CITY OF
WASILLA
• ALASKA •

	Presented
Date Action Taken:	5.26.15
Other:	
Verified By:	

CITY COUNCIL INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

IM No. 15-07: Supplemental Information Regarding Proposed Downtown Overlay Zoning District and Design Standards in Ordinance Serial No. 15-06.

Originator: Tina Crawford, City Planner
Date: 5/19/2015 Agenda of: 5/26/2015

Route to:	Department Head	Signature	Date
X	Public Works Director		5/19/15
X	Deputy Administrator		5/19/2015
X	City Clerk		5.19.15

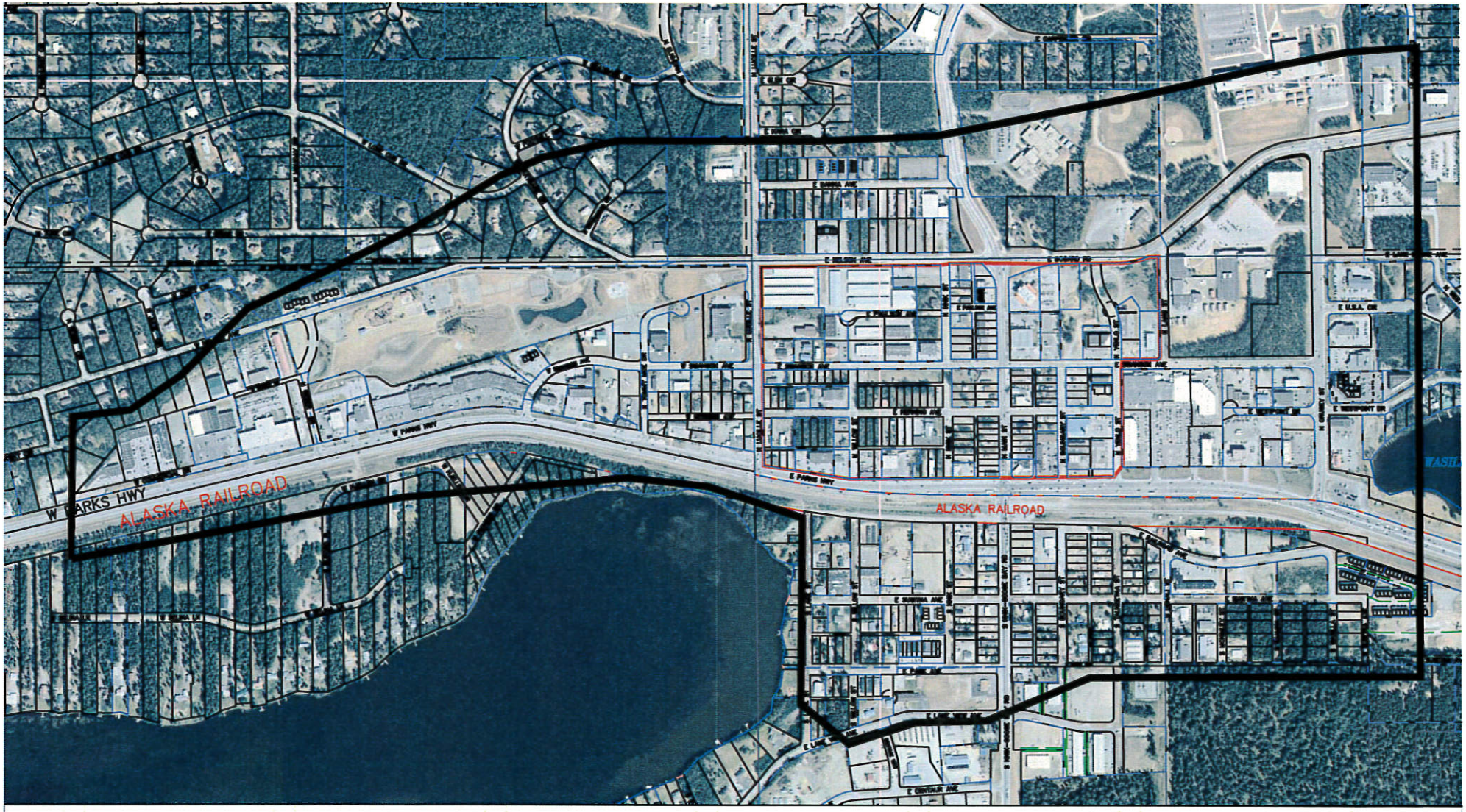
Reviewed by Mayor Bert L. Cottle: 05:19:2015

Attachments:

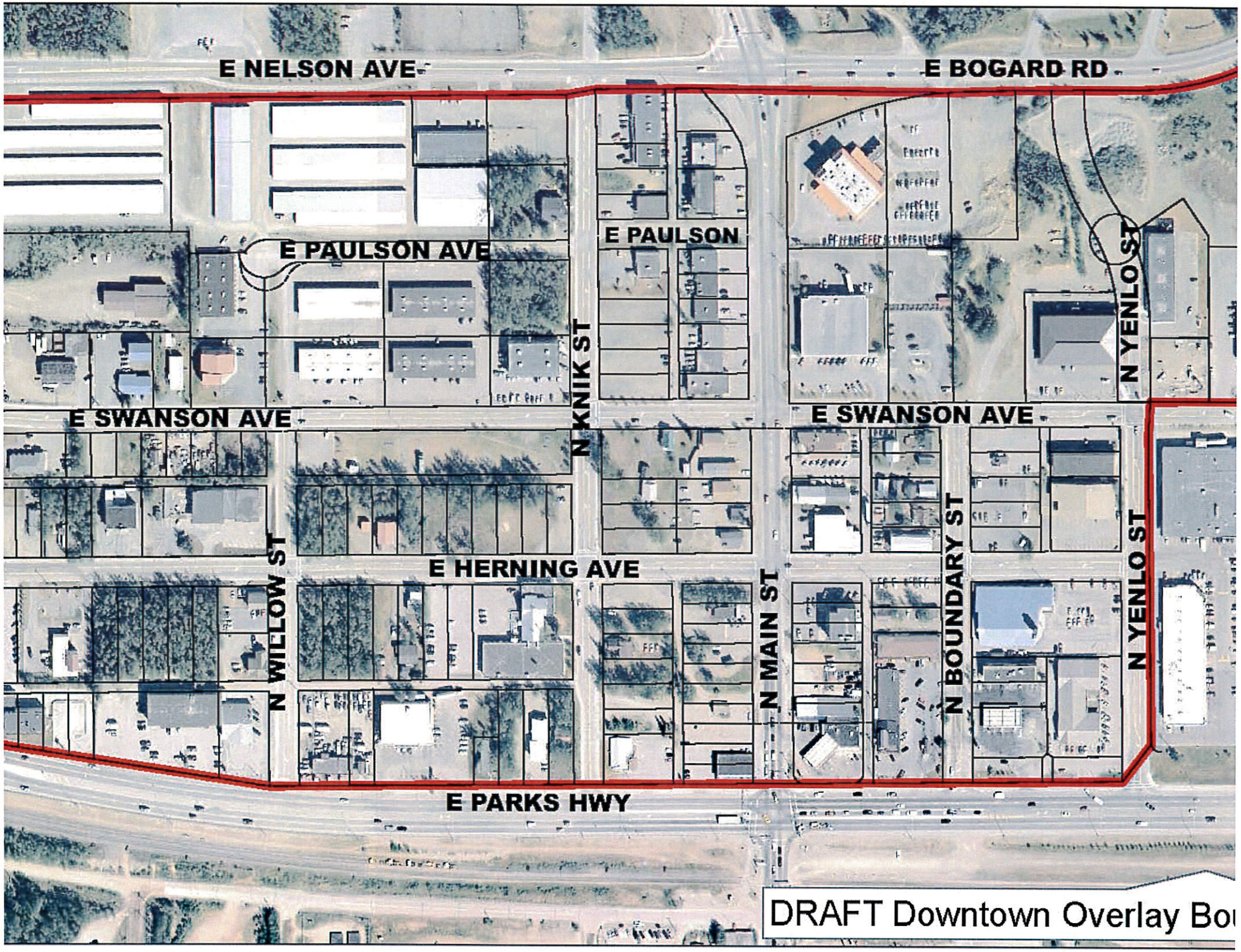
Adopted Downtown Area Boundary Map (1 page)
Proposed Downtown Overlay District Boundary Map (1 page)
Summary of Proposed Downtown Overlay District (2 pages)
Comparison Chart – Current Regulations vs. Proposed Overlay (3 pages)
Example Site Plans – Current and Proposed Regulations (3 pages)
Street Classification Diagram (4 pages)
Street Furnishing Zone Diagram (1 page)
Example Streetscape Photographs (8 pages)
Excerpts from Wasilla Downtown Area Plan (7 pages)
Downtown Chapter of Wasilla Comprehensive Plan (7 pages)
Overview of Identified Concerns and Possible Solutions (3 pages)

Summary Statement: The attached information was provided to the City Council at the public hearing for the proposed downtown overlay zoning district on May 11, 2015. Since a special meeting has been scheduled to allow additional discussion of the proposed downtown overlay, this information is being included in the packet for review in advance of the meeting. This information provides a brief history of why a downtown overlay is proposed, a comparison table of the current and proposed regulations, example site plans showing the maximum development allowed under current and proposed regulations, and other diagrams, photographs, and code language.

Additionally, staff has prepared an overview of the concerns raised regarding the proposed downtown overlay (in writing to the Council and at the public hearing). As appropriate, staff has provided either clarification of the proposed overlay requirements or suggested revisions to the regulations and boundary of the overlay district for consideration by the Council.



Adopted Downtown
Area Boundary
(2013 Downtown Area Plan)


E NELSON AVE
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E HERNING AVE
N MAIN ST
N BOUNDARY ST
N YENLO ST
E PARKS HWY
DRAFT Downtown Overlay Bou

PROPOSED DOWNTOWN OVERLAY DISTRICT

CITY COUNCIL ACTION – Need to adopt a Downtown Overlay as required in the City Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Area Plan (see Page 2.)

