



# ***FAST FORWARD*** Spokane

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## **Introduction**

In September 2007, the Downtown Spokane Partnership (DSP) and the City hired MIG, Inc., a planning and design consulting firm, in cooperation with Fehr and Peers and Economic and Planning Systems, to begin a year-long process to update the Fast Forward Spokane Downtown Plan. In order to ensure that the updated Master Plan reflects the needs and desires of the community at large, the planning process includes varied opportunities for community input. These include community workshops, online comment forms, a 50-member Downtown Taskforce, and a steering committee.

The purpose of the second community workshop, held on March 6, 2008, was to gather input on the draft plan framework. The larger group was divided into six small groups, or stations. Each workshop station focused its discussion on one of the six core elements of the plan update: (1) economic development; (2) built form and character; (3) multi-modal circulation and parking; (4) open space, public realm, and streetscapes; (5) housing and neighborhood; and (6) environmental stewardship. This memo highlights the new ideas and concept refinement provided by workshop participants, and is organized by core elements/workshop stations. Detailed transcriptions of community comments are available under separate cover.

## **Economic Development**

Although all six core elements will be essential to a thriving downtown Spokane, economic development within the downtown core is vital. More specifically, the direction that this development takes should consider present realities, and move forward with the components that residents and business owners view as necessary to the future that they envision.

The economic development workshop station discussions generated a list of needs that, if satisfied, will help to drive downtown's economic engine. In order to make downtown more livable, basic services for residents must be made available. These include the siting of a major grocery store within the downtown core; as it stands now, supermarkets are outside of walking distance for many residents. Several participants mentioned a Trader Joe's as a specific store they would like to see in their neighborhood. A farmers' market would be another welcome addition, both to help area farmers' sales and improve access to healthy, locally grown food.

Building on the farmers' market and Spokane's growing reputation as a tourist destination, discussion participants suggested the creation of an Epicurean District. Just as the antiques trade has its own section within Spokane, establishing a district of fine dining and related goods and services would strengthen downtown Spokane's brand, as well as creating another source of pride and enjoyment for residents. A retail cluster was also proposed, specifically for the south side of the railroad tracks, again contributing to a walkable, easy to navigate downtown environment. Parking must be provided to serve those residents and visitors who enter the downtown core by car; to capitalize on this fact, workshop participants favored



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variable pricing for parking; for example, higher rates might be charged during normal business hours, and lowered on nights and weekends to encourage shoppers and diners to spend more time downtown.

To drive the creation and success of small businesses in the downtown core, workshop attendees were interested in the development of an incubator space. In this model, emerging businesses can qualify for lower rents and other types of assistance while they are in their infancy; as they grow, they must give way to even newer businesses, ensuring an exciting, active space and opportunities for generations of entrepreneurs. The Spokane community also sees potential for “green collar” jobs to be a segment of overall economic development. Attracting environmentally friendly businesses would not only reflect a community priority, but build on the Pacific Northwest’s reputation as a “green” region—and make sure that Spokane is not left behind in this expanding business niche’s growth throughout the area.

## **Built Form and Character**

The built form of any place helps to define its character; workshop participants had several definite ideas about a built form that would create the downtown Spokane that they would like to make a reality. As downtown is reshaped, current property rights should be considered and maintained. Other current conditions that participants wanted to see maintained included access to the river (not “closing it in” was emphasized), and access to sunlight (as new construction occurs, massing should not be such that it creates overwhelming shadows).

Discussion group participants did want to see changes in built form as well. Smaller building footprints were mentioned; higher buildings that are more compact at their bases would allow for wider variety and less sprawl. Smaller footprints would also be an intrinsic part of another workshop station goal: increased density. Higher density contributes to a better mix of uses, draws more residents and workers to the downtown core, and activates the neighborhood. In particular, workshop participants felt that parcels along the rail corridor are prime candidates for buildings of increased heights and density (as compared to existing building stock). Finally, the group introduced pedestrian safety as an issue, citing long, dark, and uninviting underpasses as a barrier to safe travel. If the downtown is to be truly activated, safety issues must be addressed; higher density is one way to do this, adding more “eyes on the street” to a busier urban environment.

## **Multi-modal Circulation and Parking**

Effective circulation within downtown Spokane has many aspects, including mobility, connectivity, parking, and alternate transportation methods. Participants at this workshop station continued the general emphasis on the river in their discussion of mobility: Public access to and along the river should be maintained, whether by car, by bike, or on foot. A pedestrian overpass for the railroad viaduct was also discussed as an improvement to mobility. Without this overpass, the group felt that the non-academic portion of the University District will remain undeveloped.

According to workshop participants, the connectivity element of effective circulation involved existing structures, and those that have yet to be built. Suggestions for use or integration of current facilities included the revitalization of the historic trolley routes and the construction of a bridge across the railroad



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tracks. Overall, participants felt that non-motorized connectivity to the downtown core from other destinations will require significant improvement. They highlighted the need for better pedestrian connections over Division (also mentioning that the entrance to this street is ugly), and suggested that a link be made between the Convention Center site and the University District (again activating the non-academic portion of the latter). The group also saw a need for a downtown connection to Peaceful Valley and Browne's Addition.

