



## **Mayor Nadine Woodward**

Hello and welcome! Thank you to Greater Spokane Incorporated for hosting us.

It's so good to be with you and to see your smiling faces again. And thank you to everyone joining us online.

It's hard to believe that this is the first time since my few weeks in office that I've been able to deliver the State of the City in person. Right after that first address our world turned upside down. Two years later... we're finally returning to normal.

If anything good has come from the last two years, it's been our increased ability to stay connected, share information and collaborate in more innovative ways. Innovation is second nature to the people of Spokane and I applaud each of you for the resiliency and courage you continue to show as change continues to occur.

In the time I've served as your mayor, our focus has been on public safety, homelessness, housing, and economic development. As I stated in my first address to the community, we'd accomplish growth in these areas by prioritizing the work, collaborating and building strong relationships, and focusing on delivering quality results.

This is no easy task and my primary role is to serve ALL of the citizens of Spokane. We've invested a great deal of time building relationships and establishing trust in the name of collaboration. Listening to learn. Learning to grow. Growing to build. Building from unique perspectives, for collaboration, from a foundation of strengths.

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This is how we will be successful.

Much has been written and discussed on the topic of collaboration, and an African proverb sums it up very well:

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

During our time together, we’ll talk about these results, delivered despite the grips of a global pandemic. After working closely with many community partners, we’ll announce new initiatives that will restore the vibrancy, vitality, and resiliency to a community at the center of a regional ecosystem. And, we’ll set an expectation of laser focus on long-term outcomes that build trust between the public and are based on working together rather than through individual exchanges and disruptive public pressure.

A few things I can say with certainty. It’ll be bumpy at times, and frustrating too, as we try to fit all the collective wisdom together. But, we’ll learn and grow together because as Harry Truman famously said, “It’s amazing what you can accomplish if you don’t care who gets the credit.”

Over the past several months, the City as an organization has refocused on the alignment of its core deliverables to the community. That has included examining how we think, engage, and produce. That process has led us to add new emphasis on operational sustainability and mental health.

Operational sustainability is the nuts and bolts of what we do. The impact of the pandemic on our workforce, how we deliver services, and how we convene people and ideas has been at the center of our conversations. That includes everything from resource efficiencies, staffing levels, use

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of technology, and, most importantly, the safety and well-being of our customers and those in our organization who serve them.

While we'll talk about those ideas in greater details, what we kept coming back to is a discussion about mental health. Our ability to manage as individuals, organizations, and community... the stress, disruption, anxiety, and pressures that have come with COVID has become a SECOND pandemic.

Mental health is not a subject of expertise for the City organization, although we too have been impacted like everyone else - struggling to adapt to constant change, do more with less, and lead through the unknown.

So, we set out to listen and learn. We talked to experts and they told us two things: your strength is in your ability to convene and mental health is a BIG topic, so pick a focus area and do it well.

My Mental Health Task Force includes advocacy, community, education, healthcare, and youth representatives. Congresswoman Cathy McMorris-Rogers and State Representative Marcus Riccelli have joined me as honorary co-conveners to give us connectivity to local, state, and federal government resources.

Our focus is on youth because of a comment made at a roundtable discussion I was part of at Stevens Elementary. Jeremy Shay, the president of the Spokane Education Association, told the group this: "We will spend years undoing the mental health impacts of the pandemic on our youth."

That comment really struck me and it was in that moment I knew we had to do something. This was a chance to make an upstream impact for the next generation of leaders.

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Mental health is the underlying foundation of everything we do. So, it will be a common theme as we talk about public safety, housing, economic development, and homelessness.

Let me start off our discussion about public safety with a huge thank you to voters for their support of our firefighters and emergency medical responders. Our community approved another 6-year extension of the levy that allows the Spokane Fire Department to be there – and be there quickly – when you call for help. So, on behalf of Fire Chief Brian Schaeffer, Spokane Firefighters Union President Randy Marler, and the entire Spokane Fire Department, thank you voters for your support of these women and men who do such an incredible job keeping our community safe.

