

# ReFIVE

*a community plan for fifth avenue*

## Baseline Conditions

SEPTEMBER 2025 | PREPARED BY SEVA WORKSHOP FOR THE CITY OF SPOKANE

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## Introduction

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## Project Overview

This baseline conditions report underpins a community planning effort for the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community, an area within the broader East Central neighborhood of Spokane. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor is a 27-block thoroughfare parallel to the I-90 freeway, about 1.75 miles long. The core study area for the Community Plan consists of Spokane's Census Tract 30, bordered by Liberty Park to the West, S Thor St. to the East, the I-90 corridor to the North, and the Ben Burr trail to the South. The study area also includes the northern segment of Census Tract 29, as this area contains Frances L. N. Scott Elementary School which offers important considerations for many components of the Plan.

**Note:** Throughout this report, use of the phrase “5<sup>th</sup> Avenue” refers to the entire 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue study area, unless otherwise specified when referring specifically to the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor thoroughway.

Figure 1 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Study Area



Sources: Seva Workshop 2025; Leah Murphy

## NEIGHBORHOOD FORMATION AND HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

In the late 1800s, the expanding industries of forestry, mining, railroad, and agriculture brought an influx of new residents to Spokane and spurred the city's urbanization. **From 1880 to 1900, the population of the Spokane metropolitan area burgeoned from 350 to 36,848 residents.**<sup>1</sup> The East Central Neighborhood emerged as a notable residential district during this period of growth for its proximity to industry jobs, housing primarily immigrant and working-class families, including a large Italian community.

In urban areas nationwide, discriminatory housing policies beginning in the early 1900s reinforced racial segregation and extracted wealth and resources from families and neighborhoods of color. The federal Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) established "redlining" maps that delineated neighborhoods of color as ineligible for mortgage lending. As one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Spokane at the time, East Central was a redlined community. The implementation of redlining across Spokane also made it difficult for residents of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area to become homeowners. Black residents, people of color, and immigrant families were steered into the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor and surrounding areas for decades, and this area became a diverse hub and the heart of Black culture for Spokane.

In addition to redlining, developers used racially restrictive covenants to build all-white neighborhoods. This practice was particularly active in Spokane during the 1920s through the 1950s. Although the 1968 Fair Housing Act banned discrimination on the basis of race, such unenforceable legal language still appears in many property documents today. Covenants were most common in the northwest part of Spokane, on the South Hill, Airway Heights, and in the Spokane Valley. Examples of language from these covenants include: "None of said lots shall be transferred to or occupied by other than persons of the Caucasian race" and "No persons of any race, other than the white race, shall use or occupy any building upon these premises, except as a domestic servant domiciled with owner or tenant".<sup>2</sup> Discriminatory housing practices directly restricted the agency of Black families to choose where in the city to live, as well as their ability to become homeowners.

Housing discrimination was paired with other forms of racism in this area, such as selective disinvestment in neighborhood infrastructure, inequitable access to higher education, workplace discrimination, and over-policing of neighborhoods of color, among others, and by the 1950s, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area had become one of the poorest in Spokane.<sup>3,4</sup>

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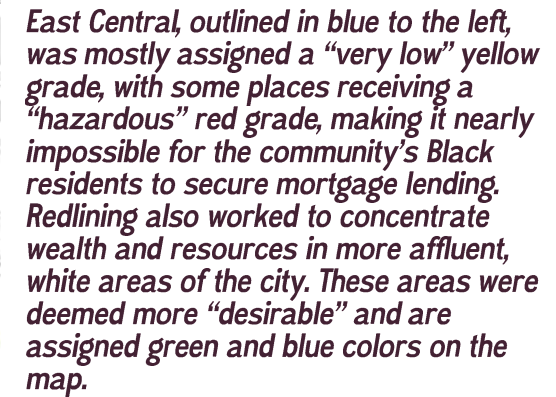
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.historicspokane.org/wp-content/uploads/EC-Historic-and-Cultural-Context-Combined-2023.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/f6b7ea49220b4089a9bd26d32fe6c1c3/#data\\_s=id%3AdataSource\\_11-19148fa12a4-layer-8%3A158038](https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/f6b7ea49220b4089a9bd26d32fe6c1c3/#data_s=id%3AdataSource_11-19148fa12a4-layer-8%3A158038)

<sup>3</sup> <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/projects/fifth-avenue-plan/epa-rethinking-highways-summary.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://ncrc.org/decades-of-disinvestment/>





SEVA WORKSHOP

## A TIMELINE OF FREEWAY DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED INTERVENTIONS

### 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue WSDOT Intervention Timeline:

- 1950: Planning for the Interstate 90 (I-90) freeway through Spokane is underway
- 1953: The State acquires ownership of the freeway right-of-way land
- 1956: Federal Highway Act is passed
- Late 1950s: Community advocacy for an alternate freeway route builds momentum in East Central, becoming a core issue in local elections
- 1958: Early plans for the North Spokane Corridor (I-395) released; All properties purchased for I-90 through eminent domain have been leveled
- 1958-1971: Construction begins and sections of the I-90 freeway open
- 1970: The Spokane Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (SMATS) lays plans to route I-395 through East Central, north of I-90
- *Many years of public opposition delayed I-395 construction*
- 1985: Spokane Regional Council and WSDOT revisit I-395 plans
- 1997: WSDOT North Spokane Freeway Final Environmental Impact Statement published
- 2001-ongoing: Right-of-way for I-395 purchased and construction begins
- 2019: WSDOT Noise Report US 395 North Spokane Corridor Project published
- 2022: Senate Bill 5853 grants WSDOT ability to lease land along US 395 and I-90 to impacted local community
- 2023: Funding for design of a Liberty Park land bridge included in state budget
- 2023: Spokane Transit Authority's LEIA Program for the Reconnecting Communities Grant proposes pedestrian accessibility improvements along 5<sup>th</sup> Ave

Sources: <https://wsdotblog.blogspot.com/2023/11/north-spokane-corridor.html>; <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2018/jun/29/north-spokane-corridor-a-harsh-reality-for-home-ow/>; <https://www.historicspokane.org/wp-content/uploads/EC-Historic-and-Cultural-Context-Combined-2023.pdf>

The emergent economic disparities along racial lines, coupled with depreciated property values following the decline of core industries after World War I, made East Central a target for federal highway expansion within Spokane. Three different routes were proposed for the development of the I-90 highway, and the historic East Central neighborhood was ultimately selected as the site for construction.<sup>5</sup> This decision mirrors a broader national trend, where, across the country, the neighborhoods that were uprooted and destroyed to make way for interstate transit in the early 1950s were overwhelmingly and disproportionately low-income and communities of color.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://spokanehistorical.org/items/show/468?tour=17&index=0#>

The I-90 highway was constructed and routed through East Central in the mid-1950s, bringing significant social, economic, and health burdens to the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community. Across East Central, over a thousand homes were demolished by the construction process, with the government providing insufficient pathways to relocation and homeownership for displaced residents. I-90 ultimately bisected the neighborhood laterally with a surface-level freeway between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues, isolating the southern area – where the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor is located today – from the preexisting Sprague business district to the north. With traffic now redirected past 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, most long-standing local businesses south of I-90 ultimately closed. Liberty Park, a cherished 21-acre community greenspace, was carved up and re-shaped, and diminished to 2 acres to make way for the highway, requiring additional home demolition.<sup>6</sup> I-90 was also sited less than 500 feet from Frances Scott Elementary School, which was built in 1908 and existed for over 50 years before freeway construction.

While the state paid homeowners through eminent domain “just compensation” requirements, many longstanding residents were insufficiently reimbursed and unable to repurchase in other areas of Spokane because of higher prices elsewhere and racially restrictive covenants.<sup>7</sup> The displacement of thousands of residents from Spokane’s East Central neighborhood not only stripped valuable investments from what was once a vibrant area but also intensified spatial, racial, and socioeconomic disparities throughout the city.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://spokanehistorical.org/items/show/114>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.historicspokane.org/wp-content/uploads/EC-Historic-and-Cultural-Context-Combined-2023.pdf>



**Figure 3**      **Photograph of Liberty Park Wading Pool (1909)**



*Liberty Park was the oldest city park in Spokane at the time of highway construction. The 21-acre park was one of the city's most popular recreational attractions and a great source of pride and natural beauty for the East Central community. This wading pool has been buried beneath the I-90 corridor.*

Source: Spokane Historical Society, <https://spokanehistorical.org/files/show/3279>

In the face of these destructive and divisive actions, East Central residents and community members advocated for their neighborhood. Groups like the East Side Taxpayer Club advocated for a freeway route that would not divide the neighborhood, and a number of grassroots community organizations took shape in the decades following the freeway construction: the League of Women for Community Action, which founded the Southeast Day Care Center and the East Central Community Center in 1979; the East Central Community Organization; and the Liberty Park Improvement Club—all laying the foundation for the ongoing advocacy of community leaders and organizations today.<sup>8</sup>

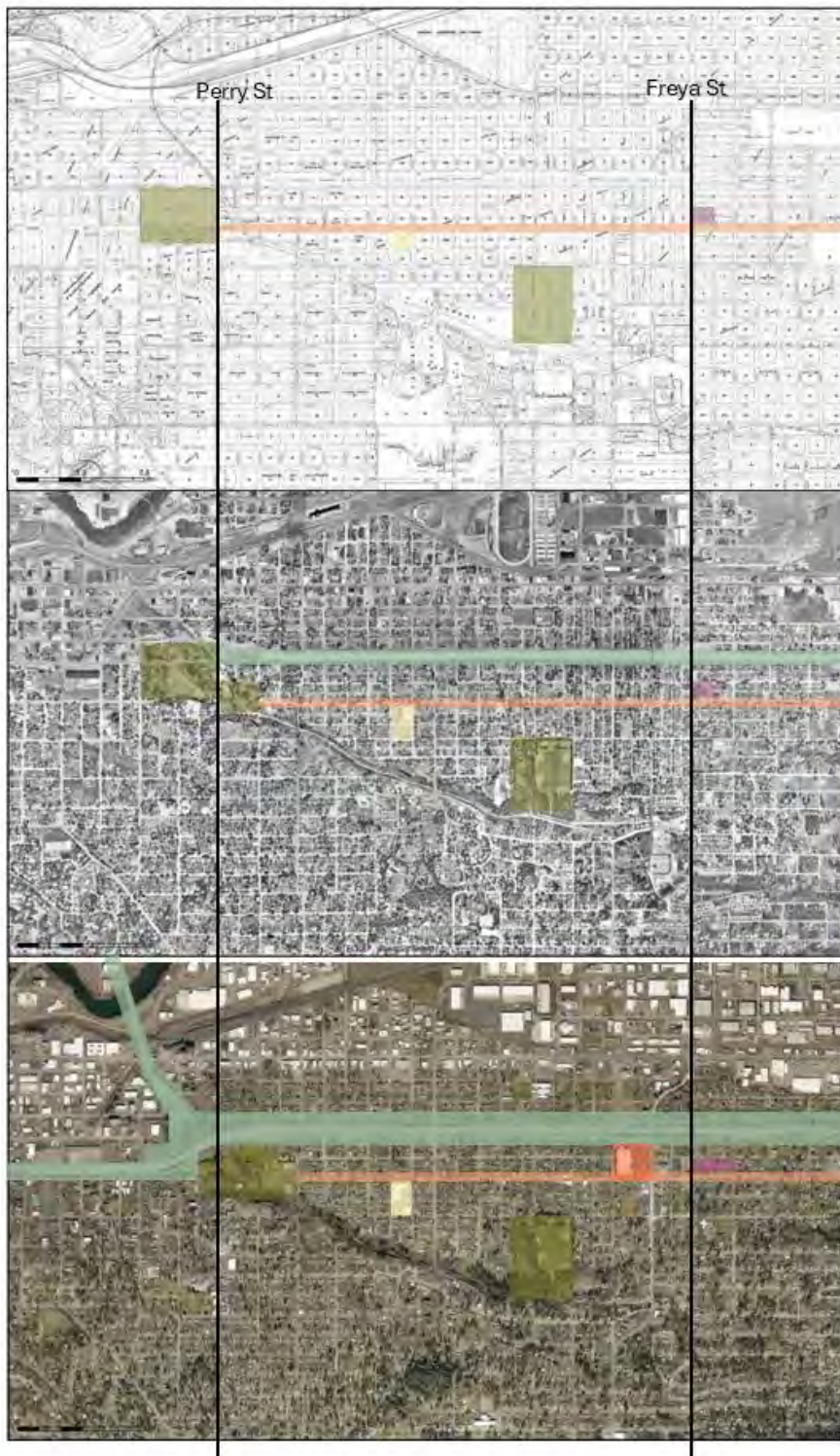
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<sup>8</sup> <https://properties.historicspokane.org/property/?PropertyID=2196>



The development of the US 395 North Spokane Corridor, originally conceived in the 1940s and now scheduled for completion after 2030, will intersect with I-90 in East Central. This once again has displaced hundreds of residents to the north and south of I-90, reduced what limited commercial parcels existed, and will locate freeway infrastructure even closer to Frances Scott Elementary School and newer public facilities like the Liberty Park Library (2021)—exacerbating the already deep historical wounds of people who live and work in this community.

Figure 4 Aerial Imagery of Study Area: 1920s, 1958, and 2024



Plat map of East Central, prior to I-90. Liberty Park, Underhill Park, the Edison School, Sheridan elementary, and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue identified.

Aerial photograph of East Central, 1958. Liberty Park, Underhill Park, Edison School, Sheridan elementary, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and I-90 highway is under construction. Over 1,000 homes demolished for the highway.

Aerial photograph of East Central, 2024. Liberty Park, Underhill Park, Fred Meyer, MLK Community Center/ police precinct/ daycare, Frances Scott elementary, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and I-90 highway with 395 N corridor identified. At least 400 additional homes demolished south of I-90 adjacent to the highway.

Sources: City of Spokane, Plat Maps compilation from early 1900s and aerial images from 1958 and 2024; Seva Workshop 2025

## Priorities for the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Community Plan

Following decades of disinvestment, the City of Spokane Department of Planning facilitated the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Initiative through various phases in 2016–2019. Through co-creation, residents have advocated for neighborhood improvements that adequately address the inequitable harm caused by redlining and the construction of the highway. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Initiative Community Strategy was adopted by City Council in 2021 through collaborative efforts between neighborhood residents, businesses and organizations, and the City of Spokane with the goal of producing a unified vision for community improvements and programming. Through stakeholder meetings and community forums, a set of strategic priority areas emerged.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, community organizations and the City have documented the experiences and priorities of residents of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community. Notably, in 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) *Rethinking Highways for Healthy Communities* planning assistance program partnered with the Carl Maxey Center, Take Up the Cause, the MLK Jr Family Outreach Center, and the City of Spokane to build a community-defined vision for restoration of the surplus highway land from the US 395 freeway project in East Central.<sup>10</sup> This program provided tailored planning assistance to communities burdened by transportation investments that have caused persistent environmental, health, and economic challenges. The engagement led by this partnership produced an action plan that outlines community priorities for redevelopment and avenues for further research.

The priorities identified across these engagement efforts were reinforced during interviews and engagement with community members who live, work, and visit 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and inform the grounding focus areas of the research and recommendations for the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Community Plan:

- **Neighborhood Walkability and Connectivity**

- Long-standing 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community members want to improve the walkability of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor and the surrounding neighborhood to improve pedestrian safety, enhance the quality of life for residents, and promote local business. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor already supports an array of cherished community-based assets and services, and as efforts build to further develop a commercial center in this neighborhood, ensuring its streets are safe and inviting for pedestrians will be important to supporting sustained growth.
- The construction of I-90 physically isolated the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor from surrounding commercial centers and other areas of Spokane, and the US 395 project is creating further impacts. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community members describe a vision for improved connectivity to more meaningfully integrate the neighborhood with the larger city. In addition to infrastructure improvements that work to physically advance connectivity, programmatic efforts to more widely promote 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue’s assets and amplify the neighborhood’s story and identity are further community-defined goals to promote connectivity.

- **Housing Affordability and Homeownership**

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<sup>9</sup> <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/projects/5th-avenue-initiative/5th-avenue-initiative-community-strategy-march-2021.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/projects/fifth-avenue-plan/epa-rethinking-highways-summary.pdf>

- With a large concentration of cost-burdened households in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood, housing affordability is a vital priority among residents. Community members emphasize a vision for affordable housing that includes programmatic and development efforts and sustains homeownership among existing members of the community as well as expands the accessibility of homeownership for first-time buyers.
- **Community Identity and Cultural Preservation**
  - A key priority of existing residents is to define and strengthen the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community identity as both unique and a part of the East Central neighborhood. The diverse community holds deeply valued history and culture, and efforts are needed to preserve and honor this history, especially in the face of past erasures. Cultural heritage was central to discussions about identity in the 5th Avenue community, serving as a powerful tool for building personal and collective identity, fostering belonging, and preserving historical continuity. The East Central neighborhood and the core of Black-owned businesses on 5th Avenue are described as "home" and a place of safety and connection for Black community members. With changing demographics, it is also important to emphasize the diverse and rich heritage of 5th Avenue, including the historic African American community and the emerging Asian, Marshallese and Hispanic/Latinx communities. As part of the discussion around identity, there is strong concern over gentrification that could change the fabric of the neighborhood and displace current residents.
- **Community Wealth Building**
  - 5th Avenue community members describe a vision for fostering a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable local economy by recognizing and nurturing existing and new community assets, such as small businesses, non-profits, and cultural organizations. Given the trauma of displacement endured across the neighborhood, the pursuit of anti-displacement strategies are essential across efforts to promote affordable housing, support local business, and enhance public spaces. There is much concern on behalf of existing residents about gentrification as improvements are introduced in the neighborhood: efforts to revitalize the built environment of the neighborhood must guarantee existing residents will be the lasting beneficiaries of these improvements.
- **Restoration and Revitalization of the Land**
  - The 5th Avenue community expresses the sentiment that the social, economic, and public health legacies of redlining and historic highway construction have yet to be sufficiently remediated through investments in the built environment. The persistent proximity of the I-90 corridor to residents of East Central also introduces environmental health concerns related to air and noise pollution. Ensuring that the health and well-being of residents of the 5th Avenue neighborhood are protected throughout revitalization efforts is essential to remedy the decades of environmental injustices endured by the community from historic highway construction.

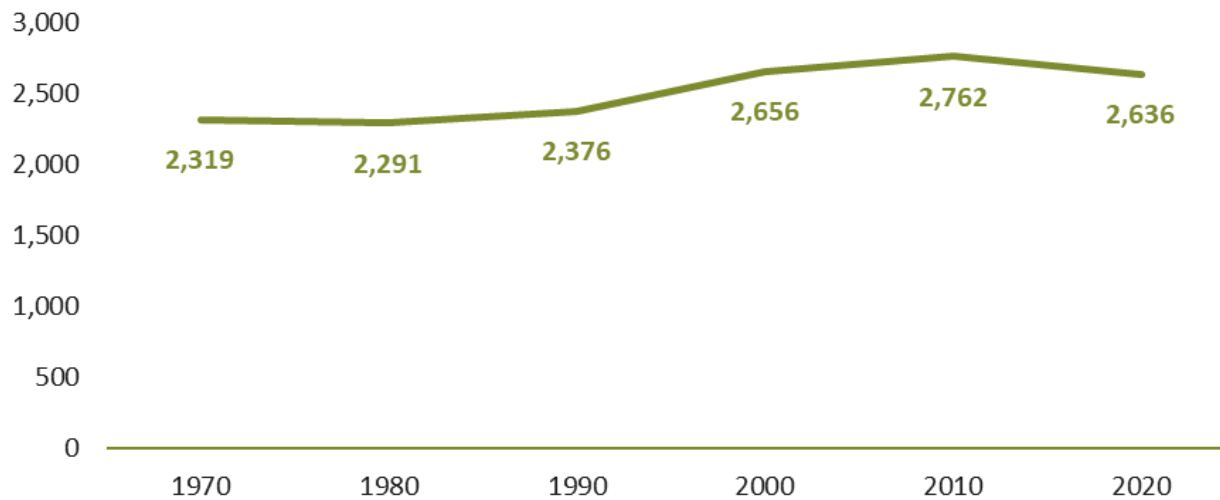
## Community Profile

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## Population Size and Demographics

The data presented in this section focuses on Census Tract 30, which comprises most of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue study area and the heart of the corridor. This area is identified on the map in Figure 6. The area is home to about 2,600 residents (2023).<sup>11</sup> The total population of this area has remained relatively steady over the last decade, though there have been demographic and socioeconomic shifts in the population mix over time.

Figure 5 Total Population of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Area from 1970 to 2020

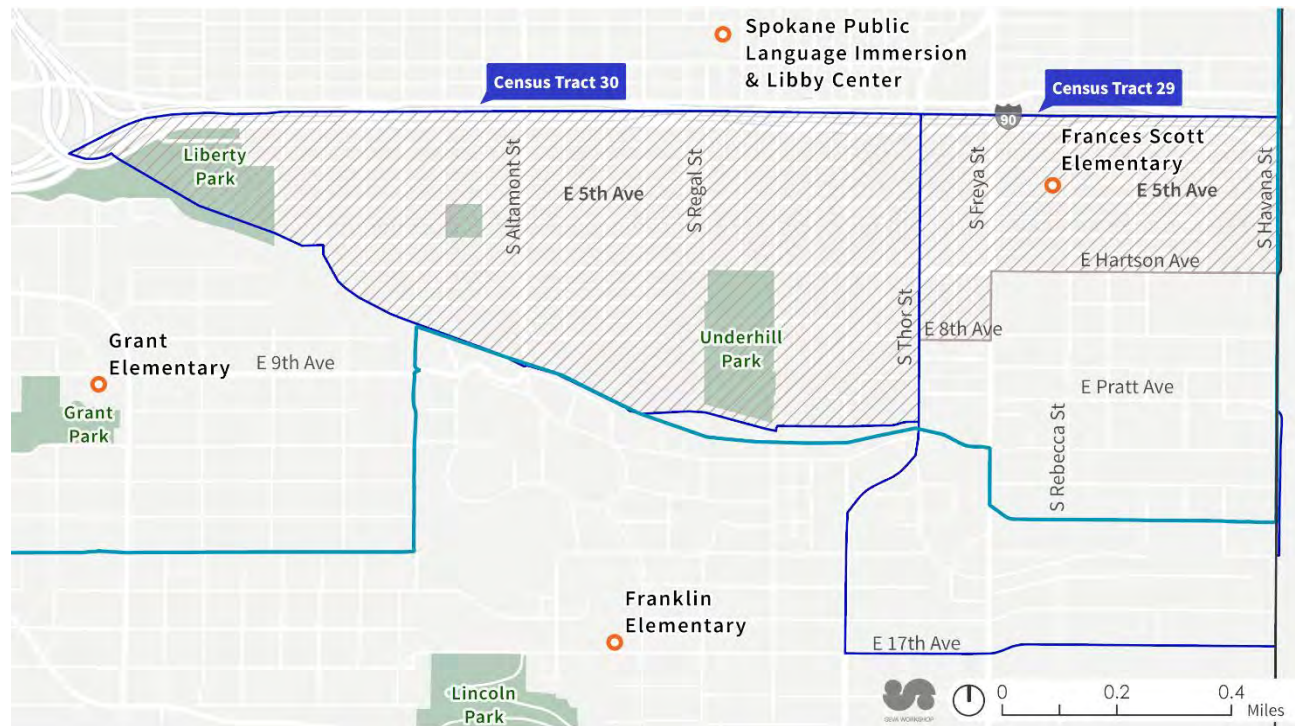


Source: US Decennial Census, 1970-2020; Seva Workshop 2025.

<sup>11</sup> 5-year ACS estimate, 2019-2023



**Figure 6 Study Area with Census Tract Boundaries**



### Spokane 5th Avenue Community Plan

- Study Area Tracts
- 5th Avenue Study Area
- Public Schools
- Parks
- East Central Neighborhood
- Spokane City Limits



Source: Seva Workshop 2025.

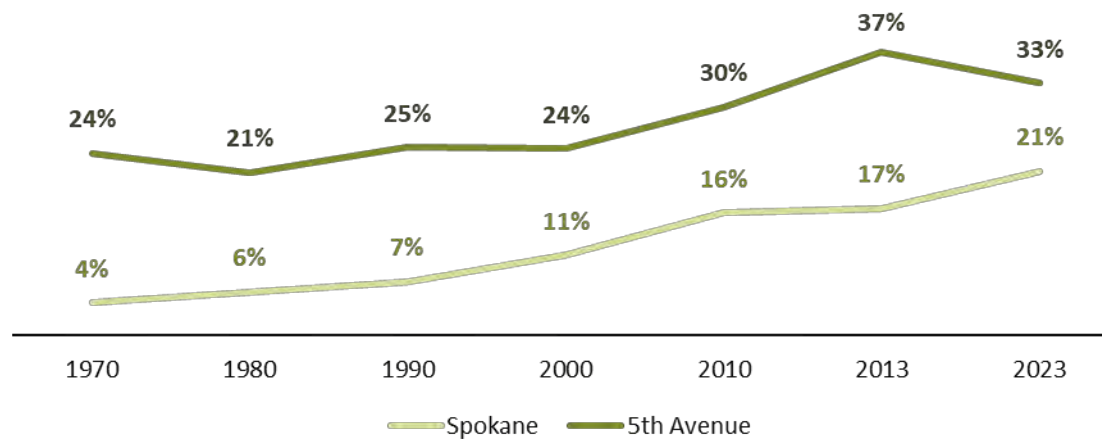
## COMMUNITY CHANGE OVER TIME

### *5<sup>th</sup> Avenue as the Heart of Spokane's Black Community*

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area and East Central Neighborhood are longstanding hubs of racial diversity in Spokane and represented an especially strong Black cultural center for the city. Today, 33% of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue's residents identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC), which is 50% higher than the citywide rate of 21%. In 1970, one in five 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community members was Black (20%), and an additional four percent of the community was BIPOC of other identities, at a time when the citywide BIPOC population was only at four percent. See Figure 7 and Figure 9. This concentration of Black Spokanites can largely be attributed to the nationally practiced procedures of housing discrimination discussed in the previous chapter.

While 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is the historic heart of Black culture in Spokane, today's Black community is much more dispersed across the city. The maps in Figure 8 show the geographic concentration of Spokane's Black residents over time. In 1970, redlining impacts are clear and East Central was home to almost all of this community. In 2023, while 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue remains important as a cultural anchor, these residents live in many more neighborhoods across the city. The graph in Figure 9 also captures this decline, from 20% to four percent. This geographic spread for a relatively small community makes it all the more important to maintain the presence of cultural centers and gathering spaces that can unite individuals and families, share an important story from Spokane's history, and connect new generations of Spokanites with the legacy of the spaces they live, work, and play.