- Approve Downtown Overlay District as recommended by Planning Commission;
- Amend proposed language and approve revised Downtown Overlay District; or
- Deny proposed Downtown Overlay District and provide direction to Planning Commission as follows:
    - Identify specific areas of proposed regulations that need revision
    - Identify type of public involvement and timeframe for process

PURPOSE OF DOWNTOWN OVERLAY:

- Create a vibrant, walkable downtown with an interesting mix of residential and commercial uses.
- Implement the requirements in the adopted City Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Area Plan
- Provide street design standards to AKDOT&PF for design of Main Street Couplet.

OVERLAY BENEFITS TO DEVELOPERS AND BUSINESS OWNERS:

- Ability to develop approximately 5,000-6,000 square feet of additional commercial building space on a one-acre lot vs. development under current regulations (see sample site plans.)
- Clear permitting requirements
- Consistent application of codes
- Assurance that investment is protected and property values preserved since all new development will be subject to same regulations.
- Design exception process – Planning Commission may waive any/all design standards if they determine that project is consistent with intent of overlay district and will be an asset to the City (not required to follow rigid criteria of Variance and Conditional Use.)
- Attractive, walkable, vibrant downtown encourages additional development that attracts more customers, which has been proven to increase sales, generate ability to charge higher rents and increase property values.
- Use of sidewalk for outdoor dining, outdoor display of goods, special events, etc.
- Existing uses are "grandfathered" unless significant change is made to existing building or parking areas.

BENEFITS TO CITY RESIDENTS:

- Creation of an attractive, walkable, vibrant downtown where they can walk, shop, and socialize.
- Additional sales tax from new businesses provides additional money to provide services to city residents (e.g. parks, playground equipment enhancements, road paving, sidewalks)
- Community pride
- Walking has health benefits
- Property values are higher for neighborhoods that are within walking distances of downtown.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

CITY ADOPTED COMPREHSENSIVE PLAN AND DOWNTOWN AREA PLAN (both plans require adoption of downtown overlay zoning district)

- **2011 – City Comprehensive Plan**
  - Chapter 5 – Downtown
    - *Goal:* Create vibrant town center and gathering place for residents and visitors with a mix of residential and commercial uses.
    - *Required Planning Action:* Create Downtown Overlay Zoning District with standards to create walkable, vibrant downtown.

- **2013 – City Downtown Area Plan** (amendment to Comprehensive Plan)
  - *Goal:* Create attractive, pedestrian-friendly downtown with mixed of commercial and residential uses.
  - *Required Planning Action:* Create Downtown Overlay Zoning District with design standards for buildings, signage, lighting, pedestrian-oriented landscaping and sidewalks, etc. to create a vibrant attractive downtown that will attract residents and visitors.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT/NOTIFICATION FOR PLANS:

- **Comprehensive Plan**
  - Two community planning workshops
  - Week-long downtown "charrette" workshop (hands-on planning exercise with public)
  - Community survey
  - Community presentation
  - Joint City Council/Planning Commission work session
  - Two Planning Commission meetings
  - City Council public hearing

- **Downtown Area Plan**
  - Public meetings – 10 Planning Commission meetings
  - One-day mini "charrette" (hands-on planning exercise with public)
  - Public presentations – Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club
  - Visioning Committee – 32 members – 1 workshop
  - Focus Groups – 25 members – 3 sessions
  - Youth Involvement – Wasilla High School students school project and curriculum
  - Consultant - URS

- **Downtown Overlay District**
  - Four Planning Commission meetings
  - Postcard mailed to all business and property owners in proposed overlay district – 1 for PC meeting and 1 for City Council meeting

COMPARATIVE TABLE
CURRENT REGULATIONS VS. PROPOSED DOWNTOWN REGULATIONS

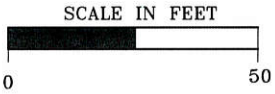
REGULATION	CURRENT CODE	PROPOSED OVERLAY
Building Height (max.)	35'	50' or three stories (*Two-story encouraged.*)
Setbacks	***Front and Rear*** – 25' ***Side*** – 10' or 0' if firewall and minimum fire code building separation.	***Front*** – 0' ***Side*** – 0' if firewall or minimum fire code building separation.
Building Orientation	N/A	Built to sidewalk with entrance on street.
Sidewalk	5' Sidewalk or 8' Bike Path	5'-8' sidewalk (depends on street type.)
Street furniture in right-of-way (*Benches, trash cans, bus shelters, bike racks, vending carts, wayfinding signage, public art, kiosks, newspaper boxes, etc.)*	Not required. If desired, must be on private property.	Encouraged.
Outdoor dining area or display of goods on sidewalk in right-of-way	Not permitted.	Allowed within street furnishings zone.
Entry Way Landscaping	Not required.	Encouraged.
Trees in right-of-way*	Not required.	1 tree per 40' in right-of-way.
Trees/shrubs (on-site)	6 trees & 12 shrubs per acre minimum plus required landscaping around parking lots.	1 tree per 40' in right-of-way – Hedge at street front parking perimeter.
Street Lighting*	On-site at pedestrian/vehicular access pts.	1 per 40' in right-of-way.
Sidewalk/Pedestrian Lighting*	None required.	Based on illumination levels. (*Only required when new or upgraded sidewalks are constructed.*)
Open Space/Green Space	30% of lot must remain in natural vegetation.	20% of lot must be open space or green space. (*Includes sidewalks, public plazas, landscaping, etc. on private property.*)
Landscape Buffers	Required.	Same as existing code.
Walls/Fences	No regulations.	***Walls*** – Allowed. Solid walls over 2' high must have decorative openings. ***Fences*** – 4'-8' (no barbed or razor wire, chain link, plastic, plain wood.)

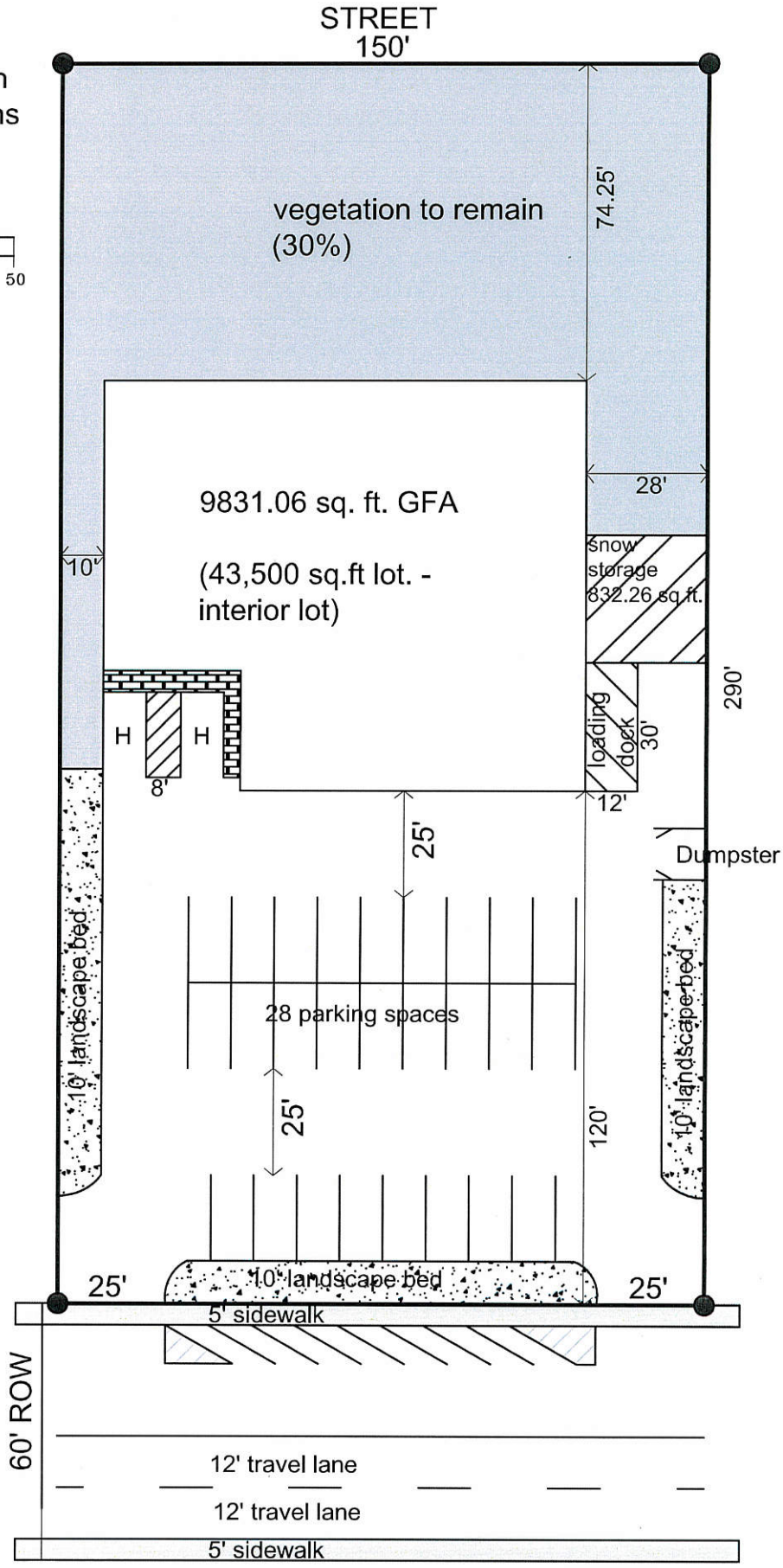
*City could assume responsibility for installing street trees, sidewalks, and street lighting instead of requiring business owner. Additionally a Business Improvement District could be established to cover the cost of the streetscape improvements.

