

Character Area Considerations

Approved by the City Council
on December 14, 2009



Character Area Considerations

Respecting Spokane's Historic Character

Character Areas

1. East Downtown/West Main
2. West Downtown
3. Riverside Avenue
4. North Monroe Street

Character Areas are places in the downtown where a combination of buildings and streetscape features create a distinct and valued character. These Character Area Considerations were developed to assist designers and developers by providing some history about each of the areas and noting positive features that may provide inspiration for new projects. Character Area Considerations are not requirements or guidelines, but may be a useful reference to designers and developers with projects located in these areas, and may assist with the preparation of a context analysis for projects subject to design review.

As of 2008, there were eighteen districts in Spokane recognized by the National Register of Historic Places, more than any city in the Pacific Northwest. The Character Areas are key places within Downtown Spokane that are within and adjacent to these historic neighborhoods. These areas have special qualities that can be protected, reinforced, and enhanced through careful consideration of the design considerations described in this section.

The following Character Areas are described in this appendix:

- East Downtown/West Main..... pg. 8
- West Downtown..... pg. 10
- Riverside Avenue..... pg. 12
- North Monroe Street..... pg. 14

Overview of Considerations

The considerations include a description of the location and historic urban character.

The most obvious features in an urban area are the buildings themselves. They provide definition with their physical presence and contribute to a sense of identity, stability and history. Another, less obvious character defining feature of an urban area is the streetscape. The streetscape incorporates the space between buildings, which includes the streets and pedestrian walkways, and helps complete the unique physical appearance of an area. The historic streetscapes discussed in this appendix are bordered by buildings that typically adjoin one another, face the street, and are often flush with the sidewalk. This space creates a sense of enclosure, like an outdoor “room”, that is enjoyed by the community and can be enhanced to become ideally suited to pedestrian activity. Each Character Area has its own unique collection and combination of public spaces that are recognizable as distinct places that have potential to provide a memorable experience that conveys a unique story in the history of Spokane.

Downtown Area Historic Districts

When rehabilitating or renovating the built environment within designated Downtown Historic Districts maintaining and enhancing the historic fabric is encouraged. Consider following the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation when rehabilitating or renovating property within the Historic Districts. The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation can also add value when working with properties that are not officially designated as historic properties within these Historic Districts.

The Historic Districts include:

- East Downtown Historic District
- West Downtown Historic Transportation Corridor
- Riverside Avenue Historic District
- Desmet Avenue Warehouse Historic District
- Four Corners Historic District

Please see map on page 7.



Historic photo of the Monroe Street Bridge—looking north

Assessing New Infill, Rehabilitation, Renovation and Additions within Character Areas and Historic Districts

Downtown Spokane has many opportunities for new infill development, renovations and additions to existing buildings. Designers and developers are encouraged to review the positive contributing characteristics described in this appendix, and be prepared to discuss them with the Design Review Board as part of the context analysis of projects subject to design review. While the following are not requirements or guidelines, please consider the following list when assessing proposals for infill, renovations, and additions within the character areas and historic districts so that the project.

- Does not adversely affect the character and setting of the area;
- Supports and compliments the quality and character of remaining historic signs and facades;
- Is sympathetic to the overall existing character of adjacent historic buildings;
- Is compatible with the existing historic environment by reflecting the predominant height, width, setback, roof form and pitch, window types and patterns, floor heights, horizontal rhythms, and orientation to the street;
- Is compatible with the character and the massing of the adjacent buildings;
- Relates to surrounding buildings at the street level and may rise above the prevailing height of the area if there is a break in the vertical plane;
- Is compatible with the historic design of existing buildings at the street level and the floor above; and
- Adopts materials and colors that relate to adjacent buildings and the surrounding areas and are compatible in quality color, texture, finish and dimension.



