



## Mayor Nadine Woodward

Hello and thank you all for joining us today for the annual State of the City Address.

We're so excited to share with you the things we're working on to move our city forward. My Cabinet members, who are here, and their teams have achieved many great advancements in public safety, housing, homelessness, economic development, mental health, and other critical areas that make us safer, more secure, and a sustainable city.

To frame our conversation today, I want to share comments a community member shared with me recently. She was part of a small group of neighbors who came to my office to talk about ideas and feedback based on their observations and experiences in the circles they travel.

As a nurse relatively new in her career, she was by far the youngest in the group. The others were retired and focusing their time on volunteer work, which she fit in around her full-time job.

Besides a deep passion for the neighborhood they live in ... in the community they love ... the group had one other thing in common. Each moved here from another city or state.

They were drawn to Spokane for its beauty, biking, hiking, seasons, walkable downtown, easy airport access to visit family, and friendly people. They arrived in Spokane with years of civic engagement in their previous communities and quickly started thinking about how THOSE experiences could be relevant to Spokane.

When it was time for the young nurse in the group to speak, she paused and said: "There's not a lot of hope."

For the next few minutes she provided more context to her statement. She talked about working as a nurse in the jail before moving to an organization that provides underserved youth with the direction and support most of them have been lacking. She found this new job more fulfilling and a way to make a difference.

"There's been a lot of devastation in the world lately," she continued, and she wondered how anyone can be successful in our current global environment.

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She was talking about financial stability, home ownership, and achieving personal and professional goals. She considered herself lucky to finish her studies at Whitworth and WSU with modest debt compared to her friends. Yet ... now in her mid-20s and in a job she loved ... she was still overwhelmed about what the future may hold for her and those around her.

“There’s no hope across many generations,” she said.

Her comments were equal parts heartbreaking, insightful, and inspiring.

Heartbreaking because hopelessness can spiral into desperation.

Insightful because in those few minutes she captured the sentiment of so many ... after what our community has experienced the past couple of years.

Inspiring because instead of giving up ... instead of retreating to her work or the isolation of her home ... instead of assigning blame or saying that’s someone else’s problem to solve ... she asked herself how can I help?

And then she acted.

She got involved in her neighborhood ... surrounded herself with people with a similar sense of community ... bonded with neighbors who have enough experience with community engagement to know that individually they may not hold all the answers, but collectively they can make a difference.

So, they began talking. They shared their backgrounds ... their dreams for their community ... they built from the strengths they saw in the neighborhood and their daily activities, and looked for opportunities to improve what’s around them.

For these four neighbors, public safety, housing security, and mental health were right at the top of the list of the things important to them.

They want to make sure others feel as safe as they do to move around the community and enjoy recreation, arts and entertainment, dining, and other activities they enjoy. They also acknowledged two things: first, not everyone shares that same feeling of safety, and second, property crime is not where they want it to be.

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They were also concerned about housing inventory... from a safe and consistent place for the unhoused ... to someone just entering the housing market ... to keeping someone currently in housing from being priced out.

Their ideas ranged from some tough love for those who need it ... to sincere compassion for the majority who find themselves at a point in life where they need a hand up.

We've had some difficult conversations as a city and as a country the past few years on issues like healthcare, politics, policing and public safety, and our economy. They shared concern about how all of these things have impacted the mental health of our community.

After about an hour of conversation, they came to the conclusion that as a Spokane community there has been tremendous effort, progress, and much opportunity.

And despite what were clear philosophical differences on some issues... what really impressed me was how they listened to each other, found common ground, and respectfully articulated the points they were making from all sides of the discussion.

Divisiveness and disruption played no part in their comments or the solutions they proposed. Instead, they chose a path of working together.

Their stories got me thinking about what we've been through the past few years and where we're headed. We've accomplished so much to build a safer, more secure, and sustainable Spokane, and yet we still have much left to do.

Sometimes, that can lead to a feeling of hopelessness. Oftentimes, that gets lost in the wedge people want to drive rather than the common ground from which we strive to build on.

Our job, our DUTY as leaders, influencers, friends, neighbors, community members, is to do everything we can to MINIMIZE the hopelessness and bring a BRIGHT LIGHT to the progress. It's to find ways to make it comfortable to work together rather than drag each other down.

We've done a lot of listening to our community. And in one hour of honest reflection, feedback, and conversation, these four neighbors captured what Spokane is currently experiencing ... and where we should all be focusing.

A year ago, we pledged to work collaboratively toward solutions and outcomes that keep our community thriving and moving forward. We recommitted to that pledge at the New Year and

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remain more resolved than ever... that there is a seat at the table for anyone willing to set aside differences and work respectfully together on the things Spokane needs. That cooperative spirit must rise above the noise and blame.