REGULATION		CURRENT CODE	PROPOSED OVERLAY
Mailboxes		Not regulated.	Unobtrusive and visually integrated.
Parking standards	***On-Site Location***	Front, side, or rear of building.	Side or rear of building.
	Parking Size	10' x 20' parking spaces for all parking (on and off-street parking)	9' x 18' parking space for on-site parking. 8.5' x 18' for on-street parking.
	Off-Site Parking	300' of property line.	1,000' of building entrance.
	Interconnectivity	Not required.	Required.
	Loading Space	One 12' x 30' loading space if over 5,000 SF Gross Floor Area (GFA).	Not required.
	Drive Aisle	25' wide	24' wide
	Driveway	25' wide	24' wide
	Parking Spaces	Generally 1 space per 300 SF GFA.	Same as existing code.
	Parking Lot Landscaping	10' landscape bed with trees, shrubs, flowers, boulders, fencing, and mulch.	4' landscape bed with 4' evergreen hedge.
	Parking Island Landscaping	10' landscape islands totaling 15% of parking area if more than 40 spaces. (*Must contain trees, shrubs, flowers, boulders, fencing, and mulch.*)	10' landscape islands required at end of parking row and every three rows of parking. (*Must contain trees & evergreen ground cover.*)
	Parking Lot Lighting	1 light per 25 parking spaces	No minimum. Must ensure appropriate lighting for pedestrians.
	Snow Storage	25 SF per required parking space	Same.
Driveway width		11' minimum; 30' maximum	12' if one way; 24' if two-way.
Driveway access points		2 two-way access points.	2 one-way access points or 1 two-way access point. (*Lots with two street fronts can have access on both streets.)*
Dumpsters		Solid enclosure with solid doors.	Same but similar finish as main building.
Utilities/Mechanical Equipment		No requirement to screen with landscaping.	Screening required. New power lines must be installed underground.

REGULATION		CURRENT CODE	PROPOSED OVERLAY
Signage	***Freestanding***	150 SF maximum – 25' maximum height.	Prohibited
	Wall	Unlimited	1 sign up to 5% of wall area facing street (up to 225 SF) plus a multi-tenant building may have one additional wall sign identifying the name of center.)
	Window	Unlimited	Prohibited except for holiday design or special event signage up to 30% of window area.
	Awning	1 on up to 30% of surface area	Unlimited but counts toward maximum wall signage.
	Directional	1 per lot	Unlimited - based on need
	Projecting	1 if no freestanding sign – 50 SF max.	Prohibited
	Ground	2 if no freestanding signs – 50 SF each	1 allowed - no size limit
	Artwork as Sign	Counts as freestanding sign	1 up to 8' tall and 12' wide.
Public Art		Must be on private property.	8' tall x 12' wide. May be in right-of-way.
Murals		Not permitted except as signage.	Allowed with approval as signage.
Architectural Design		No defined criteria. Must "…blend in with the general neighborhood appearance and architecture." No criteria or guidance for City Planner or Planning Commission when approving design. Developer has no clear understanding of City expectation.	***Architectural style*** – Any style not exactly like adjoining building.
			Color – Recommended.
			Building materials – Some prohibited materials. Complement neighbor.
			Building scale – Variations recommended
			Building offset – Required every 75'.
			Roofs/parapets –Variation every 100'. Flat roof must have decorative feature.
			Storefronts – Recommended designs. No blank walls on street level, must have windows/doors, entrances must have design element but not mandated.

Sample Site Plan
Current regulations
(showing max.
development)

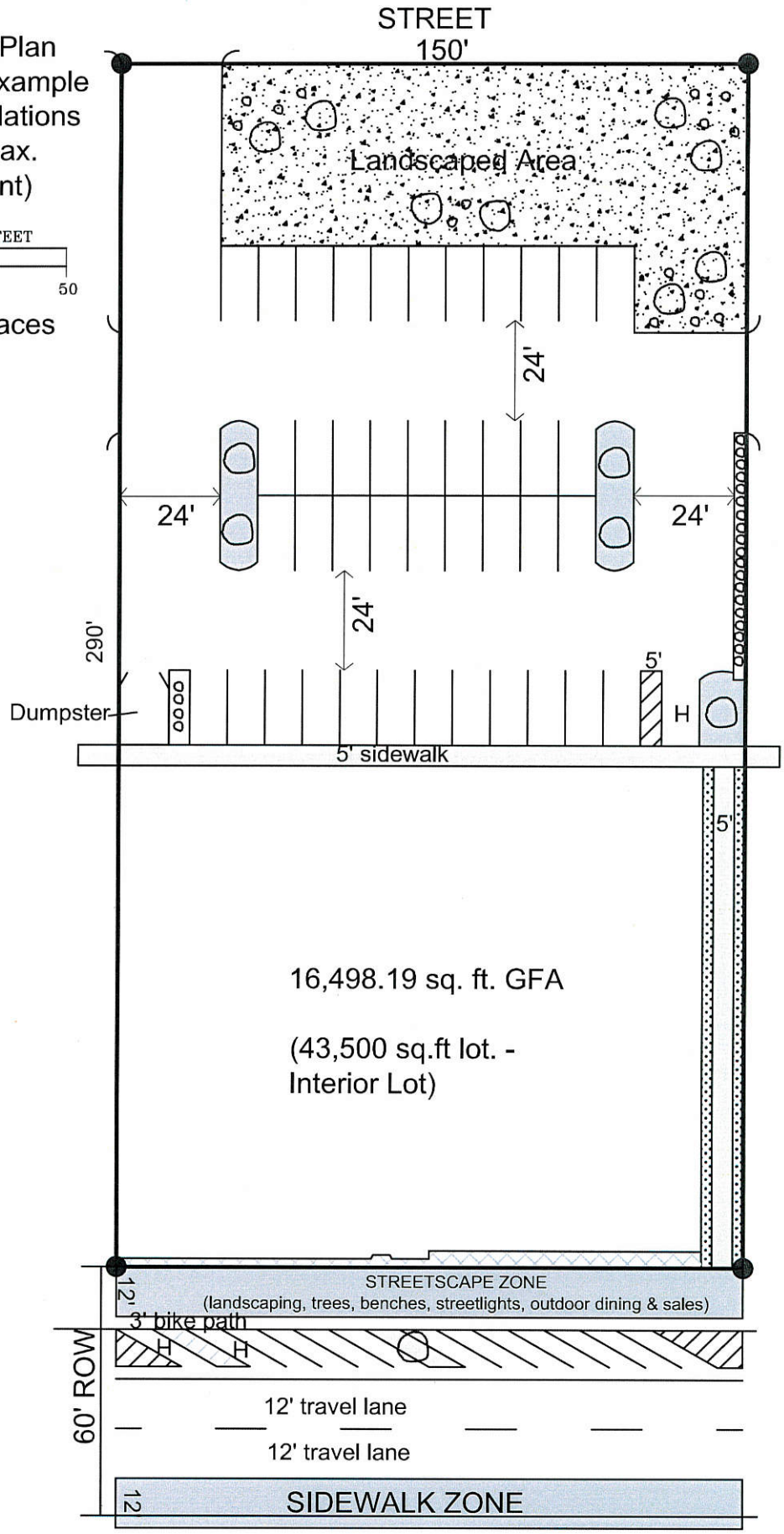




Sample Site Plan
"Main Street" Example
Proposed regulations
(showing max.
development)

SCALE IN FEET
0 50

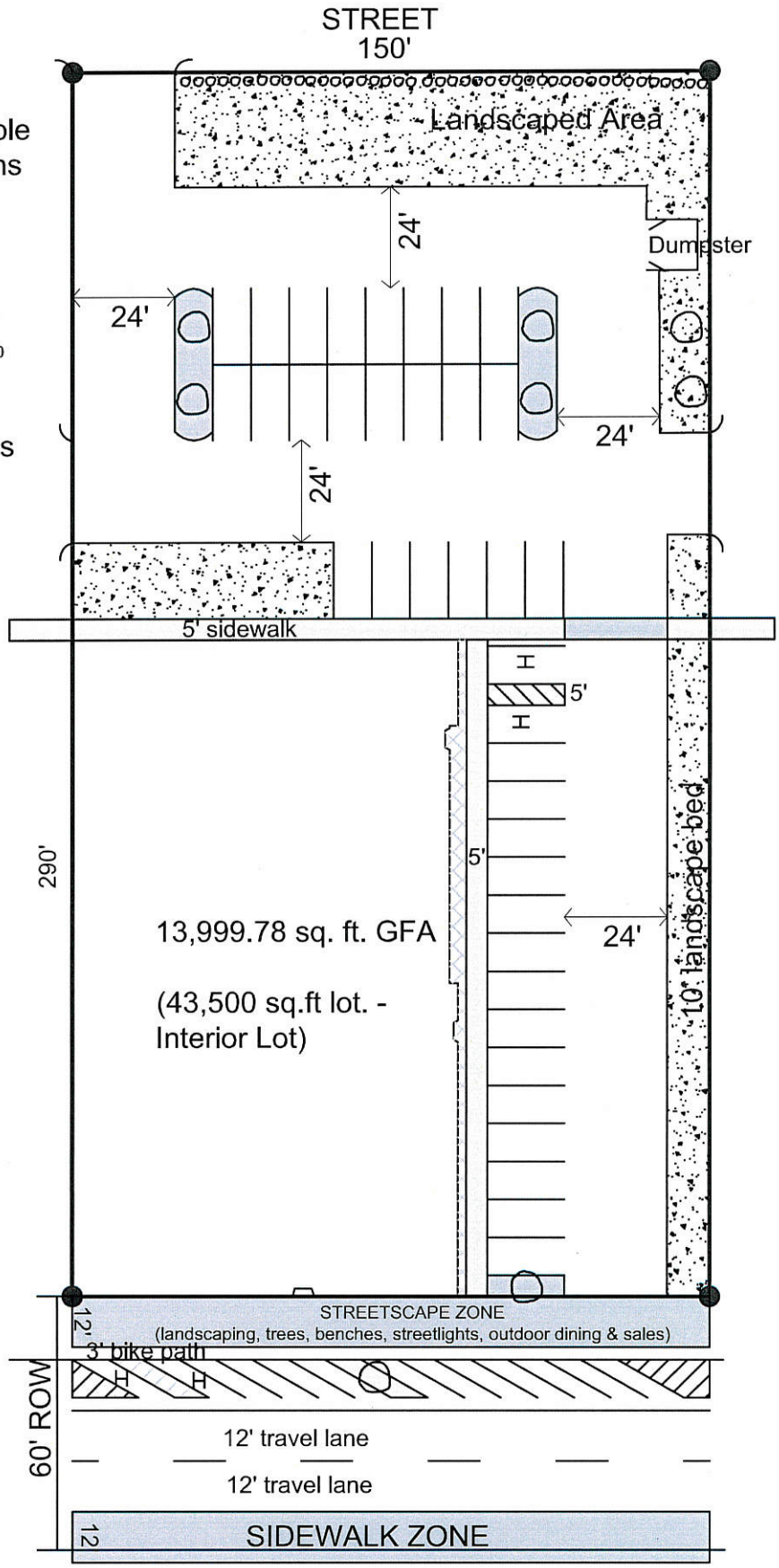
55 parking spaces



Sample Site Plan
"Main Street" Example
Proposed regulations
(showing max.
development)

