

City of Spokane Northeast Spokane Focus Group Summary

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Overview

The City of Spokane is planning for climate change with a commitment to climate justice. Climate justice recognizes that the changing climate disproportionately harms certain populations and prioritizes the health and safety of those most at risk. The City developed a climate vulnerability index (CVI), which identifies the places, people, and infrastructure in the City of Spokane that may be more vulnerable to climate hazards. The CVI identified the Northeast Spokane neighborhood as a 'hot spot' of climate vulnerability in Spokane.

To inform the Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment, the City of Spokane aimed to hear directly from Northeast Spokane residents. Focus groups provide an opportunity to collect in-depth feedback from groups within the community that may be underrepresented in other public engagement opportunities and engage in more targeted discussions.

The City of Spokane hosted a Northeast Spokane focus group with 17 residents from the Northeast Spokane neighborhood. Participants shared their lived experiences and concerns, offered ideas for reducing emissions and building a more resilient Spokane, and discussed barriers to participating in climate action. Insights from this focus group informed the development of the Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment. The key takeaways and notes below have been anonymized and synthesized.

Date & Time	Saturday, May 3 10:00 – 11:30AM
Location	Northeast Community Center, LL-Main Room (4001 N Cook St, Spokane, WA 99207)
# of Participants	15
City and Consulting Attendees	KayCee Downey, facilitator, City of Spokane Maren Murphy, note taker, City of Spokane Logan Callen, note taker, City of Spokane

Objectives

- Collect in-depth feedback from groups within the community that may be underrepresented in other public engagement opportunities and those who will face disproportionate impacts from climate hazards (e.g. overburdened communities and vulnerable populations).
- Identify equity considerations/unintended consequences of implementing actions within the Climate Element (e.g., who benefits? Who is burdened? How can the disproportionate impacts be addressed?).
- Identify top priorities and key considerations of climate resilience policies.

Key Takeaways

- Community connection and support is seen as a way to increase community resiliency.
- Poor air quality is a major concern, especially for vulnerable populations.
- Lack of shade and extreme heat reduce access to services (e.g. transit) and outdoor spaces.
- Financial constraints prevent residents from taking protective climate actions.
- There's a strong desire for practical, community-based climate education.
- Public transit is underutilized due to stigma and infrastructure gaps.
- Development is often seen as conflicting with environmental protection. Policies should align development with environmental goals, like preserving trees.
- Participants support shared solutions like gardens, composting, and mutual aid.
- Climate efforts must center equity and accessibility to be successful.

Discussion Questions

1. What climate impacts are you concerned about in Northeast Spokane? Which climate impact worries you the most?
 - Poor air quality impacts families indoors and outdoors, especially for disabled households.
 - Seniors are affected by heat and smoke; many lack purifiers or fans.
 - Winter air quality restrictions on fireplaces make it harder to stay warm. Additionally, as temperatures start to dip in the fall, but wildfire smoke lingers, residents don't want to add more smoke to their homes.
 - Water shortages are a concern, especially with population growth and business demands.
 - Conflicting messaging around planting trees vs. conserving water creates confusion.
 - Tree removal due to development reduces canopy and increases temperatures.
 - Heat and smoke limit outdoor activity, especially for people with health conditions.
 - Delayed seasons affect plant life and cause emotional distress.
 - Ice and cold weather create safety risks and worsen health issues like arthritis.

- Increased food waste in schools, even in areas with food insecurity.
 - Development needs are seen to be prioritized over environmental health and preservation of natural areas.
 - High heating and cooling costs are a concern, especially for vulnerable households.
2. What specific places, people, or systems in Northeast Spokane do you think will be most affected by climate change? Are there particular neighborhood challenges that make the impacts worse?
- Elderly and disabled residents are especially vulnerable to climate impacts.
 - Residents with mobility issues face challenges accessing cool or clean-air spaces.
 - Housing shortages and unaffordable starter homes increase vulnerability.
 - Loss of biodiversity and native vegetation harms ecosystems.
 - Public transit lacks shaded bus stops and does not take into account difficult terrain, such as hills, that separates some transit lines within the area.
 - Transit is stigmatized and perceived as unsafe, especially for women and youth who fear harassment.
 - Parks in Northeast Spokane often lack shaded or usable equipment during heatwaves.
 - Focus on central parks like Riverfront leaves out other neighborhoods.
 - Community members feel disempowered and disconnected from decision-making.
3. What ideas do you have for ways Spokane can reduce emissions and become more resilient to climate change? What changes would you like to see in your neighborhood or city?
- Focus on reuse or redevelopment of existing properties before clear-cutting areas for new development.
 - Require developers to plant and maintain trees or contribute to reforestation efforts.
 - Provide incentives for adaptive, environmentally friendly development.
 - Expand and improve bus shelters to include shade, seating, and safety features.
 - Partner with businesses to maintain and enhance local bus stops.
 - When planning biking infrastructure, seek feedback from and meet the needs of all bikers, not just hobbyists or biking enthusiasts.
 - Distribute air purifiers and fans to low-income and health-sensitive residents.
 - Increase community gardening and composting programs.
 - Create neighborhood resource boards to share tools, information, and support.
 - Prioritize practical education over promotional materials in climate programs.
 - Improve environmental education in schools and community centers.
 - Protect and enhance parks with shade and natural features like daylighted creeks.
 - Encourage communal living to centralize climate resources and reduce costs.

4. What other benefits of climate planning are most important to you? For example, making Spokane more walkable, improving air quality, creating green jobs for young people, or making transportation more accessible.
- Reclaim Spokane's identity as an environmentally conscious community which was developed through Expo '74.
 - Build a shared vision around sustainability and livability.
 - Improve transit infrastructure, increase feelings of safety, and reduce stigma around bus use.
 - Increase shade in neighborhoods to support walkability and comfort.
 - Expand environmental education and outreach.
 - Improve safety at trailheads and reduce property crime.
 - Support greater community connection and collaboration.
5. What barriers exist for NE Spokane community members to take climate action?
- Extreme heat and lack of shade make it hard to walk, bike, or wait for transit.
 - Formal meetings and engagement opportunities are often inaccessible due to the time required and format.
 - Many feel their input is ignored or dismissed by officials.
 - Lack of money for air purifiers, fans, or recycling/compost services.
 - People are overwhelmed and short on time for additional responsibilities.
 - Limited awareness of programs and opportunities for engagement.
 - Cultural narratives and political division stall collective climate action.
 - Many community members feel disempowered or believe someone else will act first.
6. How could Spokane better support Northeast Spokane residents in taking climate action?
- Host informal, local events in parks or other accessible community spaces.
 - Establish community bulletin boards in parks and community centers for the community to learn about City updates and programs but also to share their own opportunities and needs.
 - Provide resources and education on food waste, recycling, and composting.
 - Support pilot programs, such as food waste reduction, in public facilities, schools, and community centers.
 - Partner with farmers markets and other community gathering spaces.
 - Design climate programs with equity and ease of access in mind.
 - Offer incentives for participation and positive environmental behavior.
 - Include waste audits and environmental education in schools and neighborhood centers.
 - Improve park infrastructure with more shade and welcoming gathering spaces.
 - Encourage neighbor-to-neighbor support and resource-sharing.
 - Connect interested residents to climate action opportunities and programs.