[APPLAUSE]

Public safety is incredibly important in everything we do. It ranks at the top of the list of community priorities, which is why we commit so much time and resources to continuously fine-tune how we structure, operate, and deliver services.

Mental health has been a consideration for the Spokane Police Department long before the pandemic cast a white-hot light on the issue. A few years ago, the department partnered with Frontier Behavioral Health to pair mental health professionals with police officers in search of a very simple outcome – to assist an individual at the moment they're in crisis before they harm themselves or others.

The program has continued to expand for one reason: it's working.

Last year, the Behavioral Health Unit contacted more than 4,000 people in crisis, a nearly 10% increase over the previous year. Of those

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encounters, fewer than 1% were arrested. In 680 instances, behavioral health professionals determined a hospital or involuntary treatment were the safest option. A little over 300 were diverted from what could have been an arrest.

Think about that for a minute. More than 4,000 interactions and fewer than three dozen arrests.

And there're also significant benefits to officers and the community. It diverted more than 4,500 calls from patrol and freed up those officers to respond to other needs.

Spokane is finding a better way to meet a nationwide challenge. Pretty remarkable leadership.

Police resources are always at a premium. So we've partnered with the City Council to establish a hire-ahead program that allows SPD to hire 10 officers over its allocated capacity positions, while staying within their approved budget, to reduce the time it takes to replace employees who retire or leave the department.

Refocusing officer efforts and attention to crime prevention and response is critical, particularly in a time when we're seeing crime on the rise across the country.

Spokane is no different. It's a trend our officers are working hard to turn around. It'll take an effort that requires the collaboration of our community, lawmakers, and judicial system to hold offenders accountable for their actions while promoting rehabilitation through the process. That includes using arrest and conviction data to keep the community safe, while the prolific defendants have their day in court.

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Much of the crime in Spokane is tied to the drug epidemic plaguing our community. Spokane is a regional hub for the distribution of illicit narcotics, and the latest drug gripping our city is fentanyl, a powerful opioid with devastating effects, even after a single dose.

Increases in property and violent crimes can be traced straight to the prevalence of this easily accessible drug. It's why we partnered with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Attorney's Office, Spokane Police Department, Spokane County Sheriff's Office, and a community awareness group called, SAFE, on Operation Engage to fight the spread of fentanyl and its devastating ripple effect. This effort will focus on education, prevention, and enforcement to reduce fentanyl on our streets.

We've also formed a Spokane Police Department Violent Crime Task Force to go after the most egregious repeat offenders who continue to put our community at significant risk. The Task Force is built on the philosophies and successes of other specialty teams that SPD has operated. And, we're looking at approaches other cities have taken to quality of life crimes by packaging misdemeanor crimes into felony charges for those responsible for dozens and dozens of offenses.

These creative approaches are needed. Our landscape has changed over the past two years because of pandemic and legislative impacts. Social distancing, shutdowns, and employees working remotely have resulted in fewer people in spaces with fewer eyes to deter crimes of opportunity.

Legislative changes two years ago impacted how our officers respond to complaints of criminal activity. One of those laws requires officers to refer people caught possessing drugs to substance abuse treatment, TWICE, before they can be charged. And it continues to be a mandate without the promised funding to provide those treatment services. Word on the street is... police are not coming for certain crimes!

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The Police Chief and I testified during this past legislative session to restore some of the tools that allow officers to detain individuals for questioning, a step toward accountability and deterrence. Officers are now retraining how they respond to calls for service.

The community is very appreciative of the extra efforts officers continue to make. Many take the time to say thank you while acknowledging the challenges our men and women in blue face.

[\[SPD COMPLIMENTS VIDEO\]](#)

Thank you to those officers and all of the 356 men and women who wear the badge to serve you. Please know that we pray for your protection.

The fire department is also making a major public health and safety impact. Its teams rescued six people from residential fires last year and have already made three fire rescues this year. Another 100 people suffering from sudden cardiac arrest were resuscitated by paramedics, and more than 1,000 are alive today because of the department's expanded medical partnerships to improve clinical care for pediatric, stroke, cardiac, and sepsis emergencies.

