

Neighborhood Planning

White Paper

INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the City of Spokane adopted its first Comprehensive Plan under the Growth Management Act. This followed several years of community outreach and planning in a process called “Spokane Horizons.” The citizen involvement throughout the city that shaped this plan was impressive. Citizens and appointed and elected officials evaluated several possible growth patterns but identified a growth pattern called Centers and Corridors as the preferred option. This option identified specific Centers and Corridors as sites for intensified commercial and residential development.

Upon adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, all the neighborhood plans adopted prior to GMA were repealed. New neighborhood planning efforts were then directed to the implementation of the Centers and Corridors concept. This began with planning for four “pilot” centers and then, with lessons learned from the pilot processes, broadened to include the rest of the city neighborhoods. Neighborhoods were required to use an established neighborhood planning process and to work with City Planning Staff to plan for their centers and corridors and other areas of their neighborhoods. In 2004, this process was cut short due to City budget constraints, but planning staff continued to work with some neighborhoods on a very limited process to determine the land uses and boundaries within the remaining centers and corridors. Again, this process ended before work could be completed in all the centers and corridors because of City budget constraints, so some centers identified in the Comprehensive Plan have yet to undergo the required public process to evaluate land use and boundary issues.

In 2007, the City Council allocated \$550,000 for another opportunity to initiate 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.

N 8.2 Neighborhood Planning Process

Establish a collaborative neighborhood planning process that carries out the City’s firm commitment to neighborhood planning, involves simultaneous consideration of City and neighborhood goals and strategies, and includes representatives of both the City and neighborhood working together.

~ City of Spokane Comprehensive Plan
Chapter 11, Neighborhoods

Six neighborhoods began the planning process in January of 2009. As a result of lessons learned from these planning processes under the new format, staff believes that there are some refinements that would improve the neighborhood planning process. What follows is a brief overview of the issues to date and some recommendations on achieving the goals of the Comprehensive Plan with regard to neighborhood planning.

ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues and recommendations related to neighborhood planning fall into three categories:

1. City Needs and Priorities
2. Program Framework
3. Program Delivery

Within each category, a number of issues have been identified, addressed by corresponding staff recommendations. These recommendations describe refinements designed to improve the effectiveness of the neighborhood planning program.

Category 1: City Needs and Priorities

The City must fulfill its obligation to implement the Comprehensive Plan. Given the City's limited resources, neighborhood planning presents an opportunity to achieve full implementation of its plan. Each neighborhood process should fulfill two primary goals:

1. **Implement the Comprehensive Plan.** Under the Growth Management Act, the Comprehensive Plan contains the overall scheme for future development and is a framework for all future planning processes in the city. Since its adoption in 2001, a significant portion of Spokane's planning activity has been geared towards adding detail and specific implementation measures (such as development regulations or capital programming) to advance Comprehensive Plan goals and policies. Neighborhood planning represents a key opportunity to implement the Comprehensive Plan at the neighborhood level. This chance is currently being missed by some neighborhoods that do not use the Comprehensive Plan as a guiding document or even a frame of reference.
2. **Use City resources efficiently.** As a public entity, the City has a responsibility to taxpayers to use available resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. Although neighborhood planning expenditures are governed by guidelines established at the onset of the program, spending decisions at the neighborhood stakeholder group level often lack the benefit of staff guidance or a relationship to an overall budget or work plan. In addition, the CA-NPAC guidelines emphasize equity across neighborhoods over the citywide efficiency of the neighborhood planning program. As a result of these circumstances, some (but not all) neighborhood planning processes have expended funds in a less efficient manner than would be expected under a centralized budget for the program.

Issue 1A: Lack of planning for the remaining unplanned Centers and Corridors.

In 2001, the Comprehensive Plan designated mixed-use centers and corridors for focused growth. As originally designated in the Comprehensive Plan, centers and corridors are described as general locations in Chapter 3, Land Use, policies LU 3.6 through 3.9, and shown on the land use map by circles showing their approximate area. Part of the ongoing process of implementing the Comprehensive Plan has been to plan these centers and corridors in more detail.

To date, detailed planning has been completed for fourteen of these twenty-one centers and corridors. Currently, the strong possibility exists that neighborhoods with unfinished center or corridor planning could use up the funds and opportunity available now without addressing these issues.

