

**West Anchorage District Plan
Spenard Community Council
Visioning Workshop Minutes
April 2, 2009**

Introduction by Jon Isaacs, URS Alaska LLC, Senior Planner West Anchorage District Plan

Handouts about the Scope, Purpose & Need for the Project and Project Schedule were provided.

Comments from public participants

Boundary Comments

An explanation on planning area boundaries of other district plans in Anchorage was provided by Jon Isaacs, URS.

- In other towns, “A Street” is considered the center of town. We should consider this orientation in the boundary decision. Arctic Boulevard is the eastern boundary for Spenard Community Council (SCC). Arctic should be the eastern boundary of the West Anchorage District Plan (WADP) boundary.
- It is unclear why south of International Airport Boulevard is included in the WADP. West High School and Dimond High School areas are rivals, historically. There is not connectivity between these two areas. Connors Lake/Bog and the airport are some of the obstacles in between these two areas.
- The boundary should be the #1 concern. At least hold Arctic Boulevard as the eastern boundary so that SCC is whole in the planning process. This plan is about community.

Objectives for the Plan

Participants were asked to describe what they think should be objectives and vision for the WADP

- Address all the interactive transportation modes: heavy truck (Sealand), Ted Stevens International Airport (TSAIA), ARRC (at-grade crossings), plus the usual roads, pedestrian, bicycle interactions.
- Balance commercial, industrial and residential uses and needs. One use should not have too much sway and dominate uses.
- Be sensitive to commercial businesses. Sometimes they’re neglected, but they’re a pretty important part of our community.
- Achieve road maintenance and sidewalk maintenance in winter in all areas.
- All recommendations in the plan must keep in mind that we’re a winter city with winter problems. These winter issues haven’t been “solved” yet, so we should continue in the effort to work on the issues that winter presents.
- Have a positive impact on future generations and the environment.
- Set aside enough land for parks and other future needs, even if there is a perception that there is no more land in the Anchorage Bowl.

- Accommodate all the existing stakeholders. Don't "plan out" anybody. There are many different people already here.
- Revitalize neighborhoods. There are a lot of older multi-family buildings. Come up with solutions to make them last and improve them.
- The airport is a commercial center (blue collar) and we have a midtown center (white collar). Where do these workers live? Why not here? We should have a mix of housing in West Anchorage would attract both groups of people that already work here, without segregating socio-economically.
- When I was younger, it seemed there was a mix of socioeconomics and housing and people took better care of each other.
- Address transient population by assisting with the full Municipality of Anchorage goals.
- Improve Police and Fire Protection. Keep stations open and utilize marked police vehicles to increase visibility which can deter crime.
- Keep routes for kids to walk to and from school maintained.
- Support neighborhood business. Maintain their viability. Allow shoppers to walk from one neighborhood shop into the other.
- The park on Minnesota Boulevard (34th?) is an eye sore. Maybe it could be better utilized or better-maintained to increase use, safety, and aesthetics.
- Address parking requirements. Consider lenience of parking requirements in some areas to allow further development and improvements. Consider centralized parking in the context of how land is used already.
- Take a comprehensive look at all of the parks in terms of: use, safety, ingress/egress for emergency vehicles, transients and substance abuse.
- Improve bus pullouts for safety. Address the issue of getting safely on and off buses. Buses often have to stop in the middle of the lane. Delayed vehicles behind the bus can cause dangerous situations/near misses.
- Improve sidewalks and crosswalks for safety. Many sidewalks are not up to ADA compliance and snow gets piled on them regardless. A "deer track" is formed on the sidewalk snow pile; water melts on top then freezes, so people slide into the road. (Note: Message left with the Traffic Department on 4/7/09 that the crosswalk sign at Northwood and Spenard Road never changes.)
- Safety: How would this plan fit with the Community Action Police (CAP) Team/Scan, Analysis, Response and Assessment (SARA) Anchorage Police Department programs?
- Arterial Road Efficiency and Connectivity: The median on Minnesota Boulevard between Tudor Road and Northern Lights Boulevard prevents turns onto neighborhood streets. International, Minnesota and railroad tracks cut off the neighborhood around Taft Street. International Airport Boulevard needs access to the Seward Highway.

Strengths and Values

Participants were then asked to describe the strengths of West Anchorage, and some of the values that are important to them, and should be supported through the planning process.

