

City of Spokane Neighborhood Planning Process Proposed 2011 Revisions

Recent Neighborhood Planning

In 2007, the City Council allocated \$550,000 to initiate a new round of neighborhood planning. The funds were divided 26 ways with each neighborhood receiving approximately \$21,000 (the City has 27 neighborhood councils, but the Riverside Neighborhood Council opted out of the process). Due to the limited funds, the Community Assembly Neighborhood Planning Action Committee (CA-NPAC), worked with Planning Services and the Office of Neighborhood Services to develop an “Abbreviated Planning Process.” This process is designed as a way for neighborhoods to identify their issues and solutions and then take them to the Neighborhood Action Committee (NAC). The NAC is composed of representatives from City Departments who help the neighborhoods resolve their issues, if possible. The NAC process itself is fairly short and does not require full use of a neighborhood’s planning funds, so neighborhoods can then use their remaining funds to focus on planning for a specific neighborhood plan or project.

Six neighborhoods began the planning process in January of 2009. What follows is a status update on neighborhoods currently planning and list of remaining neighborhoods.

District 1

Currently Planning:

- **Hillyard/Bemiss/Whitman (Greater Hillyard Northeast Planning Alliance (GHNEPA))**

GHNEPA hired Eastern Washington University (EWU) Public Administration to serve as facilitator and report writer for their neighborhood planning process. EWU had previously worked with the neighborhood. The GHNEPA group completed a *Report and Final Proposals* dated July 2010. Since then they have been working on sharing the report and the visioning process with the neighborhood and neighborhood groups. The GHNEPA group was able to maintain a steady attendance at their meetings and made a good effort to reach out to the community to get input into their plan.

There is a \$23,000 balance of money left in the neighborhood planning funds and how to spend this money has still not been fully resolved. \$10,000 has been designated by the group to go to the Northeast Development, an economic development study being proposed by City of Spokane Business and Development Services. There has been discussion among the stakeholder group about spending the remaining money on a communication plan but this plan has yet to be set to paper or brought to planning staff to see if this falls within the intent of the neighborhood planning funds. There has also been some discussion of designating all the remaining funds toward the Northeast Development project; this project was identified in Strategy 5 in the GHNEPA Report.

- **Nevada/Lidgerwood**

Nevada Lidgerwood has used a two phase approach to neighborhood planning. They are working with EWU Urban & Regional Planning who is acting as consultant under contract with the city. The first phase of neighborhood planning identified four key issues to be further studied. The second phase of planning is currently underway. Issues identified for further study and solution identification are:

Neighborhood Communication; Non-Motorized Travel Safety; Neighborhood Identity; and Traffic patterns, volume and speed within the neighborhood. Neighborhood meetings, listening posts, and focus groups are all underway. A report on these issues and possible solutions is scheduled for completion in fall 2011.

Nevada Lidgerwood used its entire neighborhood planning money in the first phase of planning and is currently planning with Community Development funds earmarked for general neighborhood planning.

- **Riverside**

The Riverside Neighborhood opted out of the Neighborhood Planning process. Their funds were evenly distributed to the remaining 26 neighborhoods.

District 1 Neighborhoods remaining (no order):

- Logan
- Chief Garry Park
- Minnehaha

District 2

Currently Planning:

- **Southgate**

The Southgate Stakeholder's Planning Committee (SSPC) utilized an issues and solutions identification process lead by EWU Urban and Regional Planning students in the fall of 2008 to inform them of the direction in which to focus the neighborhood planning funds. They used City staff to help finish the issue and identification process and prepare reports and a presentation for the Neighborhood Action Committee. A EWU graduate student was hired to complete a Parks and Open Space Plan. The neighborhood hired City staff to make major changes to the plan after receiving comments from the Parks and Planning Services Departments. In a process running concurrently, AHBL, Inc. was hired to complete a Connectivity Plan. The remaining funds (roughly \$7,000) will be used to provide public notice to neighborhood residents, conduct an open house, and take a resolution through City Council. They will be done by August 2011.

- **East Central (finished)**

East Central began meeting in March 2009 and in May 2009 chose to move forward with a previously planned project – Ben Burr Trail trailhead improvements. Improvements to the Ben Burr Trail were a previously identified project in the East Central 1986 Neighborhood Design Plan, in the 2005 Neighborhood Plan and in their Action Plan for 2009. Neighborhood planning funds were used for design. Community Development funds were used for construction. The project was completed in the fall of 2010. The Parks Department supervised construction.

District 2 Neighborhoods remaining:

Order without a history of neighborhood planning:

1. Grandview Thorpe
2. West Hills
3. Rockwood
4. Lincoln Heights
5. Manito – Cannon Hill

Order with neighborhood planning history:

1. Latah
2. Cliff Cannon
3. Browne’s Addition
4. Comstock
5. Peaceful Valley

District 3

Currently Planning:

• **West Central**

West Central began planning mid-2009. They received assistance from Whitworth University students under the direction of the Center for Service-Learning & Community Engagement. This group conducted a small community survey. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) was conducted in 2009 and has served as a framework for guiding discussion of the stakeholder group since then. In November 2010, the West Central group made the decision to use volunteer assistance and not spend their money on hiring a consultant to facilitate the process or write their report. The Stakeholder group continues to meet monthly. A draft report was begun in February 2011.