**Figure 7** Percent BIPOC Populations of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the City of Spokane, 1970 to 2023

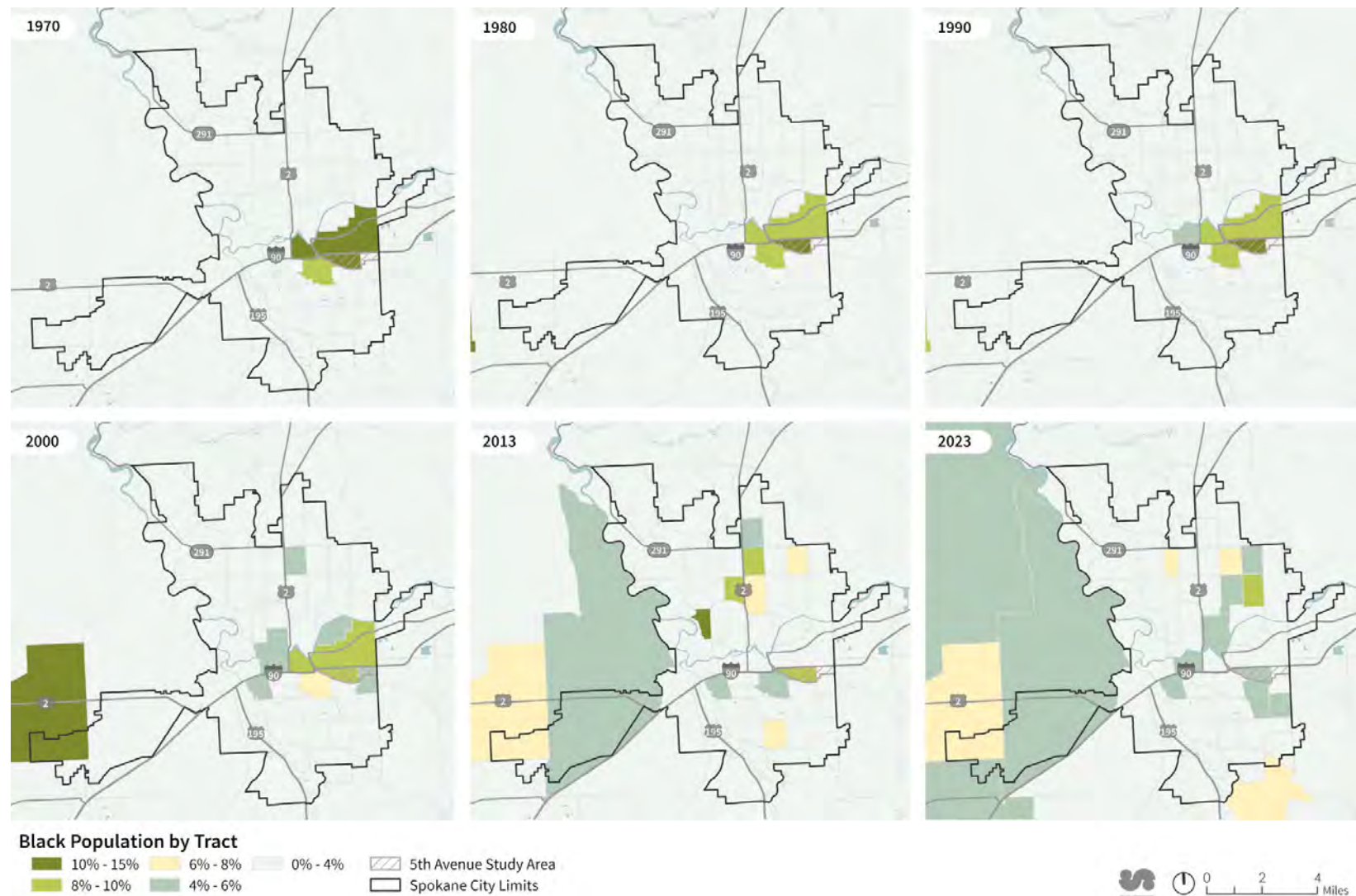


*Note: The Census survey has changed its race and ethnicity categories for selection over time. Some of the increase in BIPOC population count for more recent years could be attributed to a wider selection of options to choose from. Read more about this here: [https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/race/MREAD\\_1790\\_2010.html](https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/race/MREAD_1790_2010.html)*

Sources: US Decennial Census, 1970-2010, compiled by Brown University Diversity and Disparities Project; ACS 5-year estimates for 2013 and 2023; Seva Workshop, 2025

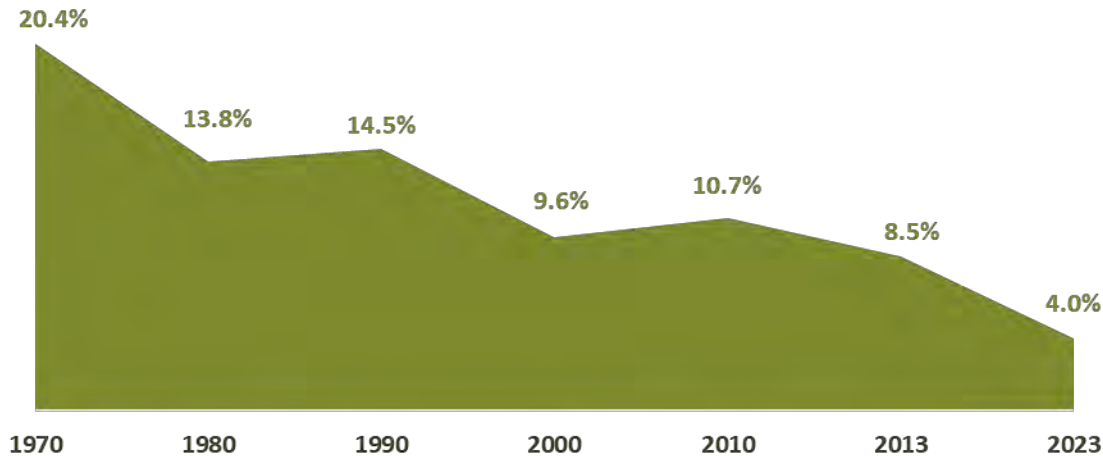


**Figure 8** Map series depicting the movement and dispersion of Spokane's Black population, 1970 to 2023



Sources: Decennial Census Data 1970-2000 and American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2013-2023), compiled by Brown University Diversity and Disparities Project, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2025

**Figure 9**      Percent Black population of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood from 1970 to 2023



*Sources: Decennial Census Data 1970-2000 and American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2013-2023), compiled by Brown University Diversity and Disparities Project, 2024; ACS 5-year estimates 2013 & 2023; Seva Workshop, 2025.*

### ***Diversity and Demographic Change in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue***

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area continues to represent one of Spokane’s most ethnically and racially diverse communities, although community demographics are shifting.** Over the past decade, there has been a notable increase in the community’s white population (63% to 67%), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander population (0.3% to 3%), and Asian population (1% to 4%). Corresponding declines are observed in the Hispanic population (19% to 14%) and Black population (9% to 4%). See . In 2023, 19% of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue residents reported speaking languages other than English at home, compared to 8% across Spokane as a whole, illustrating the ethnic diversity of the neighborhood.<sup>12</sup> Over the past five years, language data shows an increased presence of households speaking Russian, Polish, or Slavic; Other Indo-European languages, and Other Asian and Pacific Islander languages.

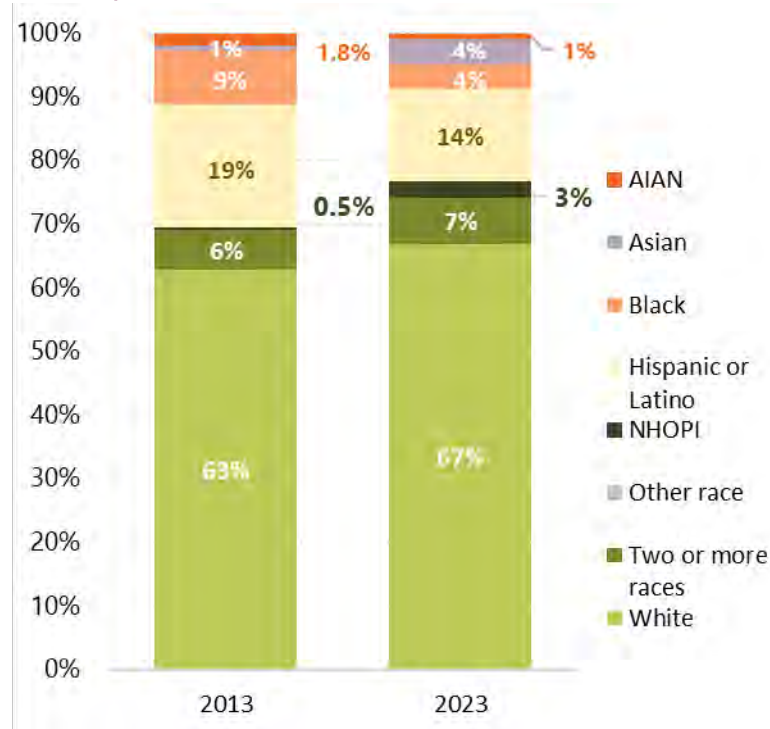
**The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area population is trending older.** Over the past decade, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community has seen growth in the size of its population aged in their 30s as well as their 70s, while shrinking in proportion of children and youth, adults in their 20s, and adults in their 50s. See Figure 11. This suggests that the newer residents are trending toward older adults who may be retired and younger adults without children.

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<sup>12</sup> ACS 5-year estimates, 2023

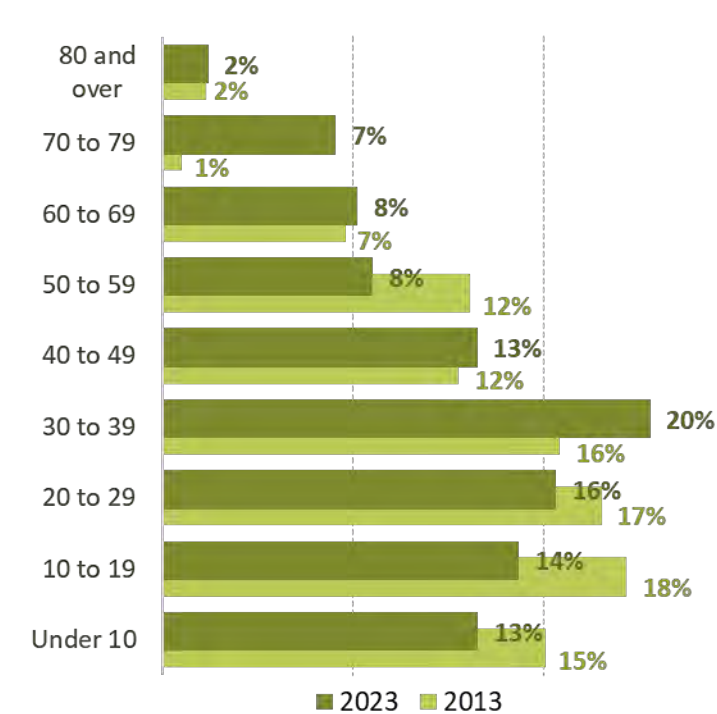
In 2023, the median household income for all residents of the 5th Avenue area was \$53,686: 18% lower than the Spokane median. See Figure 12. Over one-third of 5th Avenue households made less than \$35,000/year, underscoring the persistence of low-income households that comprise this neighborhood. Nonetheless, the median household income has almost doubled within the 5th Avenue area from 2013 to 2023 (from \$23,938 to \$53,686) and the disparity gap from the citywide median shrunk from 43% to 18%. This change, along with the other demographic shifts observed and described above, could be signals of displacement and gentrification risk. See Figure 13.

**Figure 10 Population in 5th Avenue by Race and Ethnicity, 2013 and 2023**



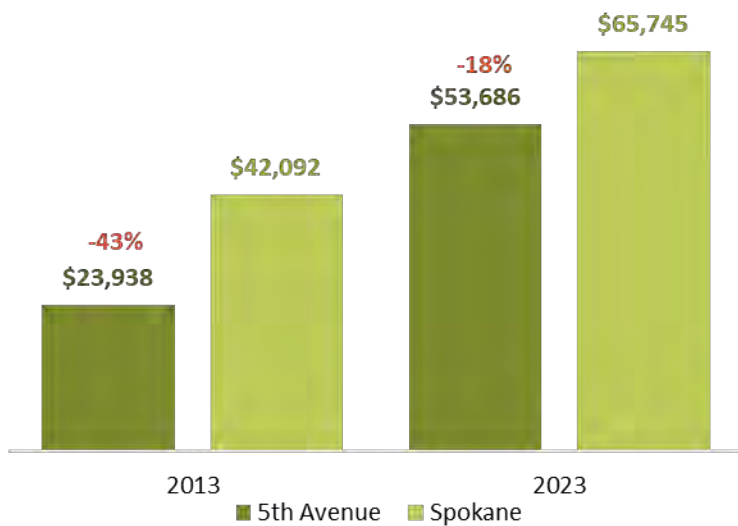
Sources: ACS 5-year estimates, 2013 & 2023; Seva Workshop, 2025

**Figure 11 Population in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue by Age, 2013 and 2023**



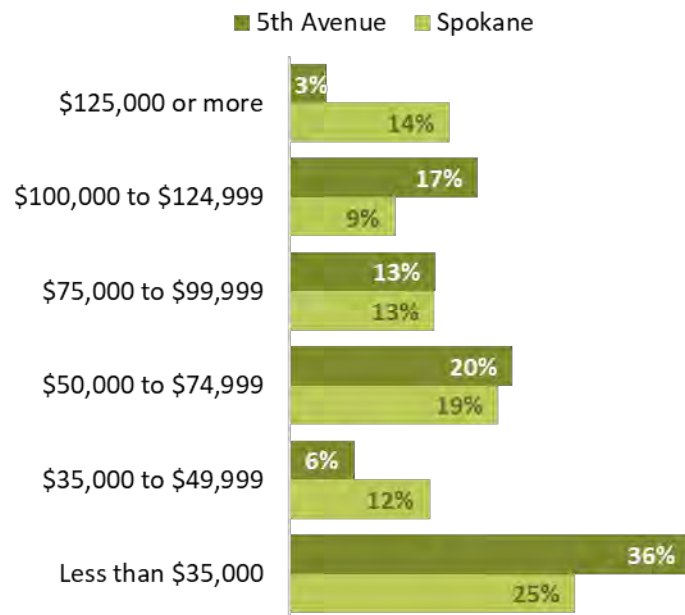
Sources: ACS 5-year estimates, 2013 & 2023; Seva Workshop, 2025

Figure 12 Median Household Income in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Spokane, 2013 and 2023



Sources: ACS 5-year estimates, 2013 & 2023; Seva Workshop, 2025

Figure 13 Household Incomes by Bracket in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Spokane, 2023



Sources: ACS 5-year Estimates, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2025

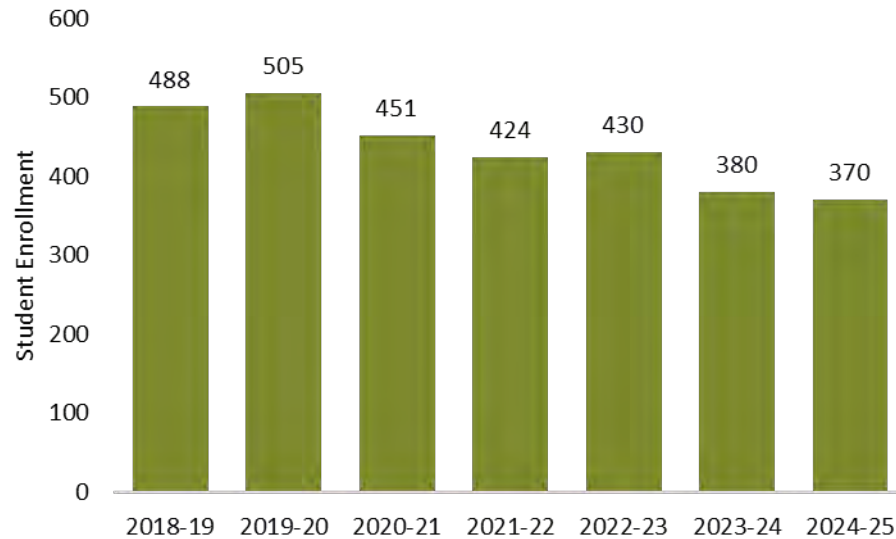
### Elementary School Student Body

Frances Scott Elementary School, located on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Rebecca St., is one of the main district public schools for 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue families. As an important local institution, Frances Scott Elementary contributes to the livability and strength of the community for families with young school-age children in the area. While the school has a catchment area broader than the study area, a scan of enrollment trends and student demographics offers some insight into the makeup of the next generation of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

**Student enrollment in Frances Scott Elementary has gradually declined since 2018, from 488 to 370 students.** See Figure 14. This trend aligns with the neighborhood demographic trends illustrated in Figure 11 above, which shows a shrinking population of children in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue from 2013 to 2023. During the 2024-2025 academic year, the Frances Scott Elementary School student body is more diverse than the Spokane School District as a whole, within which almost two-thirds of students are white, 13% are multiracial, 12% are Hispanic/Latino, 4% of students are Black, 3% are Asian, 3% are Native

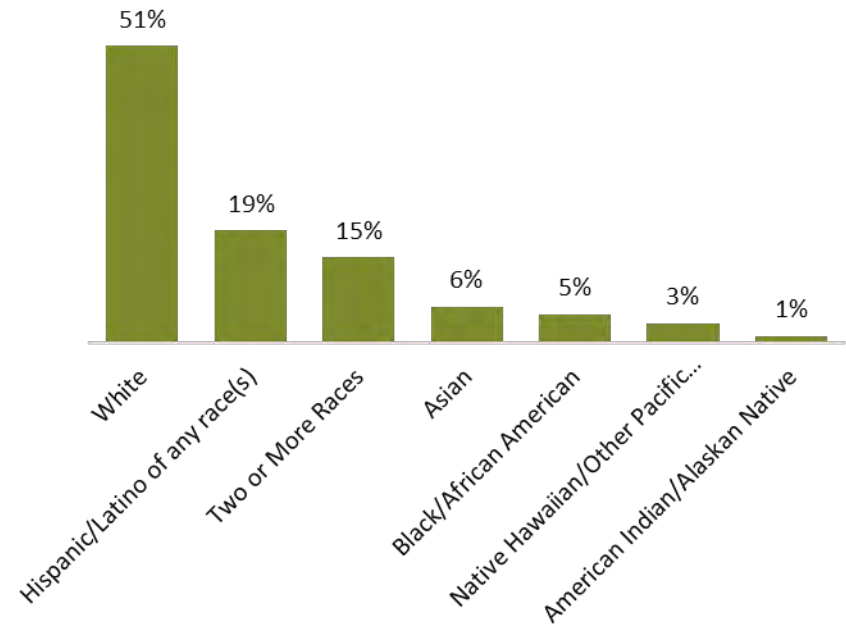
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1% are American Indian/Alaskan Native.<sup>13</sup> At Frances Scott, 51% of students are white, 19% are Hispanic/Latino, 15% are multiracial, 6% are Asian, 5% are Black, 3% are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1% are American Indian/Alaskan Native. At the school, 15% of students are English language learners, and 79% are identified as low income.

**Figure 14** Total student enrollment of Frances Scott Elementary School between 2018 and 2024 academic years



Sources: WA Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Seva Workshop 2025

**Figure 15** The racial/ethnic composition of the 2024-2025 Frances Scott Elementary student body



Sources: WA Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Seva Workshop 2025

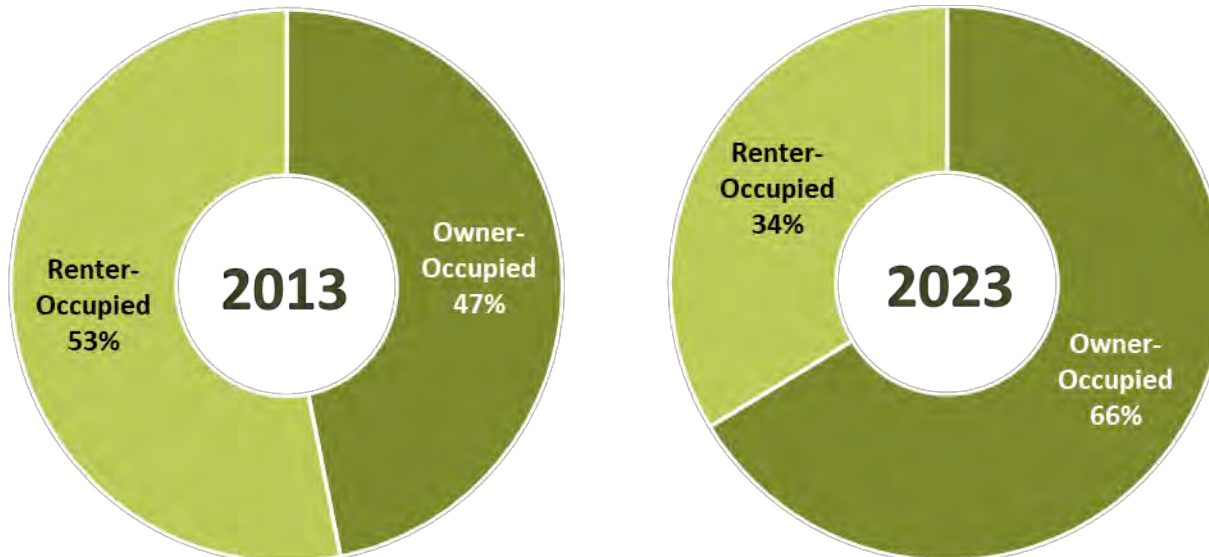
<sup>13</sup> <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/100247>



## HOUSING TENURE

The area has experienced a significant shift toward owner-occupied (versus renter-occupied) housing over the past decade. In 2023, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area contains 957 housing units, 55% of which are owner-occupied. Figure 16 illustrates how, over the past decade, the area has seen a significant rise in owner-occupied units, as in 2013 the rate of owner-occupied units was 53%.

Figure 16 Housing Tenure in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 2013 and 2023



Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2013 and 2023; Seva Workshop 2025

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area has been and remains relatively affordable compared to the rest of the City of Spokane. However, the complementary data on income, education, and demographics from 2013 to 2023 suggest that the apparent shift toward homeownership is driven by newcomers buying homes, rather than existing residents making the transition from renting to owning homes. Trends in tenure, home values, and affordability are explored in more detail in the [Topic 2: Homeownership](#) section.

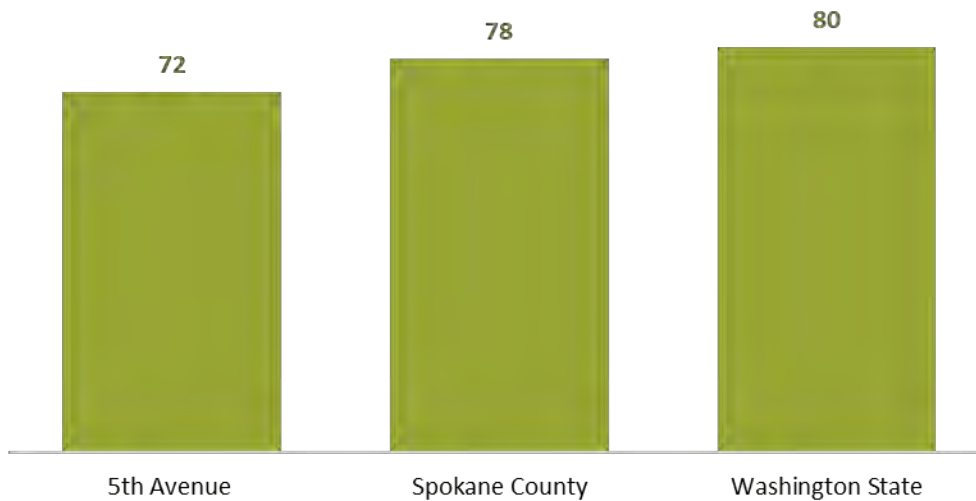
## HEALTH OF 5<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The average life expectancy across 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is 6 years lower than Spokane County and 8 years lower than Washington State.<sup>13</sup> According to data from the Spokane Regional Health District, from 2019–2023, the East Central neighborhood had the lowest life expectancy compared to all neighborhoods in the city. Life expectancy is a strong indicator of overall population health and can serve as a metric to understand the general state of

community wellbeing. There are many neighborhood-level factors that can influence longevity at the population-level, including environmental and lifestyle conditions, access to resources, and socioeconomic landscapes. These factors are interconnected and can influence the amount of chronic stress communities endure, and health hazards or benefits they may be exposed to. The disparity in life expectancy between the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area relative to Spokane County and Washington State may be indicative of the compounding and enduring impacts of environmental hazards, socioeconomic factors, legacies of systemic racism.

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community endures higher rates of asthma compared to Spokane County.** In 2022, 14.1% of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue residents over the age of 18 had asthma, compared to 12.5% of Spokane County.<sup>14</sup> The heightened burden of asthma across the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community may be related to the neighborhood's proximity to the I-90 corridor and the elevated levels of air pollution cited surrounding the freeway.

**Figure 17** Life expectancy data for 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Spokane County, and Washington State, 2015



Sources: Tejada-Vera B, Bastian B, Arias E, Escobedo LA., Salant B, *Life Expectancy Estimates by U.S. Census Tract, 2010-2015*; National Center for Health Statistics. 2020; Seva Workshop 2025

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?webmap=880892faa51d4a8d8e1252293f45b8dc>

## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community is disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards and pollutants that are negatively impacting the health of the people who call this neighborhood home. Namely, the area experiences poor air quality and elevated noise pollution, largely resulting from the area's proximity to the I-90 corridor.

According to the Environmental Health Disparities Map, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community ranks high (scoring 8 and 9 out of 10) for environmental indicators that lower air quality, including particulate matter concentration (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), proximity to heavy traffic roadways, and ozone concentration.<sup>15</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area is in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile of the state for the environmental burden of nitrogen oxide, a major emission from vehicles.<sup>16</sup>

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area is also exposed to elevated noise pollution levels, a form of pollution that is recognized by the EPA as having harmful affects on community health and welfare with prolonged exposure.<sup>17,18</sup> The EPA maintains statutory authority to regulate noise pollution under the Clean Air Act. The segment of the I-90 corridor that borders 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue historically does not include any sound barrier infrastructure. WSDOT did not recommend future noise barriers for the US 395 project and expansion of I-90 infrastructure in the Noise Report published in 2019.

**Urban heat is another environmental condition that disproportionately burdens the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community.** Urban heat islands are areas of cities that hold consistently higher temperatures than surrounding areas, predominantly due to a concentration of paved (or impervious) surfaces and low levels of vegetation and/or other natural cooling features.<sup>19</sup> The current tree canopy of the East Central neighborhood is 14%, which is low compared to other areas of Spokane as well as the citywide 2030 goal of 30% canopy coverage.<sup>20</sup>

To most meaningfully support the health and well-being of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue residents and community members, changes to the area's built environment should center health-promoting strategies that mitigate air and noise pollution and expand vegetation coverage. Additional interventions that address more systemic causes of health inequities experienced across 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, such as socioeconomic conditions, access to resources, and lifestyle conditions can additionally support lasting improvements to the health and well-being of this community.

*The concentration of particulate matter in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area is more than double the level established by the EPA as warranting intervention to protect human health.<sup>16,17</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> <https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/wtnibl/WTNIBL/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://eiscreeen.epa.gov/mapper/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/clean-air-act-overview/clean-air-act-title-iv-noise-pollution>

<sup>18</sup> <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ca7be47121e24f2bb8f5e3017051d402/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/heatislands/what-are-heat-islands>

<sup>20</sup> US Forest Service Tree Canopy Cover, 2021



# 5th Avenue Environment Profile

Environmental quality  
indicators for a freeway-  
adjacent community

## Tree Canopy

Spokane's citywide goal is 30% canopy coverage.



14% canopy  
coverage in 5<sup>th</sup>  
Avenue

## Noise pollution

Freeway traffic noise is loud and can be clearly heard from the elementary school and nearby homes.



## Asthma Rates

Poor air quality can impact health in many ways, including higher rates of asthma. In the 5<sup>th</sup> Ave community, 14% of adults have asthma compared to 12.5% citywide

## Heat Island Effect

On hot days, freeway adjacent areas of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood measure 8 degrees hotter than other parts of Spokane.



## Air Pollution

19.7  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$

Average particulate matter concentration in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community

9.0  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$

EPA threshold for public health intervention

Sources: Tree canopy data from US Forest Service, 2021; Heat Island data from Gonzaga University, 2022; Air pollution rates from Washington DOH, 2022; Asthma rates from CDC, 2022. Compiled by Seva Workshop, 2025

## Community Assets

### PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community members express love for and connection to the existing green spaces in the neighborhood. The neighborhood hosts two parks, Liberty Park and Underhill Park, as well as the Ben Burr multi-use trail which borders the southern edge of the study area.

**Liberty Park** covers about 2 acres of open space on the western edge of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area. This park has served the community since the early 1900s although it was permanently moved and altered with the construction of the I-90 freeway in the 1950s (see A Timeline of Freeway Development and Related Interventions for this history). Today, Liberty Park features a playground, a grass sports field, and a picnic area, all of which are heavily used by families and youth. The park also includes the Liberty Park Library (relocated here in 2021) and Liberty Park Aquatic Center, both of which support programming and recreation for the community and demonstrate extensive investment in this community-serving area.

**Underhill Park** is another widely utilized park space in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area with newly renovated basketball courts, pickleball courts, sidewalks, lighting, benches, and bike racks.<sup>21</sup> Underhill Park also serves as the location for many community events and programs such as the annual SERA Community Celebration and numerous summer camps for youth.

