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SUBMIT

Downtown zoning changes back in front of Borough Assembly for round two

by Molly Rettig / mrettig@newsminer.com

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FAIRBANKS — A downtown zoning ordinance is back before the Borough Assembly less than five weeks after a similar one was defeated.

This marks a second attempt to create zoning types that would encourage investment in downtown Fairbanks.

In March, the assembly rejected new zones after hours of public testimony and a 4-4 vote, saying they were too restrictive on things like building standards and parking. Nearly 20 residents, many of them business owners, showed up to ask the assembly to approve the new zones.

"The public comment from stakeholders was overwhelmingly supportive," Assemblyman Karl Kassel said.

The new proposal, introduced by assembly members Nadine Winters, Diane Hutchison and Kassel, loosens up on parking.

"That's the thing that seemed to be the bone of contention," said David van den Berg, executive director of the Downtown Association.

The Downtown Association wants to use the zoning types to implement Vision Fairbanks, a long-term revitalization plan for downtown.

They set standards for new buildings on things like building facades, setbacks and window transparency. The zoning categories come with a list of permitted uses, such as clothing stores, ice cream shops and professional offices. The rules would only apply to new buildings and uses in the event of a rezone; all existing properties and uses would be grandfathered in.

"All we're doing is creating more options. When there are more options, you're more likely to get what you want," Kassel said.

The former plan was revised to allow surface parking lots in the downtown supporting zone and accessory parking (lots connected to businesses) in the hot spot zone, the tiny inner core.

The original plan excluded parking lots, and encouraged more on-street parking, in order to make the streetscape more pedestrian-friendly.

Hutchison said excluding parking lots was foolish, especially if you want to attract residents in addition to tourists.

"If you want residents you have to cater to year-round people," she said.

Van den Berg said the amended proposal would still help make downtown more vibrant.

"Maybe this ordinance strikes a better balance between conventional parking and the pedestrian experience," he said.

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Assembly members Michael Dukes, Natalie Howard, Matt Want and Joe Blanchard voted against the last zoning ordinance. Assemblyman Tim Beck was absent.

Contact staff writer Molly Rettig at 459-7590.

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« Yukonjohn wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 09:31 PM »

Oh, and thank you Newsminer for putting who voted against the last ordinance. I know for one, Michael Dukes is a third generation Alaskan, and he grew up here. He knows how Fairbanks was when he was a boy and it was still a thriving city in the far north!!!

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« Yukonjohn wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 09:19 PM »

Just Liberty,

Yes, I was working with the Yukon Quest and FDA shared the offices at the other end of the hall in the old Zales building! Woody and that lady were the ones that got money to buy out all the bars and build the "Korean Hotel". Remember that? All that happened was that parking lot that eventually became a empty lot because of the parking police and how they collected revenue off of it...like a Korean hotel!! I know soon after, in the late 80s, I just quit going down town. I used to drink alot and hung out at Tommy's and a number of the other bars down there, but when they tore down all of the good ones, and shut the rest, it was over for me. Now that I rarely drink, I still feel the same way as I did at that time. The poor folks from the villages have no other central meeting place, and thus you end up with a few chronic inebriates, white and other, and nothing else. It is dead for the rest of my lifetime, I see nothing that can be done short of turning Alaskaland into an Historic Gaming hotspot!! It could be easily done and make the state tell us we cant.

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« Justliberty wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 08:57 PM »

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YukonJohn,

You are correct. The downtown area amounted to something until some enlightened community leaders decided all the bars were a problem. (I think they were getting a crick in their neck from looking down their nose at the bar patrons.)

They convinced the state legislature to give them some money to buy up the 'bar block' and the block where the parking garage currently sits. The plan was to use more public money to build a convention center downtown and that would attract a major hotel to locate there.

As you might recall, the project stalled after they tore down the bars. The convention center eventually became the Carlson Center and it took about 10 years before the NANA Native Corporation teamed up with Marriot to construct the hotel.

