

West Anchorage District Plan
Economic Development Focus Group Minutes

Thursday, May 28, 2009, 2-4 pm
MOA Planning Department Room 170

Boundary Discussion

- Make sure the boundary defines us without chopping it up with transportation pieces
- The airport and community relationship will not change until the governance structure changes.
- Start with some common ground and this process will work well.
- Make sure there is adequate ground participation for this plan; from the bottom up.

Strengths and Values

- The West End has wonderful features that should be maintained.
- History. Westsiders have a sense of place.
- Diversity of the area, there are different businesses that have been there for a long time and this goes back to the history of West Anchorage, which is an asset.
- Land Use & Design:
 - The City of Missoula, Montana had similar problems and hadn't defined them on what they wanted to have. A university class went to neighborhoods to ask people what they wanted. Today, that's the land use plan map this city is working with 25 years later. Survey people as to what would they like to see in the area. Give people some general ideas to help them talk about it.
 - New Title 21 will force businesses to put in new greenery which will improve things.
 - The plan should focus on preservation of our assets: saving big trees and preservation of green spaces, unique history, and small business
- Commercial Development:
 - Residents don't like surprises about adjacent land uses.
 - New boutique stores on Spenard
 - There are no big box stores at this time in West Anchorage and there isn't room for them. Instead we have small businesses.
 - West Anchorage is a major employment center.
 - The "3rd Space" is where you meet with people when it's not at work or home- indoor or outdoor. Spenard provides many of those 3rd spaces.
- Airport:
 - Address the cause and effect of the airport being the engine of the area. There are significant development opportunities within the footprint. Kulis National Air Guard Station (130 acres) is about to become available for lease. How will this mesh with the neighborhoods that have crept up around it over time? It's still being negotiated whether the business could be wide ranges of commercial or directly related to the airport.

- Airport has dropped from 5th to 3rd in the world. But we did just gain a new Chinese carrier- so it is likely that the airport will improve when the economy improves.
- Proximity to Ammenities
 - West Anchorage is on the ocean.
 - There are neighborhood schools we can walk to.
 - There aren't nice townhouses in West Anchorage; People live here to be near work or near Kincaid Park.
- Neighborhoods:
 - Getting feedback from surrounding residents is important.
 - Creating a big scene does not build healthy relationships for permanent neighbors.
 - Eclectic features of Spenard. New updates to Spenard businesses.
 - Our neighborhoods aren't defined by large roads as much. There is an opportunity to keep neighborhoods connected.
 - Stable year-round population - It's easier to make a business plan on the West side because you'll have year-round customers. We aren't impacted a lot by tourists.
 - West Side is positive. Spenard is not what it was. Find ways to strengthen the character.
- Recreation
 - There are some really nice trail systems. Including trails to get to Kincaid Park or bike along South Spenard.
 - Where are other opportunities to recreate in Spenard elsewhere?
- Transportation
 - Public transportation system- she rarely sees bus stops in the Dimond Jewel Lake area.
 - Pedestrian and bicycle traffic on North Spenard.
 - There are no crosswalks across North Spenard.
 - Connecting 27th Avenue is useful.

Issues, Weakness, and Problems

- Land Use & Design
 - There are some challenged properties and some properties needing to develop.
 - Carrs parking lots have no landscaping. If the standards are being amended for landscaping and this will be a good thing to see.
 - Connexs
 - There are not good ROW protections on the Coastal Trail.
 - Projects come to the community top-down. Solutions provided so far don't help make things truly livable.
- Commercial Development:
 - Through this planning process, you can do a backdoor mini marketing survey to create some solid information that businesses can use.