Recommendation 1A: Require that neighborhoods with designated centers or corridors and unfinished land use and zoning resolve these issues in their planning process.

Unfinished land use, zoning, or boundaries of designated centers and/or corridors represent a high priority neighborhood planning issue that must be addressed in order to meet the City goal of continuing to implement the Comprehensive Plan.

The allocated \$21,000 available for each neighborhood's planning process is sufficient to conduct a limited center and corridor planning process in which land use, zoning, and boundaries are resolved.

Issue 1B: Many neighborhoods have focused time and resources on resolving issues that do not relate to the Comprehensive Plan, other city policies, or operation of city services.

One strength of neighborhood planning is that stakeholders have the opportunity to identify neighborhood issues that would otherwise be missed in a citywide analysis. However, as a program facilitated and funded by the city, following completion of the identification of issues and solutions phase, neighborhood planning should address the implementation of solutions that directly relate to city policies and functions.

Recommendation 1B: Limit post-Neighborhood Action Committee planning activities to city-related issues.

The issue and solution identification conducted in the Abbreviated Planning Process should remain open to all types of issues regardless of their relationship to city government. However, prior to the neighborhood's report to the Neighborhood Action Committee (NAC), issues unrelated to city policies or services should be recorded, forwarded to appropriate non-governmental agencies, and removed from the list of issues considered in the remainder of the neighborhood's planning process. The remaining city related issues can then be presented to the NAC and ultimately used to inform the direction of the neighborhood's planning process.

Some of these neighborhood level opportunities include bicycle/pedestrian and connectivity planning, planning for recreational and open space opportunities, and site planning for previously identified projects, such as the Ben Burr Trail project in the East Central Neighborhood.

Category 2: Program Framework

The actual guidelines for the current neighborhood planning program were adopted by reference in Resolution 08-100, which contain two documents – the “White Paper for Community Assembly Consideration” and “CA-NPAC Guidelines for Neighborhood Planning.” These are the product of considerable deliberation and consideration by city staff and volunteers. Those who created these documents recognized the difficulty of establishing a uniform program for twenty-six participating neighborhoods, particularly with limited funds available.

While the general framework of these documents provides a solid foundation for the neighborhood planning process, key omissions, as well as mandates with unintended consequences, have prevented the program from reaching the potential envisioned by the City Council or CA-NPAC. Carefully correcting these “big picture,” structural issues in how the program is set up will in turn benefit the day-to-day functioning and eventual end results of neighborhood planning.

As the original guidelines were developed collaboratively between staff and the Community Assembly Neighborhood Planning Action Committee (CA-NPAC), any revisions should be coordinated with an equivalent group. The CA-NPAC committee dissolved in 2009, leaving the Land Use subcommittee of Community Assembly as the logical group to review any revisions to CA-NPAC-authored guidelines.

Issue 2A: No time frame has been established for completion of neighborhood processes.

The CA-NPAC guidelines do not outline a time frame within which neighborhoods will plan. All six of the neighborhoods currently planning are taking longer than the CA-NPAC committee originally anticipated. Reasons for this include the fact that four neighborhoods have supplemented their planning funds with community development funds, all of them have conducted some form of planning in the past and are taking the time to build upon those efforts, and any citizen participation process necessitates flexibility for group meeting schedules and informed input.

Recommendation 2A: Establish deadlines for the completion of neighborhood planning. This work should be completed in two phases: a six-month period to complete the Abbreviated Planning Process, followed by a one-year period to complete work on the neighborhood’s chosen plan or project.

Issue 2B: The order of neighborhoods participating in planning is not linked to the urgency of the planning needs within each neighborhood or the stakeholder groups’ preparedness to plan.

Per CA-NPAC guidelines and Planning Services policy, two neighborhoods (or groups of neighborhoods planning together) from each of the three council districts may plan at any given time. The selection process for these initial neighborhoods (and the order of subsequent neighborhoods) has been carried out differently in each district. Methods for selecting the order have ranged from a council member-facilitated meeting of neighborhood representatives in District 3 to a lottery in District 2.

These processes for setting the order of neighborhoods engaged in planning have not considered unresolved land-use or other planning issues within neighborhoods, on-going planning or economic development efforts within the neighborhood, or the ability of the neighborhood to organize to plan in a timely manner.

Recommendation 2B: Establish criteria for selecting future neighborhoods to plan.