New infill development can be seamlessly integrated into the overall context—as represented by the photo above



The Holmes Block displays a carefully executed rehabilitation of an existing historic building



Many great opportunities for storefront rehabilitation can be found in this area

Rehabilitation and Restoration of Historic Property

Renovated, restored or preserved historic buildings can provide attractive and unique commercial and residential space. For proposed rehabilitations of historic property, owners, developers and designers are encouraged to follow the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation¹, summarized as:

- If original details and ornamentation are intact, they should be retained and preserved;
- If original details are covered, they should be exposed and/or repaired; and
- If original details are missing, the details should be replaced to match the original in appearance.

Historic Preservation Incentives

There are several Historic Preservation Incentives. A few of the incentives are summarized below. Please contact the City of Spokane Historic Preservation Office for more information.

Local Historic Special Valuation Tax Incentive: The City of Spokane offers the Historic Special Valuation Tax Incentive (following approval by the Landmarks Commission) that allows a ten-year reduction on property tax for substantial rehabilitation (i.e. improvements that are consistent with the Washington State Advisory Council’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Maintenance) to properties listed on the Spokane Register of Historic Places.

Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives: The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program is one of the Federal government’s most successful and cost-effective community revitalization programs. The Preservation Tax Incentives reward private investment in rehabilitating historic properties such as offices, rental housing, and retail stores.

Facade Conservation Easement: In exchange for the donation of an easement, consisting of either a portion of land or a building’s facade, an owner may: a) claim a one-time Federal income tax deduction, and b) realize a permanent property tax reduction based on the value of the donated property. The easement must be granted to a qualified entity; and in exchange, the owner must agree to maintain the donated property.

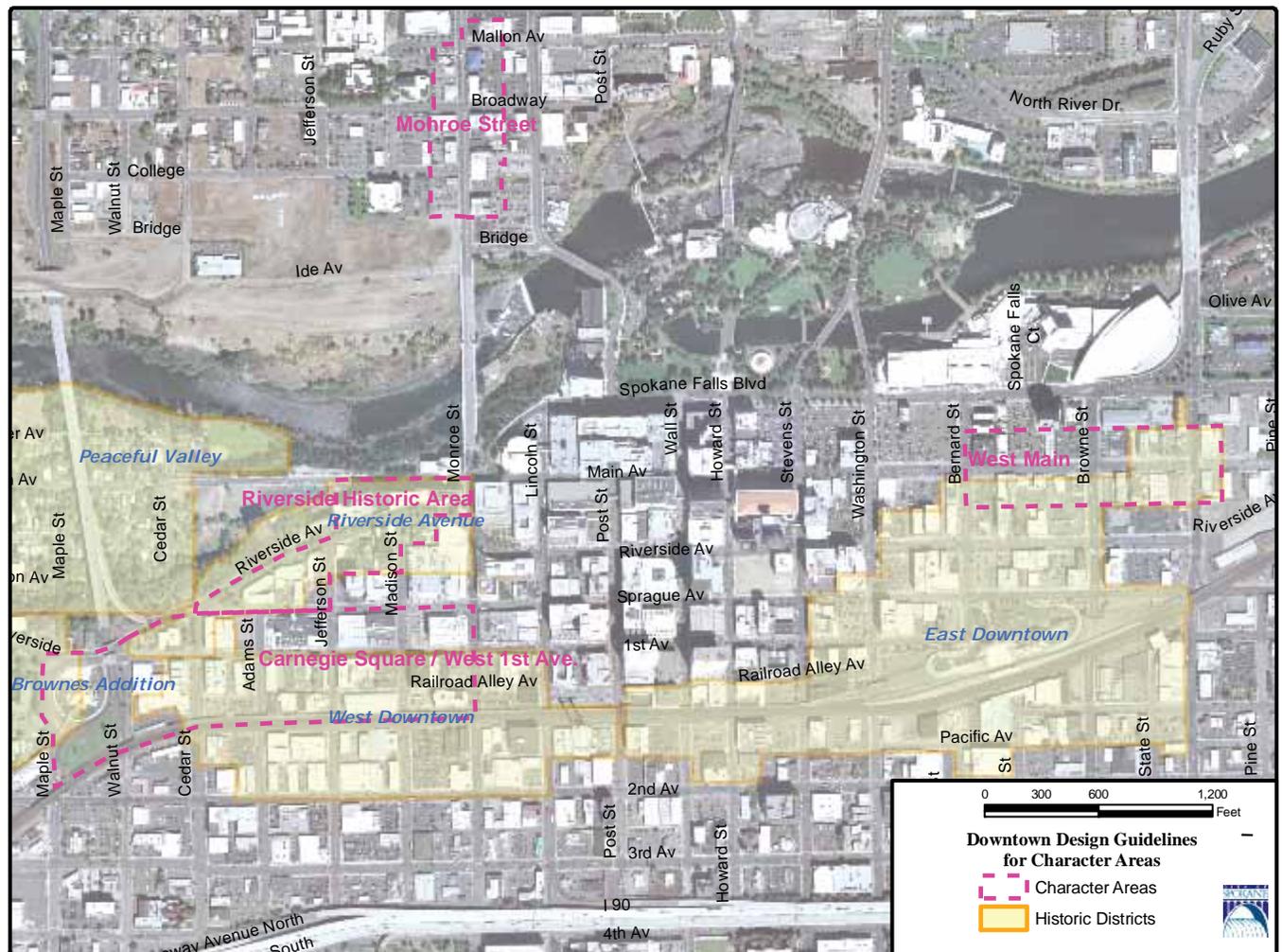
¹ Available at City Hall or on the Internet at www.nps.gov