**The Ben Burr Trail** offers one mile of paved rail-trail pathway running from Liberty Park to Underhill Park, marking the southern border of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue study area. The trail can be linked with additional urban trails north of Liberty Park connecting the city's University District and Centennial Trail, making the trail a popular route for walkers, runners, and rollers.

### FRANCES SCOTT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Frances Scott Elementary School was established in 1908 (originally named Sheridan Elementary School) and serves as an additional open space area for youth recreation. The school is located on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Rebecca St. towards the eastern border of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue study area. In the 2024-2025 academic year the school enrolled 370 students grades K-5 (see Figure 14). The schoolyard offers a playground and sports field which was most recently updated in 2018.<sup>22</sup> The school existed long before the development of the I-90 corridor, and the freeway's proximity to the school presents concerns for the health and safety of its students and staff.

### BLACK-CENTERED BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood hosts an array of existing services and businesses. For many decades, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area has served as a valuable hub of Black-owned institutions within Spokane. These cherished community assets support the community's role as a Black cultural hub in Spokane, along with its historic churches such as Mt Zion and Bethel AME.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://my.spokanecity.org/parksrec/news/2024/11/08/renovated-underhill-park-sport-courts-reopen-november-8/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.togetherspokane.org/scott>

**Topic 4: Community Wealth** dives deeper into considerations for expanding and sustaining 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue's community assets and economic development opportunities.

### ***Carl Maxey Center***

- About: The Carl Maxey Center (CMC) is a Black-led and Black-centered non-profit, 501c3 organization, that serves as a neighborhood cultural center and gathering place, as well as a community-based organization that provides programs and services focused on addressing the needs of Spokane's African American/Black community. The long-term goal of the CMC is to transform Spokane's Black community from the inside out by creating the space, the opportunities and the infrastructure necessary for Black Spokane to identify and design our own solutions to address current and future challenges.
- Programs offered:
  - Sandy Williams Justice Center – Legal clinics and civil legal aid services to assist unrepresented individuals in representing themselves in court proceedings.
  - Black Spokane Business Center – Business, networking, and marketing consultation to support Black-owned businesses.
  - Rental and Utility Assistance – A partnership with the City of Spokane to provide rental assistance to African Americans and the BIPOC population in the greatest need.
  - Student Tech Fund – A partnership with Comcast to provide technology and supplies to students who struggled with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, to prevent students of color from falling further behind.
- Groups served: Spokane and the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area's Black residents, community members, students, and business owners.

### ***SERA (Spokane Eastside Reunion Association)***

- About: The Spokane Eastside Reunion Association's (SERA) focus is to bring restoration and opportunities to the Eastside community as a unified whole to overcome the divisive highway infrastructure.
- Programs offered:
  - Job training program – 12-week job training and life skills program for youth ages 14 to 18. Participants learn a breadth of workforce development skills and earn a food worker's card. They also provide personal finance skills and support for continued education.
  - Basketball and tennis camps – multi-week SERA basketball and tennis camps for youth with biweekly motivational speakers.
- Groups served: Youth local to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

### ***Fresh Soul***

- About: Fresh Soul is a social enterprise and a southern-inspired soul food restaurant that brings restoration and opportunity to the Eastside community, especially through the SERA program. The owner is a member of the community and incorporates employment training programs for at-risk youth.

### ***MLK Jr. Family Outreach Center***

- About: The Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center is a non-profit, community-based social service center that has served East Central Spokane for over 40 years. Today, the Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center is a regionally recognized community social service center providing comprehensive education, social services, and cultural enrichment programs for children and families.
- Programs offered:
  - Children's services – FAME (Fulfillment Achievement Maturity Enrichment) after-school enrichment program for children K-6 grade who attend Grant, Sheridan or Franklin elementary schools; Summer Youth Academy interactive learning and community service summer program; ECEAP (Early Childhood Education Assistance Program) free preschool program that focuses on the well-being of the whole child by providing nutrition, health, education, and family support services; Teen Tech Center teaches employable tech skills to teens.
  - Family services – Senior Services provides emotional, social, physical, and educational activities for older adults; Food bank; Community Court is a neighborhood-focused court that attempts to harness the power of the justice system to address local problems.
- Groups served: Children and families, older adults.

### ***Take Up the Cause***

- About: Take Up the Cause is a nonprofit organization formed to bring service-enriched affordable housing to Spokane. The Cause we Take Up is to uplift and stabilize the Spokane community to help residents take control of their lives by taking the next step from homelessness to renting, from renting to ownership, and from ownership to supporting others in their community.
- Programs offered: Beloved Sunset Apartments (affordable housing); Friendship Gardens (senior housing project); Rose Apartments and Straw Bale House.
- Groups served: Unhoused Spokane residents, renters, and homeowners.

### ***New Developed Nations***

- About: The mission of New Developed Nations (NDN) is to be a program of excellence that provides the community with exceptional service by training chemically dependent and at-risk youth to be positive, functional and empowered citizens through music, sports, nutrition and education, providing them with a voice that may have once been unheard.



- Programs offered: Individual and group music therapy for youth; Healing Through Hip Hop.
- Groups served: Youth seeking innovative therapy.

### ***Larry's Barbershop***

- About: Larry's Barbershop is one of the longest-standing Black-owned businesses in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area, serving the community for over 50 years. The establishment is a cherished and invaluable asset of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, particularly among the neighborhood's Black community.

## **LOCAL ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT**

### ***5th Avenue Forward***

- The mission of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Forward is to collaboratively revitalize the 5th Avenue area through community-driven initiatives focused on affordable housing, economic empowerment, and enhancing neighborhood identity, which are grounded in the principles established by the housing bill SB 5853 (RCW 47.12.120, 47.12.125, 47.12.380). The coalition is dedicated to promoting equity and uplifting the most impacted communities in Spokane by fostering sustainable development, meaningful partnerships, and active engagement of all residents.

### ***East Spokane Business Association (ESBA)***

- The mission of the East Spokane Business Association (ESBA) is to support the East Spokane Business District by preserving and improving its unique facilities, infrastructure, and commercial interests. Members of the association access a variety of business support and networking tools.

## Topic 1: Walkability and Connectivity

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## Defining Walkability and Connectivity for 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue

**Walkability can promote community health, strengthen social connectivity, benefit local businesses, and even improve air quality through diminished car traffic.**<sup>23</sup> Neighborhoods are considered walkable if their streets are perceived and experienced as safe, accessible, and convenient to people of all ages and abilities. The built environment can promote walking, biking, and rolling by offering a variety of destinations, compact blocks, well-maintained and connected sidewalks, landscaped buffers alongside walking areas to provide shade and separation from the street, lighting, and places for occasional rest that include benches, as well as local destinations.

*A walkable neighborhood – or neighborhood walkability -- is intended to encompass the experience of people walking, biking, rolling, or accessing transit.*

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community has expressed the desire to improve the walkability of the neighborhood for improved safety, enhanced quality of life for residents, and promotion of local business. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor already supports an array of cherished community-based assets, and as efforts are advanced to further develop a commercial center in this neighborhood, safe and inviting streets for people of all ages and abilities will be even more important. The East Central neighborhood is currently ranked 10th out of Spokane's 20 core neighborhoods on the Walk Score (scoring 52 out of 100), categorizing East Central as a “highly car-dependent neighborhood” with significant opportunities to increase access to and safety of walking, public transit, rolling, and cycling.

The priorities expressed by the East Central community related to improving walkability primarily pertain to:

- **Intersection improvements** to promote safety for people
- **Youth traffic safety**, particularly surrounding Frances Scott Elementary School and neighborhood park spaces
- **Expanding accessibility** through sidewalk networks that are complete, maintained, and include features such as ADA-compliant curb ramps with tactile paving

Importantly, the foundational infrastructure of 5th Avenue was constructed when the neighborhood was directly connected to the greater East Central area. This connection was disrupted with the construction of the I-90 freeway in the early 1960s. The interstate expansion fractured the connection between the 5th Avenue area and the rest of East Central to the north, which includes the Sprague commercial district as well as many residential streets. Current efforts to revitalize the 5th Avenue corridor must consider opportunities to address this separation, expand mobility, cultivate local economic development, and keep 5th Avenue “on the map”.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8776244/>

## Current Landscape and Neighborhood Access Conditions

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor and the surrounding parcels are primarily residential, supporting a calm neighborhood with a high potential for being a great place to walk, bike, or roll. See

Figure 18. The study area is relatively small, about 1.8 miles across (estimated ~40 minute walk) and 0.5 miles from north to south (estimated ~10 minute walk). Despite this high potential for walkability, the community expresses concern for safety and accessibility as barriers to traveling outside of a car. There are also gaps in destinations that would contribute to a 15-minute neighborhood lifestyle (see sidebar) for residents, highlighting a need for improved transit connections and bike infrastructure.

### *What is a 15-minute neighborhood?*

The 15-minute neighborhood concept envisions places where residents can meet their essential needs—work, education, healthcare, shopping, and leisure—within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from their homes. The concept is rooted in sustainable urban design, fostering community well-being, and reducing environmental impact. The main ideas and goals of the 15-minute neighborhood are:

**Local accessibility.** Each neighborhood has its own set of amenities.

**Sustainability.** Encourage walking, biking, and public transport to reduce GHG emissions.

**Community building.** Design public spaces to promote social interaction.

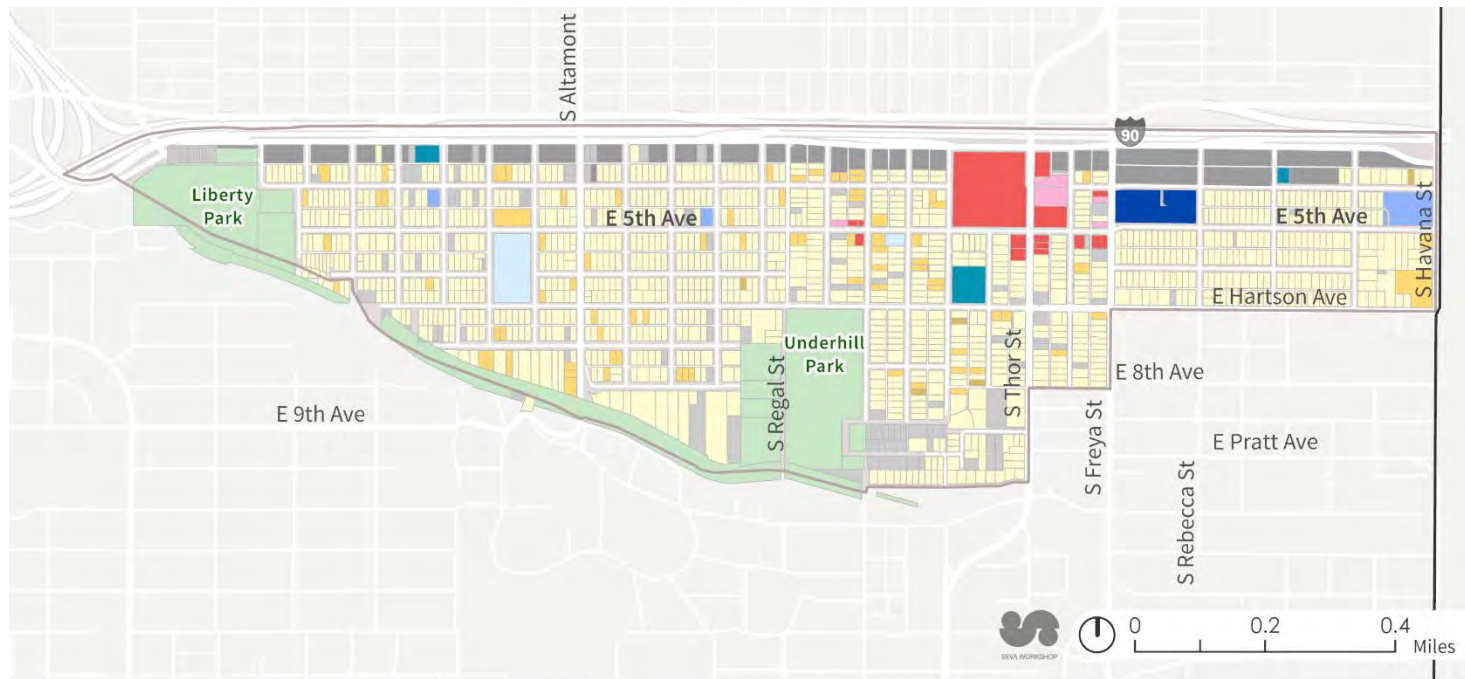
**Health and wellbeing.** Reduce commute times and traffic stress, encourage physical activity and better quality of life.

**Economic resilience.** Support local businesses by encouraging people to shop in their own neighborhood.















**Human-centric urban design.** Reallocate urban space for people, green areas, and community gathering rather than car-centric infrastructure.



Figure 18 Current land uses in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue



### Parcel Property Use

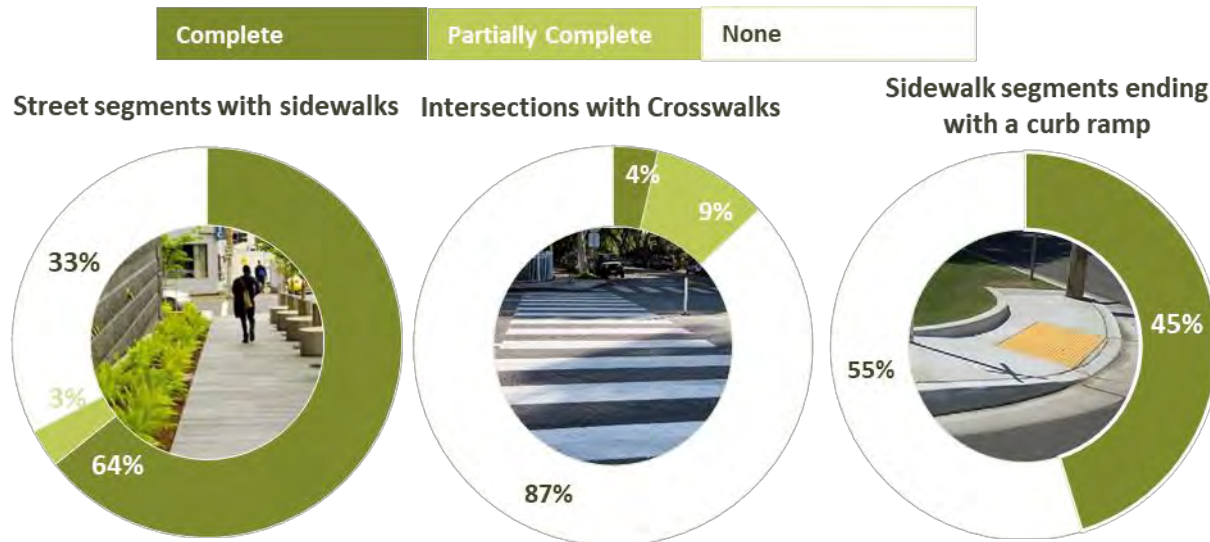
	Single Unit Residential		Churches		5th Avenue Study Area
	Multi Unit Residential		Public Assembly		Spokane City Limits
	Other Residential		Utilities		
	Retail		Park		
	Services		Vacant Land		
	Education		Non-Parcel Vacant		

Source: Spokane County Assessor, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2025

## SIDEWALKS

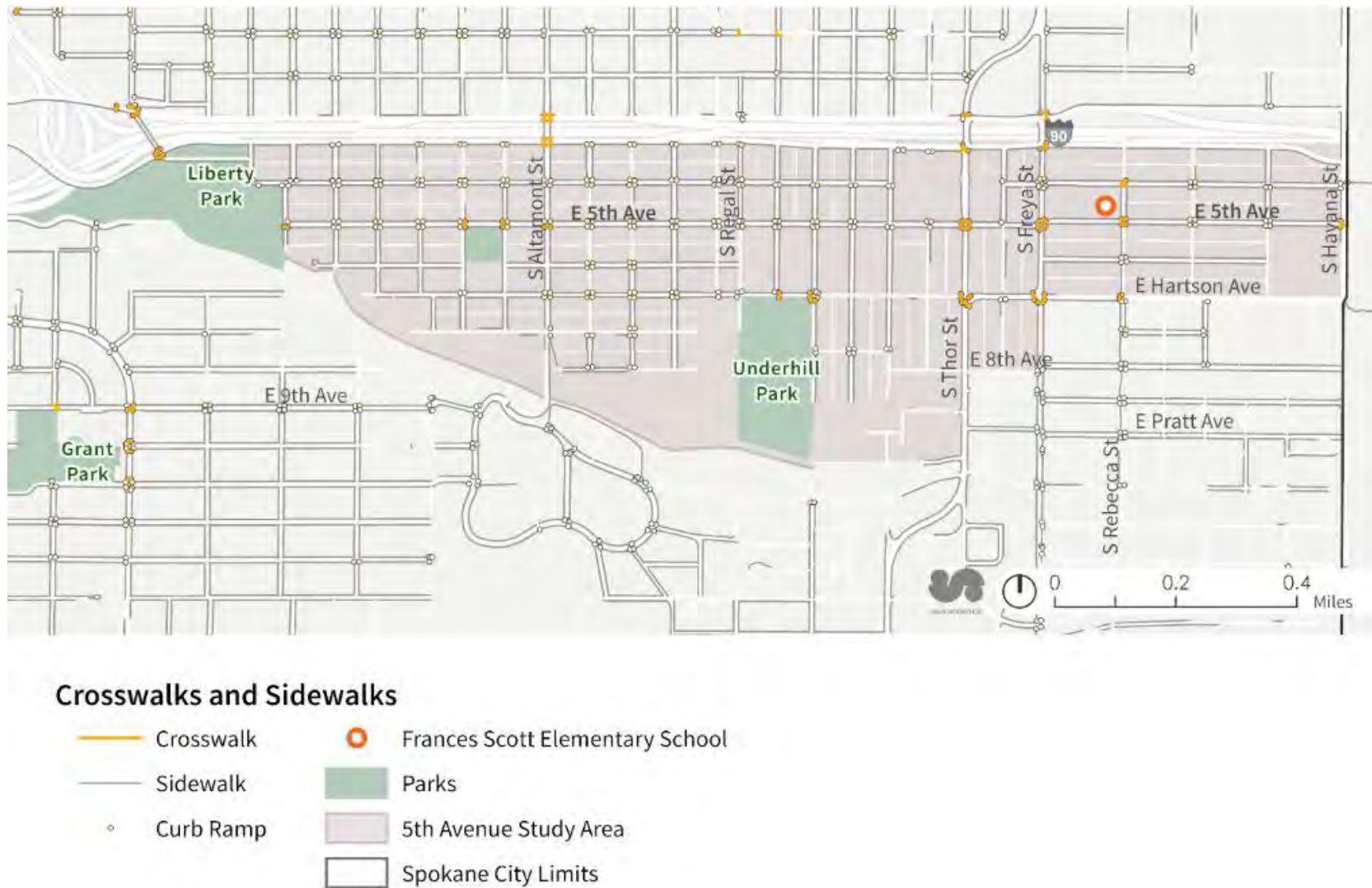
The sidewalk infrastructure in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community is mixed, with some areas in good shape and others where maintenance and investment concerns persist. There remains about one-third (36%) of street segments that either have incomplete sidewalks or no sidewalks at all. Crosswalks are available at 13% of intersections, some in all four directions and some with one or two directions. It is unlikely that crosswalks are needed at every intersection in a quiet residential community; however, community members have requested additions in certain locations. Curb ramps are sporadically available, mostly to the east of the study area, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor notably has very few. Curb ramps are an important accessibility feature for the sidewalk grid, easing navigation and travel for those who are older and those with mobility impairments or limited vision. These datapoints are captured in Figure 19. The map in Figure 20 shows the existing infrastructure and the map in Figure 21 highlights the inverse: gap areas for sidewalks, curb ramps, crosswalks, and streetlights.

**Figure 19** Datapoints for Sidewalk Network Completeness



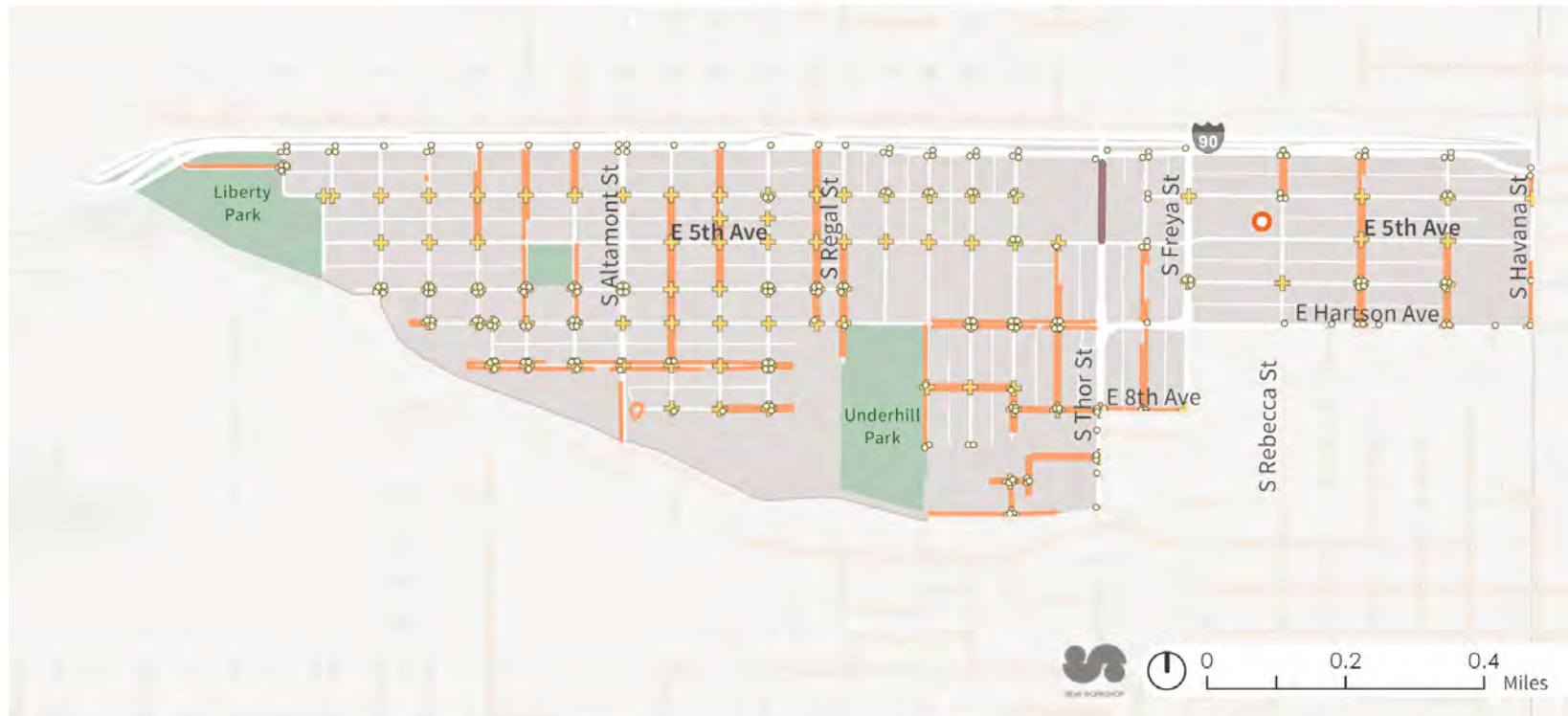
Sources: City of Spokane, 2025; Seva Workshop, 2025

Figure 20 The sidewalk, crosswalk, and curb ramp network in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue



Sources: City of Spokane, 2025; Seva Workshop, 2025

Figure 21 Gaps in the sidewalk, crosswalk, curb ramp, and streetlight networks in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue



### Gaps in Pedestrian Infrastructure

-  No Crosswalk
-  No Curb Ramp
-  No Sidewalk
-  No Streetlight
-  Frances Scott Elementary School
-  Parks
-  5th Avenue Study Area
-  Spokane City Limits

Sources: City of Spokane, 2025; Seva Workshop, 2025



## NATURAL AND PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

The I-90 corridor currently offers limited cross-through points: there are vehicular connections on Liberty Park Pl., S Altamont St., Thor St., and Freya St., and one pedestrian bridge on S Regal St. In addition to the I-90 corridor reducing connectivity points along the northern border of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area, additional features of the current neighborhood landscape introduce physical and natural hurdles to greater connectivity. See Figure 6.

**The Ben Burr Trail**, a dirt-packed multi-use trail, frames the southern ridge of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area from Liberty Park to Underhill Park, serving as a natural barrier with over 100' grade change separating 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue from the South Perry District. There is currently an underpass on Altamont St. that allows drivers to cross over the trail. Most of the streets lining the Ben Burr Trail end in a Dead End.

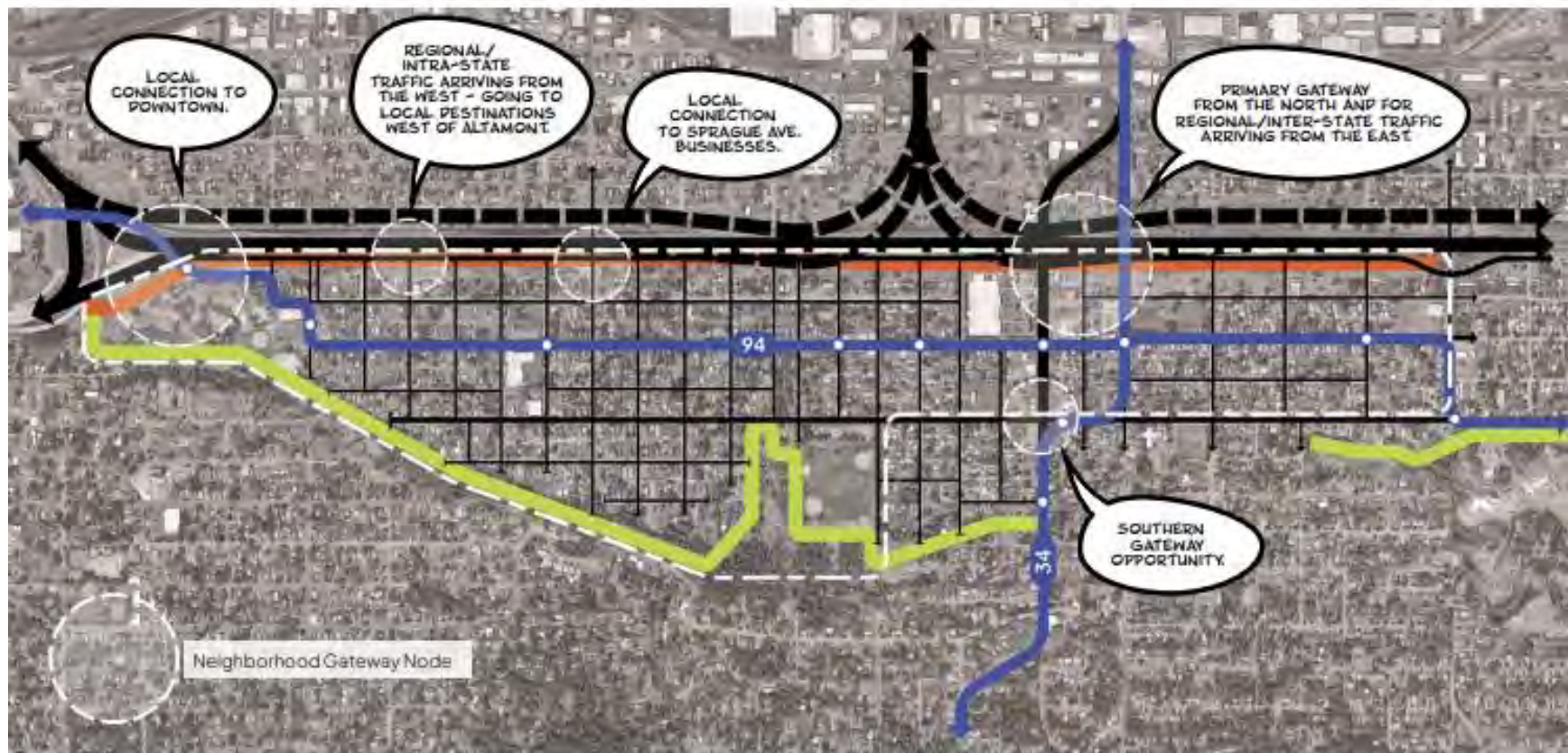
**S Thor St.** and **S Freya St.** serve as key means of north-to-south inter-neighborhood connection. The **5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor** is the main east-to-west thoroughfare within the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area, and S Ray St. serves as a connection to the Lincoln Heights neighborhood to the south.