Our greatest accomplishments are achieved through collaboration and compromise. Truly working together requires honest “give and take” and not blindly charging forward to achieve individual desires. And that must be done with respect and trust that comes without strings and devoid of retribution to be paid for disagreement.

The feedback we hear consistently focuses on the need to feel safe doing the things we all love about Spokane ... to feel secure in our place and being ... and to feel a sense of stability as we continue to build and grow our lives.

While these four neighbors were sharing their own experiences, they spoke volumes about our community psyche.

They remind us this is not about ANY one of us. Instead, it is about EVERY one of us. They and so many of our neighbors have made it clear that government exists to govern for the people not OVER the people.

That is what we hear when we listen.

**VIDEO 1: [THE WHAT](#)**

A big thank you to those who took part in the video for their honesty and vulnerability. You heard some fundamental needs expressed. The more you listen, the more you appreciate the powerful conviction and vision in their stories.

They want us to engage perspectives and dedicate resources to deliver critical outcomes for our entire community.

Public safety is a top priority. Everyone we talk to ... every meeting we attend ... every neighborhood we visit ... public safety is the topic of every conversation.

Personal safety is essential to the choices we make about where we live, where we work, and where we pursue our passions. Because of that, Police Chief Craig Meidl and I made a commitment to increase public safety through a law-and-order approach.

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We heard from neighborhoods and businesses, individuals and organizations, and officers themselves about their strong desire to continue to improve how we serve.

The feedback was consistent: people want more officers on patrol in their neighborhoods ... they want to know the officers who patrol their neighborhoods ... and they want greater responsiveness to all levels of calls.

The decisions we've made REFLECT that feedback. We've committed more resources to the things that support prevention and address root causes.

Like, opening police precincts in the downtown and East Central neighborhoods that advance the community policing model and puts officers closer to the people they serve.

We're several weeks into a new staffing model that puts more police on patrol in neighborhoods. Officers are assigned to work in one of four designated areas of the city, giving them responsibility and ownership for the neighborhoods in their sector.

The model has already resulted in a new policing approach in northwest neighborhoods based on what officers observed about recent burglaries. That analysis is also guiding proactive tactics to reduce property crime.

That's exactly the type of officer-driven ideas that come from ownership of an area ... and it's why SPD leadership worked with officers to really listen and understand the community need. Those officers shared that, above all else, they're frustrated because the community has an expectation they can't deliver within our current constraints. Officers feel like they're letting down the people they signed up to serve.

So, the department acted.

Part of being efficient with our resources is deploying them to meet emergent challenges.

VIOLENT CRIME has become a big problem in our community and across the county. We established a Violent Crimes Task Force of specially trained officers and supervisors to focus on removing prolific and violent offenders from the streets.

Since becoming operational in June, the task force has arrested more than four dozen individuals identified as prolific violent offenders ... actively wanted for crimes like drive-by-shootings, first-degree assault, and murder.

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The task force also works closely with local, state, and federal law enforcement partners, including a special emphasis on gang activity, to make best use of all resources. They're building stronger cases with the goal of longer sentences to keep prolific offenders out of our neighborhoods.

Our partnership between behavioral health professionals and police to better address people experiencing a behavioral crisis has expanded by 20 percent. That partnership, which includes the Spokane County Sheriff's Office, has diverted 80 percent of the nearly 3,700 individuals contacted from going to jail or overcrowded and costly emergency rooms.

The Spokane Fire Department has a similar program with behavioral health professionals to better direct the appropriate level of care in the field and in more formal settings.

Our Fire Department has also partnered with SREC, the Spokane Regional Emergency Communications agency, to dispatch emergency medical and fire calls for help... quicker, more efficiently and much more cost-effectively.

Partnerships have become a critical part of public safety. We emphasized that with our officers when we changed their staffing model and we're asking for your help today.

Much like the young nurse and her Browne's Addition neighbors, we're asking all of you to be engaged. Invite your neighborhood police captain to your next association or organizational meeting. Speak up about the tools law enforcement needs to be effective in your neighborhood. Let us know what's working or what isn't working where you live. Highlight the solutions that bring positive change rather than giving more attention to the challenge. That's how we'll move our city forward.

Chief Meidl and I have been regulars in front of the state legislature this session, testifying in support of bills to return accountability to laws that allow drug possession in our state. We're advocating for balance and common-sense that requires individual buy-in to accompany treatment. We had some success last year and we're back this year working for Spokane to return more of the tools law enforcement has lost.