Local Identity

Part of what contributes to the distinctive sense of place of each Character Area (with the exception of Riverside Avenue), are the expressions of energy, culture and individuality experienced in the pedestrian realm. These elements of local identity may take the form of signage, facade details, landscaping or artistic expression, and are encouraged within the East Downtown/West Main, West Downtown and North Monroe Street Character Areas, so long as they are oriented to the pedestrian. Elements of local identity build upon local and vernacular styles to bring forth a vibrant area that reflects the people who choose to live, work and do business within each area.



Creative, non-traditional streetscape elements contribute to the local identity of the East Downtown/West Main Character Area. This building may be a candidate for restoration.



The map above illustrates the location and boundaries of the four Character Areas in relation to Downtown's Historic Districts

1. East Downtown / West Main Character Area



West Main Avenue has retained a significant number of historic buildings which contribute to its character

Location

The East Downtown/West Main Character Area is bisected by West Main Avenue and is bounded by Bernard Street to the west; the alley between Spokane Falls Boulevard and Main Avenue to the north; the alley between Main and Riverside Avenues to the south; and one-half block east of Division Street. This area is included in the East Downtown Historic District located on the eastern edge of Spokane's Central Business District (CBD) and anchored by the Northern Pacific Railway Depot.



The architectural details as well as the historic wall sign in the background are integral to the identity of this area

Historic Urban Character

Historically, this area was developed for the railroad industry. Over half of the buildings date from Spokane's most pronounced period of economic and population growth: 1900 to 1910. The East Downtown/West Main Character Area is dominated by a common building type from this era: the single-room occupancy (SRO) hotel. The ground floors of SROs were typically occupied by small businesses while the upper floors provided hotels and residential apartments. The combination of the generally modest scale of the buildings (three to five stories in height), built to the edge of the parcel line (zero setbacks), with ground-floor, commercial storefronts and wide sidewalks provides a pedestrian-friendly environment and an excellent model for contemporary mixed-used development projects. Recently, there has been a number of high-quality rehabilitations to historic buildings and an increase in condominium developments in SRO buildings.