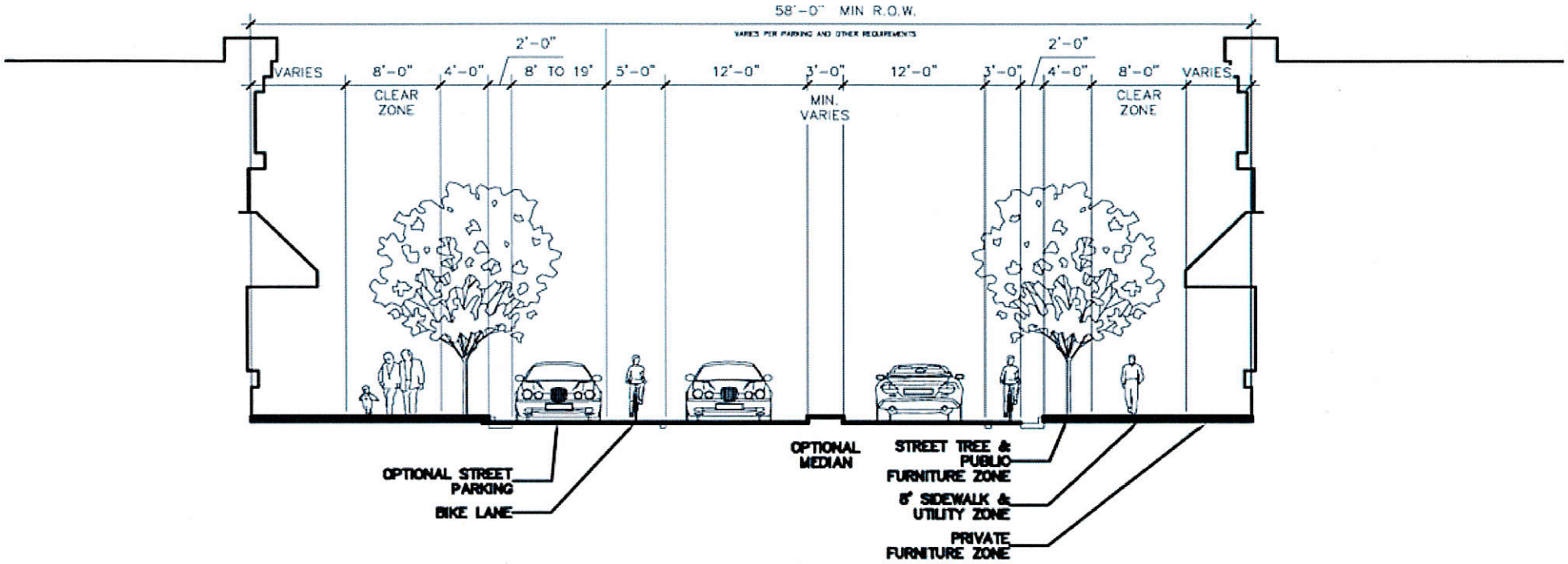
SCALE IN FEET
0 50

48 parking spaces



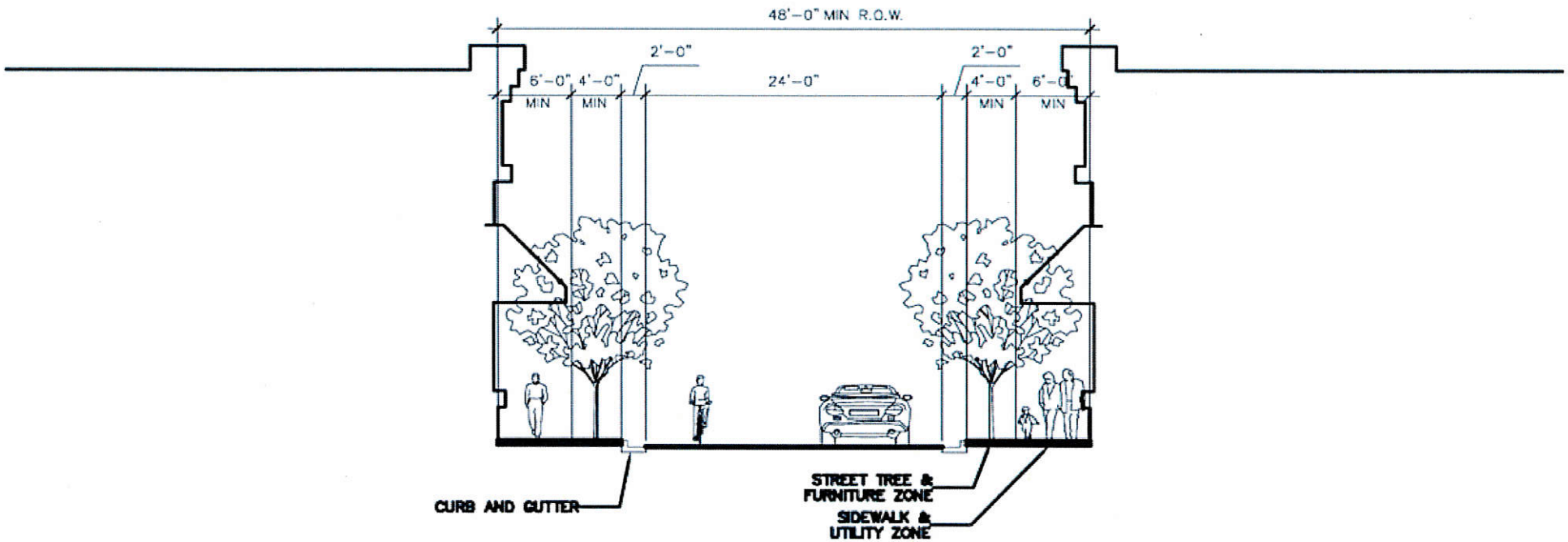
"MAIN STREET" SECTION

Applies to: Main Street, Yenlo Street, Herning Avenue, and Swanson Avenue



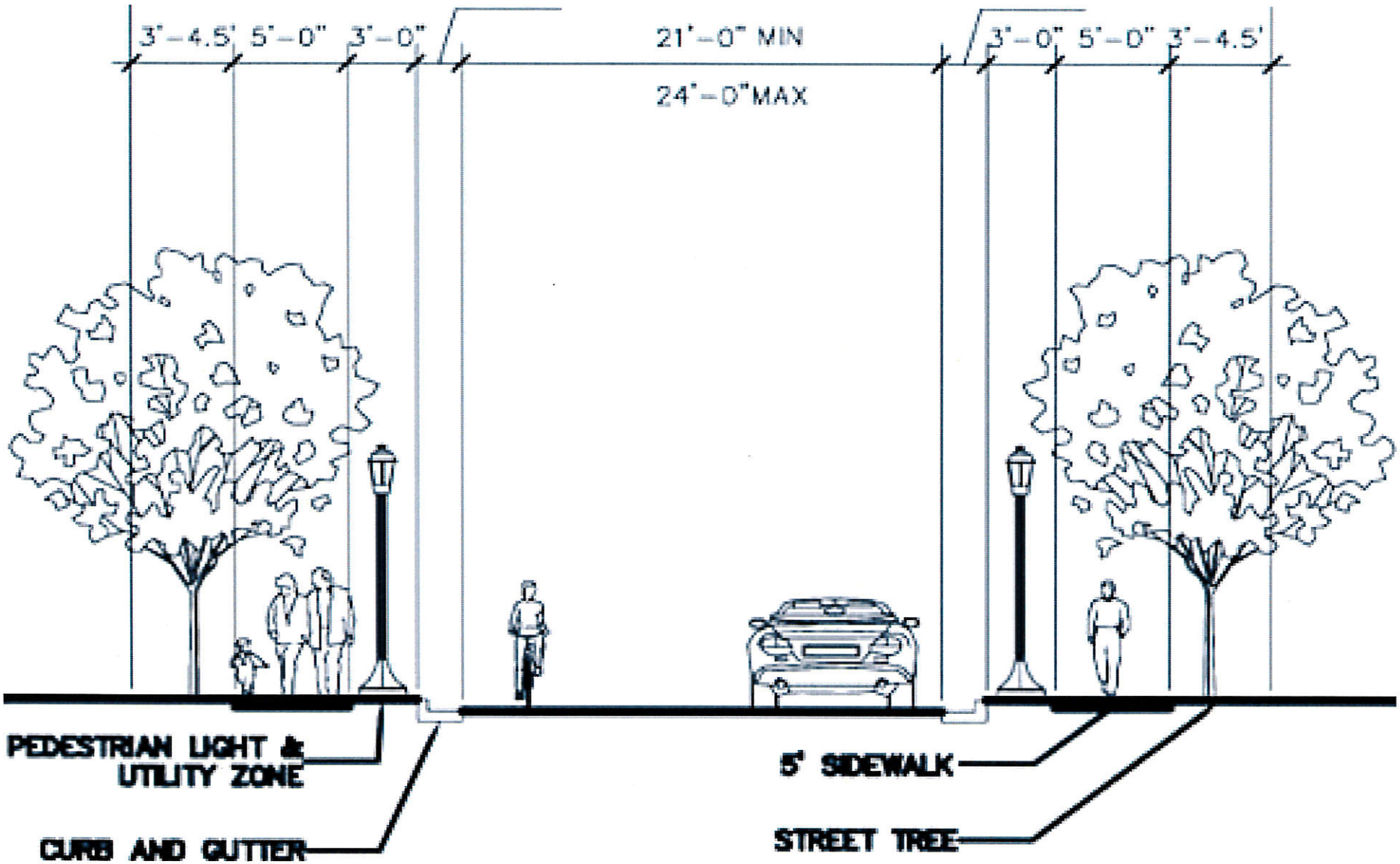
"URBAN STREET" SECTION

Applies to: Lucille Street, N. Boundary Street, Knik Street, and E. Paulson Avenue (west of Knik)