So much for community planning.

If you really think about it, the primary reason 'down-towns' sprung up was a central place to congregate for entertainment. Take away the entertainment and there really isn't any valid reason to go 'down-town'.

But community planners have to appeal to politicians and the social elite - not ordinary people in order to get their consulting contract. There simply isn't much chance of getting money from the legislature to build a bunch of night clubs, so the planners do the logical thing, i.e. promote public buildings and open spaces that appeal to the social elites and others who like to control people instead of catering to people.

The result is Vision Fairbanks.

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« [Justliberty](#) wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 08:34 PM »

Childofsol

The implication of what you are saying about the need for zoning is that if you can't reach an agreement with your neighbor by talking to him, then it is okay to ask the assembly to force your neighbor to do what you want.

That doesn't seem like a good way to build a community.

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« [childofsol](#) wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 06:58 PM »

Apparently you didn't realize that I was responding to your post, not replying to a question, rhetorical or otherwise.

"Talk to your neighbor instead of the assembly."

Talking to your neighbor is great. It doesn't replace the need for zoning.

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« [use_your_head](#) wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 06:08 PM »

Downtown Fairbanks will benefit from more restrictions to who can operate there and what can operate there? Mr. Kassel, you don't belong anywhere near political office if you think that limiting individual liberty and industry encourages it to thrive.

It seems to me that the biggest problem in our area is the blurring of Borough and City areas. We need a clear delineation of where the city ends and Fairbanks begins, that includes cops and bogus regulations.

The city is dying because few people want to live there due to the rising property costs and taxes. So residents and businesses are moving onto the Borough's lands and commuting into the city for the occasional trip.

The borough is becoming more intolerable and intrusive into our personal lives due to the fact people are confusing the two separate entities. Further I would propose a ballot measure removing the eminent domain excuse from the city's and the borough's permitted options for increasing their tax bases. Roads and bridges, ok, paid at the prevailing market price but not permitted to remove the citizen who owns the land for any reason if their offer is turned down.

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« Yukonjohn wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 03:07 PM »

Hey JustLiberty, you have been involved for many years with local politics, and you were also here to see Fairbanks, more importantly DownTown Fairbanks, when it was more in its heyday. Is there not something that can be done that will just shut down vision Fairbanks? I am not so naive to think that my vision of Fairbanks is the absolute end all, be all, but the vision that those folks have portrayed in the couple meetings I went to were surely not it. It seemed, by the history I have seen and read, that the times that downtown Fairbanks was thriving, it was a somewhat wild, frontier town near the end of the road!! Being like the examples shown by vision Fairbanks, we would never succeed!!

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« Justliberty wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 12:05 PM »

childofsol,

Apparently you didn't recognize that I was asking a rhetorical question. So lets get to the heart of the problem.

Reasonable people can disagree over whether the proposed design standards are a good idea. Reasonable people can also get together to swap ideas, consider each others perspective, and reach some sort of mutually acceptable understanding that enables them to move forward with mutual respect.

Swapping ideas requires patience, but everyone gains when the goal is to increase understanding and real cooperation.

However, the proposal before the assembly is not about swapping 'ideas' . It is about forcing someone else to submit to your idea.

I simply do not want to give the assembly the authority to require someone to submit to your good idea.

Talk to your neighbor instead of the assembly.

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« cupajo wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 11:02 AM »

The real agenda behind this proposal is to get the on-street parking limited to force users to utilize the paid parking in the parking garage. On-street parking was cut in half by the "vision" to make the pedestrian "experience" more "friendly". If not for off-street parking provided by businesses, where else could the customers park.

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« 1TarBaby wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 10:56 AM »

childofsol wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 08:01 AM »

I hope that they approve it.

"Why would downtown property owners want the assembly, which is heavily influenced by people who live outside of the city limits, imposing rules upon them?"