This contemporary infill building has successfully integrated into the surrounding context through compatible height, massing, materials and details



Adaptive re-use of existing buildings



The artful facades of these buildings contribute to local identity

1. East Downtown / West Main Character Area

Character Area Considerations

Features that contribute to the positive character of this area and may provide inspiration for new projects include:

Streetscape Improvements

- Historic, decorative, pedestrian-scale street lights that once lighted this area.
- The historic enclosure of the pedestrian realm created by buildings at the property line with no setbacks.

New Infill

- Historic architectural details that currently exist within the area, including: decorative or ornamental cornices; stepped or corbelled parapets and courses; and patterned brickwork and decorative terracotta detailing on primary facades.
- Highly-transparent display windows; transom or mezzanine windows (if a mezzanine level is present); window framing that complements the building design; windows with wood, brick, tile or stone bulkheads; and windows that open.
- Traditional commercial storefront elements: two bays, a recessed entry for each, and a separate entry to the upper floors; and recessed corner entries on buildings that occupy the end of a block.
- The modest scale of buildings at the core of the area; with taller, architecturally prominent buildings towards the western edge to serve as transition to the taller buildings within the Downtown core.
- Traditional materials such as brick, concrete or stone for foundations; walls built and/or clad of brick, concrete, terracotta.
- Flat roofs are the dominant roof-type in the area.

Rehabilitation of Existing Buildings

- Consider the standards the Secretary of the Interior has for Rehabilitation.
- Commercial storefronts that approximate their original condition.
- Historically appropriate windows such as storefront, display and transom windows with bulkheads; and upper-story windows that open. Careful attention to window trim and frames. Shaded or reflective glass should not be used.
- Historic painted wall signage advertising former businesses or products that is still visible on some of the buildings.



High-quality, historic architectural details



The existing brick alleys contribute to the uniqueness of the area



Outdoor elements contribute to the activation of the pedestrian realm



The active facade and signage details of this property provide good examples for storefront renovations as well as new infill

2. West Downtown Character Area



Historically, West First Avenue has supported both pedestrians and vehicles, with a welcoming, consistent pedestrian realm and a wide roadway with on-street parking



West First Avenue has retained a significant number of historic buildings



The Montvale Hotel's entrance was carefully restored to its original grandeur

Location

The West Downtown Character Area covers part of an area commonly referred to as the “West End”. It is bounded by Sprague Avenue to the north, the railroad corridor to the south, Maple Street to the west, and Monroe Street to the east. Over half of this area is included in the West Downtown Historic Transportation Corridor, which is oriented along Railroad Avenue and West First Avenue as a result of the development of the railroad and US Highway 10. This Character Area includes portions of two important subdistricts: Carnegie Square and Davenport District. Carnegie Square is located to the west, between Walnut and Adams Streets and the Davenport District, between Madison and Monroe Streets. Carnegie Square is a collection of restored historic buildings, and the Davenport District is a regional arts and entertainment destination with retail uses on the ground floor; mixed-use office and medium-to high-density residential above.

Historic Urban Character

This area has historical significance due to its association with railroad commerce, as evidenced by the large brick warehouses adjacent to the railroad corridor; the early influence of the automobile as seen in the showrooms and other auto-oriented buildings along West First Avenue. The Montvale Block (1899) is historically and architecturally significant as one of the oldest and best preserved examples of a single room occupancy (SRO) hotel. A number of SROs can be found along West First Avenue. These buildings have detailed facades, with storefronts at the ground floor and residential upper-floors. The historic brick warehouses are characterized by basalt foundations, loading docks, large openings with roll-up doors, and small, double-hung windows on the upper floors. Several of the warehouses flanking the railroad viaduct and adjoining alleys were originally served by at-grade rail spurs that characterized the area before the viaduct was built.

2. West Downtown Character Area

Character Area Considerations

Features that contribute to the positive character of this area and may provide inspiration for new projects include:

Streetscape Improvements

- The historic enclosure of the pedestrian realm created by buildings at the property line with no setbacks.
- Along Railroad Alley between Monroe and Adams Street the street is a joint pedestrian and vehicular corridor. Plants and other pedestrian amenities at key locations help to slow auto traffic.