## LOCAL CONNECTIVITY, GATEWAYS, AND HUBS

**5<sup>th</sup> Avenue's existing pedestrian access grid has few neighborhood entrances (or gateways) throughout the corridor.** There is an opportunity to better connect 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to neighboring business districts in Sprague to the north and Perry to the south. These identified gateway locations also have room for improvement in their placemaking and identity-building aesthetic. The sketched map in Figure 22 identifies these gateways with circles as well as locations that merit further study for connectivity improvements.

**The existing civic and commercial hubs along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue lay the groundwork for developing denser activity nodes and enhancing the connectivity of experiences between them.** The S Thor St. gateway is predominantly auto-oriented land uses that draw people inward rather than inviting them to explore the greater neighborhood. The intersection at S Greene St. is another hub that could be expanded upon as a local commercial center. Low- to mid-rise multifamily housing may be appropriate here, providing an additional concentration of patrons for new businesses.

Figure 22: 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Gateways and Connections



Spokane 5th Ave, Neighborhood - Sketchbook - 05/07/25

Not To Scale   
STUDIO SEYFRIED



## BICYCLE FACILITIES

**Bicycle facilities in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area are limited.** The maps in Figure 23 identify current conditions and proposed changes in Spokane's future bike network as defined in the 2017 Spokane Bicycle Master Plan.<sup>24</sup> A shared-use path (the Ben Burr Trail) runs along the southern edge of the neighborhood, connecting Liberty and Underhill parks. With some broken links, the trail eventually connects to Spokane's riverfront, downtown, and across a bridge to Gonzaga University.

**There are no designated bike lanes in the street grid of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.** There are "bike-friendly routes" along parts of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, S Hartson St., S Regal St., and smaller segments of S Magnolia and S Ralph streets. This designation identifies quieter neighborhood streets that are typically pleasant to bike along and have markings for shared lane use, but it does not include protected or designated bike lanes.<sup>25</sup> There are no bike-friendly streets in proximity to the elementary school. The light orange color in the top map of Figure 23 (parts of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, S Hartson St., and S Altamont St.) indicates streets with moderate traffic that also have painting for shared bike use, but no dedicated lanes are provided. The darker orange indicates similar treatments on higher-traffic streets, such as S Freya St. and S Thor St. Red lines, found within Liberty Park and north of I-90, highlight challenging connection points for riders along those routes.

The bottom map of Figure 23 identifies improvements planned for Spokane's bike network within the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area. Proposed changes include connecting and upgrading the path through Underhill Park to be a shared-use path, integrating a dedicated bike lane north/south along S Altamont St., and addressing the difficult connection within Liberty Park. Just to the southwest, a neighborhood greenway is proposed to connect riders from the Ben Burr Trail to Grant Park. To the north, a shared-use path is planned parallel to I-90, providing a protected east-west corridor for cyclists.

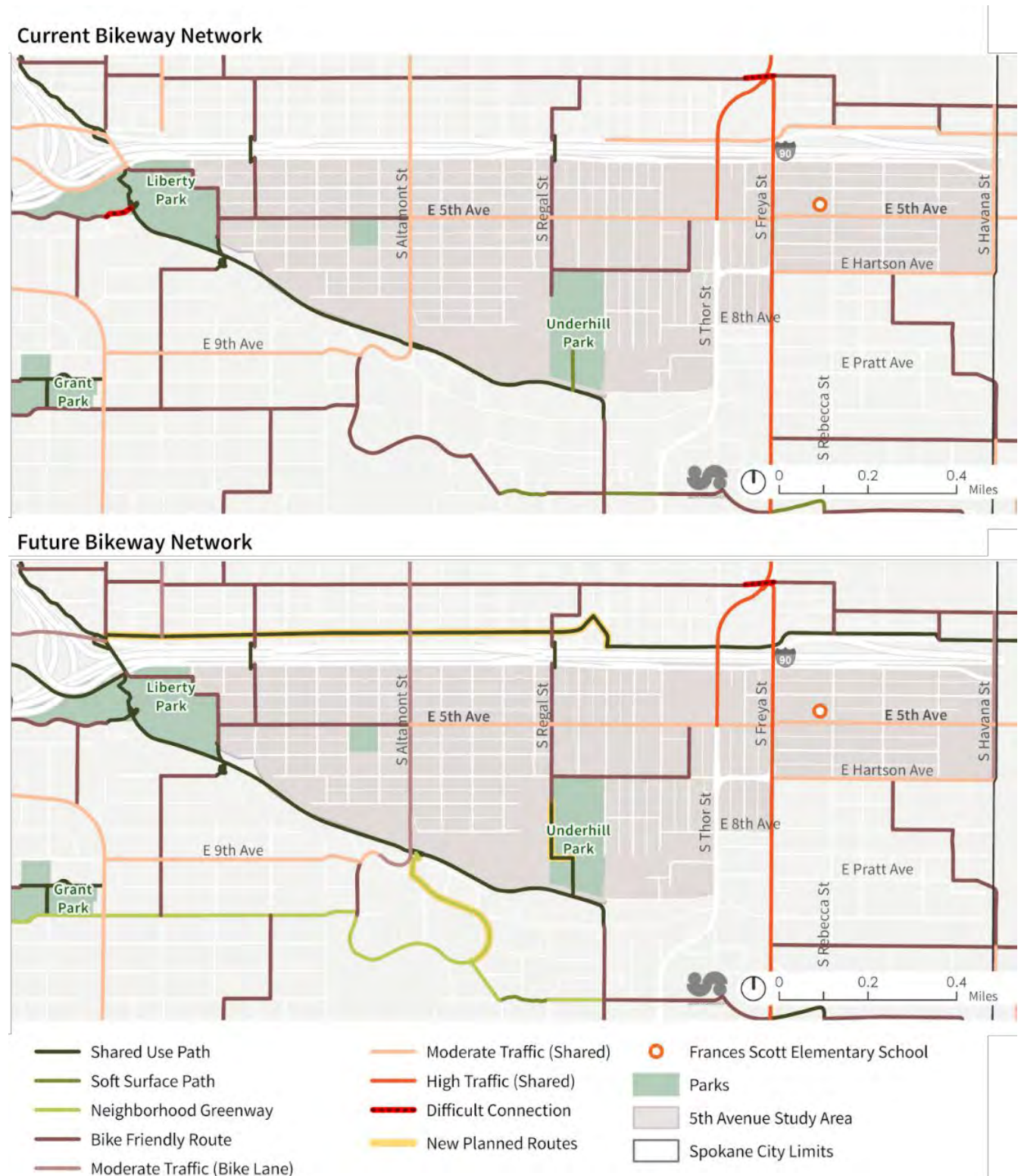
Even with improvements in the proposed future network for 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, bike facilities in this area are limited. North-south connections are challenging; there are no dedicated lanes or protected paths to the school, and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue remains the dominant east-west pathway, with only shared-use markings to support riders. These challenges can be addressed in this community plan, establishing a vision for a neighborhood where healthy and active lifestyles are safe and well-supported.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/projects/bicycle-master-plan/2017-bicycle-master-plan-updated-2020.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> From the Spokane Bike Master Plan, a bike-friendly route is a low-volume route marked by bicycle signage and/or the use of shared lane markings. They are on local streets with no centerline stripe, and low vehicle volumes and speeds.

Figure 23 Current and Proposed Future Bike Network in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue



Sources: City of Spokane, 2025; Seva Workshop, 2025

*In addition to this future network, WSDOT has committed to creating a shared use path in this area. The path will run along 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, south of I-90, from S Crestline St to S Ray St and from S Freya St to S Havana St.*

## Transit Mobility and Integration

A crucial component of walkability is seamless integration to transit, expanding the range of destinations that can be comfortably reached without a car. **The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor is the primary bus corridor for this area, offering nine different stops to catch the Spokane Transit Authority (STA) Route 94 toward downtown (west) or Millwood (east).** Along S Thor St. and S Freya St., Route 34 takes riders to Spokane Community College (north) or south through Lincoln Heights to South Hill. There is also a hyperlocal Route, the 294, which operates during the school year in proximity to Frances Scott Elementary and connects further south to Lincoln Heights Elementary, Adams Elementary, and Ferris High School. See Figure 24. Of the 27 bus stops in the study area, only five have shelters, while the others lack features for added comfort while waiting for a ride. Figure 25 shows a list of bus stops in the area by average weekday ridership, from highest to lowest.

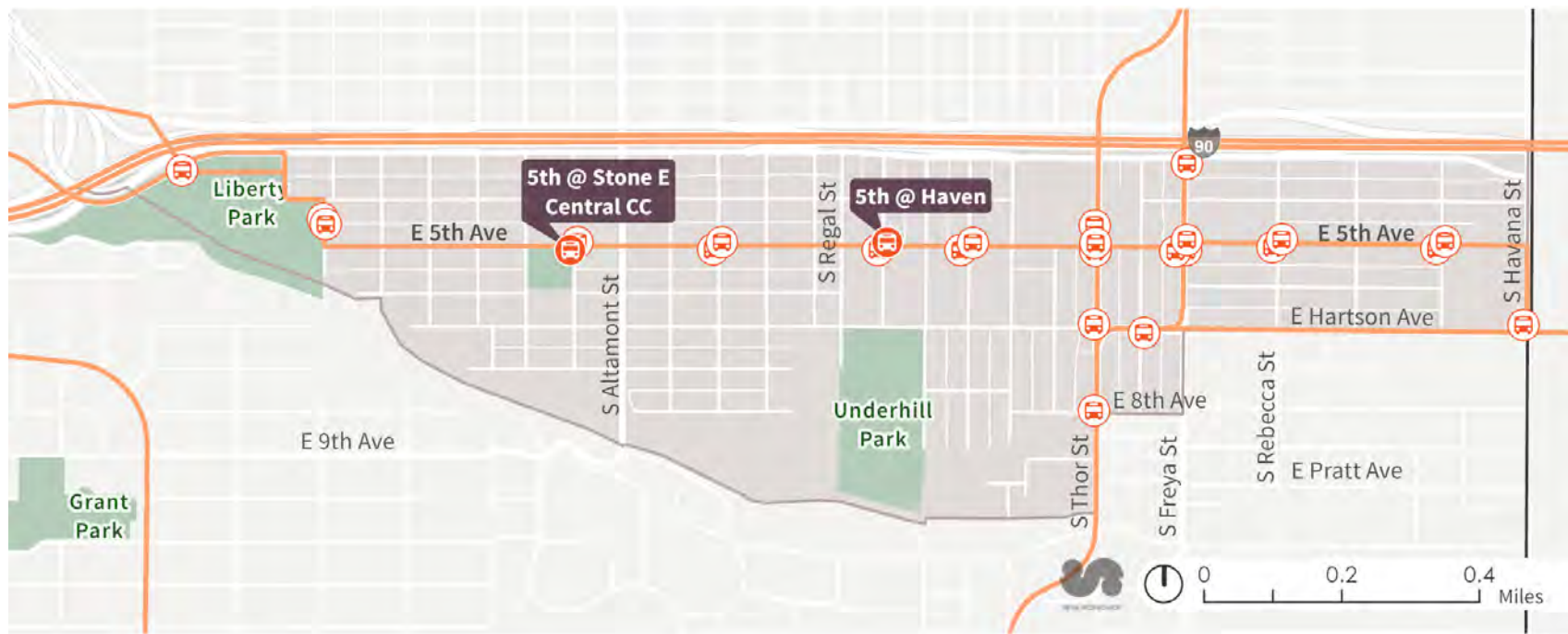


### ***Enhanced walkability is about more than sidewalks.***

A truly walkable neighborhood includes safe, seamless transit integration for people walking, biking, or rolling to a variety of destinations. This greatly expands the range of places that can be comfortably accessed without a car. In the study area, bus connections span the length of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor. The bus stop infrastructure along this corridor, however, is inconsistent and often lacking in features such as benches, shelters, and lighting that can make waiting for a ride more comfortable. The picture to the left depicts one such bus stop at 5<sup>th</sup> Ave and S Greene St, directly adjacent to the Carl Maxey Center. Below is a photo from a bus station for Spokane's rapid service line that includes features such as seating, a shade structure, and public art.



Figure 24 Spokane Transit bus stop locations in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area



### 5th Avenue Study Area Bus Stops

- |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  Bus Stop       |  Parks                 |
|  Bus Shelter    |  5th Avenue Study Area |
|  STA Bus Routes |  Spokane City Limits   |

Sources: City of Spokane, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2025.

**Figure 25**      **Weekday Ridership for Bus Stops in Study Area, Organized from High to Low by Average Weekday Boardings, 2024**

Stop Name	Average Weekday		Has Shelter?
	On	Off	
5th & Thor	75	68	Forthcoming
5th @ Stone E Central CC	37	36	Yes
Pittsburg & 4th	34	30	
Thor @ Hartson	30	2	
5th & Freya	22	23	
5th @ Haven	19	16	Yes
Thor @ 8th	15	16	
5th @ Smith	13	14	
5th @ Rebecca	12	8	
5th @ Florida	11	9	
5th @ Greene	6	9	
Freya @ 3rd Avenue	2	1	
Hartson @ Ferrall	2	7	
Havana @ Hartson	1	3	
3rd @ Liberty Park Pl.	1	3	

Sources: Spokane Transit Authority, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2025.

## Transportation Safety

Traffic calming and safety are consistently expressed as key priorities in previous and ongoing engagement with residents for the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Community Plan.<sup>26</sup> Residents want to see more traffic calming features across the neighborhood, such as bump-outs, crosswalks, and speed humps, to promote traffic safety and reduce driving speed. Specific locations concerning intersection improvements include:

- The intersection of 5th Avenue and Altamont St.
- Around community service providers, including daycares and schools
- The connection between the MLK Jr. Outreach Center at East Central
- The Liberty Park Library
- Neighborhoods parks
- The area between S Thor St. and S Freya St. (general walking, biking, and rolling experience improvements here)

There were two traffic fatalities and two serious injury crashes within the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue study area between 2017 and 2021; all four incidents involved people walking. See Figure 26. Both fatalities occurred in proximity to I-90. In 2018, a person driving under the influence ran off the road near 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and killed a person walking near 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. In 2019, a hit-and-run driver killed a person walking along the highway. The two serious injury incidents occurred in 2017 and 2020. The first took place at 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and S Magnolia St., where a person walking on the street was sideswiped by a vehicle. The second took place at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and S Altamont St. A vehicle turning left hit a person crossing the street on foot.

Figure 27 illustrates crash data of all types, even without injury, from 2024. These incidents demonstrate a pattern in the study area where the majority of crashes occur along the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor, along S Thor St., and near the Frances Scott Elementary School.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/projects/5th-avenue-initiative/5th-avenue-initiative-community-strategy-march-2021.pdf>



Figure 26 Serious Injury and Fatality Collisions in 5th Avenue, 2017-2021

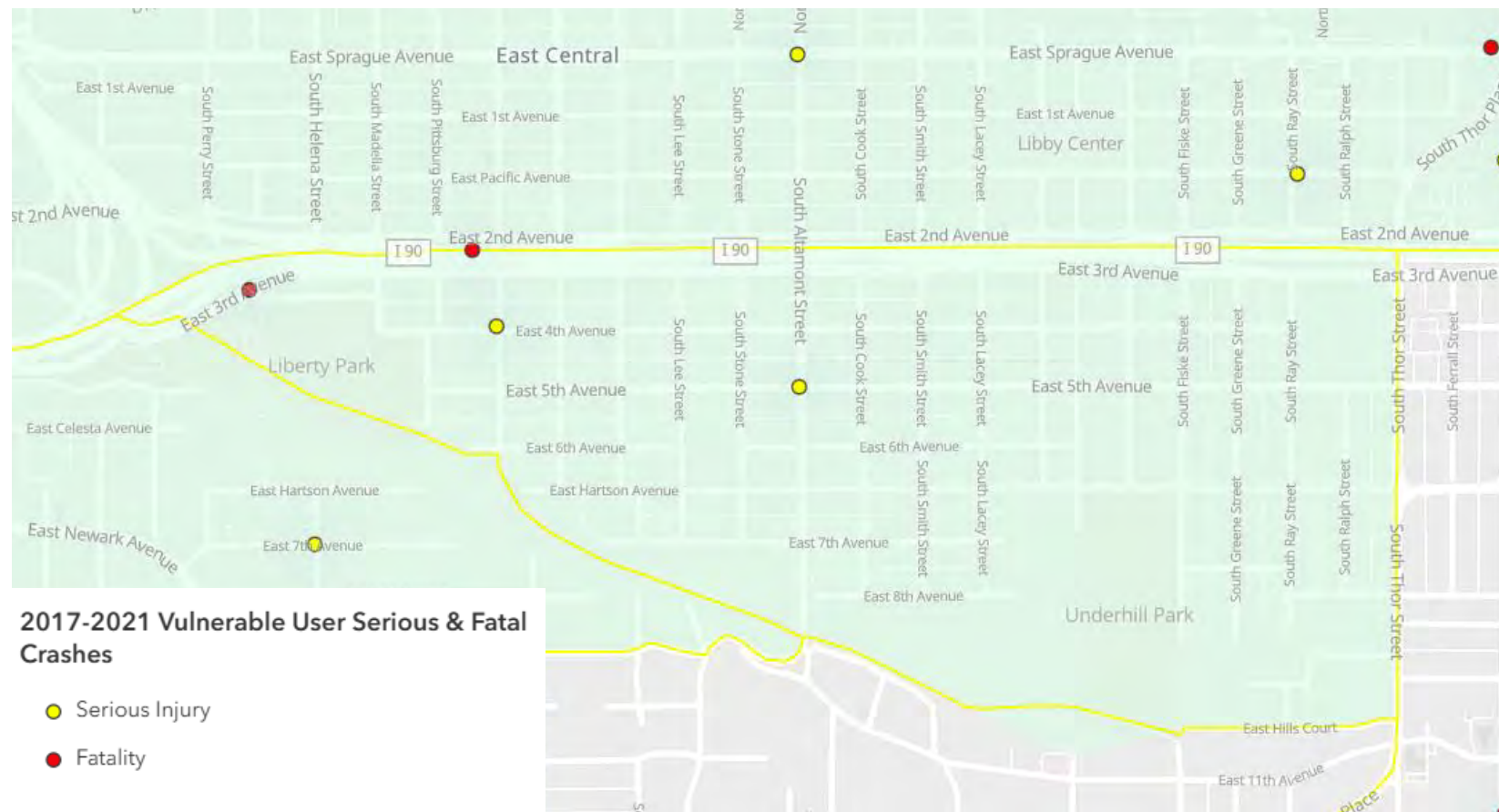


Image Source: [City of Spokane Webmap](#).

Figure 27 2024 total crashes by severity in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue

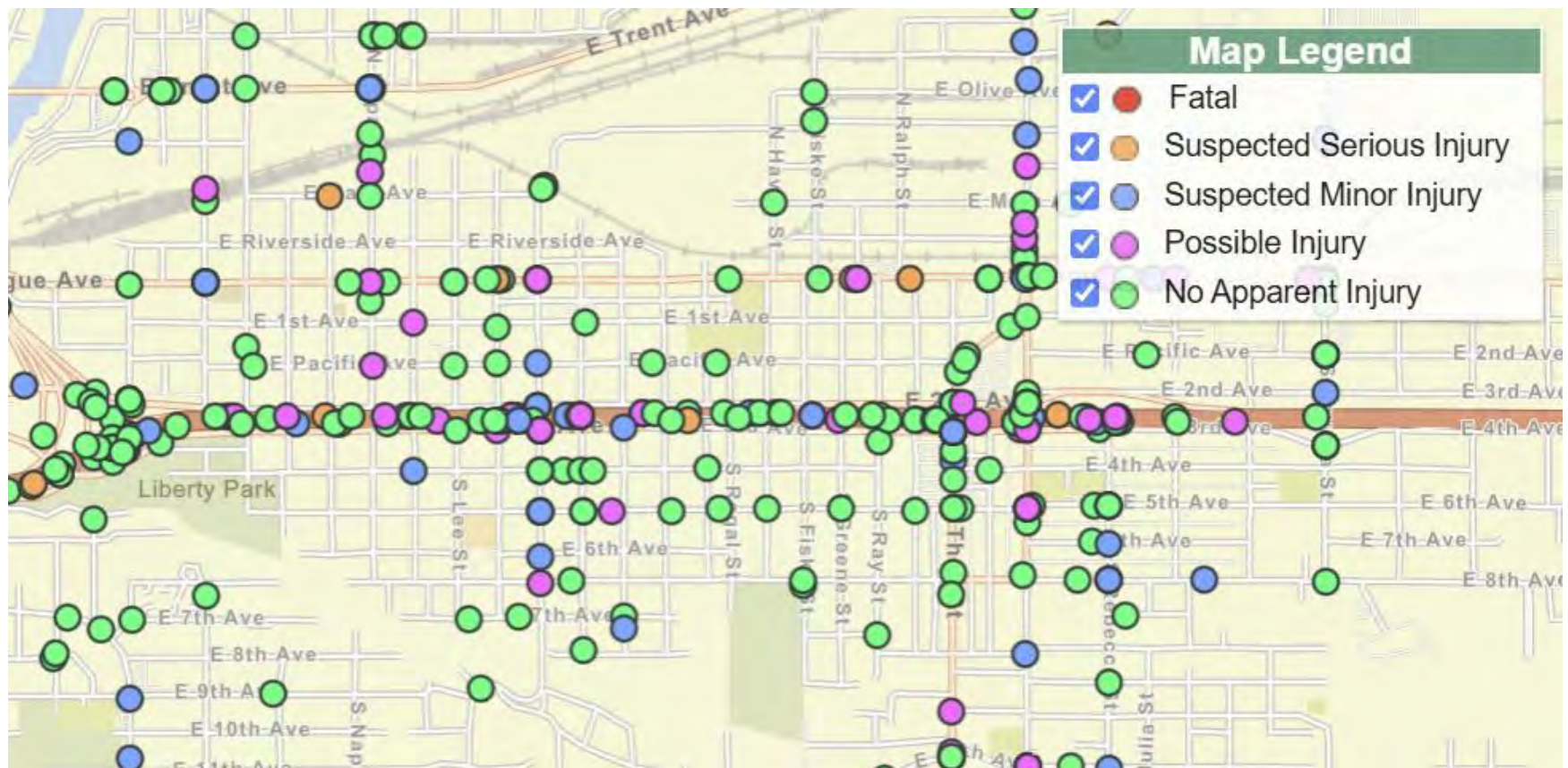


Image Source: <https://remoteapps.wsdot.wa.gov/highwaysafety/collision/data/portal/public/>.

## Youth Transportation Safety

Frances Scott Elementary School is located on 5<sup>th</sup> Ave and S Rebecca St. **Through numerous engagement efforts with families who are part of the Frances Scott community, youth traffic safety is expressed as a key priority and area for improvement.**

In April 2025, the project team was invited to attend the Frances Scott Elementary School Multicultural Arts Gala to engage with local families about their priorities and visions for the 5th Avenue neighborhood, and to discuss opportunities for the Community Plan to meet these needs. The team collected 55 input cards that asked caregivers to document areas of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue that could be improved. Twenty of these feedback cards expressed concerns related to traffic calming and walkability surrounding the Elementary School, with families noting “safety concerns around the ‘many uncontrolled intersections’” along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and particularly near Frances Scott Elementary.

Families are concerned about the streets around Frances Scott Elementary School. Currently, students living just two blocks from the school are encouraged to commute by bus instead of walking due to inadequate walkability infrastructure. This is highly unusual and indicates a need for intervention. Particularly, families would like to see a stop sign installed at 5<sup>th</sup> and Rebecca to make school crossings safer. The maps in Figure 28 identify the existing crosswalk and stop sign locations in proximity to the school.

Spokane’s Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program is actively working to improve walkability conditions for the students and staff at Frances Scott Elementary. A list of projects currently underway can be found in the next section of the report.



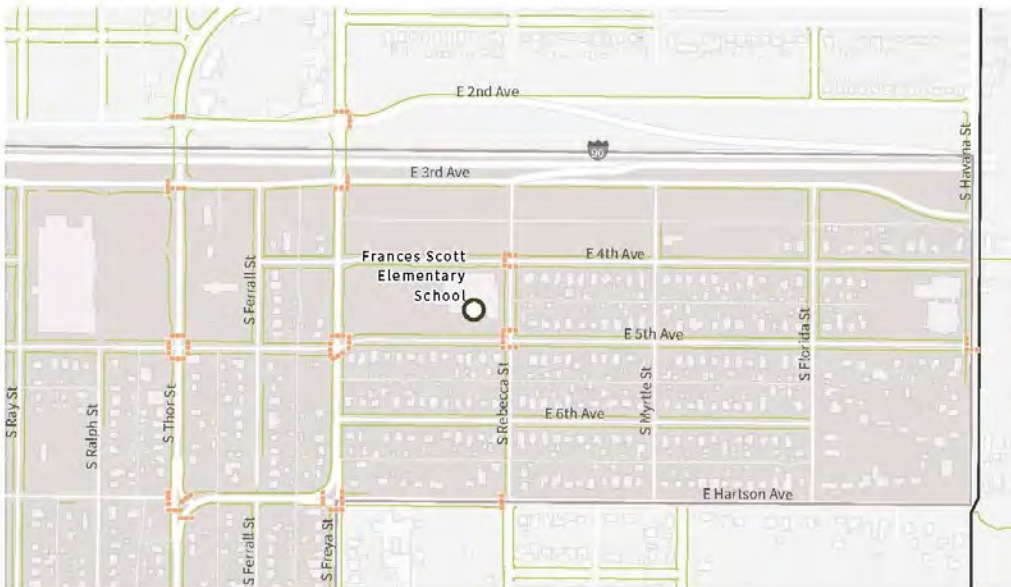


*Image above from the Frances Scott Elementary Multicultural Arts Gala, April 2025. Project team members attended this event and spoke with students and their families about visions for the future of the neighborhood.*

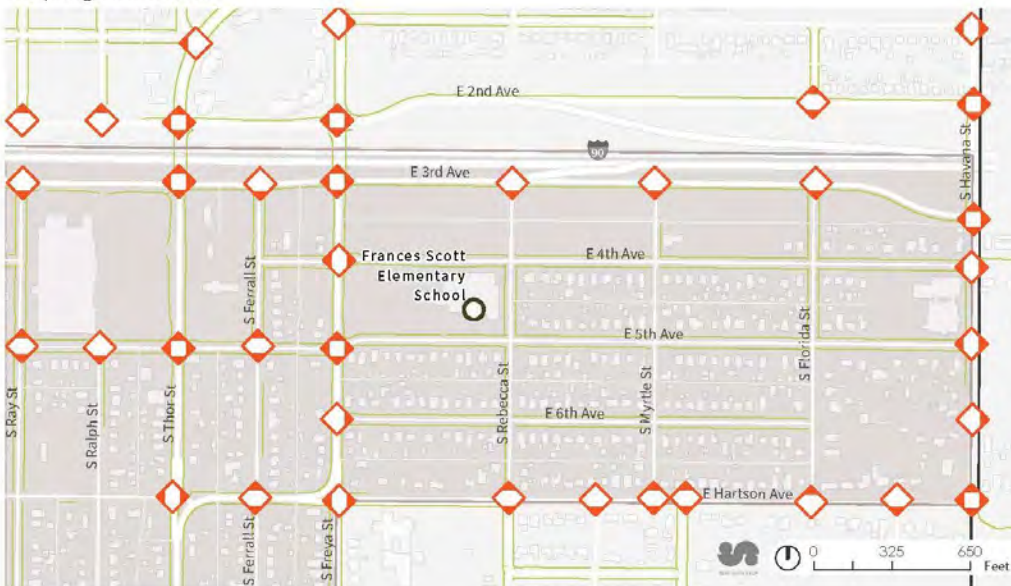
Figure 28 Crosswalks and Stop Signs Surrounding Elementary School

### Frances Scott Elementary School Traffic Calming

#### Crosswalks



#### Stop Sign Direction



#### Stop Sign Direction

- |  |            |  |          |
|--|------------|--|----------|
|  | All        |  | NS       |
|  | E          |  | N        |
|  | EW         |  | W        |
|  | S          |  | Sidewalk |
|  | Crosswalks |  |          |

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
|  | Public Schools        |
|  | 5th Avenue Study Area |
|  | Spokane City Limits   |

Sources: City of Spokane, 2025; Seva Workshop, 2025.



