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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT - REQUEST FOR AGENCY COMMENT

DEPARTMENT: -

STAFF PERSON/TITLE: Venetia Bingham, DBA President
Nimmy Phillips, DBA Vice President

DATE: April 19, 2024

APPLICANT: -

TYPE OF APPLICATION: Agency Comments

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: AME 18-07 Blueprint Downtown

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: -

PARCEL NUMBER(S): -

PHYSICAL ADDRESS: -

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FROM PLANNER:

AGENCY COMMENTS:

The mission of the Juneau Downtown Business Association is to promote and advocate, on behalf of our membership, for a vibrant and sustainable downtown.

The Downtown Business Association (DBA) membership represents approximately 70% of all downtown businesses and advocates for all downtown commerce collectively. The economic impact and value proposition to our Juneau community results in a sales tax revenue of over \$13M in annual city sales taxes. This vital source of commerce and economic vitality of Juneau, plus bed tax revenues, represents over 20% of the economic commerce for the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ). With this context in mind along with our mission for a vibrant and sustainable downtown, we share the following updates and feedback by each Blueprint Downtown goal related to Economic Vitality (Chapter 3) and Downtown Activities and Tourism (Chapter 5). Please note the plan's direct alignment with our mission.

A Destination with a Sense of Place

- To date, with the support of our members and CBJ, the DBA has successfully secured and maintained Main Street America (MSA) accreditation (p. 12). MSA accreditation and membership are vital so that Juneau is recognized in this national accreditation with an organization devoted to assisting communities in growing, thriving, and sustaining themselves.
- Our community accreditation and adherence to Main Street principles reflect our commitment and ability to uphold the standards required for this nationally recognized designation (p. 187).
- Main Street America's focus on heritage overlaps with DBA member activities and the historical and cultural significance of Juneau, which helps build pride and respect for our community (pp.13, 185, 186).

A Downtown for Everyone

- The prioritization of downtown playground space aligns with DBA's adoption of a family-friendly approach for promotions and planning purposes while also supporting Juneau's active commitment to make our downtown area a place to raise families (p. 189).
- Our regular outreach and request for input and feedback to members and other downtown businesses fosters beneficial communication among residents, businesses, organizations, and our city government (p. 191).
- The work of DBA directly facilitates placemaking (p. 191) and dynamic social connection (p.78). The dynamic social connection includes the Downtown Ambassador program that assists visitors to our downtown and the many promotions and activities planned and executed by the DBA (e.g., Gallery Walk, Pumpkin Patch, Candidate Forums) designed to draw people downtown.
- The lack of sufficient parking for employees and customers and inadequate loading zones remain significant issues for our members and their employees. We continue to seek long-term solutions, working with interested parties and CBJ.

Safe and Welcoming

- Our members creatively collaborate on downtown beautification projects (p. 192); this includes Light Up Juneau (p. 15, 73), proposed mural activities on Ferry Way, partnerships with other organizations (e.g., Litter Free), and promoting partners' activities (e.g., the purchase of hanging flower baskets).
- The goals and objectives of the Downtown Ambassador program directly align with many aspects of Blueprint Downtown, as well as the best management practices as identified by TBMP (e.g., hospitality, friendliness, 'pedestrianization') - (p. 188).

Diverse and Well-Managed Tourism

- DBA is a member of TBMP and frequently collaborates by promoting downtown volunteer activities, passing along observations, and sharing information (p. 190).
- Our Downtown Ambassador program is also directly aligned with this goal as staff engage with cruise ship passengers at multiple docks and downtown streets.

Strong and Stable Economy

- DBA is responsive to businesses and strongly advocates for all efforts to support a year-round and authentic experience (pp. 12, 78, 183).
- The DBA actively markets and promotes the Free Ride Zone via member newsletters (p. 185) and via Downtown Ambassadors to residents and visitors alike.
- The lack of easy access to aggregated statistical data specific to downtown masks the contributions of downtown businesses on fiscal impact (e.g., sales taxes), diversity (e.g., BIPOC business owners), and revitalization efforts (p. 187).
- DBA supports District heating for the downtown core was identified in the 2018 Juneau Energy Strategy as a way of reducing both heating costs and the use of fossil fuels (pp.50, 90, 106)
- DBA supports the downtown circulator concept (pp 21, 45, 259) to help promote and provide less congestion and more accessible resident and visitor access to our downtown corridor.
- DBA supports the continued efforts to electrify all downtown Juneau port area docks (130, 177, 178).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To fulfill one of the five identified priorities of Blueprint Downtown, DBA would welcome immediate additional funding for dedicated staff to advocate and support long-term revitalization efforts in downtown Juneau. This is not a cost as much as it is a value proposition. The downtown represents over 20% of the CBJ sales and bed tax revenue. This dedicated resource person should have local knowledge of key partners and activities, as well as expertise in small businesses, entrepreneurship, and economic development in order to effectively increase the vibrancy, sustainability, and economic vitality that result in increased CBJ tax receipts that produce an outstanding Return on Investment (ROI). Ideally, this would be implemented and facilitated by DBA in partnership with JEDC given our long history of successful partnership and their existing in-house competencies in all of these areas.
2. To maintain the standards for economic vitality required by Main Street America, DBA advocates for City Hall to remain in the downtown corridor. Study after study shows that moving a City Hall out of a downtown corridor is a death knell for a downtown corridor and results in business failures, disrepair of buildings, property vacancies, and shuttered buildings. Keeping our City Hall

downtown is an existential threat and paramount to the year-round success of our members and all neighboring businesses.

3. In pursuit of achieving Blueprint Downtown's desired outcomes, it is vital to secure approval for using marine passenger fees to fund the DBA's long-standing Downtown Ambassador program to sustain and perpetuate downtown vibrancy and sustainability. This nationwide best practice to advocate and enhance downtown events and "happening" destinations reflects a successful decade-long partnership between CBJ and DBA while actively promoting pedestrianization and placemaking (p. 188).
4. The DBA strongly endorses activities to beautify and increase the vibrancy of downtown in coordination with CBJ and other business groups like the DBA. Likewise, rather than designating Marine Park as "the heart of downtown," a point centrally located within the commerce center would be ideal (e.g., clock, SHI).
5. We cannot recommend creating a new Local Improvement District (LID) or Business Improvement District (BID) if it places an additional financial burden on downtown businesses already paying a relatively high amount of sales and property tax to CBJ.
6. To highlight the importance of downtown commerce and facilitate a deeper understanding of needs that exist within this crucial year-round economic ecosystem, we recommend remedying deficiencies noted above (e.g., accessible metrics, and parking needs of employers and employees).

We ask all decision-makers involved in this process to consider the far-reaching impacts of the downtown experience. With visitors to Juneau during the Legislative session and summer season and our year-round residents living across the borough and residing downtown, your support for these recommendations will help facilitate the common goals we share embedded within Blueprint Downtown.

We thank our hard-working Planning Commission for requesting public input and appreciate your consideration of our comments.