The order in which neighborhoods plan should be based on the potential to resolve significant, unique, or urgent issues through the neighborhood planning process, the strength of neighborhood plans to recruit diverse stakeholders, and the motivation of neighborhood leadership to engage in planning.

Criteria for ranking the order for neighborhood planning:

- Unplanned center or corridor
- High frequency of applications for Comprehensive Plan land use map changes in the area
- Infill issues – intensity of commercial or industrial building permits
- Developer or landowner interest
- Recent development activity perceived to be causing unforeseen problems
- Existing uses or recent investment with potential for intensification
- Neighborhood business association formation or interest
- Other City plans or projects being conducted in the area
- The ability and commitment of the neighborhood to organize and maintain a stakeholder group throughout the process

Issue 2C: Options for work products beyond the NAC report are not well-defined.

The anticipated gap between funding allocated to each neighborhood (approximately \$21,500) and the estimated cost of producing a full neighborhood plan under the Neighborhood Planning Guidebook (estimated by staff at roughly \$75,000 to \$100,000, plus the cost of supporting studies) drove the development of the Abbreviated Planning Process as an affordable planning process option.

Given its approximate cost of \$2,000-\$5,000, the Abbreviated Planning Process appears to have been well-designed to accomplish its primary intent – providing neighborhoods with an alternative to the Neighborhood Planning Guidebook process that can be afforded with the \$21,500 per neighborhood allocation. On the other hand, this cost effectiveness means that most neighborhoods can reasonably expect to complete the Abbreviated Planning Process with \$16,000 to \$19,000 of their planning allocation remaining.

The open-endedness of the post-NAC phase of neighborhood planning ultimately puts neighborhood stakeholder managers in a difficult position. Although Resolution 08-100 allows them considerable independence in choosing processes and end products, few tools are available to help them make this decision. A process and product can be selected with very little consultation with City staff, and indeed seeking the assistance of City staff may be perceived in some neighborhoods as relinquishing the neighborhood independence granted under the resolution.

Recommendation 2C: Create a “menu” of three to five options for post-NAC planning.

Provide neighborhoods options for post-NAC planning and establish a decision point immediately following the NAC response in which city staff and neighborhood stakeholders determine which of these options to pursue. These options will be fundable with the monies allocated.

Menu items may include:

- Land use or zoning for unplanned neighborhood centers and corridors
- Strategic or action plan for an identified neighborhood project
- Architectural or engineering design work for an identified project
- Analysis of the need for a future sub-area or master plan

Issue 2D: Contradictions between CA-NPAC guidelines and white paper adopted by Resolution 08-100.

The CA-NPAC guidelines and white paper are inconsistent in several areas. A problematic example is the CA-NPAC guidelines allow direct funding of capital improvements and the white paper does not.

Recommendation 2D: Use this white paper as a starting point for a collaborative process. Staff, elected officials, and the Community Assembly Land Use Committee should come together to revise and reconcile contradictions within the documents adopted by Resolution 08-100.

Category 3: Program Delivery

Issues unforeseen in the overall framework for the current neighborhood planning program have in turn led to a number of issues in the way that the program is delivered on a day-to-day basis. Most of these concerns relate to the role of City staff as defined (or left undefined) in Resolution 08-100 and its supporting documents.

For a variety of reasons, several of the first six neighborhoods engaged in planning have opted for very limited roles in their processes for City staff. Under the framework established in Resolution 08-100, that is their prerogative. However, this limited role (sometimes bordering on exclusion) of City staff from these processes has deprived neighborhoods of the benefit of the expertise, awareness of citywide issues, and coordination with key decision-makers afforded by staff planners.

Neighborhoods that have proceeded without this guidance now face a number of process and product issues, such as inadequate participation and Comprehensive Plan inconsistency. These problems are serious, and could easily have been avoided early in the process with consistent coordination with City staff.

Issue 3A: Coordination with City staff is not required.

This has led to some neighborhoods pursuing ideas not in harmony with the Comprehensive Plan or City-wide goals.

Recommendation 3A: Require neighborhoods to work with City staff during the process.

At a minimum, neighborhoods and their consultants must formally check in with City staff at key points during the neighborhood planning process as agreed to in a Memorandum of Understanding.

Issue 3B: Neighborhoods often misunderstand the role of and need for neighborhood planning.