Our community engagement tells us that we're united around the fight against the fentanyl epidemic plaguing our country. People are overdosing at alarming rates and much of the violence and property crime are traced directly to the epidemic. Bags filled with hundreds and thousands of pills are regularly a part of arrests that include illegal weapons and cash.

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And ... if we needed one more reminder just how harmful this deadly drug is to innocent victims ... we got it about a week ago. Fire and police responded to a call of an unresponsive child during a supervised visitation. CPR and Narcan were used to revive the child, who tested positive for fentanyl.

That child was only 14 months old.

Sadly, we've allowed our state to remove some of the very interventions that help law enforcement redirect damaging behaviors. We're working hard to get back a balanced solution that meets the needs of all involved because as that example so devastatingly illustrates ... drugs victimize the innocent.

That's why I'm working with Councilmembers Michael Cathcart and Jonathan Bingle on an ordinance that would return accountability to those who openly use drugs. The community has demanded we do something about rampant drug use that occurs on sidewalks, parking lots, stairways, and store fronts. We'll be bringing the ordinance to the full Council within the next few weeks as another way to get people the help they need while respecting the use of public spaces for all of us.

We're also advocating at the state level for additional funding to hire more police officers. The next phase in our new staffing model is to add even more officers to your neighborhoods, and we need the financial resources to do it.

At the same time, we're imploring our legislature to send a strong message that property crime will not be tolerated ... by increasing penalties for repeat offenders.

And, we've joined other communities around the state in advocating for a return of police pursuits, by lowering the standard to reasonable suspicion ... rather than the higher probable cause threshold ... to send an equally clear message that there will be accountability if you break the law. Unfortunately, that effort has met significant opposition from a westside committee chair, but we'll continue to work for Spokane.

We must re-establish the expectation that victims of crime are heard and considered when laws are enacted in the interest of public safety. Too often the victim is left out of the equation.

As we listened, we spent considerable time exploring and understanding the why. We wanted to know what's driving perspectives and expectations.

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We were told it's a vision that includes affordable housing, healthy neighborhoods, economic advancement, and a community working together to achieve at the highest level.

**VIDEO 2: [THE WHY](#)**

The vision is ... walks in the park and sunsets from your backyard ... it's housing that's available and affordable ... it's taking care of each other and respecting the use of the spaces we all share.

It's enjoying dinner and a show. Walking on the Centennial Trail and enjoying the Spokane river. It's short commutes and more time with loved ones.

This is how Spokane defines community. And others have been discovering those virtues in large numbers.

As we transition with the rest of the country through economic, workforce, housing, and mental health challenges and opportunities, we've met critical needs to emerge stronger as a community. An important next step is to reset negative self-perceptions and embrace expectations of support, accountability, and advancements that deliver peace of mind.

Homeownership is the largest builder of wealth for most of us. The financial equity that grows in the home is complemented by the social equity and sense of security that comes with being part of a neighborhood.

We're implementing solutions that provide greater housing accessibility and affordability.

Spokane has experienced two consecutive years of record demand for residential and total construction to add inventory and help people realize the dream of homeownership and for families to evolve their housing as they grow.

A City pilot has become a state and national model for multi-unit housing construction in traditional single-family neighborhoods to open new pathways to more housing and ownership options. Those include smaller accessory dwelling units that are keeping families together and attached townhomes that make entry in the market more affordable. These are big tools to meet the infill housing needs our comprehensive plan has promoted for more than two decades.

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Spokane also achieved a 20-year high for new multi-family units to create badly needed inventory.

For those experiencing housing insecurity, we've focused a tremendous amount of resources on stabilizing housing.

We brought together partnerships that opened and enhanced five facilities in our shelter system that meet specific needs and nearly doubled our capacity to move people toward permanent housing. We secured and distributed \$33 million dollars in grant funding to provide rental and utility assistance to keep people in their homes ... and we did it among the fastest in the state.

Building neighborhoods to maintain the characteristics that make them special while adding new amenities has been a top priority. That included expanded access to libraries through a partnership between the City and middle schools to make better use of taxpayer money and bring resources to under-served neighborhoods.

The opening of downtown's Central Library, a 21<sup>st</sup> century facility that includes media studios, a business lab, café, children's play area, and meeting and event space overlooking our beautiful Spokane Falls. New family attractions in Riverfront Park and improvements to neighborhood parks have added to Spokane's quality of life and reputation as a destination.

These community-defining efforts were built on trust ... only possible through partnerships ... and create opportunities for generations to come. They're foundational and fundamental to our re-emergence and revitalization.

It's how we move forward as a community to create a better life for our children and future generations.

### **VIDEO 3: [THE HOW](#)**

So, where do we go from here? More importantly, how do we get it done?