## Current Project Pipeline

Improvements to walkability in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue should include a combination of short-term improvements as well as long-term investments. Several projects are already underway to improve various aspects of the walking, biking, and rolling experience in this area, summarized below. In the following section, concepts for future investments are explored.

This section outlines projects currently underway to address various elements of walkability for the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community.

### I-90 Pedestrian Bridges

The ongoing WSDOT North Spokane Corridor<sup>27</sup> project includes plans to rebuild the existing pedestrian bridges over I-90 that connect the 5th Avenue area to the East Sprague Business District, as previous crossings have fallen into disrepair, with one demolished at Magnolia Street in 2023 in an emergency action.<sup>28</sup> WSDOT administered a survey in spring 2025 to gather community preferences on pedestrian bridge locations and types. Construction on the NSC/I-90 interchange is scheduled to start in late summer 2026, and construction on local street connections and ramp structures is scheduled for late 2026 and is expected to last through early 2030.<sup>29</sup> The existing pedestrian bridge on Regal and 3rd Avenue is currently the only walking, biking, or rolling connection between 5th Avenue and the northern East Central district and has harbored community input as being “narrow, not ADA compliant”.<sup>30</sup>



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<sup>27</sup> <https://wsdot.wa.gov/construction-planning/search-projects/us-395-nsc-i-90-connection>

<sup>28</sup> <https://wsdot.wa.gov/about/news/2023/i-90-through-spokane-close-overnight-feb-11-12-remove-pedestrian-bridge>

<sup>29</sup> <https://wsdot.wa.gov/construction-planning/search-projects/us-395-nsc-i-90-connection>

<sup>30</sup> <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/projects/fifth-avenue-plan/epa-rethinking-highways-summary.pdf>



*Image above is taken from the [WSDOT timelapse video](#) of the emergency overnight removal of the I-90/Magnolia Street pedestrian bridge in 2023. The removal occurred after an inspection uncovered deteriorating hinges showing signs of failure for the bridge.*

### Safe Routes to School

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) initiative has received almost \$2 million in funding to implement numerous projects to improve safety for people and traffic-calming features around Frances Scott Elementary School. Anticipated to be completed in June 2025, these projects include adding sidewalks, bump-outs, and enhanced crosswalks in the following locations:<sup>31</sup>

- S Rebecca St. (from Hartson to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue): 5-foot-wide sidewalk with curb and gutter
- 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue & S Rebecca St.: Intersection improvements include curb extensions, ADA ramps, and a relocated crosswalk to align with new bump-outs intended to reduce speeds and improve visibility
- Hartson Ave (from S Freya St. to S Havana St.): 6-foot-wide sidewalk with curb and gutter on the north side
- Additional curb extensions<sup>32</sup> and curb ramps surrounding the school

## Community-Defined Priorities for Future Mobility Planning

### 1. Improve conditions for people walking, riding, and rolling

A range of traffic calming and people-oriented investments could help improve 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue as a walkable neighborhood. Ideas include developing elements of a complete streets program along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, improving sidewalk completeness and conditions throughout the area, building a more robust network of bicycle facilities, a focused effort to improve conditions for people traveling outside a car between Thor St. and Freya St., reducing speed limits in targeted areas, addressing speeding and traffic cut throughs on Rebecca St. at 4<sup>th</sup> Ave and 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, and enhancing the public realm.<sup>33</sup>

### 2. Intersection improvements

Spokane's Safe Streets for All program added a series of crosswalks and a sidewalk connection project from 2014-2018 through this initiative, which funds a handful of projects each year across all of Spokane's neighborhoods. Previous improvements were implemented close to the library and MLK Jr. Outreach Center. A new wave of traffic calming interventions along the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor would benefit the neighborhood. Focus area might include the intersection of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and S Altamont St., the segment of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue from S Regal St. to S Rebecca St.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://my.spokanecity.org/projects/scott-elementary-safe-routes-to-school/>

<sup>32</sup> A curb extension, also known as a bump-out, is a traffic calming measure that widens the sidewalk for a short distance, allowing for greater pedestrian visibility to passing cars. These are commonly applied at intersections for added safety at crossings.

<sup>33</sup> <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/neighborhoods/programs/trafficcalming/2024/traffic-calming-summary-report.pdf>

### 3. Continued improvements for youth safety

The current project pipeline includes several safety improvement projects for enhanced safety around Frances Scott Elementary. Ideas for future improvements include adding bike lanes along Hartson Avenue by removing the south parking lane; finding crossing guards to help with safe travel for people walking, biking, or rolling during school opening and closing times; more bump-outs and dedicated crosswalks; and programming that increases turnout for active travel modes.

### 4. Expanding accessibility

The study area has gaps in the sidewalk network, intersections lacking clear crosswalks, and disconnected routes with curb ramps. Future projects can build upon programs such as Spokane's Safe Streets for All to improve the neighborhood's accessibility with a focus on key corridors such as 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, streets surrounding parks, and connections with community institutions like the MLK Jr. Family Outreach Center. A community walking audit could help identify priority improvements for accessibility, particularly if participants of the walking include people of differing physical abilities.

### 5. Improve transit integration

The study area could improve its walkability by focusing on walking, biking, and rolling integration to transit (bus stops) along its key 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor. This includes safer pathways from residential streets to the bus stops and better conditions at the bus stops with interventions such as lighting, benches, and shelters. Bus shelters also present an opportunity to feature neighborhood branding and public art that reflect the character and identity of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community.

### 6. Enhance connectivity with the rest of the city

5<sup>th</sup> Avenue has the potential to serve as a strong spine of activity and connection for the community. A coordinated effort to add destinations, build out transportation networks, define neighborhood gateways, and increase wayfinding and promotional signage can transform the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor into a destination in its own right. Wayfinding and promotional signage to call attention to community assets and local businesses have been expressed as a need by residents to dually promote connectivity as well as walkability. This can also serve to draw people in from outside the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood and boost the health of businesses and street life. When people visit 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, it should be convenient to access the neighborhood via transit, bicycle, I-90 crossings on foot, and with traffic flow on surface streets.

Connectivity will also be improved with the restoration of more bike and pedestrian pathways north, across I-90. The East Central community has long been served by the Sprague business district, which is currently a challenge for access from 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue outside of a car. Shared use paths that connect to the Ben Burr Trail for more robust and far-reaching networks of safe, multimodal transportation would enhance this neighborhood's mobility offerings. Repaired pedestrian bridges and/or underpasses would also help address these connectivity concerns.

## Topic 2: Homeownership

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## Current Housing Landscape: Overview

As detailed in the Neighborhood Formation and Housing Discrimination section of this report, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area has endured a history of discriminatory housing policies that, coupled with freeway development and the associated displacement of longstanding residents, has significantly shaped the landscape of homeownership and housing quality across the neighborhood today.

This section summarizes data and trends related to the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood's housing stock, tenure, cost production, mobility, and affordability trends. Key takeaways from this review are summarized below and connect to proposals explored in **Source: City of Spokane, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2025.**

Community-Defined Priorities for Housing.

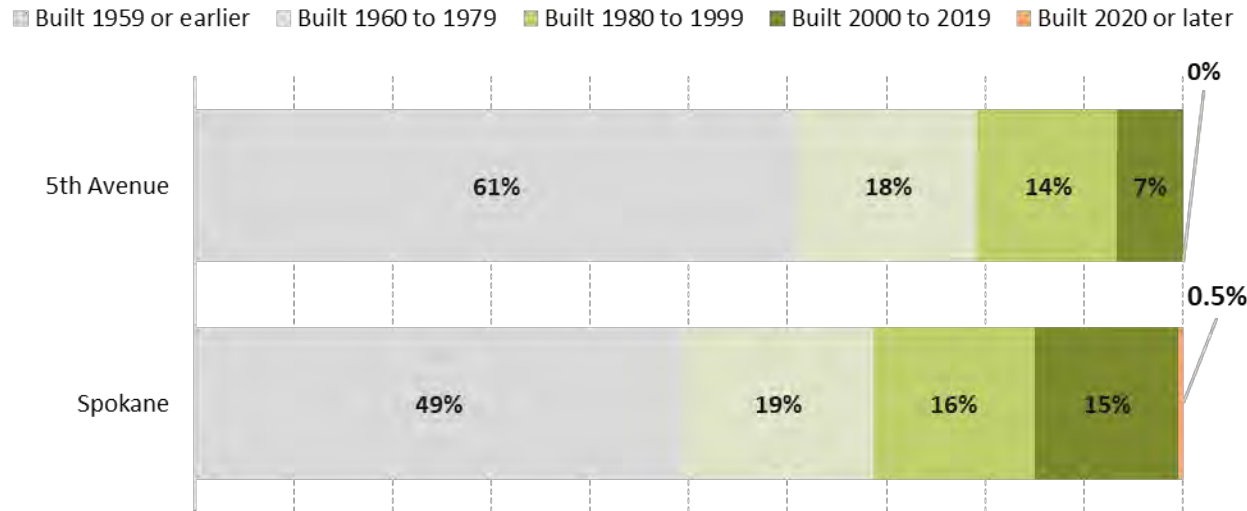
- **The 5th Avenue neighborhood housing stock trends older and slightly more affordable than citywide trends in Spokane.** These characteristics make the neighborhood an important source of entry-level homeownership potential for the city.
- **The 5th Avenue community stands out as a hub of BIPOC homeownership in Spokane.** Today's homeowners reflect a diverse mix of race and ethnic groups, although there remains a significant gap in the homeownership rates for BIPOC households.
- **Despite the relative affordability of 5th Avenue housing stock within the city context, area incomes are not aligned with current sales prices and likely mortgage rates for first-time homebuyers.** Local renters looking to enter into homeownership without being pushed out of the community or experiencing severe cost burden (paying 50% or more of monthly income toward housing) will struggle to find a suitable option. Most of all the neighborhood's Black renter households, and many of its Hispanic renter households, have left the area.
- **Many homes in this neighborhood are older and in need of updates and repairs.** This work can be costly, and with high rates of housing cost burden many households may feel unable to prioritize the funds for home repairs. Deferred maintenance can reduce quality of life for occupants, present health and/or safety risks, and reduce the wealth-generating potential of property ownership.

## HOUSING STOCK

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community housing stock consists of about 950 housing units, predominantly single-family homes that skew older in age and smaller in size than Spokane's housing stock overall. Many single-family homes reflect the craftsman style typical of the Pacific Northwest. Homes are mostly owner-occupied (66%), and a review of home sales from the past 12 months demonstrates an average sales price of around \$312,000. This is 19% lower than Spokane's citywide average sales price of \$387k.<sup>34</sup> Overall, this price point reflects a dramatic uptick in the cost to buy a house in the neighborhood. This inflection started around 2020 and peaked in 2022. See Figure 30.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood has a higher proportion of homes built pre-1960 (61% versus 49%) and a smaller proportion of units built since 2000 (7% versus 15.5%) compared to Spokane overall. See Figure 29. Homes built before 1978 have a higher likelihood of containing lead-based paint. Exposure to lead-based paint is a known health hazard, particularly among developing adolescents.

**Figure 29** Age of Housing Stock in 5th Ave Neighborhood and Spokane Overall, 2023



Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates; Seva Workshop 2025.

<sup>34</sup> Data from Zillow, 2024. Compares the average sales price in zip code 99202 with citywide trends.





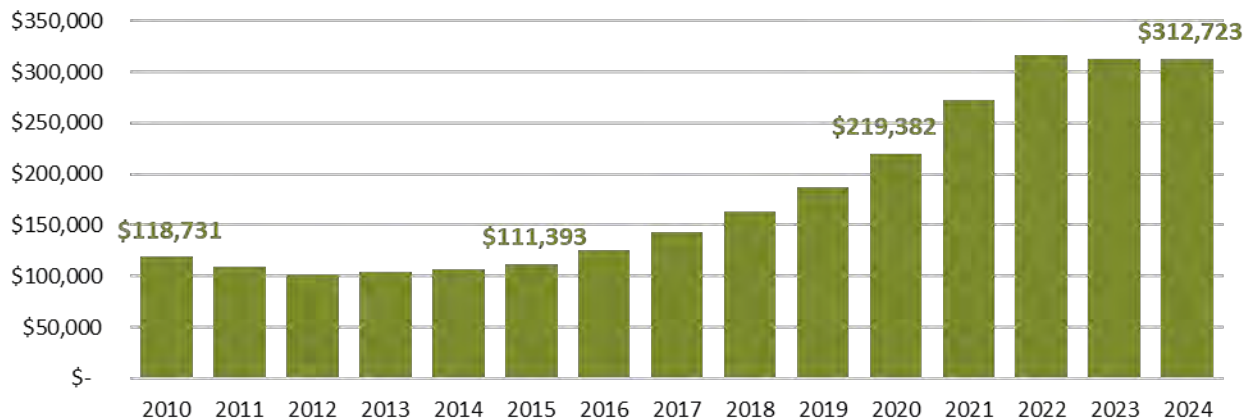
*Photos on this page represent a sampling of houses throughout the 5th Avenue neighborhood.*



## HOMEOWNERSHIP

A typical mortgage for a \$312k home, including estimates for lending rates, property tax, and insurance, can be estimated at around \$2,550 monthly. This rate is considered affordable to households earning 155% of Spokane’s median household income.<sup>35</sup> The neighborhood finds itself part of a statewide affordability crisis. While the neighborhood sales prices remain 10-30% lower per square foot than in neighboring communities of the Perry District or Lincoln Heights, they are still out of reach for most Spokane households.<sup>36</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood is an important home for relatively affordable housing stock and entry-level homeownership opportunities in East Central and Spokane at large, but homeownership is out of reach financially for an increasing percentage of the population. See Figure 30.

**Figure 30** Average Sales Prices for Homes in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 2010-2024



*Sale prices in 5th Avenue have more than doubled over the past decade, from 2014 (\$106k) to 2024 (\$312k). This dramatic shift creates a high barrier to entry into the current homeownership market, especially for first-time homebuyers.*

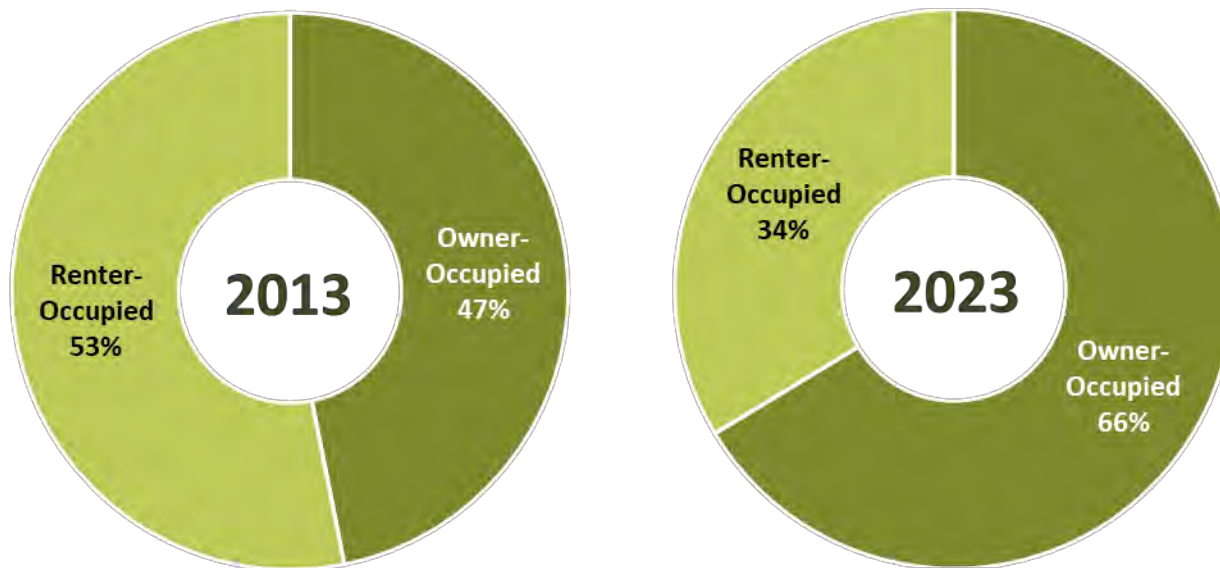
Sources: Zillow ZHVI for Zip code 99202, Average of monthly data for 2010-2024; Seva Workshop, 2025.

<sup>35</sup> Spokane median household income from ACS 5-year estimates, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Based on a review of sales within the last 12 months across these neighborhoods, comparing single family homes of 2-4 bedrooms, Zillow sales records April 2025.

The 5th Avenue Community has seen a shift toward increased homeownership in the past decade, from 47% in 2013 to 66% in 2023. The total count of units has remained stable over this time period, indicating that sites have transitioned from renter-occupied to owner-occupied rather than new parts of the neighborhood being built out or densified. See Figure 31.

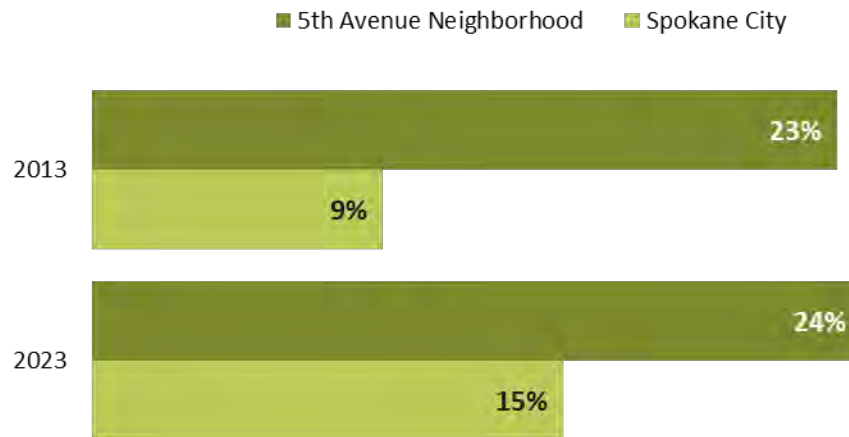
**Figure 31** Housing Tenure in the 5th Avenue Neighborhood, 2013 and 2023



Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2013 & 2023; Seva Workshop 2025.

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community is, and has been, an important hub of BIPOC homeownership in Spokane.** These trends tie directly back to the legacy of housing discrimination discussed in the Neighborhood Formation and Housing Discrimination section. While the city’s overall percentage of homeowners who are BIPOC has increased in the past decade, the 5<sup>th</sup> Ave Neighborhood remains steady as a stronger cluster for these households. The proportion of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood homeowners who identify as people of color is significantly higher than citywide trends (24% versus 15% in 2023), reflecting this neighborhood continuing to function as a hub for many of Spokane’s BIPOC communities. See Figure 32.

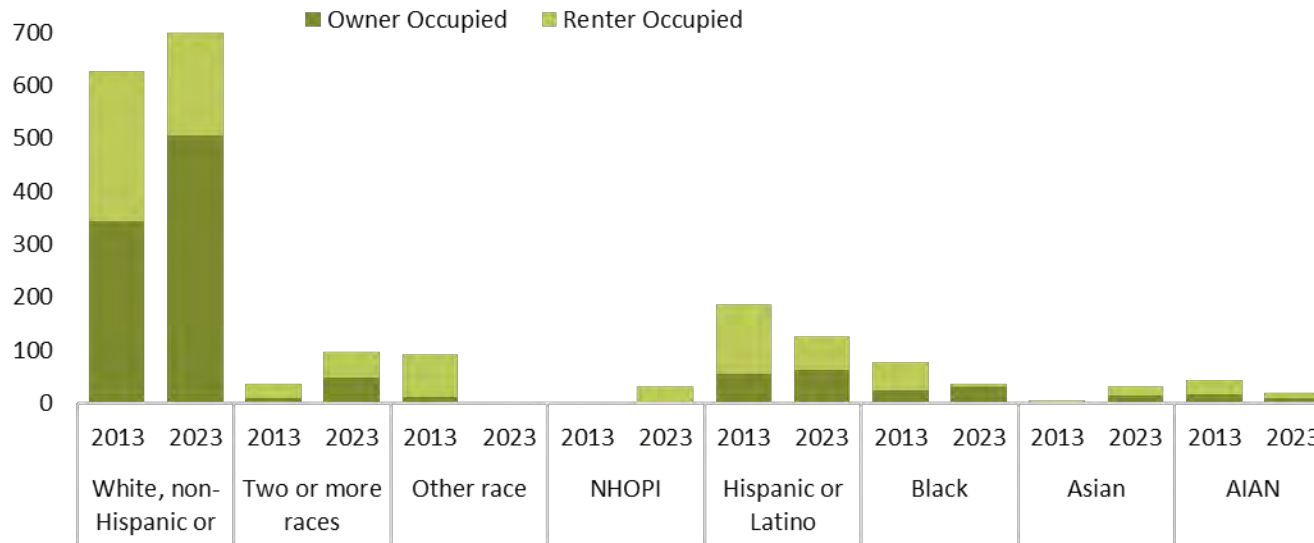
**Figure 32**      Percent of Homeowners who are BIPOC in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue versus Spokane overall, 2013 and 2023



*Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2013 and 2023; Seva Workshop 2025.*

**While the total number of housing units remained static over the 2013-2023 period, the renter population in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area declined in favor of more owner households.** Racial demographics shifted along with this change, and almost all Black renters left the neighborhood without transitioning to homeownership locally. The Hispanic renter population also experienced steep decline. In contrast, the number of white homeowners in the past decade has modestly increased but the proportion of those residents who are homeowners has jumped. See Figure 33. Despite outpacing the city overall in terms of the BIPOC homeownership rate, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community has room to grow to achieve racial equity for homeownership. Of all BIPOC residents in the neighborhood, 49% are homeowners; for the white population, this figure is 23% higher, at 72%. See Figure 34.

**Figure 33** Population by housing tenure, stratified by race and ethnicity, 2013 and 2023 in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue



Source: ACS 5-year estimates 2013 and 2023; Seva Workshop 2025.

**Figure 34** Homeownership Rate in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue by Race and Ethnicity, 2023

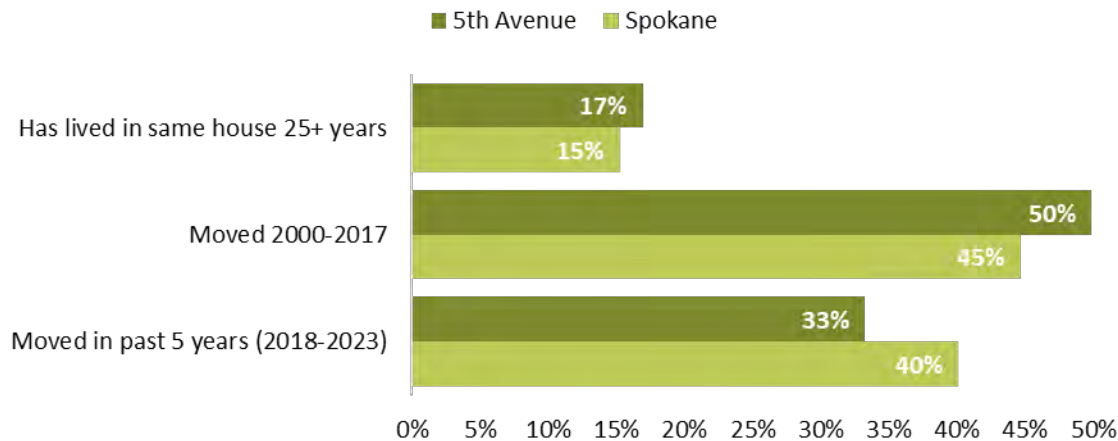


Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2013 and 2023; Seva Workshop 2025.

## MOBILITY TRENDS

Neighborhood longevity and housing stability offer many benefits to residents who can keep social networks and daily patterns intact. Mobility data suggests that the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area overall experiences a slower turnover rate than citywide trends, as there is higher proportion of households that have been in their same house or apartment for multiple decades and a lower rate of people who moved in the past 5 years. See Figure 35. However, deferred maintenance can be a challenge for long-time owners of a single property, both rental and owner-occupied, with the high cost of commonly needed upgrades such as new HVAC, replaced electrical wiring, structural repairs, or window replacement acting as a barrier to implementation. Site assessment of properties in this neighborhood confirms a wide mix of homes that appear well-maintained and others that appear in need of maintenance and updates. Support is likely needed for many residents to safely age in place, such as assistance with utility bills and with home repairs to ensure safe and healthy housing features.

Figure 35 Year Householder Moved into Unit, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue versus Spokane overall, 2023



## HOUSING COST BURDEN

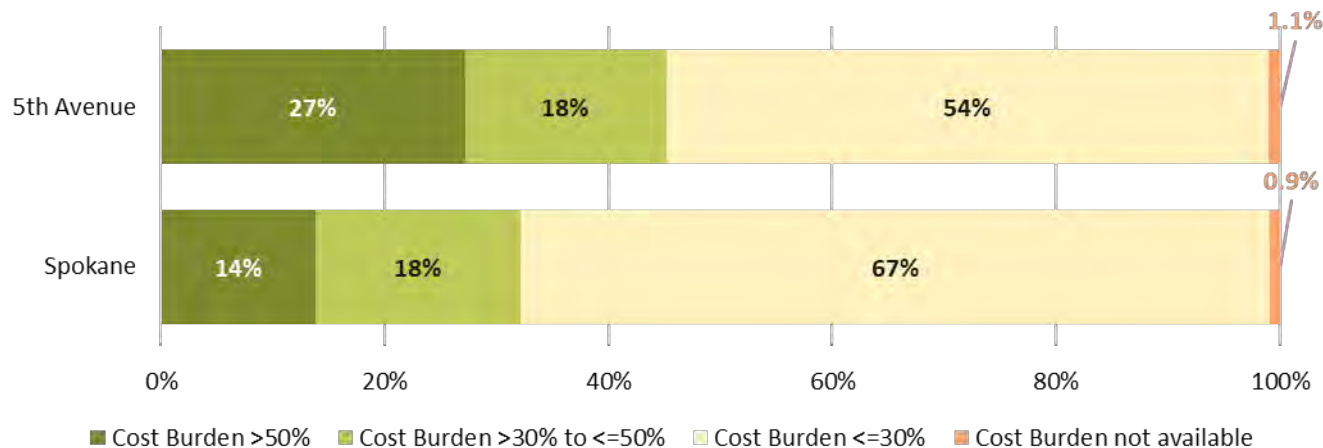
The median household income in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood is 18% lower than the citywide median, meaning that 80% AMI is a midpoint for household income in this area. See Figure 12 from the Community Profile. This income gap has narrowed in the past decade and the total quantity of housing units has remained relatively stable, suggesting that newer households moving in may be in higher income brackets than the previously existing community. Recent sale prices in the neighborhood suggest that a typical mortgage for a first-time homebuyer in the area requires an income around



155% AMI.<sup>37</sup> For most households in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood, entry into homeownership locally is out of reach financially without incurring a significant cost burden. Renters in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood are already cost-burdened at high rates, see Figure 36, and are unlikely to be able to set aside enough savings for a downpayment.

**Housing cost burden rates are high in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood, where 27% of households are severely cost-burdened (paying more than 50% of household income toward housing).** These households will struggle to cover other important costs adequately, such as transportation, healthcare, education, and groceries. An additional 18% of households qualify as cost burdened, paying 30% or more of their income toward housing. In total, 45% of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue households are cost burdened from housing, compared to a citywide rate of 32%. See Figure 36.