"LOCAL STREET" SECTION

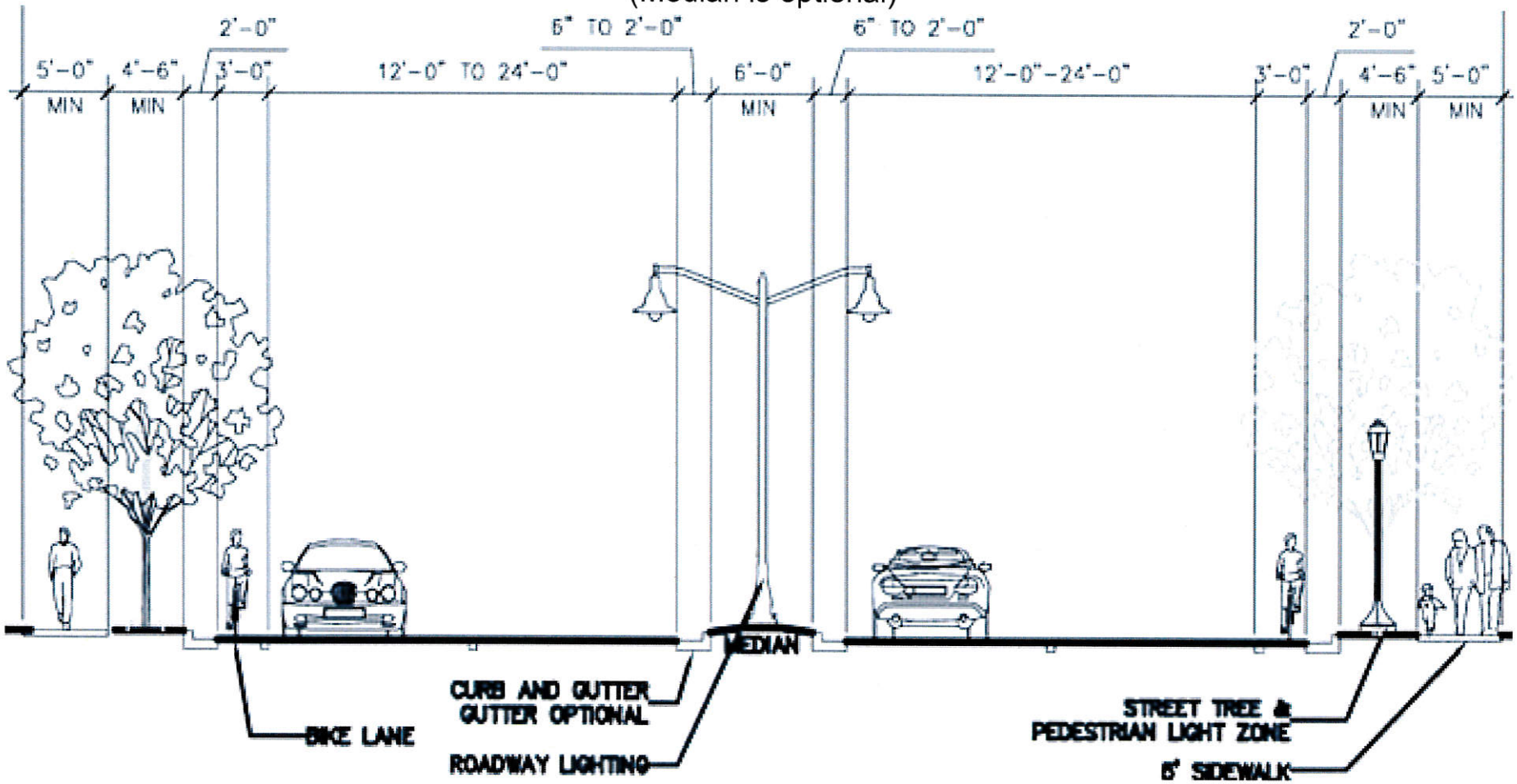
Applies to: Willow Street, E. Paulson Avenue (east of Knik)



"BOULEVARD" STREET SECTION

Applies to: Bogard Road and E. Nelson Avenue

(Median is optional)



Streetscape Example

www.flickr.com (6429196251_d7f233c7d4_z.jpg)

Main Avenue, Ocean Grove, New Jersey

Eric C.Y. Fang – Planetizen.com

http://static.panoramio.com/photos/large/46756338.jpg

http://www.bridgeandtunnelclub.com/bigmap/outoftown/newjersey/monmouthcounty/oceangrove/nagles/11night.jpg

http://www.theinnsofoceangrove.com/images/uploads/blog/victorian_holiday_13_-_main_ave.jpg

BEFORE/AFTER PHOTO SIMULATION:

Shops
PALOMARTINN

3 ISSUES, GOALS, & OBJECTIVES

Area Snapshots: Downtown

Community members helped identify assets and challenges for the downtown planning area throughout the planning process by taking part in various exercises in public workshops and meetings, focus group sessions, and written comments. The assets and challenges were used to develop issue statements, goals, and objectives for the downtown planning area.

Assets *(Strengths)*

Historical Features: Historic/cultural venues; Dorothy Page Museum; Teeland Building; potential historic district

Parks and Open Space: Wonderland Park (amphitheater and skate park) appeals to a variety of interests; lake recreation

Location: Centrally located

Municipal Services & Infrastructure: Post office; library; local government; water; sewer; power

Shopping & Services: Variety of small business; access to large and small businesses and services; centralized shopping and services; destination

Economic & Development Potential: High traffic count; available land to develop; historic features to draw tourism; tourism traffic nearby

Challenges *(Weaknesses)*

Traffic: Poor traffic flow; no traffic plan; post office location contributes to congestion

Parking: Limited availability; no parking with a Downtown atmosphere

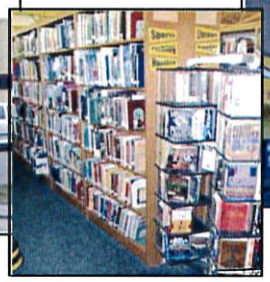
Access: No ease of accessibility; lack of connectivity—too spread out, must use car to go everywhere; lack of sidewalks

Parks & Trails: Parks not connected; lack of trails

Identity & Appearance: Lack of identifiable Downtown area; no theme, no architectural appeal; not viewed as a destination; not well-planned; unattractive, uninviting, not a good representation of citizens and skills in the area

Existing Structures: Outgrowing what is there, i.e. library, post office, etc.

Wasilla Post Office



Wasilla Library

Retail, restaurant, and office spaces in Downtown Wasilla

Issues, Goals, & Objectives

This section identifies the issues, goals, and objectives and provides a summary framework for action items, or strategies, to implement the plan.

WHAT DO THESE TERMS MEAN?

Issues are problems that impede progress or perceptions that the existing conditions are inadequate.
Goals are general, broad statements of what you want to accomplish, or the community's aspirations. They are positively stated desired future situations to address an issue.
Objectives are statements of planned results that are measurable or trackable.

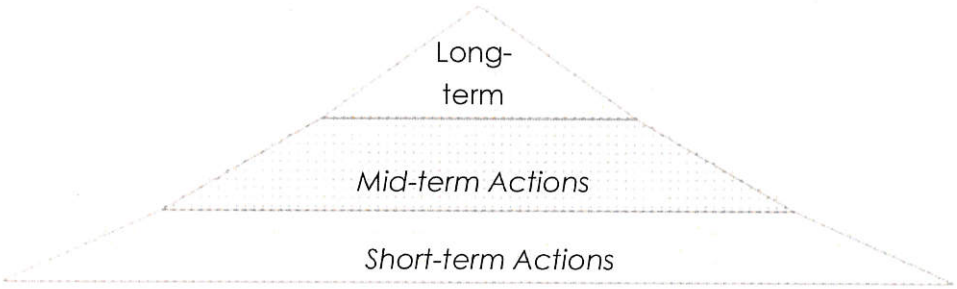
The following summary tables are categorized by issue statements. Priority issues were derived from evaluating the results from the Visioning Committee workshop, focus group sessions, charrette, public workshop, and individual public comments. Some issues identified during this planning process are lingering issues previously identified in existing planning documents.

From each identified issue, the planning team developed goals and objectives. The tables also identify potential leads and/or participating partners for initiating actions or strategies to accomplish objectives and achieve associated goals.

Schedules for Completion

Each implementation item is tied to a timeframe defined as on-going, or short-, mid-, or long-term. The planning timeframe for this plan is 15 years.

On-going actions require relationship building and maintenance of relationships, structures, plans, zones, etc. On-going actions results are often difficult to measure.
Short-term actions can be accomplished within 1 to 2 years. These actions often provide immediate reward and success, which can be motivating for accomplishing more intensive actions. Many short-term actions lay the groundwork for accomplishing mid-term actions.
Mid-term actions are accomplished within 3 to 5 years. These actions take a larger coordinated effort to complete, and more than one entity may be involved with implementing the action.
Long-term actions will take 5 to 10 years to complete and typically will involve a number of different coordinating entities to accomplish the action.