• **Five Mile Prairie**

The Five Mile Prairie Neighborhood Stakeholders utilized their 2005 Neighborhood Assessment as a starting point in identifying issues and solutions. They hired City staff to assist them in completing the process and preparing reports and a presentation for the NAC. Following the NAC process the stakeholders chose the neighborhoods number one issue to focus on first; pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to improve safety, primarily for school children. The neighborhood hired Studio Cascade to complete a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. They have utilized City staff throughout the process.

• **North Indian Trail (finished)**

In October of 2009, the Indian Trail Neighborhood Council requested from Planning Services Department (PSD) to opt out of the Neighborhood Planning process and transfer their funds to the City Engineering Services Department to do preliminary engineering for improvements to North Indian Trail Road between Kathleen and Barnes Road. In consideration of the North Indian Trail’s history with neighborhood planning, the PSD agreed with the neighborhood’s decision to transfer their funds to the Engineering Services Department.

District 3 Neighborhoods remaining (no order):

- Next: Balboa/South Indian Trail
- Northwest
- North Hill
- Emerson/Garfield

Note: Annexation may occur during this process; more neighborhoods may be added to districts.

Process Improvements

It is estimated that the first six neighborhoods should be nearing completion on or before the end of 2011. It is anticipated that a second phase of neighborhoods will then begin planning. As a result of lessons learned from this first phase, it is agreed that some refinements would improve the neighborhood planning process. The goal of these revisions is to offer the neighborhoods more certainty about process and outcomes and to improve timelines so all neighborhoods have the opportunity to engage in the process in a timelier manner. This is not intended to describe what topics the neighborhood decides to undertake.

Note: Please see DRAFT Neighborhood Planning White Paper for further background on the following expectations:

1. Every neighborhood must engage in the Abbreviated Planning and that should occur at the beginning of the process to help inform the next steps.
2. Neighborhoods must work with planning staff to:
 - Focus on a goal that is achievable within the parameters of funding, resources, and timeline. By focusing on an achievable goal, neighborhoods may have the opportunity to benefit from implementation in the future; Short term goals and implementation can lead to community building.
 - Receive expertise on the planning process, land use, comprehensive plan, city operations and rules;
 - Help define the process and a product and keep the group working on its timeline and within its budgetary constraints.
3. Selecting a consultant or other approved university help must be done early in the process so they may assist in defining goals, timeline, and budget. A list of five consultants plus local university planners is available to assist neighborhoods. Consultants must work with City staff.
4. Neighborhoods must complete their planning process within two years.
5. Strongly discourage neighborhoods from starting the neighborhood planning process before it is their turn to begin planning and before they have staff assistance. Moving forward without assistance can lead to unintended consequences, such as:
 - Neighborhoods may focus on issues that are not easily solved within the parameters of the neighborhood planning process;
 - Working over budget;
 - Working without a timeline;
 - Stakeholder burnout early in the process; long-term damage to neighborhood community building.
6. Neighborhoods must sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the City prior to beginning the planning process.
7. The order in which neighborhoods plan should be reexamined, possibly using criteria based on need. (*See DRAFT White Paper*).
8. Encourage adjacent neighborhoods to combine financial resources and plan together if they have similar characteristics.
9. While planning, neighborhoods must assign a representative to attend the meetings of the Community Assembly Land Use Subcommittee and to make quarterly reports to this group of peers.

Outcomes

- Expected final product from neighborhood planning process:
 - Participation in Abbreviated Planning Process which includes NAC, then:
 - Neighborhood Action Plan
 - Neighborhood wide action plan; or
 - Specific type of plan such as connectivity or park plan
 - Project planning – engineering or design work (construction not permitted with these funds)
 - Discussion:
 - Some projects may need assistance from staff. The Ben Burr Trailheads project needed SEPA work by planning and Parks Department construction assistance.
 - Other projects could possibly direct funds to Engineering or Business and Development Services for existing projects and created no extra work load for city staff. Examples stated earlier in this paper are for North Indian Trail and some GHNEPA funds.
- Neighborhoods will need to continue to advocate for implementation of projects after plan is completed.

Concerns

- Neighborhood planning efforts are diverting planning staff from other initiatives which may have greater city-wide benefit.
- Future level of City staff resources available to help neighborhoods is uncertain. Staff available to assist neighborhoods has decreased by 2 FTE since 2008 when project planning staff funding ended. This trend may continue. Staff resources may need to be diverted to other projects for reasons such as future state or federal mandates.
- Other departments (especially Engineering) are flooded with requests for staff assistance from the neighborhoods during the planning process. This is an unanticipated workload issue for these departments.
- Compliance with the public participation standards required by the City of Spokane and the Growth Management Act continue to be a challenge for neighborhood groups.
- Need to clarify what neighborhoods can do with remaining funds. CANPAC original members had foreseen any remaining money returning to the neighborhood planning fund to be used by neighborhoods that have not yet planned. A suggested solution is to put money into an ONS fund specifically designed to assist neighborhoods with neighborhood communication and membership building activities.

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