**Figure 36 Housing Cost Burden Rates in Spokane and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 2021**



*Note: Percentage rates indicate percent of household income paid toward housing costs, including utilities.*

*Source: CHAS (Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy) dataset based on American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2017-2021; Seva Workshop 2025.*

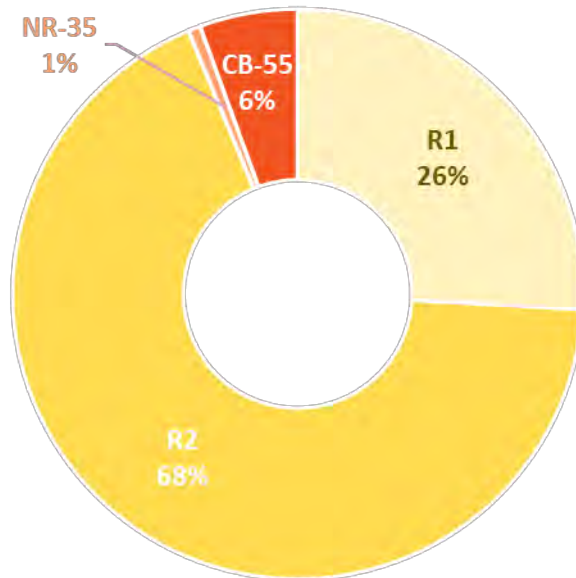
## Residential Zoning and Land Use

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood is predominantly zoned for low-density residential use, with 94% of acreage assigned to the R1 or R2 zone. The R1 zoning (26% of acreage) applies to sites east of S Freya St. and in a small pocket east of Underhill Park. R2 zoning (68% of acreage) applies to most sites

<sup>37</sup> This is based on calculations assuming a 10% downpayment and mortgage interest, property tax, and PMI rates typical for 2024.

north and south of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor from Liberty Park to S Freya St. The Community Business zone (CB-55) covers 6% of acreage and covers the commercial district along Freya and Thor, including the Fred Meyer and gas station. Residential uses are permitted in this area as well, similar to the Neighborhood Retail zone (NR-35) which is used in just a few places but allows for a mix of commercial and residential.

**Figure 37     Zoning by Acreage in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue**



*Sources: City of Spokane, 2025; Seva Workshop, 2025.*

**Zones R1 and R2 allow for single-family homes, middle housing types, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), manufactured homes, and multifamily buildings as permitted uses.** A summary of development standards, especially those that differ between these zones, can be found below. Notably, neither zone is restricted to a maximum density when a property is less than two acres in size. Regarding all properties, the minimum lot size is 1,200 sq. ft. and the max height is 40'. Density maximums are enforced in R1 and R2 for properties greater than two acres, with the R2 zone allowing greater densities on these larger lots than in R1. Additionally, the R2 zone allows for more flexibility by allowing narrow 40-foot lots and maximum building coverage up to 80%, rather than 65% in R1. These differences allow for more flexibility which, in particular, allow more types of middle housing. The commercial zones, NR and CB, are not regulated by the same density and lot requirements as the residential zones. They instead have minimum setback requirements, parking requirements, and maximum building height standards to regulate their size and scale in the community. The NR zone allows lower

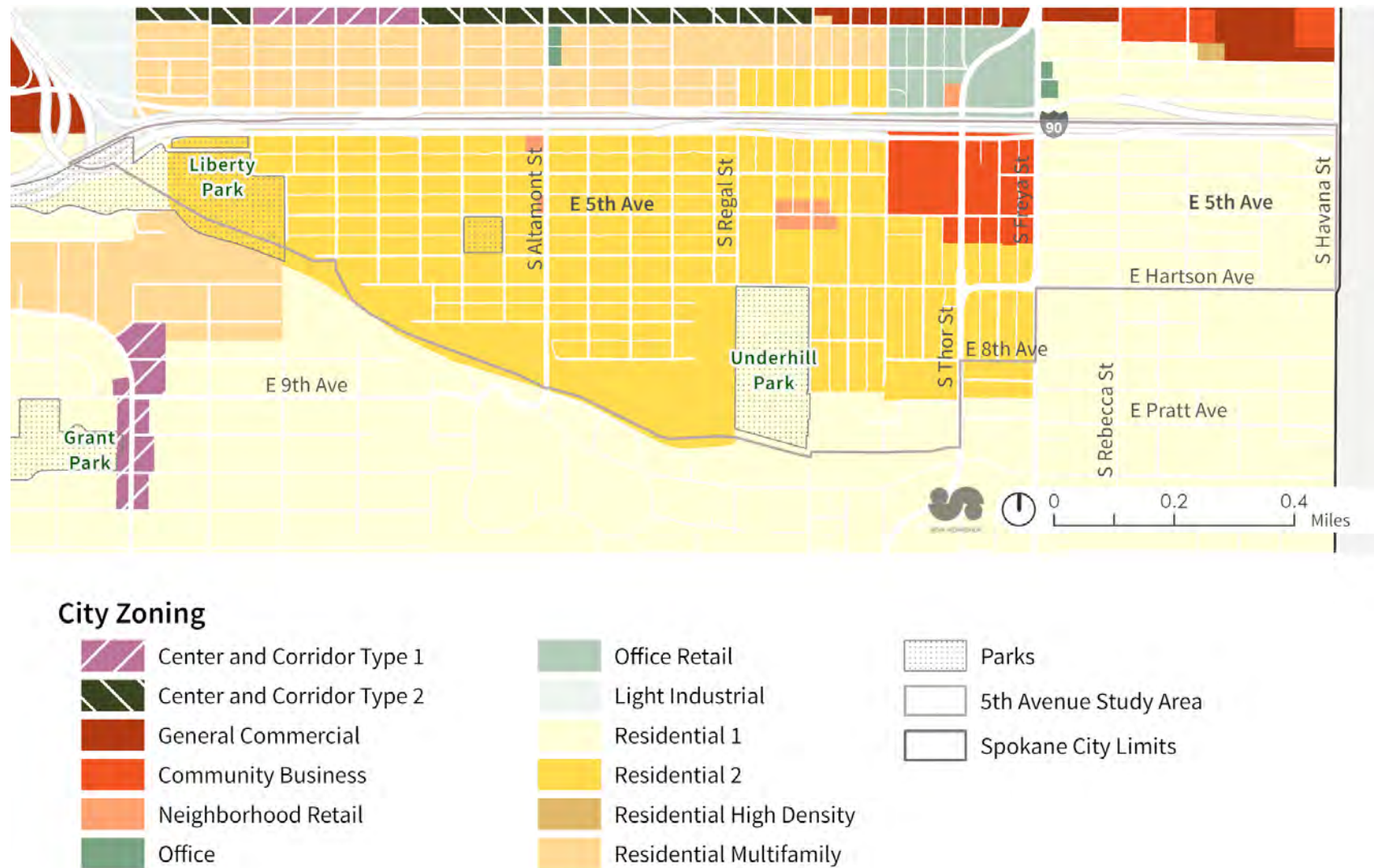
heights than the low density residential areas, at 35 feet. The CB area allows for a bit more flexibility that could accommodate small to midsized multifamily development, at 55'.

**Figure 38** Development Standards in R1 and R2 zones

DEVELOPMENT STANDARD	R1	R2	NR	CB
Max Density on sites 2 acres or less	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Max Density on sites > 2 acres	10 units/acre	20 units/acre	n/a	n/a
Minimum Density	4 units/acre	10 units/acre	n/a	n/a
Minimum Lot Area	1,200 sq. ft.	1,200 sq. ft.	n/a	n/a
Minimum Lot Depth	80 ft.	40 ft.	n/a	n/a
Max Building Coverage	65%	80%	n/a	n/a
Max FAR*	n/a	n/a	0.8	1.5
Minimum Setback Requirements	10' on the front' 3' on an interior side lot for lot widths <40', 5' for lot widths >40'; 5' from any street side		10' from R-zoned lots and from the front lot line	
Minimum Parking Requirements	Varies by use of site. For most retail purposes, 1 parking space per 200 square feet of interior floor area.			
Max Building Height	40 ft.	40 ft.	35 ft.	55 ft.

\*FAR = Floor Area Ratio. This is calculated by the interior floor area divided by the site area. There is no FAR limit for residential development in these zones.  
Source: Spokane Municipal Code 17C.111.205 (residential), 17D.120.210 (commercial), and 17C.230.020 (parking)

Figure 39 Zoning districts by parcel in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue



Source: City of Spokane, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2025.

## Community-Defined Priorities for Housing

Historic highway construction and discriminatory housing practices have left a legacy of trauma and disruption for impacted families across East Central. Many community members still feel these impacts deeply, and a focus of this plan will be to create pathways of reconnection for families impacted by historic harms. Today's community in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue echoes this priority and expresses concerns about affordability and displacement for themselves and for neighbors. Many feel that homeownership is out of reach or that the financial barriers to improving their property are simply too high with current market conditions. The ReFIVE vision will include pathways to supported and sustained homeownership for a vibrant 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community.

### 1. Supporting first-time homebuyers

- Black Homeownership Spokane<sup>38</sup> (BHS) is a grassroots initiative working with individuals and couples interested in buying their first home. The coalition serves individuals and families that are foundationally Black, Indigenous, or People of Color. The program offers financial counseling and homebuyer education, connects participants to assistance for debt paydown or downpayment funds, and is working to identify opportunities for taking advantage of Washington's new Covenant homebuyer assistance program (see below). BHS is composed of seven Spokane organizations: Take up the Cause, the Carl Maxey Center, Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center, Vision Properties, Jacquelynne Sandoval Real Estate, Community Frameworks and Habitat for Humanity-Spokane.
- Washington State's Covenant homebuyer assistance program<sup>39</sup>, created in 2023, reflects the statewide commitment to reparative justice for impacts of discrimination in housing policy. Qualified recipients receive 0% interest loans to assist with downpayment and closing cost funds. This benefit is extended to those who:
  - Are a first-time homebuyer
  - Have a household income at or below 120% AMI
  - Have a parent/grandparent/great-grandparent who lived in Washington prior to April 1968
  - The parent/grandparent/great-grandparent is Black, Hispanic, Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Korean, or Asian Indian
- Adding flexibility in housing size, format, and density within residential areas. Spokane recently updated zoning districts and descriptions to allow for greater flexibility in residential zoning. These changes allow for the integration of more middle housing types in neighborhoods with predominantly single-family homes—such as 2-3-4-plexes, townhomes, small lot developments, and accessory dwelling units. Middle housing types are often more

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<sup>38</sup> <https://favs.news/coalition-breaks-down-barriers-aids-13-black-homebuyers-in-spokane/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://wshfc.org/covenant/>



affordable than traditional single-family offerings, or they allow a homeowner to add a secondary unit on their existing lot. These changes recently came into effect for the 5th Avenue neighborhood and will hopefully result in greater choice and affordability for the community.<sup>40</sup>

## 2. Affordable housing

Many formats of subsidized affordable housing units are rentals rather than ownership, but they remain an important focus for meeting the affordability goals in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The City has several ongoing pathways of support that could increase the supply of subsidized affordable housing in this community. Using these tools promotes equitable growth within new development for the neighborhood.

- Multifamily Tax Exemption (MFTE) is a program that provides tax breaks to developers in exchange for the incorporation of subsidized affordable housing units. There are varying lengths of exemption based on the quantity of units provided and the income levels accommodated. In Spokane, the range of options within designated areas<sup>41</sup> include:
  - 8-year tax exemption for providing student housing or congregate living housing (this option only available in Spokane’s Target Investment Area or STIA)
  - 12-year tax exemption for providing 30% of units in the building affordable to low- or moderate-income households<sup>42</sup>
  - 20-year tax exemption for providing affordable homeownership units, sold to a qualified nonprofit or other partner to assure permanent affordability
  - There are additional opportunities and modifications of these exemptions based on the size of the project and whether ownership units are incorporated. Read a full summary in Spokane’s municipal code: Chapter 08.15.090
- Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) is the largest source of federal funds to support subsidized affordable housing across the country. Attracting LIHTC funds to this neighborhood could go a long way to advance goals for neighborhood affordability, but there are barriers to implementation. These projects tend to favor larger sites, which are less available in this neighborhood. The existing zoning is much lower density than a typical LIHTC project, as well, with no other residential buildings in the area at the scale of the typical density found on these sites.

## 3. Policies to help existing residents with home updates

Financial assistance for home renovations or repairs can be an important tool for maintaining homeownership and its wealth building potential. Spokane has a few existing programs that could be well suited to existing community members in 5th Avenue:<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> <https://my.spokanecity.org/projects/shaping-spokane-housing/building-opportunity-for-housing/>

<sup>41</sup> The study area west of S Thor St. is included in the STIA. The remainder of the study area is within the Affordable Housing Emphasis Area, which is only eligible for 12-year or 20-year MFTE options.

<sup>42</sup> Moderate income is defined as 115% AMI or below. In 2024-2025, a family of 4 with a household income at or below \$97,900 would qualify.

<https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/economicdevelopment/incentives/mfte/2024-2025-spokane-area-median-income.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> <https://my.spokanecity.org/news/releases/2024/11/25/home-repair-assistance-programs-available-as-winter-weather-approaches/>

- The Essential Home Repair program helps homeowners with grants up to \$6,000 that fund repairs addressing health or safety hazards, such as no heat, no water, plumbing issues, or ADA modifications. SNAP administers this program.<sup>44</sup>
- The Single Family Rehabilitation program provides low-interest loans for larger rehabilitation projects, ranging from \$10,000 - \$50,000. These projects might include things like roof repair, sewer repair, window replacement, interior rehab, foundation work, or hazardous tree removal. SNAP administers this program.<sup>45</sup>
- The Utility Pipe Rehabilitation program also offers low-interest loans to homeowners for the repair or replacement of damaged water or sewer lines.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4. Alternative models for ownership

- **Community land trusts (CLTs)**<sup>47</sup> can be used in multiple ways to create opportunities for community stability and wealth building, including securing land for community stewarded development and promoting affordable homeownership.

##### *How a community land trust works*

1. An organizing entity, typically a nonprofit, purchases a property and builds or maintains multiple units on that property
2. A family or individual then purchases a house that sits on land owned by the community land trust
  - a. The purchase price of this house is more affordable because the homeowner is only buying the house, not the land
3. The homeowners lease the land from the CLT in a long-term, renewable lease
4. The homeowners agree to sell the house at a restricted price to keep it affordable in perpetuity, but they may be able to realize appreciation from improvements they make while they live in the house

**Cooperative housing** (a co-op)<sup>48</sup> is another structure used to achieve lasting affordability and shared ownership in a community. Rather than own a structure itself, co-op members own shares in a corporation, which in turn owns or controls housing and the land on which it sits. This model is often used in formats such as student housing or senior housing,

##### **HOMESTEAD COMMUNITY LAND TRUST PARTNERSHIP WITH AYA COMMUNITY LAND TRUST**

Homestead is a non-profit organization founded to address King County's high cost of housing and provide a new economic model for lower-income households to reach homeownership. Since 1992, they have supported BIPOC ownership by converting 257 homes to permanent affordable housing. Homestead will be partnering with Aya Community Land Trust to develop affordable housing in Tacoma's historically Black neighborhood of Hilltop.

See more: <https://homesteadclt.org>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.snapwa.org/i-need-help-with-housing/essentialhomerepair/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.snapwa.org/home-repair/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://my.spokanecity.org/news/stories/2024/11/08/utility-pipe-rehab-program-assistance-for-homeowners/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://groundedsolutions.org/strengthening-neighborhoods/community-land-trusts/>

<sup>48</sup> [https://resources.uwcc.wisc.edu/housing/HousingCoops\\_HomeOwnership.pdf](https://resources.uwcc.wisc.edu/housing/HousingCoops_HomeOwnership.pdf)

although it can apply to family housing as well. Limited equity co-ops are set up with additional bylaws that limit resale value to ensure greater levels of affordability.

### ***How a co-op works***

1. Ownership of a property and its structures is transferred into the name of a common corporation
2. A family or individual purchases shares of the corporation, which entitles them the rights to occupy a unit and to have a say in the governance of the cooperative
3. Typically, there is a “buy-in fee” for new members, plus ongoing monthly fees (similar to an HOA) to help cover shared costs for the property
4. Unlike traditional homeownership arrangements, individual households often need not take out a mortgage to access housing in a co-op. Rather, the co-op itself holds the mortgage, with members paying their share of the overall cost. This means there are much lower closing costs and transactional fees when a unit changes hands, which helps maintain affordability

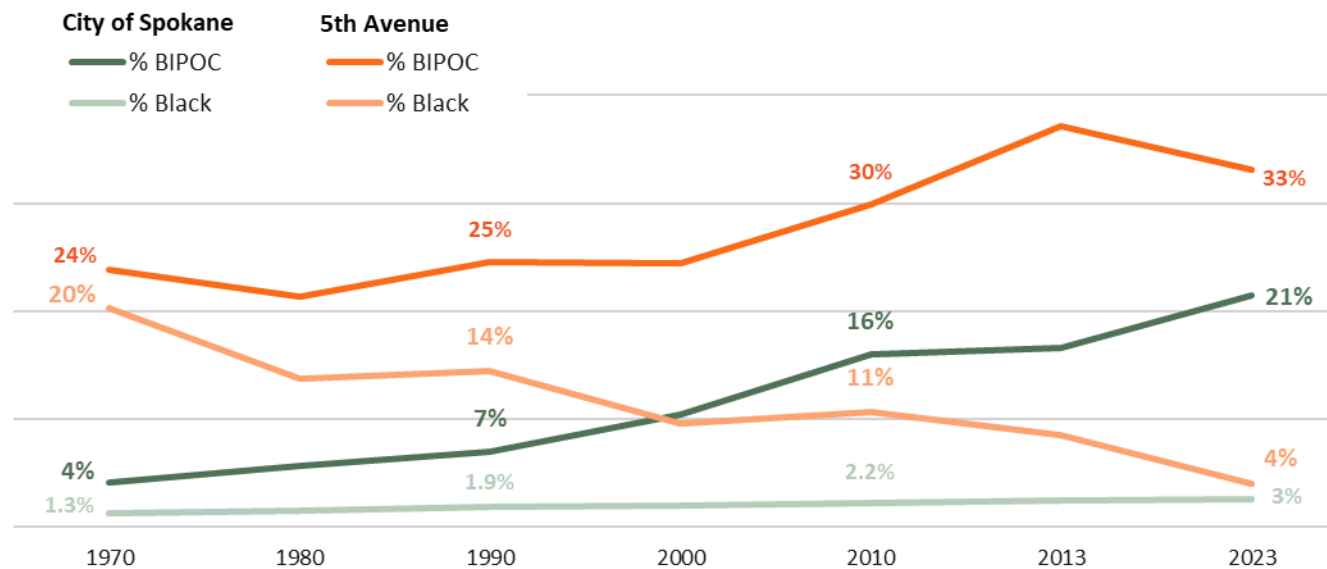
## Topic 3: Community Identity

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## Historical Demographics

The **Community Profile** details the history of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the East Central neighborhood as longstanding hubs of racial diversity in Spokane, and most notably the heart of Spokane’s Black community. Spokane’s race-based segregation was highly influential in the 1940s and 1950s. By 1970, approximately 65% of Black residents lived in just three census tracts, notably in the 5th Avenue corridor and adjacent areas.<sup>49</sup> Before establishing itself as Spokane’s Black community hub, the 5th Avenue neighborhood was also home to many Italian Americans, who made up 10% of East Central residents in the late 1930s. Despite facing anti-Italian and anti-Catholic sentiment, they overcame adversity. By the 1950s, Italian Americans had assimilated into white culture and moved to more desirable Spokane neighborhoods.

**Figure 40** Percent BIPOC and Percent Black Populations of 5th Avenue and the City of Spokane, 1970 to 2023



*Note: BIPOC percentages are inclusive of the Black population*

*Sources: US Decennial Census, 1970-2010; American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2013-2023); Seva Workshop, 2025.*

By 1970, the BIPOC population of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue comprised 24% compared to 4% in Spokane at large. While this population of Spokane has significantly increased over the decades, the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community continues to outpace citywide trends as a home for people of varying backgrounds, in 2023 at

<sup>49</sup> East Central Historic and Cultural Context, Spokane Historic Preservation Office, 2022-2023.



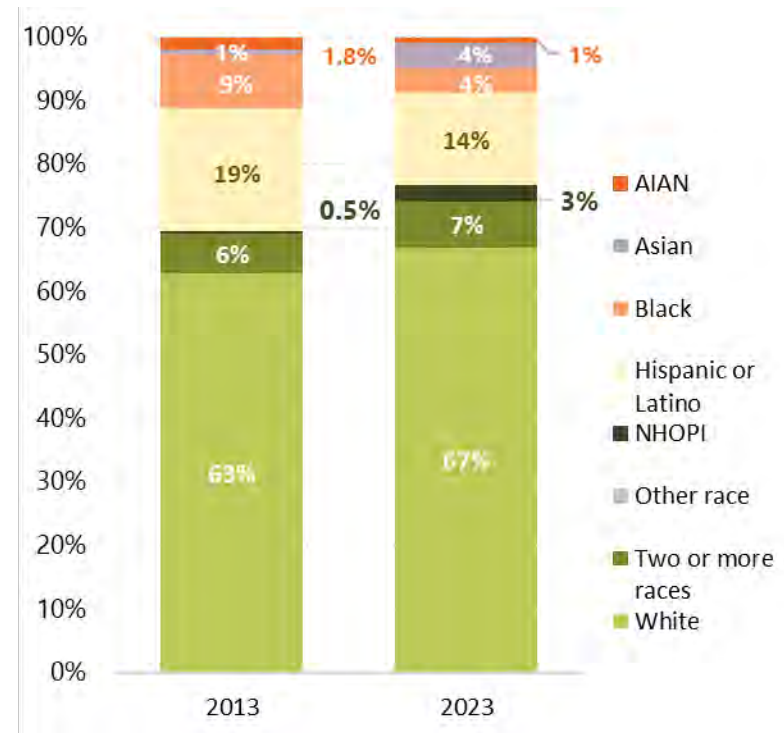
33% People of Color compared to 21% citywide. See Figure 40. While racial diversity thrives in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the neighborhood's concentration of Black residents has largely dispersed. In 2023, only 4% of residents (approximately 104 people) identify as Black compared to 20% in 1970 (approximately 464 people). A large factor for change in this neighborhood is the wave of displacement introduced with freeway development. Other contributing factors could be updates in how personal data is collected, with an increasing number of people selecting multiple categories for identity, as well as the end of institutionalized race-based housing segregation that limited neighborhood choice for People of Color. But the change is of cultural concern to Black residents of Spokane who know the power of living in community and preserving the legacy of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue's history.

## Community Demographics Today

**Community identity and cultural preservation have emerged as key issues in recent engagement efforts.** Community members are eager to define and strengthen the identity of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area. They want to celebrate and preserve the neighborhood's Black historical legacy, acknowledge the rich diversity and welcoming nature of today's community, and pave the way for a bright future where the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood is healthy and thriving.

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor in the East Central neighborhood is one of Spokane's most racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods.** The non-white population, including the Hispanic or Latino community, comprised around 37% in 2013 and 33% in 2023. Figure 41 shows the racial and ethnic composition in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Over the past decade, decline is observed in the Hispanic or Latino population (19% to 14%) and the Black population (9% to 4%). At the same time, there has been slight increases in the Asian population (1% to 4%), and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander population (0.5% to 3%). Today, the neighborhood's largest non-white racial and ethnic group is the Hispanic or Latino population, followed by those who identify as multiracial.

**Figure 41 Race and Ethnicity in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 2013 and 2023**

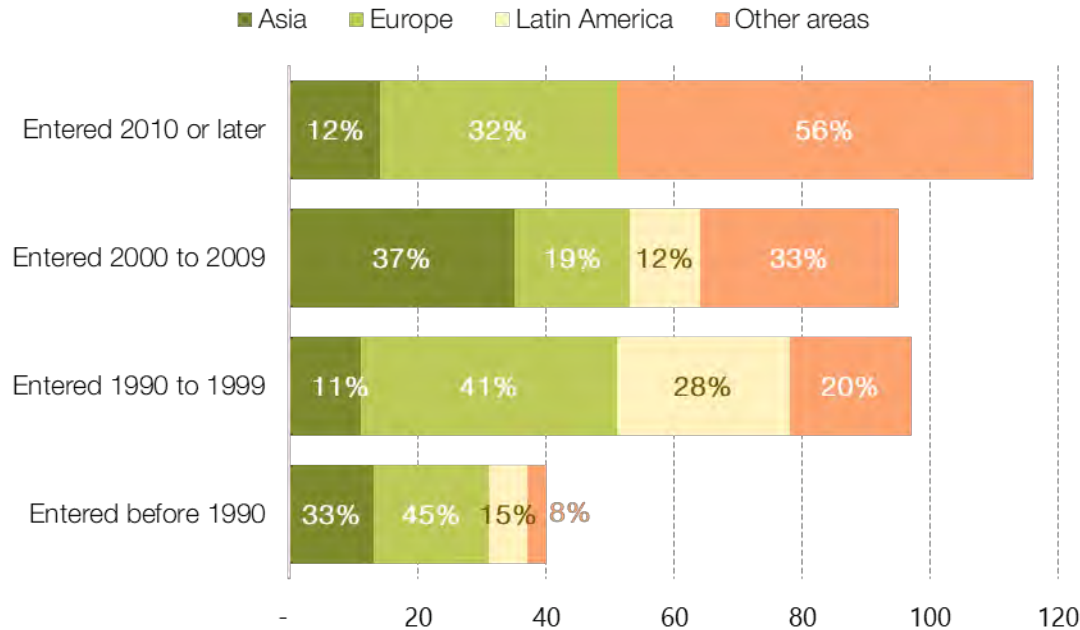


Sources: American Community Survey 5-year estimates 2013 & 2023; Seva Workshop, 2025.

**Today's demographic makeup in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue includes a growing and more diverse immigrant community.** Immigrants comprise 13% of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue population and come from a wide range of countries. Those living in the area who entered before 1990 are European (45%), Asian (33%), or Latin

American (15%) with just 8% from other countries. By contrast, immigrants in the area who arrived more recently, 2010 or later, are more than double in number and 56% of them come from countries outside of Europe, Asia, or Latin America. See Figure 42. Community institutions and local schools share that many families of Marshallese, Hmong, Ukrainian, Russian, Norwegian, Italian, Kazakh, Mexican, Vietnamese, Karen, and South African origin are part of the current 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community.

**Figure 42** Foreign-Born Population Year of Entry by Place of Birth, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 2023



Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates; Seva Workshop 2025.

## Cultural Expression Evident Today

There are several ways to see and experience the culture of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue today. Some of these previous and ongoing efforts to support cultural expression include:

- There is a longstanding hub of Black businesses and non-profits clustered along the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor.
  - **The Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center**, previously the East Central Community Center: Historically a key gathering place for the Black Community, the MLK Family Outreach Center is listed on the Spokane Register of Historic Places. Founded in 1976, their mission is to “improve the quality of life for children, youth and families in Spokane through an array of culturally responsive educational and social services within the framework of Dr. King’s vision of equal respect, treatment, and accessibility for all people.”<sup>50</sup>
  - **The Carl Maxey Center**: In 2019, the Carl Maxey Center (CMC) was founded to serve as a cultural center, gathering space, and support center. CMC offers Black-focused programming and community services, while providing a community space for various gatherings and events. The CMC was named after Spokane’s first Black attorney, Carl Maxey, who served as a criminal defense attorney and a civil rights leader in the community, leading the fight to desegregate Spokane.<sup>51</sup>
  - **Fresh Soul Restaurant and the Spokane Eastside Reunion Association’s (SERA)**: Fresh Soul is a social enterprise and southern-inspired soul food restaurant that brings restoration and opportunity to the Eastside community, especially through the Spokane Eastside Reunion Association’s (SERA) programming. The non-profit restaurant has been serving the community since 2018. The SERA program offers job training and life skill programming for youth as well as sports summer camps, and an annual backpack and school supplies drive to prepare 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue youth for success.
  - **Larry’s Barbershop**: Larry’s Barbershop is one of the longest-standing Black-owned businesses in the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area, serving the community for almost 50 years. The establishment is a cherished and invaluable asset of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, particularly among the neighborhood’s Black community.
  - **New Developed Nations**: The mission of New Developed Nations (NDN) is to be a program of excellence that provides the community with exceptional service by training chemically dependent and at-risk youth to be positive, functional and empowered citizens through music, sports, nutrition and education, providing them with a voice that may have been once unheard.

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<sup>50</sup> [https://mlkspokane.org/?page\\_id=695](https://mlkspokane.org/?page_id=695)

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.gonzaga.edu/news-events/stories/2023/2/1/black-history-month-2023>

- Historically Black Churches, such as **Mt. Zion Holiness Church** and **Mount Olive Baptist Church**.