ISSUE	GOAL	OBJECTIVE(S)/POLICY(IES)	SCHEDULE	COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Community Character (CC)					
1. Downtown Wasilla lacks a distinct identity. The boundaries are unclear. 2. The appearance of Downtown Wasilla needs to be improved, capitalizing on the historical elements.	A. Create an attractive identity for Downtown that complements Wasilla's natural setting and history. B. Promote downtown as a center of public and education services, supported by mixed commercial and residential use.	i. Institute design standards such as signage, lighting, and accommodate winter design factors.	Short-term	<$100,000	City of Wasilla Planning Department City of Wasilla Planning Commission Wasilla City Council Gateway Committee* Downtown Revitalization Committee* Public-Private Partnerships* Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitor's Bureau Civic Groups (including art and history)
		ii. Include pedestrian-oriented landscaping standards into a Downtown overlay zoning district such as using evergreen trees lining sidewalks to distinguish the area.	Mid-term	<$100,000	
		iii. Consider establishing a "Gateway Program/ Committee" (primary responsibility is to plan, design, and implement improvements for wayfinding stations and gateway entrances).	Short-term	<$100,000	
		iv. Consider establishing a Downtown Revitalization Committee and Public-Private Partnerships to develop the character of Downtown Wasilla, design projects to achieve the character, and implement improvements.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		v. Develop visual cues to identify gateways and sub-districts, such as entry kiosks, wayfinding stations, thematic landscape design, and signage.	Mid-term	$100,000 - $500,000	
		vi. Capitalize on existing facilities to develop plazas and community gathering places.	Long-term	<$100,000	
		vii. Encourage use of design themes through incentives such as variances from requirements, expedited permit processing, tax abatements, and loan programs.	Long-term	<$100,000	
		viii. Explore zoning areas by building type, rather than use to achieve aesthetic objectives but allow for flexibility in mixed use districts.	Long-term	<$100,000	
		ix. Promote community events that support the identity and theme of the area to attract visitors and tourists.	On-going	<$100,000	
		x. Create an educational program through a public-private partnership to promote Downtown's identity and theme.	Mid-term	<$100,000	
			*Indicates an entity recommended to be established but not yet in existence		

ISSUE	GOAL	OBJECTIVE(S)/POLICY(IES)	SCHEDULE	COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Land Ownership, Platting, and Zoning (LO)					
1. Small lot sizes pose challenges to development.	A. Create larger, functional parcel sizes that accommodate development	i. Create an overlay Downtown zoning district.	Mid-term	$100,000 - $500,000	City of Wasilla Planning Department City of Wasilla Planning Commission Downtown Landowners Matanuska-Susitna Homebuilders Association
		ii. Work with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to streamline the replatting process with regard to consolidation of small lots within the City of Wasilla.	Long-term	<$100,000	
		iii. Institute development incentives, such as replatting initiatives and business improvement districts.	Mid-term	$100,000 - $500,000	
		iv. Create a program where the City purchases available parcels to hold for potential replatting.	Long-term	>$500,000	
			*Indicates an entity recommended to be established but not yet in existence		

ISSUE	GOAL	OBJECTIVE(S)/POLICY(IES)	SCHEDULE	COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Economic Development and Recommended Land Uses (EC/LU)					
1. A good mix of services, shopping, and dining is limited in Downtown Wasilla. 2. Wasilla is known as a "pass through" site; tourists pass by the community on their way to other destinations.	A. Develop an attractive, diverse city center. B. Develop Downtown Wasilla as a government and education center that is interspersed with mixed use (including residential and commercial development). C. Make Downtown a destination for residents and visitors. D. Establish a downtown redevelopment district.	i. Identify priorities for infill development, in terms of locations and uses.	Long-term	<$100,000	City of Wasilla Planning and Economic Development Departments City of Wasilla Planning Commission Wasilla City Council Matanuska-Susitna Borough Matanuska-Susitna School District Public-Private Partnerships* Downtown Revitalization Committee* Chamber of Commerce and Member Organizations Downtown Businesses and Trade Organizations Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
		ii. Evaluate and prioritize needs for visitor service infrastructure in the area, such as public restrooms, parking, signage, pedestrian paths, and visitor information stations.	On-going	$100,000 - $500,000	
		iii. Prepare a public facilities plan that addresses city, borough, state, and federal facility needs in Wasilla.	Mid-term	$100,000 - $500,000	
		iv. Advocate the needs of Wasilla students to the Matanuska-Susitna School District for future long-term facility planning efforts, forging a relationship that benefits students.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		v. Incorporate public institutions and mixed use as priorities in rezonings and ordinance revisions.	On-going	$100,000 - $500,000	
		vi. Adopt design standards to ensure infill development complements existing development.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		vii. Promote infill development through incentives such as a business improvement district.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		viii. Provide financing incentives for mixed-use development, such as credit assurance, equity investment in the project, or soft second loans to developers.	On-going	$100,000 - $500,000	
		ix. Identify enterprise zones for specific uses such as employment core zones.	Mid-term	$100,000 - $500,000	
		x. Develop partnerships and marketing programs to promote Downtown.	Long-term	$100,000 - $500,000	City of Wasilla Planning and Economic Development Departments Wasilla Chamber of Commerce Alaska Small Business Development Center
		xi. Review and revise public relations and marketing materials, featuring changes and attractions in the Downtown and other areas of Wasilla.	On-going	<$100,000	
		xii. Update zoning in Downtown to encourage a diversified city center.	On-going	<$100,000	
		xiii. Inventory vacant properties and abandoned buildings and offer incentives for redevelopment.	Long-term	$100,000 - $500,000	
		xiv. Explore alternate uses of strip mall developments, including incentives for redevelopment to mixed use.	On-going	>$500,000	
		xv. Encourage development of establishments that would entice visitors to the area, such as small shops, cafés, and sites with historic themes.	Short-term	<$100,000	
3. There are few locally based industries and limited professional employment opportunities for the influx of new residents.	A. Attract and retain professional service sectors to provide local employment and decrease economic leakage.	i. Attract Matanuska-Susitna Borough and state government offices to Downtown Wasilla.	Long-term	<$100,000	
		ii. Identify resources that promote entrepreneurship and business relocation/location to Wasilla, such as venture capital, marketing strategies, and private-public partnerships.	Short-term	<$100,000	
			*Indicates an entity recommended to be established but not yet in existence		

ISSUE	GOAL	OBJECTIVE(S)/POLICY(IES)	SCHEDULE	COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Infrastructure (IN)					
1. The community is experiencing rapid growth and it is projected to continue. 2. Rapid growth and development is placing strains on existing infrastructure and public facilities, including roads and schools.	A. Provide infrastructure and services that accommodate growth and development.	i. Update infrastructure and economic development plans, and coordinate priorities and timing of interdependent projects and facilities improvements.	Long-term	$100,000 - $500,000	City of Wasilla Planning, Economic Development and Public Works Departments City of Wasilla Planning Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission Wasilla City Council Wasilla Chamber of Commerce Public-Private Partnerships *Downtown Businesses Matanuska-Susitna School District
		ii. Encourage infill development to address underutilized areas of Downtown.	On-going	<$100,000	
		iii. Establish economic incentives such as Business Improvement Districts.	Short-term	$100,000 - $500,000	
		iv. Evaluate school expansion capacity on school campuses.	Long-term	<$100,000	
			*Indicates an entity recommended to be established but not yet in existence		

ISSUE	GOAL	OBJECTIVE(S)/POLICY(IES)	SCHEDULE	COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Transportation and Connectivity (TC)					
1. Local residents feel that Downtown Wasilla is vehicle-oriented and unsafe for pedestrians.	A. Create a pedestrian-friendly Downtown. B. Increase inter-modal connectivity within the Downtown area and to other parts of Wasilla.	i. Use infill development to encourage mixed use and reduce vehicle trips.	Long-term	<$100,000	City of Wasilla Planning and Public Works Departments City of Wasilla Planning Commission Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Public-Private Partnerships* Downtown Revitalization Committee* Downtown Businesses State Legislators City of Wasilla Planning and Public Works Departments City of Wasilla Planning Commission Wasilla City Council
		ii. Encourage pedestrian amenities in capital project planning, zoning, and subdivision actions with the establishment of such things as walkways and overpasses.	On-going	$100,000 - $500,000	
		iii. Institute design standards that promote pedestrian access including winter design factors.	Mid-term	$100,000 - $500,000	
		iv. Develop and/or enforce City ordinances that enhance pedestrian safety, such as stopping for pedestrians in crosswalks.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		v. Coordinate pedestrian improvements with parking initiatives and solutions.	On-going	$100,000 - $500,000	
		vi. Investigate winter city solutions for pedestrian access.	Short-term	<$100,000	
2. Parking is limited for Downtown Wasilla services (e.g. library, post office).	A. Address the parking demand in Downtown. B. Provide parking solutions that encourage mixed use, meet public facility needs, and improve pedestrian access.	i. Assess existing capacity versus existing and projected demand.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		ii. Review and revise as necessary the parking requirements for new developments.	On-going	$100,000 - $500,000	
		iii. Evaluate the feasibility of centralized parking facilities, including construction via public-private partnerships, municipal funding, or tax increment financing.	Mid-term	$100,000 - $500,000	City of Wasilla Planning and Public Works Departments City of Wasilla Planning Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission Wasilla City Council MASCOT Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Public-Private Partnerships* Downtown Businesses
3. Wasilla has congested roads and poor traffic flow. 4. There is a lack of public transit service within community.	A. Improve the movement of people and commodities throughout Wasilla and surrounding areas via various modes of safe, accessible transit.	i. Update current transportation plans to reflect growing demands and patterns and to roadway assess condition and capacity, and traffic/accident problem areas.	Long-term	<$100,000	
		ii. Recognize projects already programmed in the capital improvements projects such as the Main Street/Yenlo One-Way Couplet and focus future redevelopment around them.	On-going	<$100,000	
		iii. Ensure that transportation plan updates reflect growing demands and patterns, roadway condition and capacity, and traffic/accident problem areas.	On-going	$100,000 - $500,000	
		iv. Coordinate transportation improvements with the development of new public and commercial development that can generate changes in traffic volumes and patterns.	Long-term	>$500,000	
		v. Implement priorities from the Wasilla Official Streets and Highway Plan.	On-going	<$100,000	
		vi. Initiate a feasibility study to determine public transportation needs, potential demand, and expansion options.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		vii. Work with MASCOT to investigate additional funding sources to expand public transit service.	Long-term	<$100,000	
		viii. Investigate funding sources to promote multi-modal transportation (such as bike paths) and ensure incorporation into transportation improvements.	Short-term	$100,000 - $500,000	
			*Indicates an entity recommended to be established but not yet in existence		

