

Executive Summary

The actions of Juneau's residents and the adopted plans of the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) have recognized the Willoughby District as Juneau's Civic, Arts and Cultural area for at least 50 years.

In the 1960's, the City provided the land and Juneau citizens voted to support a one year, one percent sales tax to raise matching funds to build the Alaska State Museum here. Today, in addition to the nearby State Capitol and Alaska State Museum, the Willoughby District is home to major State offices, the Juneau Centennial Hall Convention and Visitors Center, the Central Council of Tlingit Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska's Andrew Hope Building with its meeting spaces and ANB/ANS Juneau camp home, the Juneau Arts and Culture Center (the JACC), Zach Gordon Youth Center, and Juneau's public broadcasting offices and studios.

The CBJ Comprehensive Plan establishes direction for growth in this area:

1. Support the establishment of a Cultural Campus;
2. Seek to strengthen and enhance the Capitol Complex; and
3. Provide for mixed use development that integrates residential, retail and office uses.

The Willoughby District Land Use Plan is a Long Range Plan. The projects in it will be accomplished over time by a series of near to long term public sector investments in park and plaza space, infrastructure, and parking; and through private sector investments as land owners are ready to improve their properties.

The Plan will be a blue print for development in this area for the next 20-25 years. It will be used by CBJ staff (and portions of the plan will be adopted into Juneau's Comprehensive Plan), public and private landowners, developers, and the general public. Portions of the CBJ Land Use Code (Title 49) will be amended to codify changes to the Mixed Use 2 zone to implement this Plan (such as reducing required parking and some building setbacks).

The Plan is being prepared in advance of significant investment that is anticipated over the next two to ten years. Projects include construction of a new State Library, Archives and Museum facility, improvements to Whittier Street, creation of a public plaza between the State Office Building and the new Museum as parking is relocated,

completion of Juneau's long-planned Seawalk nearby, and more. These investments will likely stimulate some private property owners in the area to reinvest in their property.

With the benefit of a community endorsed Willoughby District Land Use Plan to help guide, coordinate, and set clear rules for these investments, this area can be much more what a series of individual projects could create alone.

The Willoughby District will continue to be a place that welcomes all ages, income levels, and populations. Juneau's Civic, Arts and Cultural campus will thrive as the public and private sector both take actions to achieve the vision established in this Plan.

Development Themes

The Willoughby District Land Use Plan was developed by building upon direction found in other CBJ plans and following a process that included an inventory of current land uses and building conditions, traffic patterns and pedestrian facilities, employee numbers, existing parking spaces, community destinations, current CBJ Comprehensive Plan policies and zoning standards, and the District's assets and challenges. Collecting and reviewing photographs illustrating changes in the District over the last 50 years, and research into area history provided inspiration and fundamental plan concepts. Public and committee meetings provided focus as did meetings with landowners, and a web based survey that generated 250 comments from people that work, live or visit the area frequently. An early draft greatly benefited from multi-department internal CBJ review.

Planning and design principles were applied and combined with the work and input above to develop key themes that characterize the desired outcomes of the Willoughby District Land Use Plan (see Figure 6).

- ***The Willoughby District is the heart of Juneau's Civic, Arts and Cultural campus.***

It is a dynamic center for government and legislative activities; public and civic gathering; art, cultural and entertainment events; and residential and commercial activity. This area has thoughtful building design and dignified public spaces.

- ***There is great public space here.***

More public space, restored creeks and streams and pedestrian connections between public spaces and civic buildings characterize this area. Public investment in streets, wide sidewalks with colored bricks or concrete, landscaping, human-scale lighting, visible crosswalks and pedestrian connections to and through the area, public open space, and public art all showcase the area and help spur private sector development.

- ***The number of residential units in the Willoughby District triples over the next 20 years.***

Denser residential development is along Village Street, in mixed-use buildings by Gold Creek, and above the first floor along Willoughby Avenue. Residential units are a mix of market rate and affordable housing. They are townhouses, apartments, condos and loft style that serve populations including legislative staff, seasonal workers, and residents that no longer wish to own a large house or need smaller housing units (the elderly, “snowbirds”, single parents, etc).

Builders also benefit from bonus and financial incentives in the District that are available for building housing, 1st floor retail, transit oriented development features, or by providing a higher level of building design.

- ***Willoughby Avenue is the center of the commercial area.***

Lining Willoughby Avenue are stores, places to eat, and services; buildings are built to the sidewalk and have canopies to shelter walkers from the rain; attractive street front displays and wall murals make walking fun.

Developers benefit from reduced parking requirements that recognize that residents and employees in this walkable downtown area are close to services and transit and less reliant on cars for trips within and adjacent to the District. Those attending evening events park in spaces vacated when workers leave at the end of the workday. Offices and retail stores have nearby on-street parking, some surface parking tucked behind buildings, or parking in garages or below buildings.

- ***All of the above is possible because the area’s former super-blocks are now a grid of human-scaled streets and wide sidewalks, and parking has been relocated behind or under buildings and in garages.***

Together these improvements have created developable parcels that enable denser mixed-use buildings and residential development.

- ***All past and present resident and stakeholder input will be valued, consulted and incorporated into future planning endeavors.***

A neighborhood plan for this district will include substantial consultation with area residents and institutions in overseeing changes and supporting the vision for their neighborhood.

Willoughby District Land Use Plan

The Willoughby District Land Use Plan shows the Willoughby District as the area will look in the future when it is ‘built-out’ following identified development considerations, incentives and zoning rules, and sequenced investments.

Accomplishing the vision of the Willoughby District Plan will depend on partnerships between the public and private sector. The most common partnership is the informal one that exists because public sector investments often stimulate nearby private sector property upgrades.

This Plan suggests additional zoning bonuses and financial incentives that the public sector can offer in the Willoughby District to entice the private sector to build in ways that accomplish Juneau’s community goals for this area.

Implementation

Federal, State, City and private sector capital improvement or development projects proposed in the Willoughby District will be evaluated by CBJ staff, Planning Commissioners and/or others to see that it is consistent with the Willoughby District Land Use Plan’s planning and design principles, development themes, and 14 development considerations. The Future Development (Build-Out) Scenario (Figure 7) and the Public Improvement and Parking Plan (Figure 8) are a blue-print that together illustrate the capital improvements and types of land uses, buildings and investments needed to achieve Juneau’s community goals for this area.

Property owners and developers should use this Plan as a guideline to understand what the community desires to achieve in the Willoughby District (and what will thus be easier to permit). Proposed building sizes and footprints will differ from what is depicted in the Plan;

however, the overall emphasis is on mixed-use development and providing significantly more dwelling units that are a mix of market rate and affordable housing.

The Plan offers locations for types of uses that result in a cohesive and principled approach to balancing public and private space, building scale and massing proximate to open space, orientation of parking, and ensuring pedestrian and vehicle connections to, from and between buildings and areas. Most important is accomplishing development here that implements the Willoughby District Land Use Plan planning and design principles (section 5.1), development themes (section 5.2), and development considerations (section 5.3).