I would like to rephrase that: "Why would the assembly, which is heavily influenced by people who live outside the city limits, vote against something that the downtown property owners want?"

----3 rd phrase:

Solution to issue: ONLY with a written notarized request by 100% of the land owners in the zoned area.

If all of the property owners agree to the plan, then do it them.

However, NOT one single dime of anyone's tax money -borough, city, state, federal - will be spent on the "plan" And violation of this covenant reverts the zoning to the prior zoning.

Now the downtown association can KMA and buzz off.

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« Akteabags wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 10:44 AM »

"The public is not that stupid,"

ha!

they voted for ms. CUT AND RUN, er, ms. CASH AND CARRY, our, half-term, former gov, the DINGBAT....

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« 4thstreet wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 09:59 AM »

what 'downtown'? do we have a 'downtown'?

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« arcticdogs wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 09:30 AM »

The only way I feel this should pass is if there were no grandfather rights. Existing business owners should have to comply to a re-zone the same as new business would have too. If they really believe this is the way they want downtown to look, then why wouldn't existing business invest in their own buildings? If only new business have to bear the cost of this change, just how long would it take for their "vision" to be complete.. just how many new business open up downtown each year anyway?

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« sonofchulio wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 09:26 AM »

"All we're doing is creating more options. When there are more options, you're more likely to get what you want," explained the three-card-monte dealer.

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« childofsol wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 08:01 AM »

I hope that they approve it.

"Why would downtown property owners want the assembly, which is heavily influenced by people who live outside of the city limits, imposing rules upon them?"

I would like to rephrase that: "Why would the assembly, which is heavily influenced by people who live outside the city limits, vote against something that the downtown property owners want?"

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« [Larmex wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 07:06 AM](#) »

Why do they keep wasting time on this DEAD subject? Is this all the Borough has to do? and why are they doing it and not the City? The best thing we could do is limit the Borough meetings to once a quarter, then mabey they would take care of the important things and stop beating a dead horse...

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« [Navin wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 05:31 AM](#) »

"All we're doing is creating more options. When there are more options, you're more likely to get what you want," Kassel said.

Restricting options is "creating more options?" ??? This is doublespeak right out of the novel 1984.

Kassel is wildly insane to think the public will fall for rhetoric like that. The public is not that stupid, regardless of how good or not good his ordinance might be.

Whatever he's smoking, he ought to do it in the back room and not bother the rest of us with his profound stupidity of logic.

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« [doubledumb wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 03:53 AM](#) »

Any re-zoning is not to favor the public but for the money. I wonder who will make the most profit if this one goes through? Vision Fairbanks bwill make some big profit for a few of the "boys" especially after the "costs over run", it will end up being over one BILLION \$\$\$ to make downtown Oh so Lovely. Spread the money around and do something needed for the community, not just the "downtown" area once again, such as, road repair, curbs, sidewalks, lighting, proper traffic signage, painted crosswalks, remove Polaris building, etc. etc. How many Hundreds of millions of \$\$\$\$\$\$ have been dumped into the "downtown" area over the past 40 years, and look at what we still have. Disgusting. At least there's a few good Thai resturants down there.....but then they built their business in the old existing buildings. Guess hard work pays off.

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« [Justliberty wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 01:45 AM](#) »

Several things about this effort puzzle me.

1. Why would downtown property owners want the assembly, which is heavily influenced by people who live outside of the city limits, imposing rules upon them?
2. Why would they be asking the assembly to tell them to do what they say they want to do? Couldn't they just do it?
3. How would a more restrictive zoning category increase anyone's options?
4. I avoid going downtown because I don't want to put up with the hassle of the parking authority, so why would regulating window tinting make me want to go down town?

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« [just-saying wrote on Sunday, May 08 at 12:55 AM](#) »

Precisely, YukonJohn. Keep bringing it up until you win the vote. (Kind of reminds me of the sales tax votes.)

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