In order to entice families to live in downtown Spokane—creating a multi-generational and active atmosphere—this workshop station wanted to see an elementary school sited in the downtown area. If this were to happen, caregivers could easily walk their children to school, which would be attractive to many families. One-way versus two-way streets were also discussed; in general, participants felt that the number of one-way streets should be reduced, specifically citing Main Street as one that should be converted to two-way.

Since the desire is to attract more people to downtown Spokane, supplying adequate parking is a necessary evil. As the situation stands, workshop participants decried the amount of surface parking, and wanted to see it discouraged in the future. They examined other options, including incentives to build parking structures (with retail or other ground floor uses), angled parking along newly converted two-way streets, and a “Smart Park” system modeled on the one in Portland. Participants wanted improved residential parking options, and parking lots that accommodate bicycles. They also suggested the placement of mini park and rides throughout the downtown core, establishing a “park once” scenario, where visitors could drive into the downtown, and then travel to their various destinations via transit, bike, or on foot.

Public transit was much discussed at this workshop station, including the need for major improvements at the STA Plaza. Group members emphasized the creation of a downtown circulator bus route, a loop that would be convenient for residents, workers, and visitors alike. They also put forward the idea of implementing a “fareless square” area, wherein users could ride transit free of charge. Light rail was mentioned as a quick and clean option to city buses; a car sharing program, enabling residents to eliminate one or more cars from their household, was also suggested.

## **Open Space, Public Realm and Streetscapes**

Improving the public realm within downtown Spokane will mean improving the environment for bicyclists and pedestrians, according to this workshop station's input. Even more specifically, participants emphasized a more pedestrian-friendly environment, especially in the southern section of the downtown. One suggestion to achieve this was to construct a Maple Street Pedestrian Bridge, possibly beneath the existing traffic deck. The angled parking suggested for improved circulation would also serve to separate cyclists and walkers from auto traffic. Overall, group members saw the pedestrian as “king of the downtown,” taking precedence on two-way streets such as Main, Riverside, and Division.

Although pedestrians were prioritized, the designation of bicycle boulevards within downtown Spokane was put forward as another public realm improvement. In addition, workshop participants envisioned green space as a connecting element throughout the downtown area. They wondered if Riverfront Park, an existing open space, could be better utilized, becoming more than just a swath of green.



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## **Housing and Neighborhood**

Participants at this workshop station were concerned that, as downtown Spokane becomes denser, infill development does not relate to existing neighborhoods' character. They wanted to stop this perceived trend; one suggestion included building row houses south of the University District. However, the major theme of this group's discussion was the importance of a mix of housing types and residents within the downtown. No one wanted to see age, income, culture, or any other demographic as factors that might separate the community.

To this end, participants wanted to maintain a certain level of single room occupancy (SRO) housing within the downtown core, assuring availability for lower-income residents. Above this level, mid-range housing should be plentiful, both for rent and for sale. The group suggested offering incentives for the construction of housing near employment sites, decreasing auto traffic and lessening the economic burdens associated with owning and maintaining a car. Tax credits could also be made available to encourage the construction of multi-family dwellings. Transit-oriented development (TOD) was seen as another crucial development strategy, adding the easy availability of transit options to the housing mix.

In addition to the nearby potential row houses mentioned above, the University District was viewed as vital to a varied and accessible housing stock. Group members wanted to see more student housing added within the District. The University could also grant long-term ground leases to developers for the construction of residential housing units. Recognizing that the University and Spokane's other attractions will continue to draw visitors, workshop participants suggested that the opportunity sites near Spokane Falls could be good locations for hotels.

## **Environmental Stewardship**

Underlying all redevelopment efforts in downtown Spokane is the desire—and, increasingly, need—to incorporate sustainable principles. Simply living downtown is “green,” according to members of this workshop station; but beyond that, other facilities and systems can be built along green lines. Making locally produced food available, and encouraging its use, was one suggested improvement, dovetailing with the proposed addition of rooftop gardens.

Workshop participants felt that LEED certification should be required for new construction, and that new and remodeled homes should be as energy-efficient and environmentally friendly as possible. The Saranac Hotel renovation was cited as an excellent example of preservation as sustainable practice; the project was certified LEED Gold and was viewed as beautiful as well. Moving into the streetscape, the group noted that permeable surfaces (to drain storm water) are not allowed under current code; permeability should be achieved at ground level. Even ordinary recycling bins could be incorporated as street furniture, beautifying the streetscape and enabling responsible practices.

In order to create an environment conducive to sustainability, workshop participants emphasized the importance of policy. They felt that the zoning code should incorporate environmental design, and



suggested a revitalization of the street tree program. Air quality policies should also be put in place, which naturally would encourage alternative modes of transportation.

## **Conclusion**

At this workshop, the community was given the opportunity to evaluate the framework for the draft Fast Forward Spokane Downtown Plan update. Their involvement at this time and level will contribute to a more meaningful plan as the process moves forward—one that reflects the values and priorities of Spokane residents. They seek an active downtown, with a thriving economy, a more compact built form, eased traffic circulation, green space, a mix of housing, and a commitment to sustainability. As the planning process continues, the framework that the community helped to shape will form the basis for specific recommendations, creating an updated blueprint that Spokane government, residents, and businesses can use to continue revitalizing the heart of their community.