

Council might change course on Cushman St.

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A resolution to halt the conversion of Cushman Street to two-way traffic in downtown will be up for debate among City Council members Monday night.

The City Council voted in favor of the switch in April as part of the Vision Fairbanks revitalization plan.

David van den Berg, the executive director of Downtown Association Fairbanks, said the resolution, if approved, would put a damper on an essential element to the revitalization plan to promote local-serving retail, create and enhance parks and open spaces, improve pedestrian and bike traffic and build a more

vibrant downtown center.

The move to convert Cushman Street to two-way traffic is an integral part of the Vision Fairbanks plan, which was designed to create a pedestrian- and shopper-friendly atmosphere, according to a report by Crandall Arambula, an urban development design company.

"A fundamental requirement for Fairbanks downtown revitalization is the conversion of Cushman from a one-way through street to a local serving street with two-way traffic," an initial report for the plan stated. "If the adjustment cannot be made, the Fairbanks revitalization effort will be fatally flawed."

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CUSHMAN: Council members talk traffic flow

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Councilman Jerry Cleworth, who has stated he disagrees with much of the revitalization plan as it currently stands, will introduce the resolution.

Some concerns listed in the resolution include the slowing of traffic flow along Cushman Street, something that urban planners are trying to do to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. Issues such as parallel parking on two-way streets and slowed vehicle response are among those addressed by Cleworth.

According to Cleworth, his biggest concern with the conversion of Cushman is the \$6 million price tag.

"I'm hoping all the parties can get together and rethink this," Cleworth said. "I hope something good will come of this. It wasn't intended to be adversarial, there is just a strong difference of opinion on how to use these funds."

The \$6 million fund is state-allocated money specifically designated for capital projects, according to Fairbanks North Star borough officials.

"Is this what we really want to do with \$6 million?" Cleworth asked rhetorically. "Would it not be wiser to try and get some infrastructure upgrades such as sidewalks and streets rather than spending it redirecting traffic?"

Councilwoman Vivian Stiver, a Second Avenue business owner, voted in support of the revitalization plan in an April City Council meeting, but said she thought Cleworth's efforts to question the price tag and the project were valid.

"I don't know if it's a bad plan or not, but I think it's reasonable to step back and re-evaluate this," Stiver said. "Looking at the economic hard times, I wonder if this is the best way to spend that money."

Councilman Chad Roberts has

long been in opposition to the Vision Fairbanks plan and said he likely will support Cleworth's resolution.

Councilwoman Emily Bratcher and councilman Bernard Gatewood have both stated their support for the changes to Cushman Street. Councilman John Eberhart previously voted in support of the plan but was unavailable for comment about whether or not he supported the conversion of Cushman into a two-way street.

If a vote on the resolution is not postponed, and the council has a tie vote, Fairbanks Mayor Terry Strle said she would vote in opposition to the resolution to break the tie.

A presentation and workshop on standards and guidelines implementing Vision Fairbanks will be at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday at the Carlson Center.

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