*Murals decorate the facade of several of the commercial and non-profit spaces along 5th Avenue, adding art and personality to the place.*

Notably, there have been efforts to reclaim and rename schools and community centers in honor of Spokane's Black history as well as organizing community events and opportunities for storytelling:

- In 2020, the East Central Community Center was renamed the MLK Center.
- In 2021, the elementary school changed its name to Frances Scott Elementary School, honoring Spokane's long-time educator, civil rights activist, and first African American female attorney.
- East Central is home to Spokane's largest official Juneteenth celebration in the nearby Grant Park
- Many residents rent the community spaces offered at the MLK Center for family gatherings, celebrations, and events

- The Carl Maxey Center Housing & Economic Opportunity (CMC HEO) workgroup formed in 2022 to advocate for community redevelopment of highway surplus land in East Central, established by the housing bill SB 5853 (RCW 47.12.120, 47.12.125, 47.12.380).
- The 5th Avenue Forward coalition emerged in 2025 to carry forward the work of the CMC HEO and to collaboratively revitalize the 5th Avenue area through community-driven initiatives focused on affordable housing, economic empowerment, and enhancing neighborhood identity.
- 5th Ave Forward is facilitating a video project as well as branding effort in 2025 to capture storytelling from those who grew up, live, work and have cultural connections in the 5th Avenue area.

## Community-Defined Priorities for Identity and Expression

Given the changing demographics and increased ethnic and cultural diversity of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, there is a desire to foster a community identity that can foster connection and belonging. Community-defined priorities showcase a need to memorialize the Black community's history and sense of place while also incorporating the new residents' diverse cultural contributions. Community identity can be visually represented in the built environment through a unified branding strategy, integration of public art and historic placemaking, and cultural programs and activities that reflect the unique stories and heritage of residents.

### Ideas to explore in the ReFIVE Community Plan include:

- Memorialize and bring forward the historical and current Black footprint
  - Bring Black history and stories to the forefront
  - Show creativity and identity expression reflective of the Black community
- Highlight the neighborhood's welcoming cultural environment and informal role as a landing place for a wide range of immigrant communities, a sense of social cohesion amongst cultural diversity
- Enhance access and opportunity for all ages, designing community destinations for kids to grow up with
- Attract young professionals with housing options like smaller apartments, choices for food and dining, and a scene for entertainment and leisure
- More housing opportunities for families to grow and expand in East Central, specifically in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and stay connected to the community and local institutions
- Cultural programming, summer events, and markets



## Strategies and Inspiration

### Idea 1: Historic Preservation designations

One way to memorialize the historic identity of an area is to create a historic or cultural overlay district, develop neighborhood branding and signage, and create neighborhood gateways and a heritage trail with interpretive signage. These interventions formalize a neighborhood identity and tell a specific origin story in a place.

Examples of historic Black neighborhoods that are celebrating Black excellence include the revival of Tulsa’s “Black Wall Street” in Oklahoma, the Hayti District (also known as “The Black Capitol of the South”) in Durham, North Carolina, and the Fourth Avenue District in Birmingham, Alabama. These historic districts vary in size and number of designated landmarks. Some have nationally recognized memorials that attract a high number of visitors and represent a shared national identity and history for Black Americans.<sup>52</sup> While the Black community on 5th Avenue is considerably smaller compared to these other historic districts, the economic and community-building achievements of historic preservation planning for Black communities merits investigation in this specific context.

### Considerations

- Affordability and anti-displacement tools must be considered when planning historic landmark and district designations. In some cases, preservation tools can negatively impact racial and ethnic minorities by driving up property values and result in the displacement of low-income communities of color.<sup>53</sup> But there are successful examples of Black historical preservation districts that demonstrate the potential for positive outcomes.
- Historic designations create long-lasting markers for history and storytelling, but they do not guarantee that the community being recognized will continue to live in the neighborhood. A historic overlay district is unlikely, on its own, to re-establish a new community of Black residents in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

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<sup>52</sup> <https://savingplaces.org/stories/9-historic-black-neighborhoods-that-celebrate-black-excellence>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.planning.org/planning/2021/spring/tools-iapa-takeaway/>

## Idea 2: Create an Arts or Cultural District

An arts and/or cultural district is a formalized mixed-use area of a city that hosts a high concentration of cultural and creative facilities. These districts are cherished around the country for amplifying, celebrating, and educating about an area's unique and distinct culture through artistic expressions. Arts and cultural districts are assets to their cities in how they beautify neighborhoods, attract business, provide employment, and support a vibrant and innovative atmosphere. A district designation can cement a neighborhood identity and fuel a cluster of creative activity for future growth.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area is already widely decorated with murals that celebrate and tell the story of the community. 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue could be an ideal location for a formalized arts or cultural district within Spokane considering the existing neighborhood vibrancy and creativity, and this transformation could provide an avenue for the neighborhood's history and legacy to be conveyed and honored.

### *Examples of Arts and Cultural Districts*

- Spokane, Washington: Hillyard Creative Arts District is Spokane's first creative arts district, designated in May 2025. The Northeast Public Development Authority led this effort with community leaders, including business owners, artists, and residents, who were united in their vision to revitalize Spokane's oldest business district. The designation includes aesthetic benefits like the maintenance and beautification of the district, as well as a shared identity and visibility through the coordination of events, sharing of resources, technical assistance, and access to grants that will boost the economic growth and cultural significance of the area.<sup>54</sup>
- Los Angeles, California: Destination Crenshaw "celebrating our legacy, building our future." This Black art and economic revival program is a linear park that runs alongside a local transit line. The project focused on building and creating new community spaces, amplifying local businesses, adding green spaces and trees, and funding the work of 100 Black artists featured throughout the corridor.<sup>55</sup>

## REVIVING BLACK MAIN STREETS, CASE STUDY OF MOBILE ALABAMA.

The city of Mobile, Alabama is developing a plan to revive "the Avenue," an historical economic hub of the local Black community. With a \$3.5 million grant from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), they are planning a Civil Rights and Cultural Heritage District. The plan focuses on connecting historic sites with a new interpretive center, a park, and plaza along with unified branding, logo, and color palette. They will also include a business development strategy that included a heritage tourism market analysis with added commercial spaces for dining, retail, and entertainment. Importantly, the plan also addresses concerns about gentrification and displacement through grants and zero-interest loans for housing.

Source:

<https://www.planning.org/planning/2025/jan/reviving-black-main-streets/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.hillyardspokane.org/creativedistrict>

<sup>55</sup> <https://destinationcrenshaw.la/>

- Baltimore, Maryland: Black Arts District: Formally designated in 2019, Baltimore’s Black Arts District “empowers Black creatives and continues the community-based revitalization efforts in West Baltimore through culture, arts, and entertainment. Our vision of the Black Arts District is to be a model of Black creative autonomy”.<sup>56</sup>
- Tieton, Washington: On a much smaller scale and with a very different history, the agricultural town of Tieton, Washington has been leaning into an arts and culture identity to revive economic development, activate public life, and cultivate resilience in the face of change. Adaptive reuse has been a key strategy in this community which strives to honor its agricultural legacy while serving and reflecting the residents of today.<sup>57</sup>
- Minneapolis, Minnesota: The City of Minneapolis has designated a number of neighborhood commercial centers as cultural districts. The effort initiated with the intent of disrupting patterns of gentrification and displacement, celebrating the unique cultural history of the identified places. Today there are seven identified cultural districts in the city and they receive support in a variety of ways, such as funds for creative initiatives and technical assistance for local businesses.<sup>58</sup>

### **Considerations**

- While a formal arts district designation may take several years to establish, informal art interventions can add color, identity, and placemaking to 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the shorter term.
- A partnership with Spokane Arts could be explored. This local non-profit organization supports arts and culture across Spokane, including projects to convert streets and crosswalks into art installations, design public art for buildings and public spaces, and offer scholarships to support local artists.<sup>59</sup>
- Successful implementation of this concept may require land use changes that allow retail uses in more places and live/work developments. The concept will also need a champion and handful of initial sites to establish 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue as an arts destination.

### **Idea 3: Legacy Business Programs**

Local businesses are a big part of identity and placemaking for a community. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood is home to Spokane’s longest-running Black business (Larry’s Barber Shop) and the city’s only soul food restaurant (Fresh Soul). Working with business owners to cement their place in the community for the future is an important anti-displacement strategy. This strategy could start as a pilot program focused on a few Black-owned businesses. There are numerous multi-ethnic and small business-focused business associations across the City of Spokane that could be utilized to lead

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<sup>56</sup> <https://www.blackartsdistrict.org/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/things-have-changed-in-tieton-a-small-town-that-brings-together-agriculture-artists-and-families/>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.minneapolis.org/cultural-districts/districts/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://spokanearts.org/>

or support the development of such a program, such as Multi-Ethnic Business Association (AHANA), Spokane Independent Metro Business Alliance (SIMBA), and East Spokane Business Association (ESBA).<sup>60,61,62</sup>

A legacy business program would offer assistance in one or more of the following ways:

- Understanding the unique needs and challenges of legacy businesses in the neighborhood. This might be access to capital, professional networking opportunities, or accessing funding opportunities
- Providing educational opportunities or access to business and market data for free or at a reduced cost
- Assisting with the navigation of City processes or loan applications
- Technical assistance and consultation for business owners interested in retiring or passing down their ownership to a new generation
- Connecting owners with funding and grant opportunities with examples like:
  - US Chamber of Commerce Coalition to Back Black Businesses (CBBB): Initiated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CBBB has provided over \$14 million in grants, mentorship, and resources nationwide to “empower small businesses in economically distressed communities”.<sup>63</sup>
  - National Urban League: The League “promotes economic empowerment through education and job training, housing and community development, workforce development, entrepreneurship, health, and quality of life”.<sup>64</sup>

#### Idea 4: Community Events and Programming

There are already a number of events that celebrate cultural expression in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue today. Formal and informal gatherings build identity and reflect the hyperlocal diversity in an area. In 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Underhill Park, Liberty Park, and the MLK Center are important spaces for hosting these types of gatherings. Given the number of immigrant households in the neighborhood, there may be public education needed on low barrier to entry formats for hosting more organized celebrations, such as block parties or parades.

This plan can help support a thriving future of cultural expression in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue by:

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<sup>60</sup> <https://ahana-meba.org/>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.spokaneindependent.org/>

<sup>62</sup> <https://myesba.org/>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/solutions/corporate-citizenship/coalition-to-back-black-businesses>

<sup>64</sup> <https://nul.org/mission-and-history>

## Baseline Conditions | ReFIVE, A Community Plan for 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue

- Leveraging the recent Play Streets & Neighborhood Block Party Program ordinance to demonstrate the power of a block party and sharing quick “how-to” guides in many languages.
- Identifying opportunities for tactical urbanism and partnering with interested residents, businesses, or institutions to lead a neighborhood improvement project.
- Lowering potential barriers to access, such as permitting costs, reservation fees in public spaces, and ensuring that appropriate facilities with lighting, electricity, and bathrooms are available.
- Exploring the creation of a 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Farmers Market once a week during the summer months, partnering with local Black-owned businesses and food trucks, family programming, and live music to attract existing residents and new visitors and learn more about the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community history and identity.



## Topic 4: Community Wealth Building

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## Defining Community Wealth for 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Building community wealth is about “creating an economy where assets are broadly held and locally rooted over the long term so that income recirculates locally, creating stable prosperity”.<sup>65</sup> Wealth inequality persists for several reasons, the primary among them being its intergenerational nature. Family members pass along money, assets, and property to children and relatives when they pass, and this generational handoff is a way that wealth remains in some families rather than others. For over 250 years, BIPOC communities have faced systemic barriers to wealth accumulation and asset ownership in the United States. The historical legacy of slavery, discriminatory employment and lending practices, racial segregation through the enforcement of restrictive covenants, redlining and local funding of education have all contributed to significant disparities in homeownership and small business ownership along racial lines. A stark example of this is that in 2016, the net worth of a Black family nationally was reported to be ten times less than that of a typical white family.<sup>66</sup> In that same year in Washington state, the median income for Black households was 32% lower than for white households and the homeownership gap was 36% – with 67% of white households owning their home and only 31% of Black households.<sup>67</sup> These economic realities perpetuate economic inequality across communities nationally and locally.

A community wealth building approach aims to foster more resilient, equitable, and sustainable economies by recognizing and nurturing local community assets, such as small businesses, non-profits, and cultural organizations. The pillars of community wealth building to be explored in the 5th Avenue context are:<sup>68</sup>

- Inclusive and Democratic Enterprise
- Just Use of Land and Property
- Locally Rooted Finance

### RESILIENT ECONOMY

A resilient economy can withstand, adapt, and recover from economic stressors.

### EQUITABLE ECONOMY

An equitable economy addresses systemic disparities and historical disadvantages to provide fair economic opportunities and outcomes for all.

### SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

A sustainable economy recognizes that natural resources are finite and ensures economic activity prioritizes long-term environmental and social well-being.

<sup>65</sup> <https://live-future-of-building-wealth.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sec7-Ch57-Howard-McKinley.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/>

<sup>67</sup> ACS 5-year estimates, White (non-Hispanic) and Black households in 2016, Tables S2502 and S1903

<sup>68</sup> [The Democracy Collaborative, 2023](#)

## Economic Landscape

### INCOME DISPARITIES IN SPOKANE

Racial disparities persist in incomes across Spokane, with the lowest median household income reported for American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (NHOPI), and Black households. Incomes are highest among Hispanic, “Other”, and white households. See Figure 43. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community is home to many lower income households, with 36% of households having incomes less than \$35,000 per year compared to 25% citywide. At the other end of the spectrum, only 3% of households have incomes at \$125,000 or above compared to 14% citywide. The median household income in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is 18% lower than in Spokane overall, at \$53k, while the annual income needed to afford a typical 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue home purchase is estimated at just over \$75k. See Figure 12 and Figure 13 in the Community Profile.

**Figure 43** Median Household Income by Race and Ethnicity in Spokane, 2023



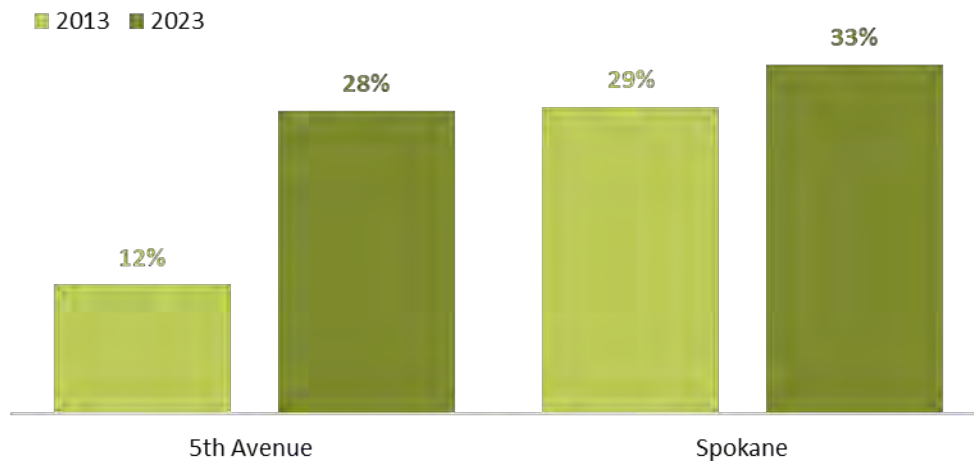
Sources: ACS 5-year estimates, 2023; Seva Workshop, 2025.

## EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN 5<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE

For residents of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, employment rates are highest in the education/healthcare/social assistance industries (27%), manufacturing (13%), and arts/entertainment/recreation/ food service industries (11%). Employment in manufacturing has more than doubled among residents of this community over the past decade (from 55 to 142) and outpace a citywide rate of 7% employment in the industry. There has also been jump in those who work in the finance/insurance/real estate industries 2013-2023 (from 33 to 97). Overall, industries of employment for residents of this area track closely with citywide trends.<sup>69</sup>

Shifts in education attainment across 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue show an uptick in adults with college degrees over the past decade. The percentage of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue residents with a Bachelor's degree or higher increased by 17% from 2013 to 2023, a disproportionately higher trend than that of the City of Spokane (increased by 5%). See Figure 44. Literature on displacement suggests that neighborhood-level shifts in education, especially when considered alongside concurrent demographic and income shifts, may be indicative of gentrification and the displacement of longstanding residents.<sup>70</sup>

**Figure 44** Population 25 and Older with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher (% Total), 2013 and 2023



Source: ACS 5-year estimates 2013 & 2023; Seva Workshop 2025.

<sup>69</sup> ACS 5-year estimates for 2013 and 2023, Table C24050

<sup>70</sup> ["Displacement or Succession?: Residential Mobility in Gentrifying Neighborhoods"](#)-Lance Freeman, 2005

## Commercial Activity

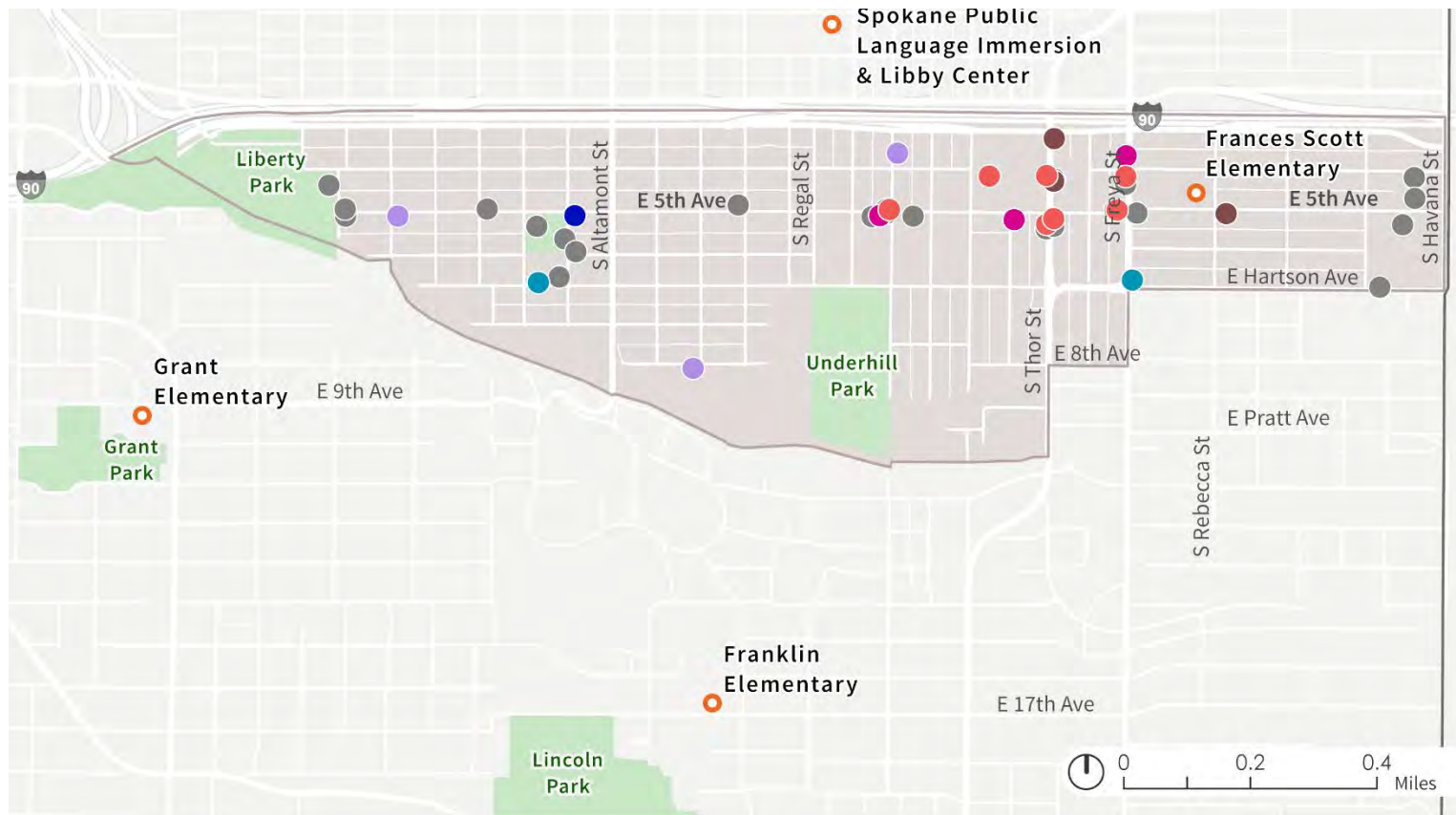
**Commercial and employment activity is limited within the area– 98% of residents who work commute to other job centers for their employment and residents have limited options to shop for goods and services within 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.**<sup>71</sup> There is a Fred Meyer grocery store, a number of auto-oriented businesses, and a drive-thru coffee at the primary commercial intersection at 5<sup>th</sup> and Thor. The closest bank or credit union is the Washington Trust Bank, north of I-90 in the Sprague neighborhood of East Central. Prior to I-90's presence in the neighborhood, the Sprague business district was a better connected commercial center serving 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the greater East Central neighborhood. Today, with the interstate barrier, this community feels a wider gap from that area. Another impact of the freeway development was the direct loss of various commercial properties in and near 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The area along 3rd Avenue is of particular note for that impact. A map highlighting registered businesses and non-profits is shown below in Figure 45. Most non-residential activity comes from nonprofit and service-based establishments, with a small cluster at 5<sup>th</sup> and Greene.

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<sup>71</sup> Commute data from LEHD Census onthemap for Census tract 30, 2022



Figure 45: Map of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Businesses and Services



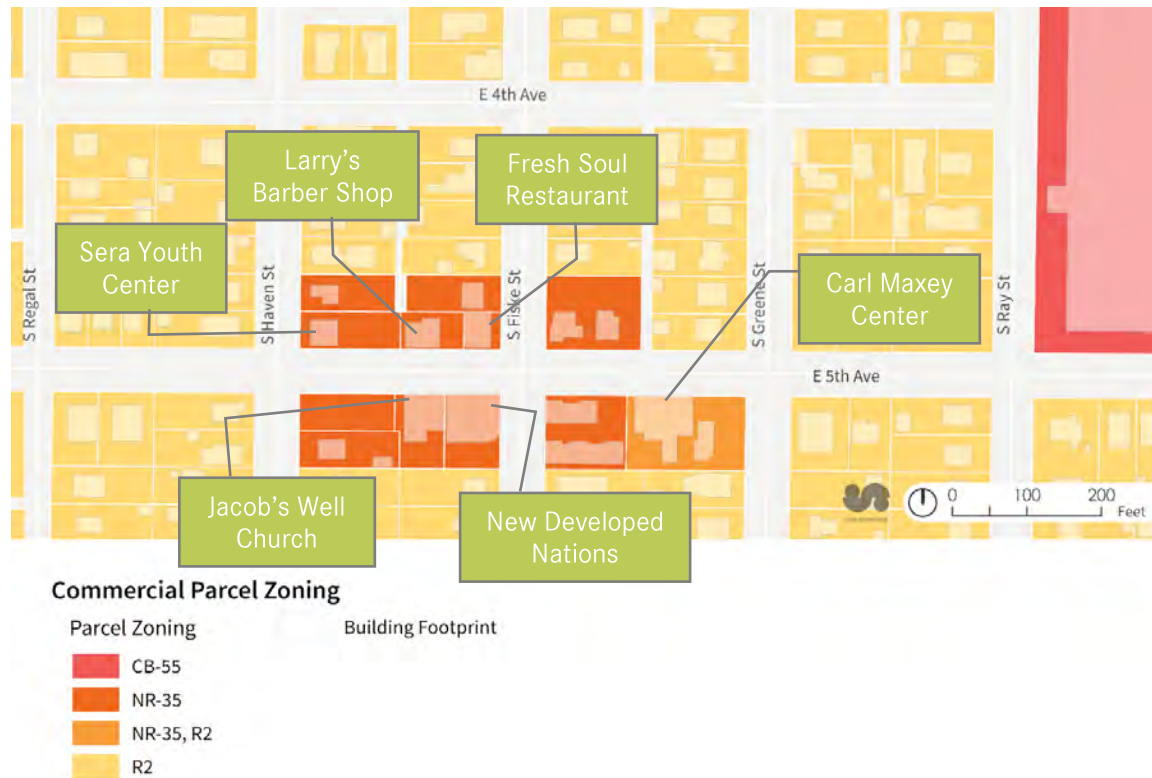
### Spokane 5th Avenue Businesses and Services

- |                     |                                  |                         |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ● Auto Services     | ● Hair & Nail Care               | ■ Parks                 |
| ● Creative Services | ● Nursing Home                   | ■ 5th Avenue Study Area |
| ● Daycare           | ● Other Services and Non Profits | □ Spokane City Limits   |
| ● Food and drink    | ● Public Schools                 |                         |

## COMMERCIAL ZONING AND LAND USE

As mentioned in the [Residential Zoning and Land Use](#) section, the zoning districts within 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and surrounding blocks are mostly dedicated to lowrise residential. There are two commercial zoning districts applied within the study area – Community Business (CB-55) and Neighborhood Retail (NR-35). The Community Business zone applies to a cluster of properties on S Thor St. between 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue featuring commercial uses that are more regional serving. The NR zone applies to a handful of properties at 5<sup>th</sup> Ave and Greene St., and two properties along Altamont. This commercial cluster represents the main opportunity, under existing land use regulations, to expand the offerings of neighborhood serving retail within the area. See Figure 46.

**Figure 46** Hub of Neighborhood Retail along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue



Source: Scout Spokane County, 2025; Seva Workshop, 2025.

## EXISTING LANDSCAPE OF COMMERCIAL PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Within the limited number of commercial sites that exist in Figure 46, there is a cluster of Black-owned properties and businesses: the Fresh Soul Restaurant, Larry's Barbershop, the Serpentine Society dance school, New Developed Nations, and The Carl Maxey Center. The Carl Maxey Center (CMC), along with the Spokane chapter of the NAACP in Downtown, are the only Black-led and Black-centered 501c3 non-profit serving the Black and African American community in Spokane. The CMC in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue currently occupies only half of its property footprint. Michael Brown owns the Fresh Soul restaurant as well as the site of the Sera Youth program and Larry Roseman owns the barbershop. This concentration of Black property and business ownership is unique in Spokane and has room to grow in its density and range of retail offerings.

## Models for Shared Ownership Structures

### *Inclusive and Democratic Enterprise*

In 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a successful wealth building model will support the existing cluster of neighborhood commercial activity. This will encourage opportunities for new and complementary enterprises that can also contribute vibrancy to the neighborhood. A moderate level of commercial activity with a unified branding strategy to preserve the Black identity of the corridor and support Black-owned properties will also bring vibrancy and encourage new visitors to the area.

Given the limited number of small businesses and nonprofits on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue currently, this wealth-building strategy moves away from a model of wealth extraction with absentee ownership towards promoting a range of enterprises that elevate democratic ownership and job creation. Importantly, this strategy highlights opportunities for local small business ownership.

Examples of formats that inclusive and democratic enterprises might take:

**Worker Cooperatives.** Also known as employee-owned cooperatives, these are businesses that are owned by workers. Worker cooperatives are also usually governed democratically with a voting system.

**Conversion to employee ownership.** Programs like Shared Equity in Economic Development (SEED) help legacy businesses continue or transition to worker-owned cooperatives through technical advising, community education.

### EVERGREEN COOPERATIVE, CLEVELAND, OH

The Evergreen Cooperative serves as a successful example of how to support community wealth building in a predominantly Black, low-income neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio.

Evergreen Cooperative is a non-profit that focuses on using capital to buy businesses and support them in transition to an employee-ownership model. They have worked with a range of company types, from small/mid-sized manufacturing to coffee shops, and see their role as supporting community wealth building in lower-income neighborhoods.

<https://www.evgoh.com/>

Launched in 2018, the cities of Philadelphia, Atlanta, Durham, and Miami were selected to receive support from SEED.<sup>72</sup> This strategy may work well for legacy businesses with owners who are ready to retire and want to transition their business to employee-ownership.

**Social enterprises.** The **Carl Maxey Center** (CMC) is a Black-led and Black-centered non-profit, 501c3 organization, that serves as a neighborhood cultural center and gathering place, as well as a community-based organization that provides programs and services focused on addressing the needs of Spokane's African American/ Black community. **Fresh Soul** is social enterprise and southern-inspired soul food restaurant that brings restoration and opportunity to the Eastside community, especially through the Spokane Eastside Reunion Association's (SERA) programming. The **Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center** is a non-profit, community-based social service center that has served East Central Spokane for over 40 years. Today, the Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center is a regionally recognized community social service center providing comprehensive education, social services and cultural enrichment programs for children and families.