ISSUE	GOAL	OBJECTIVE(S)/POLICY(IES)	SCHEDULE	COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Transportation and Connectivity (TC)					
5. Local residents feel that Wasilla railroad crossings are inconvenient and unsafe.	A. Improve railroad crossing efficiency and safety.	i. Work with the Alaska Railroad to evaluate and assess crossing safety, eliminate at-grade crossings, and realign track facilities.	On-going	<$100,000	City of Wasilla Planning and Public Works Departments Alaska Railroad
		ii. Improve signage, striping, and crossing markers.	Mid-term	<$100,000	
		iii. Work with the Alaska Railroad to provide public education outreach.	On-going	<$100,000	
6. An integrated trail system is needed to connect areas of Wasilla and destinations outside Wasilla.	A. Provide a multi-use trail system that promotes connectivity within Wasilla and multi-modal circulation.	i. Inventory existing trails in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.	Short-term	<$100,000	City of Wasilla Planning and Public Works Departments City of Wasilla Planning Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Area Landowners, Residents, and Businesses Public-Private Partnerships* Nonprofit Community Interest Groups
		ii. Explore options for land acquisition, easements, and partnerships.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		iii. Provide incentives for developers to include space and/or reserve easements for public plazas, parks, and trails.	On-going	<$100,000	
		iv. Investigate funding sources such as those through SAFETEA-LU/National Recreation Trails Program and other partnerships to implement methods and action items, which include acquisition of rights-of-way and funding trails.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		v. Create multi-modal linkages, for example, car to parking to trails; centralized parking, bus, bike path.	Long-term	$100,000 - $500,000	
			*Indicates an entity recommended to be established but not yet in existence		

ISSUE	GOAL	OBJECTIVE(S)/POLICY(IES)	SCHEDULE	COST	RESPONSIBLE PARTY
Funding (FN)					
1. There is limited funding for ongoing projects and City incentives.	A. Efficiently utilize existing funding. B. Obtain new funding sources for projects and City incentives.	i. Establish the framework for tax increment finance districts to provide funding for future development incentives.	Mid-term	<$100,000	City of Wasilla City of Wasilla Planning Commission Wasilla City Council Public-Private Partnerships* Downtown Businesses Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and other state agencies
		ii. Identify grants, bonds, development districts, cost sharing options and public-private partnerships to fund projects.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		iii. Identify and complete projects or plans that make the community eligible for new funding sources.	Mid-Term	$100,000 - $500,000	
		iv. Develop partnerships with the state and Matanuska-Susitna Borough governments to fund existing and proposed City projects.	On-going	<$100,000	
		v. Initiate a public education program that promotes the availability of the City's capital improvement projects in locations such as City Hall and the City website through mediums like mailings, newspaper notices, and public service announcements.	Short-term	<$100,000	
		vi. Evaluate phasing and sequence of projects to ensure efficient use of funds.	On-going	<$100,000	
			*Indicates an entity recommended to be established but not yet in existence		

Chapter 5. Downtown

5.1 Current Conditions and Trends

What Downtown?

The City's Downtown does not have easily definable boundaries. Those not familiar with the City might wonder if there is a Downtown. For the purposes of describing the current conditions, the historic town site area is currently the "core" or heart of Downtown, surrounded by a larger area, which could eventually support a more defined Downtown (see Figure 7).

Wasilla's Original Post Office and Historic Town Site

Currently, Downtown has a variety of land uses including public facilities retail, housing, and offices. Public facilities include the historical museum and historic building complex, City Hall and offices, public library, parks, and the post office.

In 1917, a plat of small lots was auctioned off by the Alaska Railroad Commission, effectively creating what is now the Downtown district. From this beginning, a small crossroads commercial area has expanded east and west along the present Parks Highway to become the major commercial corridor of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

Until the population boom years of the last two decades, the City never had the opportunity to develop a traditional pedestrian-friendly mixed-use Downtown like older communities that grew during pre-automobile times. Instead, the recent period of growth followed the "suburban", highway-oriented development pattern classic to highway corridors in America. The original small lots of Downtown are not conducive to this development pattern and have been overlooked as development sites.

Creating a traditional town center is still possible for the City. The most important factor is that the market conditions are conducive for growth. There is significant room in the marketplace for retail, service and hospitality businesses.

Remnants of the original fabric of the crossroads Downtown includes several historic structures, the museum, and historic town site complex, City Hall, and post office to serve as Downtown anchors. The existing small lot sizes can even become an asset for developing small businesses if the zoning codes are amended to enable commercial uses. At a minimum, revisions are needed to the minimum required setbacks and parking requirements.

Community Input

A week-long planning charrette was conducted for the City's Downtown in late October 2009. This included meetings with City officials, business leaders, walking tours, and three evening planning workshops with the public. In between meetings, concepts for the Downtown were sketched for presentation at the planning workshops.

Figure 7. Downtown Study Area 2007 Aeromap Orthophoto

Current issues identified by workshop participants with Downtown include:

- Traffic congestion, especially related to vehicle stacking on Main Street for access to the Parks Highway.
- Poor pedestrian connectivity and a lack of sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the Downtown area.
- No identity as a Downtown district; looks like a strip mall and lacks personality.
- Appearance of buildings, streets, and sidewalks detract from economic development potential
- Lack of places to gather, learn, and enjoy arts and culture (need new Library and Valley Performing Arts Theater).
- Need a Downtown park as a gathering place and green area
- Need gateway entrances to town
- Identify Downtown boundaries

Opportunities identified by participants include:

- Market potential for growth
- Desire by the community to develop a vibrant Downtown
- Access and location
- Parks and open space

The planning charrette defined both the physical and built environment business owners and residents desired for Downtown. Rough sketches were produced during the charrette to communicate these ideas. These ideas would require extensive changes to the Downtown area. The concept plan features:

- **Pedestrian Focus:** Sidewalks should be constructed on both sides of all Downtown streets. Buildings are oriented to the sidewalk and street rather than parking lots and have minimal or no setbacks from the sidewalks. Crosswalks define safe pedestrian zones at intersections.

Several unique, historic and well-located buildings are already in place in the Downtown core, providing cornerstones for future development with a stronger identity.

Major roadway projects, including a Yenlo and Main Street couplet system are needed to address Downtown's traffic issues at Main Street, Knik-Goose Bay Road, the railroad, and Parks Highway.

- **Improved Traffic Flows:** A one-way couplet should be constructed to improve traffic flows around Downtown. The Yenlo and Main Street couplet is a key project to move forward. On-street parking is essential for Downtown and must be included the project.
- **Town Square:** Residents liked the idea of a town square to add green space and a place for gatherings and celebrations in Downtown. There are two possible locations for the town square as shown in the concepts.
- **Building Form:** Two- and three-story commercial buildings should be developed in a zero lot line form, right up to the sidewalk. Private parking lots can be constructed in the rear of the buildings. Retail and service businesses should be located on the ground level, with office and residential use on upper floors. A 2009 Retail, Office and Lodging Study completed by the Gibbs Planning Group for this planning effort demonstrates that the City could add considerable retail, office and lodging development, some of which may be captured in the Downtown area.
- **Parking:** On-street parking throughout Downtown will serve to calm traffic and support business development. This will add a considerable parking inventory to Downtown and is sufficient for the development conceptualized. Additional parking may be located at the rear of buildings. Larger developments may require the construction of parking structures.
- **Landscaping:** Landscaped areas will add beauty and visual interest to Downtown. Gateway landscaping treatments at the intersections of Yenlo, Boundary and Main streets and the Parks Highway will attract attention to the Downtown.
- **Streetscape:** Clean, attractive sidewalks and pedestrian scale lighting fixtures will enhance the business district and appeal to pedestrians and shoppers. Fancy and expensive streetscape treatments are not necessary.

In October 2010 a final public meeting was held where residents were asked to articulate priorities for enhancing Downtown. Residents' input requested that the City focus at first in the core area of Downtown, and preserve and build on pre-statehood historical elements. Most residents expressed support for creating a "Main Street U.S.A" atmosphere, with some support for whole block re-development and taller structures in key locations to create more interest and energy Downtown.

As a tool for implementing what was envisioned in the charrette, this Plan recommends that the City and key Downtown interests explore "Overlay Zoning" to include land use provisions and specific design standards that are compatible with community needs. A general area to consider for the overlay is the Greater Downtown Area (see Figure 7).

Downtown sidewalks, on-street parking, and streetscape adds appeal for pedestrians and shoppers.

5.2 Desired Future Conditions

The City has a definable Downtown based around the historic town site with these attributes:

- It is pedestrian friendly, with sidewalks and crosswalks at street intersections.
- The area is attractive, with landscaping and good architecture that represents an Alaskan image and fits in with the spectacular natural surroundings.
- Downtown has convenient, on-street parking and easy access.
- Mixed uses are present, combining ground-level retail with office and housing in upper stories of buildings, as market conditions allow.
- The area is vibrant, attracting residents and tourists with a variety of specialty shops and activities, at all hours of the day and evening and in all seasons.

City of Wasilla Resident Opinions Regarding Downtown
√ Residents are generally supportive of "Redevelopment of the Downtown Area to strengthen its role as a town center": ***33% residents - Very Supportive*** ***34% residents - Somewhat Supportive*** ***16% residents - Not Sure*** ***17% residents - Not Supportive***
√ Many residents believe that Wasilla "should strengthen small city identity": ***24% residents - Strongly Agree*** ***31% residents - Agree*** ***30% residents - Neutral*** ***10% residents - Disagree*** ***6% residents - Strongly Disagree***
√ Residents have mixed views about "developing physical enhancements in the Downtown (e.g. gateways, streetscapes)": ***24% residents - Very Supportive*** ***34% residents - Somewhat Supportive*** ***17% residents - Not Sure*** ***25% residents - Not Supportive***

Source: 2010 Community Survey (see page 1-4)

5.3 Goals, Objectives, and Actions

Goal 1. Promote and encourage development and redevelopment within the Downtown area.

