

West Anchorage Planning Group

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday March 31, 2009, 6:30-9:30pm

MOA Planning Department, 4700 Elmore Road, Room 170

In attendance:

Jae Shin

Matt Burkholder (for Jason Bergerson)

Breck Tostevin

Mike Mitchell

Rich Wilson

Peggy Auth

Alli Harvey

Mike Carlson

Cathy Gleason

Staff:

Thede Tobish, Tyler Robinson, Jon Isaacs, Kim Wetzel

I. Introduction

Tom Nelson – reviewed the history of the request from the Anchorage Assembly to start the West Anchorage District planning process.

II. Presentation WADP

Q: Turnagain Community Council (TCC) sat down with Tom Davis of the Municipality in 2006 when the existing land use map was out for public input. What happened to those comments?

A: The 2006 Land Use Map is still a technical document. It is the first cut at describing land use. The expectation [of this project] is to refine this unadopted land use map with the adoption of each District plan. The official land use map is still the 1982 map. If TCC's comments were not incorporated, this may be the opportunity to incorporate them.

Q: What about the status of the Airport Zoning District, since it is not approved as part of the Title 21 rewrite?

A: The Airport Zoning District describes land use within the airport. The West Anchorage District Plan (WADP) and Airport Zoning District processes will be conducted in parallel. Recommendations out of the WADP will help inform completing the Zoning District.

Comment: The Hillside District Plan Public Hearing is scheduled in June. West Anchorage Planning Group (WAPG) members are encouraged to attend to learn about their district planning outcomes.

Comment: It would be preferred if the northern boundary of the WADP follow the Turnagain boundary which is halfway through the lagoon.

Q: How does the WAPG interact with the other public involvement forums? How do the results come back to the WAPG? When would we receive results of agency or stakeholder interviews? It will be more beneficial to have face-time with them. Can we sit-in on the Focus Group meetings? What happens when certain issues are not resolved?

A: Results of notes of meetings and focus groups summaries will be public. Their information will be incorporated into some of the products. When certain items are a conflict, then the WAPG can make recommendations or implementation action items in order to resolve these conflicts. We can consider if it's appropriate to bring certain WAPG representatives to meetings when this is appropriate.

Comment: We would like a list of existing plans and projects such as the Spenard Road, Gravel Pit area. We would like to know what's going to be going under construction in the near term too.

Q: There is concern about the Midtown District Plan because they're on a different track than WADP, but their boundary cuts Spenard Road down the middle. We don't want Spenard Road to be a struggle between the two plans. Spenard Community Council objected to the Midtown District boundary bifurcating Spenard Road. The history of this road goes back to the 1920s. The Midtown Plan does not seem to be interested in the residential pockets inside of its boundary. We need to acknowledge that things have occurred naturally on Spenard Road that make it a town center. It should not be a part of two different plans.

A: Our planning team can meet with Midtown planning team in order to provide the WAPG a summary of how they choose their boundaries, what assumptions they are making, and what recommendations they are going to produce. It may be worth considering we recommend the north/east end of Spenard have its own corridor plan like the west/north end of Spenard Road, which has a corridor plan from the 1980s. WAPG members are welcome to comment during the Midtown Plan Public Review Draft time period.

Q: The WADP should be meeting more than four times. I assumed we are meeting more frequently. The Anchorage 2020 Plan describes that "the preparation of this plan will include representatives to develop a plan". After we discuss our issues- then we'll be able to discuss how much meeting is necessary.

A: The role of the WAPG is to look at products. This is not a committee that writes the document or wordsmiths the document. We can consider whether we have the WADP meet in a longer timeframe or on the weekend. We don't have an over-funded plan so that the process is not endless and we can move onto the recommendations. The planning process needs a start, middle and finish. The recommendations are the most important part, and the majority of the plan is the finish when the WAPG is done meeting, but the MOA is implementing recommendations.

EXERCISE # 1

What are your objectives for this plan?

