

SUMMARY OF TRENDS, ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Downtown Spokane has undergone dramatic change in the past eight years. As a result of these changed circumstances, in 2007 the City of Spokane and the Downtown Spokane Partnership agreed to update “Charting the Future – The Plan for a New Downtown,” which was developed in 1999. The Downtown Spokane Plan Update will provide an updated vision and a new set of goals and recommendations for Downtown.

The Downtown Spokane Plan Update will be crafted to fully integrate visioning, urban planning, design guidelines and regulatory recommendations with a comprehensive public participation and outreach process. The Plan will use an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach: a true partnership between the consultant team, the City and Downtown Spokane Partnership staff, stakeholders and the public.

The following is a preliminary list of trends, issues and opportunities that we have heard during the planning process thus far. We encourage you to get involved by providing your thoughts and helping us to expand this list.

TRENDS

Strong Population Growth

Until recently, the bulk of Spokane’s growth has occurred in more suburban areas and outside the City. The continued and strong population and employment growth within the Spokane region is beginning to be absorbed in the Downtown. Regional population and employment growth has out-paced state and national levels, a trend that is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

Regional Commercial, Entertainment and Cultural Hub

Regional commercial functions such as the legal, finance, and retail sectors have increased their concentration in Downtown Spokane, with the central City now accounting for about 13 percent of total County jobs. Downtown Spokane has emerged as the primary nightlife and entertainment venue of Eastern Washington, with the opening of restaurants, bars, and night clubs, including Steam Plant Square and the Big Easy Concert House and cultural facilities such as the Fox Theater and the Performing Arts Center. This trend has coincided with growth in Spokane’s convention and hospitality sector, aided by major hotel development including the Davenport and Montvale

Hotels, expansion and improvement to the Spokane Convention Center, and increased success attracting national events such as the U.S. Figure Skating Championships.

Continuing Market Development

Although the Downtown is the City’s historic center, its scale still represents a relatively small and fledgling market. The depth and strength of the housing, retail, and office markets remain untested and lack a long track record of success. The Downtown community still lacks key solidifying assets such as a grocery store, and needs to stay vigilant on safety and noise perceptions.

Residential Growth

There are currently slightly over 2,000 residential units Downtown, and although this only accounts for about 3 percent of the City population, it represents an increase of about 25 percent in the last five years. Recently built condominium projects in Downtown include urban lofts at West 809, Upper Falls Condominiums, the Railside Center, and a historic renovation of the old Western Soap Building (The Edge).

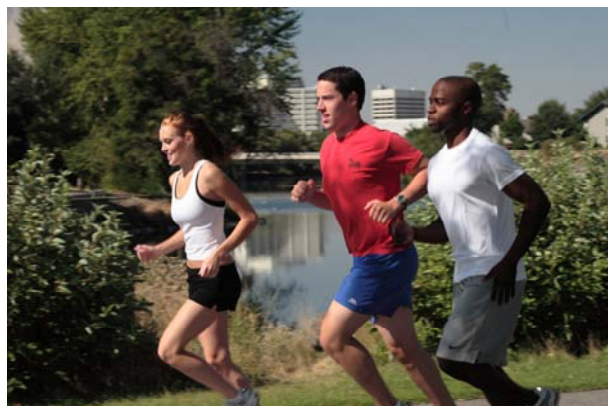
Major planned and proposed projects are expected to double the Downtown population in the next seven years, including 2,600 units at Kendall Yards, Cornerstone Courtyard with 50 apartment units, and the New Madison with 53 mixed rental units. Many of the market segments targeted by these new projects suggest a potential shift in demographics away from lower-income groups and seniors to empty-nesters and younger professionals.

Economic Drivers: Higher-Education and Health Care

There are now about 11,000 students at Downtown’s post-secondary educational institutions, including Washington State University, Gonzaga University and Eastern Washington University. In addition, there are approximately 8,400 employees associated with health care institutions in Spokane, many located in or near Downtown including Deaconess Medical Center, Sacred Heart Hospital, Shriner’s Hospital, and Rockwood Clinic. Cross relationships between health care and education are helping to foster an emerging bio-medical cluster. To accommodate this demand, an estimated 800,000 square feet of medical office space have been added to the market in the last 10 years.



The refurbished Davenport Hotel anchors Downtown’s arts and entertainment district.



New housing projects suggest that young professionals will play a key role in fueling Downtown’s growth.



Downtown’s three universities represent an increasingly important driver of Spokane’s economy.

