

[print](#)

## Vision Fairbanks plan dealt big blow by Fairbanks Borough Assembly

---

by Christopher Eshleman / [ceshleman@newsminer.com](mailto:ceshleman@newsminer.com)

06.24.11 - 11:05 pm

**FAIRBANKS** — The failure of a land-use ordinance Friday throws a cloak across efforts behind the measure's parent project — the Vision Fairbanks downtown revitalization plan — a lead proponent said Friday.

The ordinance would have updated law books with new downtown-specific land-use rules. It died by way of a 3-6 Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly vote early Friday morning.

That fate, coupled with local leaders' December rejection of Vision Fairbanks' traffic-specific component, leaves the plan facing a long recovery.

"The implementation phase of Vision Fairbanks is over," said David van den Berg, who directs the Downtown Association of Fairbanks. But he said parties looking to improve downtown's investment climate are left with the ideas generated during the planning process. "(Improvement) is not a one trick pony. There are other things we have going and we remain committed to an all-of-the-above approach, whether we generate the ideas or people bring them to us."

Sponsors at the assembly's meeting, which ran through Thursday night and into Friday morning, had proposed adding two new classifications to public zoning books. One would have set ground rules for development on and near a central stretch of Cushman Street — a site viewed as a potential "hot spot" for retail — that is currently dominated by parking lots.

It was a watered-down version of an ordinance that failed at the assembly's work desk three months ago. The Borough Assembly nonetheless rejected the measure early Friday morning following input — split down the middle — from downtown business leaders and land owners.

Assembly member Diane Hutchison, who backed the March proposal, said she can't support it "until it's not so divisive."

Current land use rules downtown are loose. Proponents said the changes would minimize the risk facing firms and entrepreneurs thinking of investing in downtown's core by ensuring neighbors could not open, for example, a car wash next door to their retail store.

But the measure's architectural and design standards created friction between borough and city government agencies.

Hutchison joined Tim Beck, Joe Blanchard, Michael Dukes, Natalie Howard and Matt Want in opposing the measure. Karl Kassel, Mike Musick and Nadine Winters voted yes.

Assembly members, including two incumbents, in 2008 adopted Vision Fairbanks as part of the community's comprehensive development plan. Van den Berg, whose nonprofit has since helped anchor interagency work, said the plan still provides a guide for parties interested in economic development downtown. But he said specifics related to zoning and traffic were keystone pieces needed for the long haul.

Van den Berg said the association will start exploring new ideas.

"We remain committed to an all-of-the-above approach to revitalizing downtown," he said.

Contact staff writer Christopher Eshleman at 459-7582.

---

© newsminer.com 2011