### ***Locally Rooted Finance***

Community wealth building incorporates community-focused banking organizations that become lending and investment vehicles:

**Local Credit Unions.** Also known as cooperatively owned banks, credit unions are financial institutions owned by their members. Credit unions provide all the banking services that traditional banks offer, including savings accounts, loans, and credit cards, while reinvesting and returning the profits to their members by lowering their loan rates and fees or increasing their savings rates. This strategy empowers members to gain control and transparency over their finances while fostering a circular financial assistance model that enables them to support one another. As a community wealth-building model, credit unions offer a solution to address racist and exploitative lending practices that permeate for-profit banking institutions.<sup>73</sup> This plan could leverage the existing Spokane area credit unions, such as the Spokane Teachers Credit Union and the Spokane City Credit Union.

**Community Development Financial Institutions.** As specialized lender institutions, CDFIs offer lending and financial services to under-resourced communities left out of traditional financial institutions. With over 1,400 CDFIs nationwide, this strategy provides low-income, women, BIPOC, rural, and Native communities an opportunity to access capital through loans, financial education, and business development assistance.<sup>74</sup> In 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, CDFI lending could help bolster new small businesses and new jobs.

**Community Investment Trust.** Also called investment cooperatives, this strategy allows communities to share investments in business ownership or property. Legally, community investment trusts are locally-owned for-profit entities that enable neighborhood residents, non-profits, or developers to purchase commercial real estate or specific projects.<sup>75</sup>

**Participatory Budgeting (PB) initiatives.** This democratic process for public budgeting is slowly gaining traction across the world. PB initiatives have been successful and implemented to design a truly people-led and people-powered process that gives power to communities historically left out of public

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<sup>72</sup> <https://institute.coop/sites/default/files/SEED%20Fellowship%20v03.01.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.americascreditunions.org/about-us>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.ofn.org/>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/community-wealth-building-models>

spending and decision-making processes. The PB Project is a nonprofit organization that leads radical change by supporting local governments, schools, and organizations in implementing participatory budgeting for decision-making.<sup>76</sup> If implemented in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, PB could empower residents to fund local projects that will enhance their neighborhood and build a stronger and more engaged community voice.

## Community-Defined Priorities for Economic Development

The community has expressed a desire for added vibrancy and destinations within the neighborhood. Walkable businesses contribute to a sense of community and identity, especially when those destinations are locally owned and reflective of place. This includes supporting the existing businesses and institutions in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, as well as attracting new ones. Shared ownership structures, both for the ownership of land and businesses, allow for more people to benefit in their success and to feel invested in promoting their longevity.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community can also achieve its goals in partnership with larger efforts and pools of funding. Partnering with the City and State to attract infrastructure improvement dollars to the neighborhood could help create a better environment for local businesses to thrive within. Outside financing opportunities can also bolster local ambition and make projects feasible. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue neighborhood is part of Spokane's eligible area for New Market Tax Credits, as one example of how outside funding could be leveraged for local benefit.

## LOCAL BUSINESS SUPPORT STRATEGIES

These strategies can be considered to help support the existing business community and attract more local commercial activity to the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor.

**Legacy Business Program.**<sup>77</sup> This strategy aims to financially assist small, Black-owned, and independently owned businesses that serve as community gathering spots and hubs for social cohesion, as well as retain wealth within the community. These businesses usually face challenges in making a profit from increased competition, labor costs, and shifting consumer preferences. See **Topic 3: Community Identity** for more details and recommendations for this type of strategy.

**Corner Stores.** Once a staple of their local community, corner stores contribute to creating a complete community. Cities are starting to consider historic locations of community family-owned businesses as locations that can be reimaged as modern community grocery stores, cafes, or childcare centers, creating more vibrant neighborhoods.<sup>78</sup> In 2017, the city of Spokane rolled back zoning restrictions to allow historical corner stores to restore

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<sup>76</sup> <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/>

<sup>77</sup> [https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/economicDevelopment/22820\\_Legacy\\_Report\\_2017-09-25.pdf](https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/economicDevelopment/22820_Legacy_Report_2017-09-25.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> [https://www.planning.org/planning/2025/mar/how-the-push-to-revive-ghost-stores-can-bring-back-hyperlocal-communities/?utm\\_campaign=Planning-magazine&utm\\_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz-vrFl5qpz5P9G9F56yWoSNWVvHX1uZkcZX\\_fTrBvXQjXoeKEPKJ9CY16t5pWDxvvrN7S8Az8kifNpYwn6TRBvZ4cOMlw&hsmi=354455344&utm\\_content=353964072&utm\\_source=hs\\_email](https://www.planning.org/planning/2025/mar/how-the-push-to-revive-ghost-stores-can-bring-back-hyperlocal-communities/?utm_campaign=Planning-magazine&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz-vrFl5qpz5P9G9F56yWoSNWVvHX1uZkcZX_fTrBvXQjXoeKEPKJ9CY16t5pWDxvvrN7S8Az8kifNpYwn6TRBvZ4cOMlw&hsmi=354455344&utm_content=353964072&utm_source=hs_email)



their commercial uses.<sup>79</sup> Documentation for historic business locations in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue reveals a few opportunities to advance the opportunity for bringing back these important pillars in a complete neighborhood.

**Support entrepreneurship and business incubation.** Owning a business can be a path to financial independence and self-determination for many. The lack of commercial space within the area is one barrier to starting a business for the local community, as well as navigating complex administrative permitting processes. An intentional effort to ignite business development from within the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community would build a sense of local pride and identity while offering a path to wealth building in the community. There are a handful of existing organizations who are also valuable resources for this area, such as Spokane Independent Metro Business Alliance (SIMBA) and Business Research services at the Liberty Park Library.

**New Market Tax Credits** incentivize community development and economic growth by providing businesses with access to financing that is more flexible and/or lower cost than market rate to attract investment in designated areas. Funds are channeled through local community development providers. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community, west of S Thor St, is eligible for this benefit as part of the STIA.<sup>80</sup> Projects using NMTC funds could benefit a mixed-use or commercial development site.

## JUST USE OF LAND AND PROPERTY

Expanded flexibility in land use regulations may be needed to support the desired growth trajectory of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area. The success of a more robust neighborhood commercial corridor could be supported by City-led actions such as:

- Expanding the number of sites with mixed use or neighborhood retail zoning designations
- Proposing different land use designations to increase the allowed density of housing along the spine of the corridor, or along the already more commercial Thor Ave, to maximize the local spending power that can support neighborhood businesses
- Identifying a parcel or site within the area that could be matched with an employer offering living wage employment

### ALBINA VISION TRUST

Albina Vision Trust is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to “buy back land, rebuild community, and reroot Black legacies and Black futures.” It stands as one of the largest initiatives addressing the legacy of racist policies that have displaced the Black community in Portland. Once completed, the Albina Vision Trust will provide 100 acres of affordable housing, green space, and a hub for educational centers and minority-owned businesses along Portland’s waterfront.

See more: <https://albinavision.org/>

<sup>79</sup> <https://my.spokanecity.org/projects/activate-existing-neighborhood-commercial-structures/>

<sup>80</sup> <https://nmtcoalition.org/how-it-works/>

- Partner with the potential employer to ensure that land use designations accommodate their needs while maintaining neighborhood compatibility

Community partners are essential for wealth-building strategies. Spokane's CBOs and entrepreneurs would be the lead for these actions, with potential support from City or other government sources:

- Identifying opportunity site locations for redevelopment, exploring a catalyst location for mid-rise, mixed-use development
- Envisioning the continued evolution of the Carl Maxey Center property, with potential for growth or added activity
- Pursuing a land banking strategy, potentially in partnership with existing efforts at Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium

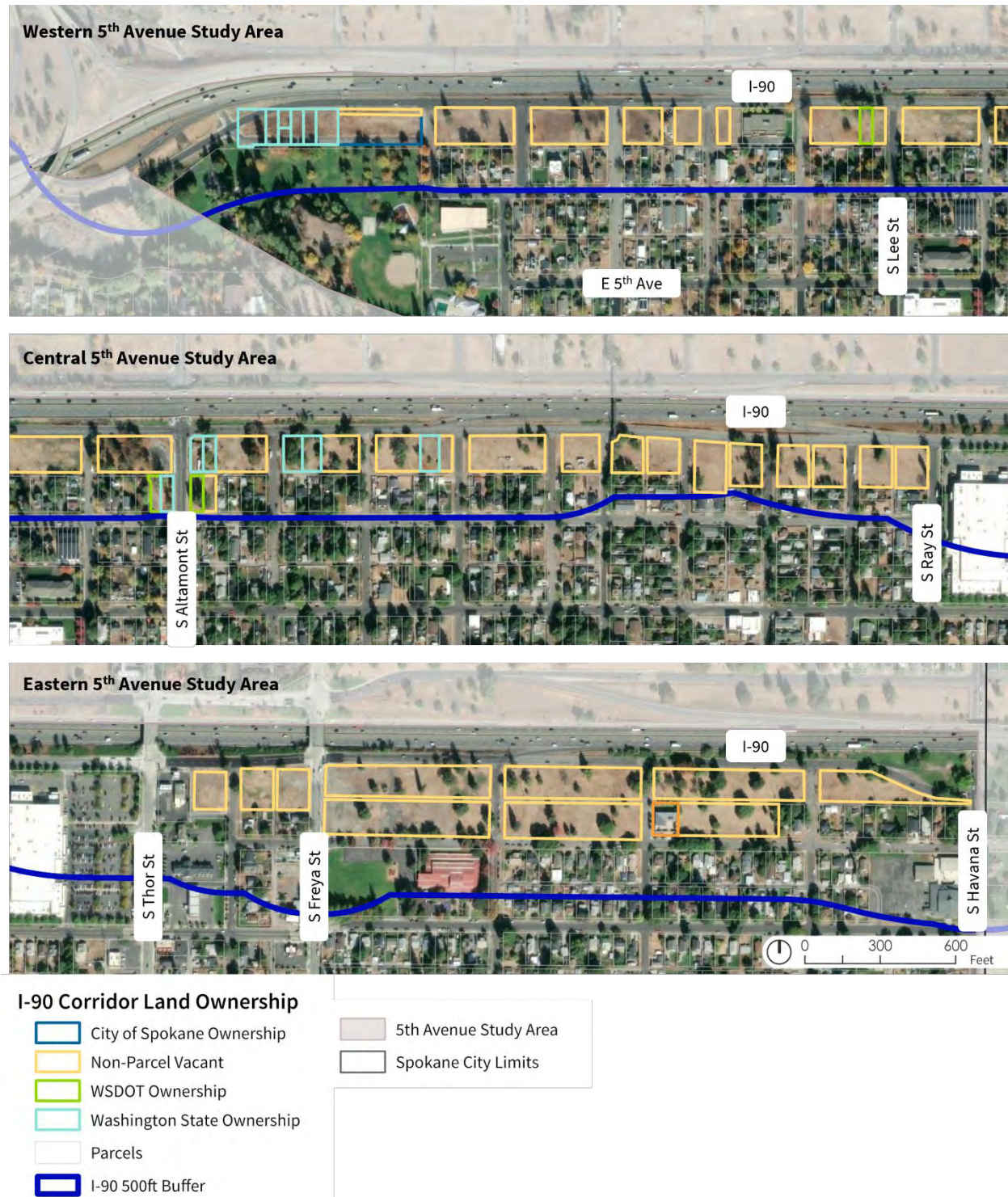
## Topic 5: Restore the Land

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## Study Area: Freeway-Adjacent Parcels

The impact of the development of the I-90 freeway has had major, lasting impacts on the social and economic landscape of East Central, as well as the health and wellbeing of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community (see [A Timeline of Freeway Development and Related Interventions](#) section of this report). The planning and land use decisions made for the parcels located within 500' of the I-90 freeway are particularly important to address through a public health and environmental justice lens and pose unique opportunities to meet the priorities of the community. There are approximately 30 acres of land along the southern border of the I-90 corridor that are under WSDOT ownership within the study area. These sites are possible for surplus land designation, meaning that some of the land may become opportunity areas for community stewardship of this land in the future. The maps in Figure 47 show the I-90 freeway sites divided into three segments – western, central, and eastern. The western segment connects Liberty Park, nearby residential communities, and includes a utility site. The central segment abuts residential areas, ending with the Fred Meyer site. The eastern segment includes the Fred Meyer parking lot and businesses across the street, Frances Scott Elementary School, and continued residential homes.

**Figure 47 Study Area Segments Along I-90 Corridor**



Sources: City of Spokane, 2024; Spokane County Assessor, 2024; Seva Workshop, 2025.



## Environmental Conditions

The East Central and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community have expressed that the public health legacies of redlining and highway construction have yet to be sufficiently addressed by investments in the built environment. The at-grade I-90 infrastructure and associated vehicular traffic lower the area's air quality, increase noise pollution, heighten roadway safety concerns, and visually disrupt the aesthetic of the residential community. Revitalization of possible surplus land surrounding the I-90 corridor is a critical piece of restoration work needed for the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community, and thoughtful consideration for the health implications of freeway-adjacent development is essential to ensure lasting benefits result from these plans.

As detailed on [page 23](#), environmental health concerns related to the proximity of the land surrounding the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor to the I-90 freeway are important to ground restoration efforts. Priority concerns include poor air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, heat islands, reduced tree canopy, traffic noise, and loss of park space at Liberty Park. These environmental impacts are known public health concerns and are particularly harmful among the area's youth and elderly population.

## BUFFERING STANDARDS

There are currently no buffering standards dictating the minimum distance between housing developments and freeways. Neither the City of Spokane nor Washington State have a mandated buffer zone dictating the minimum distance, nor do they have set rules or guidelines to dictate what land uses are appropriate or safe in proximity to the freeway. One validated guideline and rule of thumb from the Urban Institute recommends a 500-1,000-foot buffer between freeway corridors and residential housing.<sup>81</sup> California freeway studies show about a 70% drop in particulate pollution levels at a distance of 500 feet.<sup>82</sup> A study published by the California EPA finds slightly elevated cancer risks associated with exposure to freeways and high traffic roads.<sup>83</sup> This is challenging to reconcile with the direct proximity of the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area to the freeway and the community's desire to see housing return to areas that are currently vacant.

Given the breadth of challenges and depth of trauma introduced to the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue community as a result of highway development over the last 70 years, it is important for the ReFIVE Community Plan to present a holistic plan for restoration of available property that enhances the quality of life for current and future community members in this neighborhood. Revisioning potential surplus land that borders the freeway won't bring back the historic landscape of the community, but it introduces an opportunity to honor the area's history, promote equitable development for the future, enhance cultural spaces, address longstanding environmental health burdens, and improve local mobility across the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area.

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<sup>81</sup> <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/The%20Polluted%20Life%20Near%20the%20Highway.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4667368/>

<sup>83</sup> [https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Land%20Use%20Handbook\\_0.pdf](https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Land%20Use%20Handbook_0.pdf)

## Current WSDOT Projects in East Central

In 2022, with much community advocacy and leadership, the Washington State legislature passed Senate Bill 5853, granting WSDOT the ability to lease state property no longer needed for highway infrastructure in Spokane to a community-based organization in order to remedy past impacts to historically marginalized populations within impacted local communities resulting from the construction of Interstate 90 and the US 395 North Spokane Corridor project.<sup>84</sup> This law (RCW 47.12.380) creates opportunities for the local community to have ownership over efforts to meaningfully address persistent environmental, health, and economic challenges caused by transportation infrastructure. The law states that, if returned to the community, the land must be used towards community purposes including “housing and ancillary improvements, parks, community revitalization projects, enhanced public spaces such as trails and public plazas, and projects that provide enhanced economic development in the impacted community.”

Mapped below in Figure 48 are descriptions of pre-existing infrastructure improvements proposed or currently taking place on the WSDOT-owned parcels surrounding the I-90 corridor.

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<sup>84</sup> <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2021-22/Pdf/Bill%20Reports/Senate/5853-S.E%20SBR%20APS%2022.pdf?q=20240208052637>

Figure 48 Proposed or existing infrastructure improvements on WSDOT-owned parcels surrounding the I-90 corridor

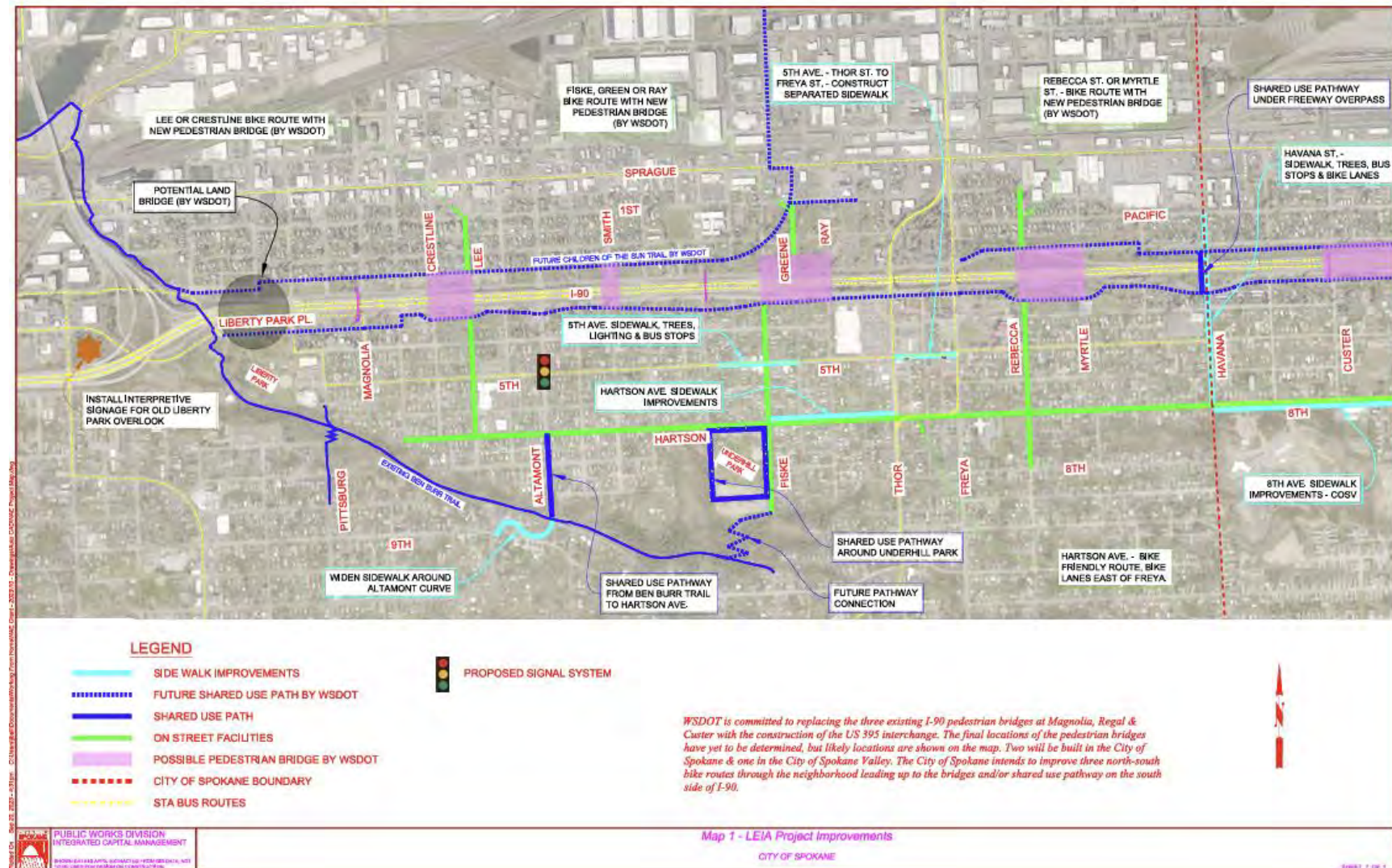


Image Source: 2023 LEIA Program Application, Figure 13



## I-90 Pedestrian Bridges

Two pedestrian bridges cross I-90 in census tract 30 that allow people to connect to the Sprague Business District and neighborhood to the north. In 2023, WSDOT demolished the pedestrian bridge at Magnolia Street in an emergency action due to severe deterioration. The ongoing WSDOT North Spokane Corridor<sup>85</sup> project includes plans to rebuild the existing pedestrian bridges over I-90 that connect the 5th Avenue area to the East Sprague Business District.<sup>86</sup> Locations for two updated pedestrian bridge locations have been confirmed at Lee St. and Lacey St. informed by a community preferences survey administered by WSDOT in spring 2025.<sup>87</sup> Construction on the NSC/I-90 interchange is scheduled to start in late summer 2026, and construction on local street connections and ramp structures are scheduled for late 2026 and are expected to last through early 2030.<sup>88</sup> The existing pedestrian bridge on Regal and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue is currently the only walking, biking, or rolling connection between 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the northern East Central district and has harbored community input as being “narrow, not ADA compliant”.<sup>89</sup>



Image Source: WSDOT

<sup>85</sup> <https://wsdot.wa.gov/construction-planning/search-projects/us-395-nsc-i-90-connection>

<sup>86</sup> <https://wsdot.wa.gov/about/news/2023/i-90-through-spokane-close-overnight-feb-11-12-remove-pedestrian-bridge>

<sup>87</sup> <https://wsdot.wa.gov/about/news/2024/third-north-spokane-corridor-community-discussion-wednesday-nov-20>

<sup>88</sup> <https://wsdot.wa.gov/construction-planning/search-projects/us-395-nsc-i-90-connection>

<sup>89</sup> <https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/projects/fifth-avenue-plan/epa-rethinking-highways-summary.pdf>

### US-395 North Spokane Corridor

A significant amount of the right-of-way land parallel to I-90 within East Central will be utilized by WSDOT's North Spokane Corridor connector project through the development of surface streets and access ramps. Early plans for the NSC have been in the works since 1958, with public opposition and lack of funding preventing official implementation and construction until 2001.<sup>90</sup> Seven miles of the northern portion of the highway have been constructed as of March 2025. Once completed, the 10.5-mile corridor will connect with I-90 at the Sprague Avenue (Thor/Freya) interchange. On/off ramps are planned to allow traffic from I-90 onto US 395 and will influence the flow of traffic in and around the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area.<sup>91</sup>

As noted above, WSDOT has established plans to repair I-90 pedestrian crossings as an arm of this project. WSDOT has also expressed interest in pursuing local placemaking efforts in the communities surrounding the NSC.

### Liberty Park Land Bridge

Funding to design a potential Liberty Park land bridge was included in the 2023 state budget proposals as part of the WSDOT Reconnecting I-90 Communities initiative. A park-like land bridge is one proposed solution from WSDOT to physically connect the neighborhood near Liberty Park south of I-90 to the north side and the existing Sprague commercial district, utilizing some of the possible surplus land along I-90. The project has not yet progressed beyond the initial design stage.<sup>92</sup>

### Liberty to Edgecliff Improvements for Accessibility (2023 LEIA Program)

The LEIA grant program was led by the Spokane Transit Authority in partnership with the City of Spokane and City of Spokane Valley to improve neighborhood level accessibility, mobility, and connectivity, focusing on reconnecting communities along Interstate 90 disproportionately burdened by transportation infrastructure through the federal Reconnecting Communities grant program. The projects proposed within the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area included transit upgrades and streetscape improvements but did not ultimately win funding.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> <https://wsdotblog.blogspot.com/2023/11/north-spokane-corridor.html>

<sup>91</sup> <https://wsdot.wa.gov/construction-planning/major-projects/north-spokane-corridor>; <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/6e4dff6e5d34705b34a1eadb325403a>; <https://esbiz.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ESBA-North-Spokane-Corridor-Final-Compressed-File-V18.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2023/apr/03/getting-there-funding-for-liberty-park-land-bridge/>

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.spokanetransit.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/LEIA-program.pdf>; <https://www.spokanetransit.com/projects/neighborhood-access-equity/>



## Community-Defined Priorities for Restoration and Revitalization

The community has clearly expressed, over many years, a strong desire to see restored activity and development in the currently vacant areas alongside the freeway. This section draws inspiration from other communities that have pursued restorative development efforts across the county.

### Reimagining the Civic commons Initiative

An innovative partnership among the private sector, government, philanthropy, and community groups is working to transform Detroit's Fitzgerald neighborhood. Launched in 2016, the Detroit Civic Commons Initiative serves as a model for the collaborative reinvention of civic spaces and has worked to turn the neighborhood's vacant lots into vibrant public spaces that meet community needs, with a particular focus on parks and green spaces. This project is grounded in evidence surrounding the role of parks and open spaces to help drive community revitalization and economic development.<sup>94</sup>



*The physical improvements implemented through this project were closely guided by community-defined goals and visions as a value of the Initiative: “People have to know that this is a project about them, about their neighborhood, so that they can immediately feel that they are a part of something bigger”*

*-Maurice Cox, the Planning and Development Director for the City of Detroit<sup>95</sup>*

*Image Source: Earthscape Play*

<sup>94</sup> <https://medium.com/reimagining-the-civic-commons/fitzgerald-a-detroit-neighborhood-moving-forward-with-green-space-d620c3906e40>

<sup>95</sup> <https://medium.com/reimagining-the-civic-commons/lessons-from-detroit-civic-commons-5-questions-with-maurice-cox-3281fe2447e1>

### Destination Crenshaw: Los Angeles, California

Destination Crenshaw is a reparative development project along LA's Crenshaw Boulevard, a project that has worked to ensure the eminent construction of the Crenshaw/LAX airport light rail line through Black LA's main thoroughfare supports economic revival, celebrates and strengthens LA's Black community, and honors the neighborhood's story. The transit line corridor that runs through the neighborhood known as the heart of Black culture in LA will be transformed into an open-air linear museum with over 100 public art installations and dotted with pocket parks and green space, creating the largest Black public art project in the US.<sup>96</sup>



*“Anchored by permanent and rotating art installations, ten new public parks, exhibits, and entirely new streetscapes, this public art and cultural experience will run along Crenshaw Boulevard and celebrate the long-standing reputation of the neighborhood as a creative incubator as well as Black LA's impact on popular culture and social change”*

*-Perkins and Will, lead designers for the project*

Image Source: Destination Crenshaw, <https://destinationcrenshaw.la/>

<sup>96</sup> <https://destinationcrenshaw.la/>

## Considerations in 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Below are some important considerations for defining a vision for future development on the WSDOT land surrounding the highway:

- Consider housing market demands within the neighborhood to discern the viability of residential uses on possible surplus lands. I-90 was constructed through the East Central residential neighborhood in the 1950s, siting divisive infrastructure immediately adjacent to houses and less than 500 feet from public schools (buffer shown in blue). Additional housing was demolished for the US 395 project over the last 10-15 years. The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue area continues to be predominately residential, and redevelopment of possible surplus lands should consider mitigation of ongoing environmental health concerns from air pollution and noise, as well as the visual impacts associated with this proximity. This type of use would require rezoning.
- This area presents an opportunity to create strong public realm/greenway connections to and through the neighborhood, including gateways in and out of the area.
- This area could also provide spaces for active recreation facilities. Stakeholders from Frances Scott Elementary School have voiced an interest in this type of potential use adjacent to their site to support students and families.
- The area is a heat island with low tree canopy coverage. The extent of possible surplus lands offers significant opportunity to increase the urban tree canopy, while adding to air quality improvement, absorbing sound, and acting as a visual barrier between the freeway and community uses to the south.
- Community stakeholders at the EPA workshop in November 2024 advocated for continued studying of noise barriers for inclusion along I-90 as part of the North Spokane Corridor, as previous studies did not reflect historical and cumulative noise levels in East Central. The 2025-2026 State Biennium Transportation Budget included funding for an environmental justice assessment to determine if noise abatement will reduce environmental harm to the East Central Neighborhood.<sup>97</sup>
- This area could be well poised to host an employment or economic development site of some kind. Care should be taken to ensure a potential site would contribute living wage jobs to the community and that they are not providing commercial uses that would pull energy away from the neighborhood retail cluster along E. 5th Avenue. This type of use would also require significant rezoning.

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<sup>97</sup> <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5161-S.SL.pdf?q=20250605155615>