

PROJECT:	Wasilla 2045	DATE:	August 22, 2025
PROJECT NUMBER:	1181.64089.01	TIME:	11 AM
ORGANIZER:	Karlie Lamothe	SUBJECT:	Downtown Overlay
LOCATION:	The Gathering House at the Grape Tap	CONTACT INFORMATION:	klamothe@dowl.com Wasilla2045@dowl.com
		PROJECT WEBSITE:	Wasilla2045.com

ATTENDEES:

LaQuita Chmielowski, DOWL
See sign in sheet

DOWL held a stakeholder meeting on Thursday, August 14, 2025. Ten Stakeholders were invited initially via email on June 30, with a reminder and formal invitation on August 8.

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the 2045 Wasilla Comprehensive Plan Update and the Wasilla Downtown Overlay District and associated Design standards, which were adopted to support the goals of the Downtown Area Plan in 2016. The Wasilla Planning Commission plans to hear a request to repeal the Overlay District and Design Standards due to concerns that the requirements were overly restrictive and limiting development and investment opportunities.

DOWL asked stakeholders the following questions:

- **Does the Downtown Overlay Boundary need to be revised?**

Responses:

- The group discussed potentially expanding the extent of the Downtown Overlay Boundary to the west to include Newcomb Park.
- Another option that was discussed was to reduce the Downtown area to create a historic district bounded by Main Street and Boundary and Swanson and Herning.
- The city center/Downtown isn't well defined due to the highway that extends through Wasilla and the surrounding area. The Downtown Overlay may not be the best for the community; there could be a creation of districts. There could be a downtown core area with a nod to the history of the area, and to help designate regions from one another.
- Consideration that the Downtown boundary could be expanded to include Newcomb Park/Honor Memorial, or even reduced to include one future main street and Historic District (bounded by Main/Boundary and Swanson/Herning)

- **What does your ideal Downtown Wasilla look like? How is it set apart from the surrounding area?**

Responses:

- The majority of uses in Wasilla are commercial retail, and a trend that the group thought would likely continue for this area.
- Attendees would like to see support for small/local businesses on smaller parcels (see question below on help from the City for development of small lots, such as subdividing for larger parcels).
- The core area of downtown Wasilla is set apart from the surrounding area due to the historic nature of buildings and businesses. The lots are smaller in size and may lend themselves to development for local businesses.
- Downtown is attractive for smaller development due to affordability and proximity to government/historic buildings and parks, as well as lower traffic in this area

- **The goals of the Overlay Design Standards were to encourage pedestrian activity, preserve Wasilla's unique character, and promote development with a nod to the City's history. Does this still resonate?**

Responses:

- Attendees indicated that the design standards were restrictive on the historic, small lots in Downtown, including landscaping and parking. These requirements have impacted and stopped development in this area.
 - The City of Wasilla owns a lot of property in the Downtown area, , such as City Hall, the parks, the block between Herning/Swanson and Main/Boundary and some of the parking areas. This may be an opportunity for the City to leverage the properties to support the vision for downtown and provide shared parking within the area.
 - Shared parking or off-site parking can benefit smaller lots and improve walkability. Should consider the ability to make it easier to have the opportunity to share parking to meet total required parking in the "core" area of downtown Wasilla.
- **How will the Wasilla Main Street Rehabilitation Project (couplet) project impact Downtown Wasilla?**

Responses:

- The group discussed the idea of having a "Main Street" similar to downtown Palmer with planters and banners to create a sense of place. As part of this discussion, attendees indicated that Main Street and Yenlo may not be the appropriate streets after the couplet is complete. However, these roads may create a good boundary for a core or historical district.
- Attendees discussed that it may be more appropriate for one of the east-west roadways between Main Street and Yenlo to serve as a "Main Street". This also led to a broader discussion of place making with standard light poles, planter, and banners that could establish the districts. This could include other elements, such as wayfinding signage and kiosks that discusses the history of Wasilla.
- Designating one of the Downtown roads as "Main Street" versus the full overlay district area (Yenlo and Main Street will be impacted by Couplet, consider Herning, Nelson, Swanson)

Additional Comments/Questions:

- **Walkability and Connectivity:**
 - Attendees indicated that it felt like Wasilla has multiple commercial cores: Fred Meyer/Target area to east of Wasilla Lake, Home Depot and other commercial development along the Palmer-Wasilla Highway extension, and the Downtown area. There are limited sidewalks and connectivity between these areas that do not make them walkable.
- **Development Trends**
 - Development that happens near Fred Meyer/Target area will likely continue to include larger commercial chains due to rise in development cost and land values, while the Downtown area should focus on local businesses. In the downtown area there are smaller lots that lend themselves to development by smaller businesses.
- **Future Funding for Infrastructure:**
 - Sales tax may not be enough in the future to support infrastructure or other improvements that are needed to support continued development if there is not enough sales/revenue.

- Placemaking:
 - Discussion on creating a district for Downtown through placemaking may include:
 - Historic signage
 - Ornate lighting
 - Light poles with interchangeable banners
 - Gateway to district
 - See Palmer Kiosk
- Future Continuity:
 - There was concerns of how you provide continuity of the Comprehensive Plan goals and implementation now and in the future as administrations changes
- Development Feasibility:
 - Need more lenders and developers included in these conversations to provide input on the challenges of development and if there are things the City can do to remove some of the barriers.
- Question for the City:
 - Can the City help facilitate development (shared parking or allowing on-street parking to count towards required parking for use).

DOWL will follow up via email with all invitees following this meeting with additional questions to allow everyone to provide additional input. DOWL will also include the project web page that is updated to provide ways to stay involved in the project.