- Northwood School is nearby and there is a park where kids can play. This creates family ties.
- History.
- I can be downtown or the Dimond Center within 10 minutes. It is convenient for the airport (5 minutes).
- I am a people person, so I live and shop in this area. Relationships with neighbors and businesses are strong.
- This is a great place to live.
- Its very accessible place to have a business. Easy for them to ship things.
- We need a bus that does a loop around Spenard Road, Denali Street, and Fireweed Avenue that runs very frequently. This in addition to some parking garages could maybe solve some transportation problems in the area. The Pearl District in Portland is a good example to follow.
- It's good the way it is, just make it more useable.
- Before Spenard was absorbed by Anchorage, this was a place with a self-contained, individual flavor. A lot of the character is gone to accommodate growth.
- Don't tear buildings down and rebuild without them looking like Spenard's character.
- Prevent zero-lot tract homes that look like everywhere USA.
- Smaller buses and more in-depth routes would improve Transit.
- From a business perspective, accessibility. We need more input from the businesses and more of a partnership. Especially the big businesses because they give back a lot.
- I love the trees here.
- I don't just live here, I work here. This is a strength of Spenard.
- Convenience of location.
- Style of home that I like (ranch style, wide streets, size of property, single family, used to have nice views) single story is easier to get up steps.
- The community.
- Spenard is more like a small town than anywhere else in Anchorage: interesting mix of small businesses, assorted residential in close proximity. It's created some land use challenges.
- Fish Creek watershed and all its affiliated parks that create little pockets.
- I can walk out my door and stand at the Lake Spenard beach. I want to prevent the airport from blocking out the historical residential use there. Not just the lake but the ability to walk around the lake. I love the beautiful visas you can see on the far west side of Lake Spenard.
- I like all the little trails on the back sides of neighborhoods.
- My neighbors speak fondly of this neighborhood when they reminisce.
- If you want people to stay, you have to maintain what we have.
- Wildlife cruising through. Don't take too much of their foliage away like big huge hotel or we will loose wildlife.
- In the 50s, Spenard was big and Anchorage was small. Anchorage took over Spenard.

- Whenever you look at issues, you need to determine: will you lose or gain jobs?
- We can't just look at it from one point of view: look at melding and mellowing of commercial and residential and neither point of view. Administrations seem to have different points of view. "Don't plant a tree if it will obstruct the view."
- The mountains.
- The people.
- Spenard is a bohemian part of our city, eclectic. A fun mix of people. We can speak to each other about our differences without animosity. We need to continue doing that.
- Small tight-knit area. I know my neighbors. They don't move out a lot. There aren't a lot of sales all the time. People tend to hang on to property here for a long time. You can trust who is close to you; we look out for what's important to us. Renters aren't moving in and out either; they stick around too. We don't have gangs and guns. We've had our drug issues and dig areas. But the police and CCs are quick to figure it out. We're not afraid to get involved.

Weaknesses and Issues

Participants were then asked to describe the weaknesses of West Anchorage, and some of the issues that should be addressed by the planning process.

- Too many hotels on International Airport Road. It looks terrible; it needs landscaping.
- Developing a large airport in Wasilla/Mat-Su could displace air traffic from TSAIA.
- Kulis Air National Guard Base is shutting down. Reeve Airlines is pursuing a 5 yr lease.
- We need a senior clinic and health facilities on the west side, especially for accessibility for seniors.
- How do we get kids who grew up here to come back?
- Kids have to walk in the road because there are not sidewalks. I don't like seeing that. I drive my kids.
- Dumpsters and parking occurring in the Right-of-Way.
- Title 21 Land Use Code, when applied to my business (Blaine's), would force me to find another space. I think other businesses in Spenard want to stay and should. Land Use applications should look at specific situations.
- Design and engineering of public facilities need to be done locally. Dimond High School used to be a problem because it was designed for a California climate. Service High School has flat roofs. School design should consider multi-floors to save space and hold more students. The construction of South High School was not justified since the new Dimond High School building contains half the students it used to have.
- Older housing stock. This is also opportunity because we need some new housing for people who want to live and work in midtown.
- Artic & 36th is primed for redevelopment. I think mixed use would be good. It's not in code, but maybe under the new Title 21 Land Use Map.

- Quality of public areas- maintenance and repair. In the general Spenard area, there are pockets of well maintained and nice spaces and spaces that are neglected/ degraded. I'd like to see public areas and sidewalks. For example, there's a piece of handrail (when you go under Spenard Road) fell down a long time ago.
- Keep chain businesses out of Spenard. We want to keep our character.
- Utilization of Community Councils is not consistent. Businesses come to us to ask for resolutions that they can go to the Assembly with to avoid conflict. Spenard used to be one of the strongest councils. Developers used to come to us. Now they bypass councils.
- More centralized public transportation system.
- Create a rapid transit system to airport, the Valley, other neighborhoods, and Fairbanks. Let's turn into a green state and use "green" electric fuel to get us there.
- You will need to deal with FAA.
- The airport is run by State staff so there is no oversight and high turnover. This problem will continue until there is a local commission to manage TSAIA like Merrill Field.
- Helicopters that run through Spenard are very loud. Their height and flight paths have no limits.
- Maintenance of this plan needs a commitment from the city. Don't build new roads without the commitment to maintain them. There should be a contract to ensure this.
- We think/acknowledge of ourselves as a northern city so we should avoid blocking sunlight to houses. Our standards need to meet unique characteristics of a northern climate.
- Piece-meal rezoning has impacted Spenard CC. It has a domino effect into residential areas. Once it's done, it's done. You can't go back on rezones.
- Airport noise.
- High concentration of bars in the area causes crime and impacts the neighborhood.
- How do schools and parks interact with each other and the area?
- Northwest parks district is one of the biggest in town. If they're not being used, how can we make them more used?
- Context Sensitive Design: In the effort to make things more efficient for the airport, you impact the neighborhood. Maybe you don't need bigger roads for the airport. There's a push to enlarge the Jewel Lake intersection. It may make it easier for transport of freight from port to airport, but it chokes-off neighborhoods. You can't walk across the street anymore.

Next Step

The Spenard CC WADP Task Force will get a copy of these notes for review and to make additions in order to capture the broad opinions of the community.