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## Fairbanks City Council backs new zoning plan for Vision Fairbanks

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**FAIRBANKS** — The Fairbanks City Council gave conditional support on Monday to new zoning categories aimed at revitalizing downtown Fairbanks.

The borough planning commission takes up the zoning categories, laid out in Ordinance 2010-09, today.

The new zoning classes are called “downtown supporting commercial district” and “retail hot spot district.” The zones effectively discourage businesses such as bars, tattoo parlors, car washes and taxidermy shoppes in favor of businesses such as restaurants, hair salons, offices and retail stores.

The ordinance also sets guidelines for downtown building facades, prohibiting frosted, tinted or reflective glass.

The Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly must adopt the ordinance before the new zoning classes are available.

Further action by the assembly would be needed to apply the new zones on lots.

“In time, as revitalization takes effect downtown, we’ll be glad that we’ve got these new tools to protect investment,” said David van den Berg, executive director of the Downtown Association of Fairbanks.

The new zoning classifications help implement a revitalization plan known as Vision Fairbanks, which is touted by supporters as a tool to help attract investment downtown.

But critics, such as City Councilman Jerry Cleworth, are concerned that the government might impose the new zoning categories on property owners, uninvited.

The City Council voted 4-2 to approve a resolution applauding the ordinance but calling on the borough to make sure zoning changes are voluntary, not mandatory.

The council also asked for specific changes, asking the borough to define the area where the retail hot spot district would be located and to back off on the prohibition on tinted glass.

Councilwoman Vivian Stiver joined Cleworth in opposing the measure, which was sponsored by Mayor Terry Strle and Councilwoman Emily Bratcher.

Councilmen Chad Roberts and Bernard Gatewood supported the resolution, but with reservations.

“I don’t have a whole lot of confidence in it,” Roberts said. “Zoning is not going to fulfill the vision. It’s people. It’s money.”

Gatewood agreed but said, “I’m going to give it a chance.”

Vision Fairbanks aims to apply the new zones to an area bordered by Barnette Street to the west, First Avenue to the north, Lacey Street to the east and Seventh Avenue to the south.

A panhandle of property along First Avenue to Cowles Street also is part of the plan.

A major component of the plan is making one-way streets into two-way streets.

Van den Berg said he’s met with 79 percent of private landowners downtown promoting the development plan.

“Great downtowns don’t just happen,” he told the City Council.

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