New Infill

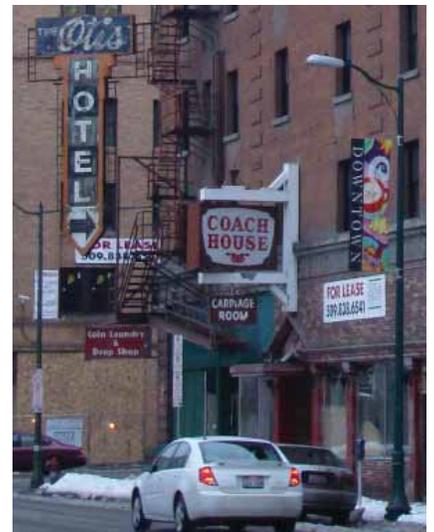
- Building materials that contribute to the historic character of this area include poured concrete or stone (such as basalt) for foundations; brick, reinforced masonry or concrete for walls; and terracotta, stone and metal accents and trims for architectural details.
- Building heights at a minimum of three-stories at the sidewalk edge.
- Flat roofs are the dominant roof type in the area.
- Minimal details, trims and accents on buildings.
- Traditional commercial storefront elements: two bays, a recessed entry for each, and a separate entry to the upper floors.

Renovations and Additions

- Consider the standards the Secretary of the Interior has for Rehabilitation.
- Commercial storefronts that approximate their original condition.
- Historically appropriate windows such as storefront, display and transom windows with bulkheads; and upper-story windows that open. Careful attention to window trim and frames. Shaded or reflective glass should not be used.
- Historic painted wall signage advertising former businesses or products that is still visible on some of the buildings.
- Historic warehouse details such as loading docks, large openings with roll-up doors, and small, double hung windows on the upper floors.



The upstairs of this warehouse has been converted to housing while maintaining its historic details



Historic signage contributes to the personality of a neighborhood and should be preserved or renovated if possible



Traditional commercial storefront elements contribute to the attractiveness of a destination

3. Riverside Avenue Character Area



The streetscape character of Riverside Avenue has changed very little over the past thirty years



Riverside Avenue streetscape in 2009



View north from Riverside Avenue and Jefferson Street



Landscaped median with lindens

Location

The Riverside Avenue Character Area is included in the Riverfront Avenue Historic District, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Generally, this area is bisected by Riverside Avenue, centered along five blocks between Cedar and Monroe Streets, bounded on the south by Sprague Avenue, and to the north by the bluff overlooking the Spokane River Gorge.

Historic Urban Character

Riverside Avenue has a striking individual character, with many high-quality, monumental buildings lining both sides of the street. Portions of the north edge of Riverside Avenue have significant views of the Courthouse across the river. This area was called the Civic Center of Spokane during the early part of the 20th century and was developed at the height of the City Beautiful Movement (1910s) as a linear public square. In 1907, portions of Riverside Avenue were given a boulevard treatment with ornamental street trees and wide, turfed median strips planted with lindens. Today, Riverside Avenue is a park-like, public setting, lined with numerous grand buildings and commemorative statuary. Several of the buildings along the south side of Riverside add to the park-like setting by incorporating formal landscaping within the right-of-way or by setting back from the street, with the additional space either included in a widened sidewalk or used for formal landscaping. These buildings were designed and built between 1901 and 1931 to showcase Spokane's premier social organizations, and there are numerous late 19th and early 20th century architectural styles designed at grand scales, with the intent of setting these buildings apart from one another, and the rest of the city.

3. Riverside Avenue Character Area

Character Area Considerations

Features that contribute to the positive character of this area and may provide inspiration for new projects include:

Streetscape Improvements

- The historic park-like setting of the area and landscaped setbacks.
- Street trees along the south side of Riverside between Madison and Jefferson Streets.