- We don't have stores for our 5-minute stops. Turnagain also needs a hardware store.
- Airport:
 - Governance regarding the airport. TSAIA runs independent of the legislature and the MOA; it does not have to respond to either. Until there is responsive governance to the airport, there will continue to be disagreements. Don't know who to identify who to go to for discussion of issues.
- Proximity:
 - An actual town center would be good with benches and be a place to congregate. Westchester lagoon may be a good spot (except that it so difficult to get to).
 - Intentionally or not, it seems that the neighborhood north of Northern Lights have been defined. Raspberry Road defined some neighborhoods as well.
 - I just want to walk to Carrs, walk to school, walk to REI.
- Recreation
 - There aren't a lot of kept green spaces. The existing green spaces in Spenard are often used for transients. The city needs to take care of homelessness.
- Transportation:
 - You can advocate for buses, but they're not "cool" to ride so they might not solve transportation issues.
 - Crosswalk timing is not long enough for pedestrian safety. There are handicap residents who have a difficult time getting across roads.
 - The bus system needs to be improved. There's not enough ridership, but you can increase ridership by combining it with school busing.
 - There is no buffer between the fast traffic and pedestrians in main corridors. It doesn't feel good to walk down Northern Lights or on Minnesota, even when you have the space.
 - There are a lot of stops along the Dimond/Jewel Lake (Route 7 and 7A) corridor without shelters or benches.

Solutions

- Use existing municipal assets when financial times are tough.
- Use the Survey Monkey to capture a much-larger spectrum of what people want for land use planning. Not enough people's needs are captured with the limited outreach done now.
- Airport:
 - Have an Airport Authority that runs TSAIA like a business instead of the odd hybrid we have today.
- Commercial Development
 - MOA/Business partnership- Define the types of businesses/vision we'd like to have. Sometimes you have to invite them in. Example: Millennium Hotel struck a deal with MOA in 1986 that they would spend \$20 million to build a hotel if MOA provided create certain amenities: road

improvements, landscaping, reduce prostitution in the area. Millennium now serves as an anchor to the West end of Spenard Road and REI was an anchor on the north end.

- Conduct a marketing survey. It's hard for small businesses to beat established brands. Consider UAA, West HS gifted mentorship program, International Baccalaureate students who have required community action service, or APU student thesis as a source to do marketing research. Use the Anchorage Prospector Tool on the AEDC website. But it doesn't give you the consumer demand piece.
- Neighborhoods:
 - Develop other areas that include 3rd Spaces/ places to create community.
 - West/Romig campus might function like an indoor public space.
 - Expand the Community Development Authority to consider Spenard.
- Transportation
 - Put tunnels under Raspberry rather than large fences.
 - Cut & cover Minnesota to reconnect Turnagain to Spenard.
 - Widen Spenard Road sidewalks. Maybe not as wide as originally planned in the Spenard Road Improvement Project.
 - Combine the People Mover with school district buses on the West Side as a pilot. It serves people without cars and the city is more accessible to young people. Or include smaller buses that serve as shuttles.
 - Pay for parking for spaces in areas other than downtown.

Trends

- Transportation:
 - Trend: There will be more pedestrian, more bicycle use.
 - Solution: This needs to be accommodated
 - Trend: Growing demands on surface transportation. You may see a demand for public transit on the south side of the airport as the Kulis property develops.
- Neighborhoods:
 - Trend: People desire to slow down and work together as neighbors and get to know our neighbors better.
 - Trend: People want those 3rd spaces.
- Commercial Development:
 - Trend: Media is causing too much anxiety about economic problems in Anchorage. It seems the small businesses in Spenard are doing fine. For example, supply sales are going up, while picture framing is down the tube. Blaines is planning to build a new store with a coffee shop. Business people in Spenard are making a concerted effort to spend locally.
 - Trend: Kids' priorities have changed. They want technology as part of their business experience.
 - Solution: Hot spots are being provided by businesses because it's not that expensive.
 - Q: What is happening at the Carrs Jewel Lake?

- A: Jewel Lake & Dimond tenants have been there a long time. In the past, they had karate and pizza. Over time, it's progressed to massage and nails, dance, hair. It's more of a destination
- Look at Saturday Market analysis that was done over time until they resulted in what exists now. Some businesses are mad about the carpet-baggers and some non-market businesses benefit from the higher traffic.

Housing:

- Trend: Housing market is doing fine. It will take off again. There is still land to develop on the West side. This again will lead to more traffic.
- Trend: There will be a boom in the \$200-250,000 house price range. There's still a high desire for the single family range.
- Trend: Residential development in West Anchorage is going to start growing. It will present a traffic problem.
- Trend: People want those 3rd spaces.

Follow-up

- During school registration is a good time to get community input. That is a good time to reach parents- and it's required!
- Focus group participants want to get involved in future airport conversations.