

revitalizing
anchorage

A Pearl in the Making

By Paul Fuhs

Most people in Anchorage imagine Fairview as a rundown part of town. There is some truth to that, but it doesn't have to be that way. A group of Fairview businesses, some of the longest standing in Anchorage, have organized the Fairview Business Association (FBA) to revitalize this section of town as a thriving contributor to Anchorage's economy.

They have embarked on an ambitious plan to redesign Gambell Street, convince the Municipality to create a pilot program for tax incentives for developers, promote affordable housing for workers, encourage

the development of a parking facility and hospitality attractions in the area around the Sullivan Arena, and a concerted effort to deal with the problem of public inebriates created by the location of social service agencies in the area.

"We have so much potential in this area" say Heidi Heinrich, Manager of the iconic Lucky Wishbone. "We have underdeveloped properties in Fairview, in a town that has limited land left available, we have a potential customer base of 25,000 people a day driving through our main roads and we are close to downtown. With just a few changes, this area could really take off."

The Fairview area is unique in Anchorage in that it has a combination of retail, banking, hotel, entertainment, restaurant, processing and manufacturing, light and heavy industrial in the Post Road area, training, service, medical, professional and sports businesses. Fairview is also home to the Sullivan Arena and Merrill Field, both of which are substantial economic engines for Anchorage.

Flanking all of these businesses is a mix of primarily single- and multi-family residential housing. The association sees a potential for further higher density housing in the Gambell/Ingra Street corridor and will make developers aware



of the provisions of House Bill 50, sponsored by Representatives Costello and Gara and passed last legislative session, which allows the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to finance combined commercial and residential developments. One of the needs of local businesses is housing that their workers can afford to live in and is close enough for them to easily get to work.

"Most other areas of town have zoned their commercial and residential area to be separate," says Christopher Constant, chairman of the FBA Board. "In this area it really makes sense to combine them. If you look at the area like we do, as a logical extension of the Downtown core, East Downtown, Fairview is a developer's land of opportunity."

The group is also pushing the Municipality to adopt a pilot program of tax abatement in which developers can write the costs of required municipal infrastructure upgrades against their property taxes until they are paid off, at which time they will revert to full tax payments.

The costs of these public upgrades often burden a project to the point that they just don't get built.

The most immediate signature development being pushed by the Association is the Gambell Street Redevelopment Project, which would make Gambell a three lane highway, the same as all the other streets it connects to, which would allow for wider sidewalks, room for snow storage and removal, compliance with ADA standards, underground utilities and improved access to businesses.

The Association, with the support of Mayor Sullivan, the Legislature and Governor, received a grant of \$200,000 to perform an engineering analysis and traffic modeling for the project. The Association hired CH2MHILL/Kittleson Associates to perform the analysis, and they found that the project would adequately accommodate the traffic levels up to 2035, when a new connection between the Glenn and Seward Highways is slated to occur.

The Anchorage Assembly recently awarded an additional \$83,000 to the

Association to complete cost estimates for undergrounding utilities and rebuilding storm drains so that these improvements would be ready to be incorporated into the resurfacing of Gambell Street in 2015 by the Alaska Department of Transportation.

According to Heinrich, "We know it is our responsibility to take the lead on making the improvements we know we can make in our area of town. At the same time, we recognize we couldn't have come as far as we have in a short time without the support of our Mayor, Assembly, Legislature, the Governor and the Fairview Community Council, and we really thank them for their support. We look forward to lifting ourselves up, while at the same time making a major contribution to Anchorage's economy overall."

For more information on the Fairview Economic Revitalization Plan, go to the FBA website at Fairviewrising.com

Paul Fuhs is the Project Manager for the Gambell Street Redevelopment Project