With the adoption of the Growth Management Act in 1990 and the City’s Comprehensive Plan in 2001, the role of neighborhood planning (and neighborhood plans) fundamentally changed. The breadth and detail level of the land use planning process supporting the Comprehensive Plan supersedes the former role of neighborhood plans in providing more specific land use mapping. As stated in Comprehensive Plan Chapter 11, Neighborhoods, goal N8, “Although the city will be conducting neighborhood planning activities, the city is not committed to recreating neighborhood specific plans per se.” Instead, post-Comprehensive Plan neighborhood planning is intended to be focused on specific tasks such as planning for designated centers and corridors and planning for future annexation areas with the City’s Urban Growth Area (UGA).

Many of the first six neighborhood planning processes have been driven by ambitions to recreate neighborhood specific plans of a previous era, or to enact land use and transportation changes with significant impacts beyond neighborhood boundaries. Some of this may have to do with the relative familiarity of stakeholders with these previous documents and the lack of definition given thus far to alternative neighborhood-level plans, such as project plans or action plans.

Recommendation 3B: Provide three to five approved types of plans or activities to address common neighborhood planning issues.

Provide neighborhoods with a City approved list of planning alternatives such Action Plans or needs assessments as mentioned in Recommendation 2C:

Menu items may include:

- Land use or zoning for unplanned neighborhood centers and corridors
- Strategic or action plan for an identified neighborhood project
- Architectural or engineering design work for an identified project
- Analysis of the need for a future sub-area or master plan

Issue 3C: Neighborhood facilitated public participation efforts may not meet Growth Management Act requirements.

In addition to the general planning principle of public involvement, the Growth Management Act requires an adopted program for “early and continuous public participation” in comprehensive planning and adoption of consistent development regulations. A plan, implementing regulation, or Comprehensive Plan amendment failing to comply with this requirement may be declared invalid¹. The Neighborhood Planning Guidebook, adopted by City Council resolution in 2003, provides a pre-approved process that serves as a GMA-compliant public participation program. By setting up a detailed framework for outreach to neighborhood stakeholders, as well as staff oversight throughout the process, the Guidebook offers a boilerplate for participation that meets state standards.

The Abbreviated Planning Process calls for a condensed version of the stakeholder team formation and issues and solutions identification required in the Guidebook. While neighborhoods have made a

¹ See Revised Code of Washington at RCW 36.70A.140 and RCW 36.70A.302.

variety of efforts to recruit participants to their planning processes, the results have been uneven, both in terms of levels of participation and the effectiveness of receiving feedback from those participants.

Recommendation 3C: Require professional planning facilitation of public participation processes leading to Comprehensive Plan amendments.

Professional assistance for these processes ensures that public participation meets the standards set forth by the Growth Management Act. While consultants or faculty-student teams from university planning programs could provide much of the direct assistance to these processes, their design and implementation should be closely coordinated with City staff.

In order to determine staffing and process needs early on, stakeholder teams should work with City staff immediately following the Neighborhood Action Committee response to formally identify any proposed planning efforts which would require a professionally facilitated process.

Issue 3D: Some neighborhoods are planning without reliable background information.

When the early stages of the Neighborhood Planning Guidebook process were condensed and adapted to form the Abbreviated Planning Process, steps involving neighborhood-level data collection, analysis, and assessment were eliminated. These deletions were designed to adapt the process to the reduced level of per-neighborhood funding and City staff involvement available under the current allocation.

Although some funds are initially conserved by eliminating this step, the cost of muddling through planning processes with inadequate background information is borne throughout the process. Base maps and neighborhood indicators can help provide important context in the first stages of issue identification. Background data could also prove valuable to stakeholder groups working on documenting issues for reports to the Neighborhood Action Committee, as well as making decisions on how to prioritize the neighborhood's most pressing issues. Instead, these determinations (and their supporting justifications) have tended to rely on generalized or anecdotal impressions from stakeholder group participants. While this type of personal insight is an important component of neighborhood planning, it is most effective when coupled with an empirical assessment of local conditions.

Recommendation 3D: Incorporate the Initial Planning Kit and Initial Planning Kit Meeting described in the Neighborhood Planning Guidebook into the Abbreviated Planning Process.

This solution is intended to strike a compromise between the Abbreviated Planning Process and the time and resource-intensive Neighborhood Assessments completed as part of the Letter of Intent process in 2004.