The past few years have taught us many lessons and given us a new launching point. The tests we've endured remind us that Spokane is unequivocally resilient. The results show us our best outcomes come are realized when we work together.

The progress has directed a clear path forward in three critical areas.

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First, we're establishing and reinforcing a mindset that prioritizes community wellness and wellbeing.

Our mental health has been shaken. Over and over again, community members express fatigue, frustration, and loss of patience. We can all point to examples in stores and restaurants, at work, even within our own families where behavior has been altered. The uncertainty we experience has come at a deep cost that has people craving stability instead of constant change.

Moving forward we must embrace compromise and demonstrate understanding. We have to appreciate good as we work to get to great.

And that starts with our youth. My Mental Health Task Force of community professionals is addressing the needs of our youth who've been most impacted by the events of the past couple of years.

We must set the example with our own behavior and build youth the supports that will make them successful for the future.

Our partner experts on the Task Force tell us that mental health has a 30-percent statewide vacancy rate, with nearly one-third of employees leaving the profession every year. The result is that nearly three-quarters of organizations statewide are cutting programs or reducing access at a time when we need every single resource and much more.

Spokane, they tell us, mirrors that data.

Our work as a task force includes adding staffing and space resources to make help more accessible to youth in crisis. We are partnered as advocates at the state and federal level for additional reimbursement and funding to ensure service providers can maintain and grow necessary resources. And, we're bringing greater awareness to the tools and supports already in place to create more engagement points and remove the stigma of reaching out for help.

Prioritizing community health and wellbeing also includes making better use of organizational and community resources.

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Looking inside our city organization, we've re-established the Community Safety Initiative work group to improve our criminal justice system. We're evaluating how the system can work better to deliver accountability and supports to improve public safety.

This involves leveraging the best of therapeutic and traditional courts, pre- and post-conviction services, and law enforcement and community programs to evolve our model. The ultimate outcome is a reduction in repeat offenses and overall crime rates, and accountability to the victim and our community.

Looking upstream, we need to catch people before they enter the system by creating new opportunities for people to build financial security, create employment options, and advance their skillsets and careers. We're looking for more partnerships like our collaboration with the Small Business Administration and AHANA on a program to provide resources for multi-ethnic small business owners.

These are the types of programs that lift community up and infuse hope into dreams.

Finally, we looked back and looked around to look forward. Our experience tells us that the best times in our city's history share a few key ingredients ... big ideas that turn challenges into opportunities ... critical community partnerships that work effectively across perceived boundaries ... and the will to get it done.

The City, with its partners and collaborators, neighbors and neighborhoods, stakeholders and volunteers, are working on three big ideas that will fundamentally change how we move our community forward.

In many ways, Expo '74 put Spokane on the map. It transformed industry, established a clear regional centerpiece we all feel ownership of, and solidified our city's place in the region.

That foundational point in Spokane's history is about to reach a major milestone.

In the nearly 50 years since Expo, Riverfront Park has grown and matured into a major regional attraction that continues to draw visitors, conventions, concerts, celebrations, and sporting and community events.

Numerous stakeholders have partnered around an Expo Plus-50 celebration that returns the focus to the major investments in regional attractions downtown. It connects an exciting arts

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and entertainment district to thriving restaurants, shopping, and hospitality with the river and park in the middle of it all.

That celebration will come together over the next year as work finishes on the new stadium, major events continue to fill up the Podium and the Spokane Arena, the Civic Theatre hosts its full schedule of performances, and Riverfront Park grows as an outdoor venue.

The region is also coming together to more effectively and collaboratively address homelessness. The City is one of several voices in a conversation about a regional collaborative that can fundamentally change how we provide meaningful services that move people into housing faster, more efficiently, and with greater success.

That conversation, with the help of a consultant, will involve everyone who has a part in visioning, funding, supporting, assisting, moving, and connecting people to services and housing. We've spoken extensively with Spokane Valley and Spokane County about spending the next few months discussing what a longer, more formalized engagement might look like.

We're happy to share that the private and nonprofit community have already stepped forward in support.

Finally, we're working closely with our community partners on a regional broadband effort to bring new investment to connect areas with the greatest economic and educational potential for growth. It's a generational opportunity to build greater technology equity and economic advancement for generations to come.

Spokane has so much going for it and we're taking the steps ... together ... to embrace the opportunities before us and rise from our new launch point.

Community is about more than any one of us, it's about all of us.

The lessons we learned over the past few years that our Browne's Addition neighbors so eloquently captured reminded us of that. The words we heard today from community members confirm it.

Our challenge today, as a region, is to embrace the progress, grow with the opportunities, and thrive through the power of partnership.

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