The City is once again considering a regional emergency dispatch approach that would deliver the kind of service the community expects and save the City money. We've also formally partnered with the regional emergency management system to more proactively coordinate responses to disasters with other cities, towns, and unincorporated areas of Spokane County.

Our improvements to public safety directly impact quality of life as we restore vibrancy, vitality, and resiliency to our downtown, the region's economic engine and gathering place. The pandemic has taken its toll on

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urban centers across the country. Revitalizing our downtown will take a partnership of government, the private sector, and nonprofits to reactivate our urban center.

The City has taken important steps, hiring a new director of Community and Economic Development, a division that I created to meet the challenges of pandemic recovery and to focus on our neighborhood business districts. A new planning director is working with neighborhoods to advance livability needs while maintaining the unique character of Spokane's blocks.

Additional cleanup crews will be able to remove graffiti, litter, and camps more quickly and will soon go to 7-day-a-week operation. New secure trash cans have also been added to the downtown core to keep garbage from returning to sidewalks and streets.

Extra effort is being given to put a "spit shine" – as my City Administrator likes to call it – on our City ahead of iconic community events that have been missing the past two years. And, of course, visits by Paul McCartney, who's kicking off his Got Back Tour tomorrow night right here in our city, and Bob Dylan, who recently announced he'll launch his Rough and Rowdy Ways Tour Memorial Day Weekend in Spokane.

Our emphasis on cleanup has been ongoing for some time. Last month alone, City crews collected 110,000 pounds of litter citywide. Not the weekly curbside garbage pickup. We're talking litter, discarded in our public spaces. That's the amount of garbage 275 families of 4 generate in a month.

Revitalization of our business corridors is being coordinated citywide next month to invite people back to visit local businesses and take part in community events. I'm really excited about an alleyway activation program that took a small step last summer and will be showcased for

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expansion in June to give people new, inviting ways to enjoy our downtown and deter unwanted activity.

All of these activities are building toward a return of events this summer that will serve as an enthusiastic and energetic “welcome back” to the things we so cherish about our community. A huge thank you to the Downtown Spokane Partnership for all the work they’re doing alongside the City to make that happen.

New and remodeled Spokane Public Library branches, each accomplished through partnerships with schools or parks, have opened in the northeast, northwest, and south over the past year. Investments in neighborhood parks and trails are adding to our reputation for livability and are great complements to the beautiful transformation of Riverfront Park as the region’s front porch.

Simultaneously, the City is working to simplify and improve key economic development incentives, such as the Multi-Family Tax Exemption and Projects of Citywide Significance program, to make them easier to access and administer. Regional stakeholders are also discussing how we can work together to strengthen broadband fiber to create an internet exchange point, which significantly improves our competitiveness in today’s virtual world.

These are all critically important to support existing and new businesses as we emerge even stronger from the disruption of the past two years. Fortunately, we have a lot to build from including celebrating the U.S. Small Business Administration’s regional Young Entrepreneur of the Year from right here in Spokane. Jessica Winfrey-Atkinson of Sweet Frostings Blissful Bakeshop is being recognized for demonstrating resiliency, staying power, and innovation. Sweet Frostings opened in 2011, has expanded three times, and now employs 35 people. Jessica is with us

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today and will be receiving her award at a later date. Congratulations Jessica.

[APPLAUSE]

Building from here requires partnership with the private sector and nonprofits to reactivate a community known for its vitality, energy, and hospitality. So, we're also calling on downtown businesses to bring employees back into the office to increase foot traffic and eyes on the street.

New sports, recreation, and entertainment additions are activating the north bank of the Spokane River and helping to expand our downtown... with the river as its majestic centerpiece. Stakeholders are discussing shared parking, transportation links, and new housing, commercial, and mixed-use development that reinvents Spokane as a centerpiece 50 years after we invited the World's Fair to visit.

We're also working with the City Council to protect riverbanks against the impacts of camping and littering to enhance our Cleaner River Faster initiative that kept pollution out of the river so that we could get back into it.