Snapshot: Downtown Spokane in 2007

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Create a Sense of Place

With limited streetscape and pedestrian amenities, Downtown lacks a clear identity and unifying character. There is a clear need to enhance streetscapes, add street trees and create gateways that foster a sense of place and extend a warm welcome to people entering Downtown. The visitor experience can also be improved by implementing a wayfinding and signage system that efficiently directs people to Downtown destinations and the regional transportation system.

Strengthen Connections to Neighborhoods and Districts

Spokane still lacks strong connections between Downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods and districts. Roadways and railroad lines act as physical and visual barriers that make the trip to and from Downtown longer and less inviting. Stronger connections with adjacent neighborhoods will encourage residents and visitors to shop, recreate and work in Downtown.

Downtown Spokane's University District is home to three universities, making it the academic center for the inland Pacific Northwest. By encouraging infill development and forming better linkages to this district, Downtown can capitalize on the proximity of these universities and better leverage their economic benefits to the City.

Protect Scenic Views

Spokane's stunning natural beauty is one of the City's strongest assets. However, as the pace and height of development increases in Downtown, it will be important to implement regulations that protect the views to and from these features, including the Spokane River and Riverfront Park.

Activate Spokane River and Riverfront Park

The Spokane River and Riverfront Park are strategically located amenities that continue to be underutilized. The recommendations from the River Gorge Master Plan should be used to activate and better integrate these assets into the fabric of Downtown.

Implement a Downtown Circulator

Many of the destinations and activity centers in Downtown Spokane are just outside of a comfortable walking distance from the Downtown core. While a number of recent plans and studies have called for a dedicated transit option to serve these destinations, Downtown Spokane still relies on the existing Spokane Transit Authority (STA) bus and shuttle coverage to serve these uses. The recent Downtown Streetcar Feasibility Study lays the groundwork for possible solutions and builds on previous findings that a dedicated Downtown circulator system would be both feasible and beneficial to Downtown mobility.

Leverage Underutilized Sites

There are numerous vacant and underutilized sites in Downtown, including several surface parking lots that could jumpstart the revitalization of entire blocks or streets in the City's core. Downtown's historic building stock also offers extensive redevelopment opportunities.

Enhance All Modes of Transportation

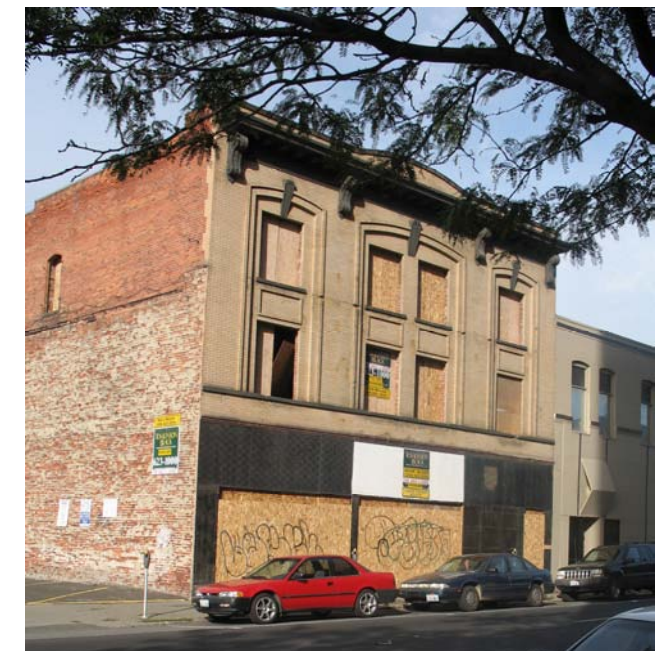
The many wide streets of Downtown Spokane currently have ample capacity, and offer an opportunity to reconfigure lanes, parking, sidewalks, and landscaping to improve the streetscape and street function for all modes of travel. Together, these improvements will help to create a safe, pedestrian-friendly street level environment. A proposed light rail system for Spokane is yet another opportunity to introduce a convenient transit option into Downtown.

Develop Coordinated Approach to Parking

Rising parking costs and limited supply and access remain challenges for Downtown. Even so, a recently implemented parking improvement program, which promotes a customer-friendly approach to parking, has been well-received by the business community, employees and Downtown visitors.



The Spokane River and Riverfront Park need to be better utilized.



Vacant buildings offer opportunities for strengthening Downtown's urban fabric.



Downtown's wide streets can be used to create a transportation system that serves all modes of travel.