- Revitalize the neighborhood
- Protect neighborhood character can be destroyed by scale (when properties are redeveloped disproportionate and/or out-of-character with the neighborhood)
- Preserve open space
- Improve/maintain quality of life issues
- Address the airport/local community conflicts
- Increase availability of bike routes
- Increase viability of non-motorized transport; provide a transportation system that includes non-motorized/non-auto-centric modes
- Address the airport's growth desires and its impacts of public lands surrounding the airport
- Find ways to compatibly work-out issues about the airport considering different perspectives.
- Consider how properties adjacent to the airport affect it
- Create zoning to dissuade residential or incompatible uses under the flight-path
- Determine how the Coastal Wildlife Refuge (public lands) impact the market and mission of Ted Stevens International Airport (TSAIA).
- Will the WADP accommodate market changes or the mission of TSAIA?
- Protect residential neighborhoods
- Revitalization on Spenard Road should be nurtured while still accommodating the amount of traffic, zoning, Etc.
- Build flexibility in this plan to meet the goals of the plan without going to the drawing board when markets change, for instance. Solutions or recommendations should meet demand as quickly as possible.
- Increase pedestrian facilities
- Improve connectivity between neighborhoods
- Encourage higher density residential to conserve energy
- Encourage West Anchorage neighborhoods to develop their own identities in positive ways.
- Long-term preservation of water quality issues (e.g. well water in R-5 lots)
- Resolve a lot of land use battles, permanently so we can stop fighting.
- Review the plan implementation section of the 2020 Plan because it already prescribes that implementation activities that should occur within the WADP
- Formally identify address and resolve land use as it relates to environmental/health impacts
- Identify environmental/health impacts in West Anchorage and how they will continue into the future
- Permanently protect trails, greenways and natural open space areas, essential buffering and get them permanently protected. Without flexibility.
- Address how Alaska Railroad infrastructure cuts our neighborhoods;
- Use a district approach or "mega block" to look at development rather than a block by block approach– for example, parking could be added in one area so that another business could build up and still meet its parking requirements.

- Analyze how new or existing roads are arranged - identify which ones are “short cuts” that potentially impact neighborhoods. Solve some connectivity issues.
- Consider multiple uses of open spaces or green belts. For example, community gardens could be created in underutilized open spaces.
- Institute “no right on red” rule for safety
- We want a sign that states when you’ve entered the Spenard neighborhood

EXERCISE #2

What are the strengths or values of West Anchorage that this plan need to reinforce and support?

- Tight knit neighborhoods
- Access to recreational facilities
- Lots of trees
- It’s close to downtown
- Spenard Road business area (Bear Tooth/REI)
- Spectacular coastline
- Diversity of small businesses within walking or easy biking distance from most neighborhoods in the district
- Thriving economic opportunities for our kids and grandkids
- Compact enough (Spenard neighborhood particularly) that there are a lot of buses, some bike trails, it’s walkable
- Entrepreneurial spirit and small businesses
- Quantity of park space
- Traffic is not bad
- Juxtaposition of the wild and developed
- High quality of life in Turnagain, an old, established neighborhood
- People identify with their neighborhood and appreciate what they have and think they are assets worth protecting
- Historic aspects of Spenard

EXERCISE #3

What are some of the problems or weaknesses this plan needs to address or fix?

- Neighborhoods are seeing a lack of ownership. You can do what you want with your property until it starts to affect your neighbor. Not sure if its code enforcement or another mechanism. Not let it get junked up. There are a lot of older homes that need a facelift. Landlords could put a new façade on their buildings.
- We’re missing some sidewalk and pedestrian and biking facilities/amenities
- The Wisconsin Avenue area is very rundown and even lacks paving. Maybe it could use high-density abatement.
- What are the appropriate limits of growth (of the airport) as a freight port? Part of this debate is beyond the purview of this group. But some of it is relevant to discuss.