By now, you're understanding that this is not a one-size-fits-all solution and approach. And, it's fitting that during Spokane Gives Month in April, we're talking about how everyone plays a small part in the betterment of our greater community.

Spokane Gives is in its 9<sup>th</sup> year and has seen nearly 100,000 volunteers give more than 440,000 hours of service. A \$10 million impact in our community.

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That's the power of a City coming together toward a common goal. To be a compassionate community where there's opportunity and support to do great things. Take a look at what we're doing to create those opportunities.

[\[ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VIDEO\]](#)

Many of you are the job creators, employers, and the ones who connect individual skills to needs right here in Spokane. Now, more than any time in recent memory, those connections are critical as we work together to overcome labor shortages that threaten our progress.

That includes housing, which has fallen victim to a perfect storm of years of lagging production and inventory, labor and materials challenges, and regulatory considerations as we work our way out of a challenge nearly every city in this country is facing.

Consider this, when the pandemic hit, the median home price in Spokane County was right around \$288,000. The median home price just set a record for a second consecutive month in March at \$430,000. That's a 50% increase in just two years and the kind of astronomical impact we're challenged with.

Several months ago, I declared a housing emergency in Spokane. That declaration included more than two dozen priority actions my administration would take and in partnership with the City Council to immediately improve housing availability at all levels. Those actions range from staffing, code requirement changes, and community engagement.

Since that declaration, the City has prioritized hiring to focus on housing outcomes. Full-route plan reviews on residential projects have dropped from 6 weeks to 2. And consultants are now supporting staff to

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accommodate record volumes of development and building activity much more quickly.

The Planning Department has led a Shaping Spokane Housing initiative that proposes more flexibility for residential development, particularly for duplexes, townhouses, accessory dwelling units, and short-term rentals in commercial zones. The initiative also streamlines permitting for subdivision updates and adds more housing types, densities and zones, and increases affordable-to-low-income home construction by faith institutions.

All of that is to sustain and grow the momentum in the residential and overall construction markets.

Last year, for the second year in a row, the City recorded a 23-year high for both residential and total construction valuation. Single-family permits exceeded the yearly average for the first time since 2018 with the majority of inventory in the \$200,000 to \$400,000 range.

Growth in multi-family units was even more pronounced. The city had the biggest year since at least 2005 and more than doubled the annual average for apartments and other multi-unit residential. In fact, multi-family housing, along with investments in public and higher education, and manufacturing, accounted for the largest projects last year.

Here's the impact that work is having on our community.

[\[HOUSING VIDEO\]](#)

We have a long way still to go and, while we're encouraged by some of the early progress, housing is still a topic of conversation everywhere. Especially among those trying to enter the market as renters or first-time home buyers.

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Housing inventory at all levels is one of the greatest factors impacting our ability to get and keep people housed.

Spokane, like virtually every other community across the country, is wrestling with how to help its homeless population. Passionate debate has been about how to provide shelter, what types, and what to do about people who don't want help.

Today, we're announcing the next evolution of our homelessness plan. It's the extension of work announced in July of 2020, that added low-barrier shelter space for youth, young adults, men, women, and families; provided greater consistency to shelter users and providers; introduced a bridge housing program as a crucial gateway out of homelessness, and taken major steps toward a true regional approach. And it was based on recommendations in the Continuum of Care 5-Year Plan.

The plan we're announcing today is built on community collaboration and relies on resources from providers, nonprofits, private industry and government - to further build a regional system of assets and resources that meet people with services, prevent them from becoming homeless or get them temporarily housed, and move them out of homelessness.

The idea was to bring together people and groups with vastly different approaches and ideologies around this universally shared belief:

Sidewalks, alleyways, and other outdoor spaces are not safe, healthy, or humane for those struggling with mental health, substance abuse, or other conditions that require emergency interventions and a permanent housing solution to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring by fostering shared responsibility among stakeholders.

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Homelessness is an issue that draws out a passion in people that is as personal as it is polarizing. There are as many solutions as there are individuals homeless and in crisis. Bill Nye said it best “Everyone you will ever meet knows something you don’t.”