New Infill

- High-quality, durable, and traditional building materials such as rusticated stone or sandstone foundations; brick masonry; smooth-dressed sandstone; glazed white or rusticated terracotta facing; and details crafted of granite, brick, ivory terracotta, sandstone, ceramic tiles, cast stone, copper, glass, and iron.
- A minimum of three stories and a maximum of four stories at the sidewalk edge.
- The view corridor between the intersection of Riverside Avenue and Jefferson Street to the County Courthouse

Rehabilitation of Existing Buildings

- Before beginning a project consult with the City of Spokane Historic Preservation Office.
- Consider the standards the Secretary of the Interior has for Rehabilitation.



Most of the buildings in this area are set back from the street with landscaping



Historic infill borrows traditional building materials and details from buildings in the area by providing a setback and not dominating adjacent buildings

4. North Monroe Street Character Area



*Historic North Monroe (Looking South)—
Note the generous sidewalks and ample
fabric awnings at building entrances*



*Historic Monroe Street Bridge—Note
the wide sidewalks and pedestrian
amenities such as sheltered viewpoints and
ornamental, pedestrian-scale streetlights*



*Milford's displays the high-quality and
attractive signage, commercial storefront
elements, and building exterior details
that contribute to this area*

Location

North Monroe Street Character Area is included in the Monroe Street Antique District, and is located along Monroe Street, including a half block on either side of the street, between Bridge Avenue to the south, and Mallon Avenue to the north.

Historic Urban Character

The key historic structure in the area is the Holmes Block, built in 1904. It has a distinctive character, with red brick masonry fashioned into a three-story, Second Empire style. Despite much previous renovation within the area, the historic commercial hub is evident by the many storefront buildings in the district. Historic photographs of North Monroe Street describe a generous pedestrian realm with pedestrian-oriented, ornamental streetlights and storefront entrances with ample fabric awnings. Other characteristics that define the area to this day include zero front setbacks, simple ornamentation, and building footprints that cover entire parcels. This area provides a number of building rehabilitation and re-use opportunities that could enhance the historic elements that remain.



*Renovation and re-use of an existing
historic building and streetscape can make
a strong contribution to local character*



*Special outdoor spaces, such as this side
yard plaza, contribute to the uniqueness
of the area*

4. North Monroe Street Character Area

Character Area Considerations

Features that contribute to the positive character of this area and may provide inspiration for new projects include:

Streetscape Improvements

- Incorporating a consistent, wider (minimum 12-foot) pedestrian realm along North Monroe Street would allow space for on-street snow storage in winter and a buffer area between pedestrian walkway and the roadway. Historically Monroe Street did not have on street parking.
- The historic, decorative, pedestrian-scale street lights that once lighted this area and the lighting on the renovated Monroe Street Bridge.
- Awnings over entrances to commercial storefronts.
- The historic enclosure of the pedestrian realm created by buildings at the property line with no setbacks.

New Infill

- The use of brick masonry.
- A minimum of three stories and a maximum of four stories at the sidewalk edge.
- Mixed-use building design and renovation: storefronts at the ground floor and residential upper floors.
- Building details such as ornamental cornices, patterned brickwork that may frame doors and windows, and corbelled parapets.
- Traditional commercial storefronts: two bays, a recessed entry for each, and a separate entry to the upper floors.
- Transparent display windows; transom or mezzanine windows (if a mezzanine level is present); window framing that complements the building design; windows with wood, brick, tile or stone bulkheads; and windows that open.

Rehabilitation of Existing Buildings

- Consider the standards the Secretary of the Interior has for Rehabilitation.
- Renovated commercial storefronts that approximate their original condition.
- Historic painted wall signage advertising former businesses or products that is still visible on some of the buildings.



Businesses can contribute local identity to the neighborhood through exterior details and signage—without detracting from adjacent historic properties



A number of properties in the area have vertical mixed-uses, with upstairs housing and active ground-floor commercial storefronts



A mix of uses successfully coexist in this area and many historic signs has been maintained