- Urbanization causes safety issues around the airport. The airport doesn't have a buffer. It used to back in the 1930s. There are some who say there should be an internal buffer.
- The beach on Lake Spenard needs protection. It was deeded by Joe Spenard as a park. The lifeguard was taken away and access is threatening to be removed completely.
- Residents near Bear Tooth are bearing the burden of the place's popularity. Parking has to get under control. When the Quick Tow lot gets converted to parking, the neighbors on that side will be pressured too.
- Large roads make connecting between neighborhoods impassable, such as Northern Lights Boulevard and Spenard Road
- Context sensitive design for roads is still not being used. Design is still dominated by engineering. McCray, Strawberry Road are examples of road rebuilds with clearing that resulted in characterless neighborhoods
- Lack of adequate landscaping by private business or in public areas (incorporating evergreens so we have year round cover). Businesses aren't required to landscape.
- The airport has come a long way in public process. The public participation component was not reflected in the final products (Airport Master Plan and General Aviation Plan). Hopefully public process will be successful in this municipal document.

Next Meeting?

5pm in May @ Spenard Rec Center

Action Items

- Send short survey to members that are not in attendance. (*Only one response so far, see below.*)
- Provide the state mandate for the International Alaska Statute Title 2 State mandate for the airport. (*Included in resources document.*)
- Provide a copy of the latest Airport Master Plan and the 2002 version (*Included in resources document.*)
- Meeting minutes will be distributed for additional comment. Please respond with concise feedback; feel free to consult with your community council's subcommittee. This assignment will go to the missing members too.
- Describe the Airport Zoning District process to the WAPG.
- Provide a list of websites to download related plans (*Included in resources document.*)
- Provide a list related projects - what will be going under construction, projects that have already been resolved

Additional Comments from WAPG member Andrew Hutzel who did not attend in person

Objectives

Provide technical knowledge regarding general aviation activity at Lake Hood Seaplane Base.

Share knowledge, analyze opportunities, and address challenges.

Likes & Values

Airports, Anchorage International and Lake Hood Seaplane Base.

Lake Hood Seaplane Base has approximately 1,000 general aviation aircraft operating from Lake Hood and the Lake Hood gravel strip. Lake Hood is considered (and no other facility has come forth to challenge) the largest and busiest float plane base in the world.

Based on "Water Flying" magazine's five individual float base articles in their 2005 annual magazine, Lake Hood Seaplane Base is four (4) times larger and busier than any other seaplane base around the world. During summer months thousands of tourists walking, or riding tour buses, visit Lake Hood Seaplane Base. It is my understanding Lake Hood is the most popular destination for tourists visiting Anchorage.

Moreover, during summer season, hundreds of local west Anchorage residents walk, bicycle, rollerblade or run around Lake Hood and Lake Spenard, approximately a 4.4 mile distance. Who among us hasn't taken visiting family or friends on a tour of Lake Hood to watch float planes depart and land every few minutes?

Dislikes & Issues

None given.

Additional Comments from WAPG member PJ Crammer, Commodity Forwarders, Inc.

Objectives

My objectives for the West Anchorage District Plan is balancing the airport and local community needs for growth and advancement in roads, property value, access, safety and expansion. I'd like to see the airport and community work together without their own agenda.

Likes & Values

I like West Anchorage because I live and work in the area, quick access to major road, short distance to airport and small community feel. Some of the strengths is small community feel, closeness to airport, Lake Hood Elementary is a walking school and within 7 minutes I have access to most shopping areas. I chosen to live and work in West Anchorage since 1988 and wouldn't change it for anything. There's less crime and mixture of nationalities and level of income.

Dislikes & Issues

I dislike West Anchorage because of some people believe the airport should shrink or go away without really think about the effect on the community. I weakness or issue I have with West Anchorage is upgrades to West High School, it is way overdue. Where else can you live and have access to outdoor activities within 10 minutes but also have the city live.

Additional Comments from WAPG member Ron Peck, Alaska Travel Industry Association

Objectives

I would hope that we address the concerns of residents, the airport, and the users of the airport. Additionally, maintain the identity and importance of Lake Hood and its unique uses – both for personal use and aircraft use. Recognize the importance and value of the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum for residents and visitors alike

Likes & Values

I appreciate the unique aspects of West Anchorage. Specifically the blend of residential areas, Lake Hood, public lands, Ted Stevens Airport and the variety of businesses large and small in scale.

Dislikes & Issues

P.J's.