My commitment was to listen, and the plan we’re announcing today is the culmination of reviewing data and recommendations from all perspectives, socializing the plan with providers, advocates, business owners, and many others to gain as much feedback and buy-in as possible. Any collaboration is based on compromise and this is no different. Everyone should be able to identify with at least some of the elements of the plan, but maybe not all. However, this plan provides a path forward to the outcomes we all want to see – a compassionate, safe and clean city.

We’ve met a couple of times with former Governor Christine Gregoire, who leads an organization that did extensive research about attitudes toward homelessness statewide and in Spokane. That work showed three conclusions:

- Homelessness is our greatest challenge as a community and as a state
- It is a statewide problem
- And, it has specific community impacts

That data, resources and ideas from people and organizations throughout our region really informed the next evolution of the 2020 plan and has eight areas of focus.

- Get individuals emergency housed
- Meet them with individualized services
- Coordinate supportive resources

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- Know them by name and need
- Deploy case workers to meet people where they are physically and in life
- Deliver transparency and accountability to maintain buy-in
- Create more housing inventory
- Expect compassionate accountability

We've already started executing the plan with 15 initial steps on the screen behind me. Those range from identifying a shelter site for on-demand activation, including for weather, disaster, and other needs; developing a transportation partnership and route to connect people to services; deploying a public shelter dashboard for awareness of resources and capacity; and opening a dialogue with the court system about how to bring greater accountability into our therapeutic courts.

Now, we need your help. We need you to identify where you can be most effective in moving us forward as one community, toward one goal of getting people off of the streets, sidewalks, and fields and into safe places to sleep out of the elements.

Let me be very clear about one thing. This plan is a next chapter, it's not the end of the book. The strategies and execution are building blocks toward a next evolution. Many open questions remain about where and how we add resources, how we can better partner with the court system to achieve greater accountability to the service connections we are making, and how we do a better job of getting upstream to make those service connections before they become a crisis in someone's life.

To the Continuum of Care, CHHS Board, the Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium, the Spokane Homeless Coalition, Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners, Catholic Charities, City Gate, Family Promise, The Guardians, The Salvation Army, Truth Ministries, UGM,

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Volunteers of America, Downtown Spokane Partnership, Hello for Good, Hope Street Coalition, Berry Consulting, the Mayor's Advisory Council on Downtown Environment, the Regional Governance Group, and so many others in our community, I will say this.

We were listening and we'll continue to listen. This plan is not perfect, but it is a best compromise.

If you take away one thing, I want to you know this:

We are in the business of delivering people outcomes. Plain and simple. No other agendas. No other motivations.

And, this is why we do what we do:

[\[HOMELESSNESS VIDEO\]](#)

Please join me in congratulating Kris Brewer on his success. Kris, please come up to the stage. We have a housewarming gift for you.

[APPLAUSE]

As our time together draws to a close, we have one more exciting announcement. We've thrown a lot at you, especially as it relates to homelessness. Much of that requires community resources to get us where we need to go.

So, we'll be announcing a community fundraising initiative to close Spokane Gives Month next week. It will call on each of you as individuals and those of you who own and run businesses large and small to support the ongoing operation of keeping our city clean, vibrant, and safe.

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Finally, we're excited to announce that the City has formalized a partnership with Catholic Charities to pursue a new permanent shelter campus that would relocate the House of Charity out of downtown and further serve people in need in a location outside of the downtown core. The vision is to significantly increase space for women, provide comprehensive services that will help people become more stable and help them move into permanent supportive housing, and offer even greater flexibility with how we give everyone a fresh start toward making Spokane a model for how we support the individual journey.

That campus will be in a different area than the drop-in shelter we are currently finalizing with another partner, outside of downtown, and become part of a transportation loop being developed to connect people to shelter and additional supportive services.

There's a lot of work left to do. There always will be. And you know what, I always tell people that I am so lucky to have a team and a community around me because it means none of us has to do it alone.

I'll leave you with this thought from former high school football coach and life coach, Art Williams:

"I'm not telling you it's going to be easy. I'm telling you it's going to be worth it."

Thank you everyone for your time and attention and continued partnership.

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