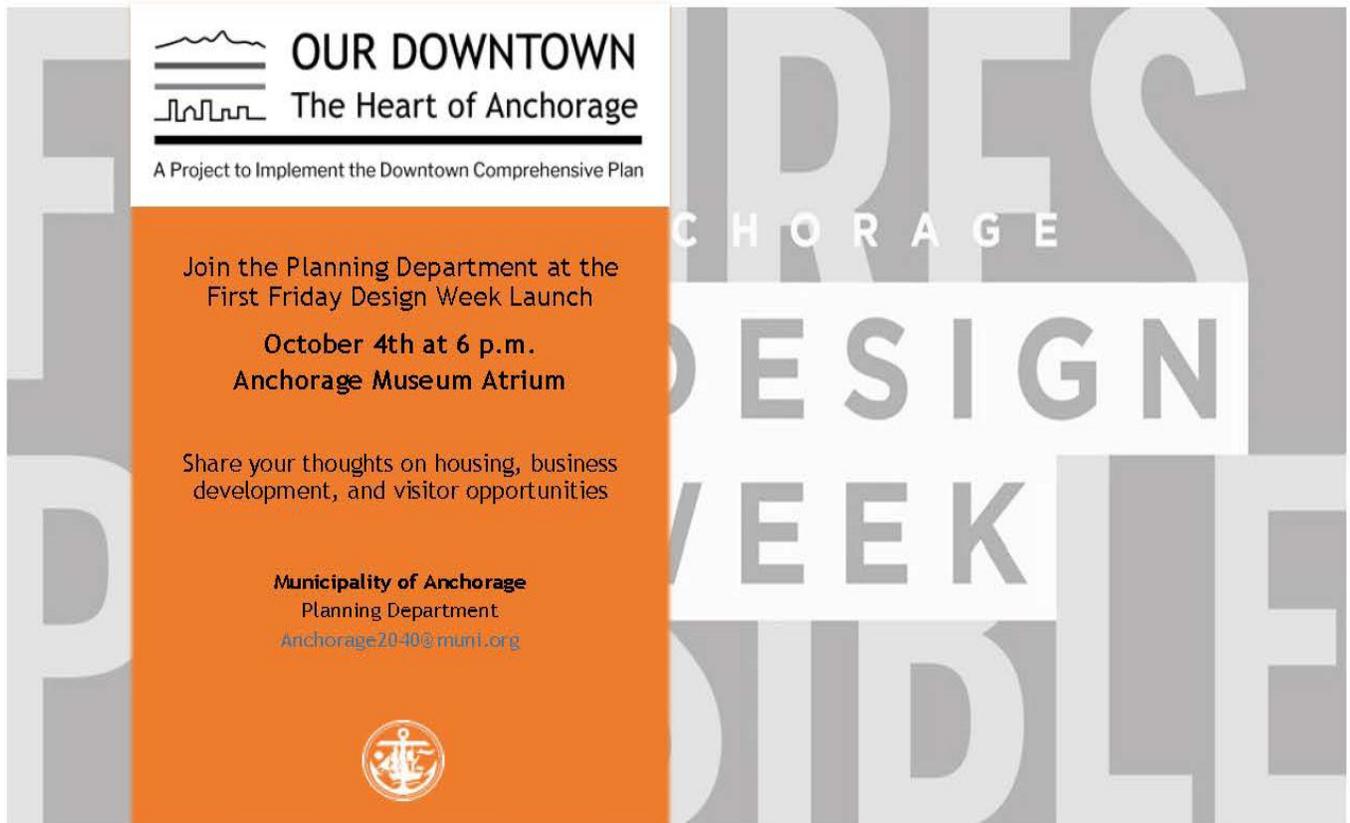
Contact the Project Managers:

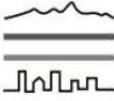
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ATTACHMENT B – October 4, 2019 - Design Week Event Invitation



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Join the Planning Department at the
First Friday Design Week Launch

October 4th at 6 p.m.
Anchorage Museum Atrium

Share your thoughts on housing, business
development, and visitor opportunities

Municipality of Anchorage
Planning Department
Anchorage2040@muri.org



ATTACHMENT C – Example Outreach October 4, 2019 – What part of Anchorage do you live in?

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What part of Anchorage do you live in?
 Please place a dot to indicate where you live