Objective	Actions
1.1 Adopt land use policies that encourage a mix of land uses in the Downtown area that create and establish a more vibrant town center, create a gathering place for residents and visitors, and a focus for business and cultural activities.	1.1.1 Create a Downtown overlay zoning district that incorporates Wasilla's historic center (see Downtown overlay concept map). Develop land use regulations and development standards that encourage new development/redevelopment, appropriate land use patterns, and a cohesive town center. 1.1.2 Consider developing an incentive based policy or other solutions to help reduce lot fragmentation of potentially valuable commercial sites. 1.1.3 Support developer's efforts to reconsolidate Downtown lots for high-quality development that will enhance the historic Downtown district. 1.1.4 Adopt land use policies that allow development of multi-story buildings with street-level commercial and office uses with upper-story residential units in the Downtown area.
1.2 Identify opportunities to develop civic investments that revitalize the Downtown area and reinforce its identity as an attractive civic center.	1.2.1 Support partnership approaches that leverage funding and community support to help build a new library, expanded Valley Performing Arts Theater, town square, streetscape, sidewalks, and lighting in the Downtown core. 1.2.2 Design and improve Downtown streets to encourage walking, on-street parking, covered walkways, and additional curbs and gutters. 1.2.3 Work closely with ADOT&PF on major road projects, including the Yenlo Street Extension/Main Street Couplet and the Parks Highway Alternative Route development, to ensure that roadway's are upgraded to re-shape core area circulation for walkability, on-street parking, and to include streetscape design opportunities.
1.3 Improve pedestrian access in the Downtown area.	1.3.1 Work with roadway facility designers and community members to define basic functional and aesthetic parameters for streetscape improvements in the Downtown area. 1.3.2 Dedicate city, state, and federal resources as available to developing Downtown's streetscape infrastructure, including wide sidewalks and pedestrian amenities. 1.3.3 Partner with Downtown business and property owners on improvement and management issues related to improving the Downtown pedestrian environment (parking needs, sidewalk upgrades, and regular snow clearing and maintenance).

Goal 2. Build the partnerships and develop the community capacity required to transform Downtown.

Objective	Actions
2.1 Bring key stakeholders together to help mobilize implementation of a Downtown overlay zoning district.	2.1.1 Engage key stakeholders and involve them in creating and assisting with the implementation of the Downtown overlay zoning district, potentially through a Downtown Development committee.
2.2 Create public-private partnerships that can leverage resources to implement the Downtown overlay zoning district.	2.2.1 Encourage the creation of a business improvement district among core area businesses to supplement city services and invest in the Downtown's maintenance, marketing, and the common improvements that help attract residents and visitors.

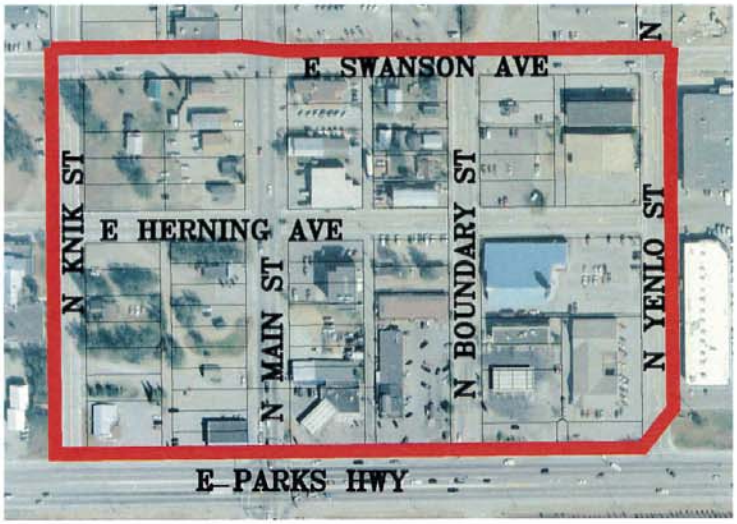
Wasilla's business district in 1974 (aerial, above) was focused in a "node" at the major crossroads. Today, much of the main business activity has become linear in nature, and spread along the highway corridor, making it harder to identify Wasilla's "Downtown."

ISSUE	CODE REQUIREMENT (AA – Administrative; UP – Use Permit; CU – Conditional Use)		COMMENTS
	Current	Proposed	
Existing uses and buildings not really "grandfathered" because they are required to come into compliance if changed - Grandfathered businesses should be allowed to expand without coming into compliance with regulations	Use or building only "grandfathered" if unchanged or no vacancy >12 months – If damaged >65%, may not be reconstructed. Additions to nonconforming structure must comply with current code and no additions if nonconforming use.	Improvement allowed up to 25% of assessed tax value or building size before requiring compliance. Then only requires sidewalk, street trees, and street lights and new addition must comply with design criteria. Existing building is exempt.	• Overlay allows improvements up to 25% of building value or size • Current code only allows improvements if only building is nonconforming and new addition meets current code. • Business owners are unaware of current "grandfather" regulations and what current code requires for new development.
Rents will increase due to construction costs	Must be similar to area appearance and architecture – decision by City Planner or Planning Commission.	No prescribed design, material, or color – just identifies prohibited types	Overlay will not have significantly higher costs since developer chooses design, type, and color – Current code requires paved parking, landscaping, & architectural design
Regulations will lower property value and make it difficult to sell property	--	--	City adopted zoning in 1982 with major overhaul in 1996 – Did not negatively impact property values
No one shops downtown – people mainly shop online or at big-box stores	--	--	Baby boomers and millenials want walkable downtown near neighborhoods – Also want to live downtown but can't always afford due to higher rents/demand. Existing businesses in Overlay are doing well.
No one walks downtown or anywhere – northern climate	Code requires sidewalks to provide circulation or access to schools, playgrounds, shopping, transit, and other community facilities.	Sidewalks required when new addition or renovation >25% of building value or size	Seniors, parents with kids, and school-age kids walk to parks, post office, Carrs, school, eat lunch, etc. even with unattractive, missing, and/or damaged and narrow sidewalks with no attractive route. Walking would increase if safer and more attractive route.
City shouldn't tell property owners what they can/can't do on property – City should only provide guidelines – not make revisions mandatory	--	--	1st class city must have Comp Plan and zoning – Initial zoning in 1982 and current in 1996 – Codes provide clear expectations and provide property value protection for investment cost.
Offices should be allowed on ground level as permitted use vs. conditional use	Allowed as AA	Allowed as AA for upper-story or ground-level with CU	Revise pages 3 & 4 of 16 in ordinance to either allow by right everywhere or keep CU for "main street" roads
No notice to owners	--	--	Web, eNotice, Ads, 2 Postcards about proposed Overlay
Beautification won't attract customers	--	--	Landscaping, buffering, and screening required in current code – Why if it doesn't make a difference?
Need incentives for owners to improve property	None	None proposed	Create Business Improvement District (BID) tax?
Downtown will only be used by tourists	--	--	Designed for community – not just tourists
Agree that City appearance needs to be improved – just not by business owners	--	--	Would require City residents to give up services to pay for business property improvements or create BID.
No benefit to City residents or businesses	--	--	Health benefits, improved attractiveness, increased property value due to increased demand, unique shopping, seniors able to "age in place", etc.

ISSUE	CODE REQUIREMENT (AA – Administrative; UP – Use Permit; CU – Conditional Use)		COMMENTS
	Current	Proposed	
Wait until couplet is complete before adopting overlay	--	--	Overlay will provide direction to DOT while designing roadway, sidewalks, street trees/lighting, etc.
No way to know what people will want in 25 years	First code in 1982 and current code in 1996.	Ensures appropriate design with use flexibility to reflect market demand	There is data that supports the demand by "baby boomers" and "millennials" for the traditional downtown
Reduce area of Overlay	--	15 Blocks – Approx. 76 acres	See two alternative boundary maps in packet
Downtown isn't a good location for residential uses – too noisy	Residential allowed with Use Permit	Upper-story multifamily allowed as AA; Ground-level as CU	Condos developed on and south of Wasilla Lake adjacent to railroad – Yenlo PUD in downtown
Don't want low-income housing in downtown	Can't regulate income-type	Can't regulate income-type	If managed properly, provides affordable housing near necessary services for less affluent seniors/families
Banks don't want marketability of properties to be reduced in any way	--	--	Banks continue to finance sale of "grandfathered" properties even without re-build letter from City
Let someone else do it first – then we will	--	--	Difficult to find investor willing to spend $$ to develop in less attractive area without assurance that future development will be of similar type and quality
Only traffic on Main Street is through traffic	--	--	Businesses are still open on Main Street.
Two areas in Michigan tried to created walkable downtown and both failed	--	--	See Golden, CO, Denver, CO, Ocean City, NJ, Breckenridge, CO, and other NE cities
Allow mini-storage in downtown	Up to 10,000 SF as AA; then CU	Prohibited	This is not the type of use that generates customers – Could revise ordinance to allow use as AA or CU
Allow gas station in downtown	Up to 10,000 SF as AA; then CU	Prohibited	Two in Overlay – Plenty of other locations available – Could revise Overlay to allow as AA or CU
Allow funeral home in downtown	Up to 10,000 SF as AA; then CU	Prohibited	One in Overlay – Doesn't generate customers – Could revise Overlay to allow as AA or CU
Price of groceries and goods will increase	--	--	Most design, type, and color are not mandated
Let market drive type of design and type of businesses	Code adopted in 1996 with regulations	Focuses on building type/design vs. type of use – allows flexibility	Could revise material, color, and design requirements
20% open space is too much	30% must remain in vegetation; if illegally removed, must be replanted	On-site sidewalks, seating areas, plazas, landscaping, etc. count	Overlay will reduce vegetation required on-site and will allow up to 50% more commercial square footage.
Create Downtown Overlay Committee	--	--	Comprehensive Plan – Engage stakeholders to "implement" Overlay. Committee needed to identify ways to attract businesses downtown, fund necessary improvements (if not by owner), and activities/events to bring customers downtown
Conduct charrette/additional public process	--	--	Charrette and extensive public involvement for Comp Plan and Downtown Area Plan. Both require overlay to create an attractive, vibrant, and pedestrian oriented downtown.

Current Proposed Boundary

Alternative Boundary #1



Alternative Boundary #2