

Hamilton Corridor

Model Form-Based Code

Spokane's Logan Neighborhood (Neighborhood) hopes to improve the vitality and appearance of the Hamilton Corridor. The Neighborhood is interested in spending a portion of its planning funds to evaluate current issues and explore the benefits new approaches to zoning regulations might bring. The Neighborhood and the City's Planning and Development Department have discussed form-based code as a potential alternative to the zoning currently in place, and they wish to prepare a model form-based code for the portion of Hamilton Street between and including its intersections with Sharp and Mission.

This proposal is not focused on developing policy alternatives or on determining the type of market conditions best suited to redevelopment. It is also not geared to evaluate the transportation system, property values, infrastructure capacity or capital facilities planning. Rather, its focus is on the concepts and practical outcomes of development regulations, proposing a new zoning approach for the Hamilton Corridor to facilitate development while ensuring compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods. Outcomes are intended to serve as a springboard for further investigation and possible adoption of a new code for the corridor. Such work may also serve as a demonstration project, informing similar work for other "Centers & Corridors" areas elsewhere in Spokane.

There are several reasons for performing this project now, all of which direct this work to be cost-effective, sensitive to local needs, driven by stakeholder involvement, and presented in an accessible, engaging and compelling format. These include:

- 1. Development context** – The Hamilton Corridor runs from I-90 to North Foothills Drive, functioning as the primary commercial corridor for the Logan Neighborhood. Gonzaga University and its associated development anchor the southern end, and commercial businesses and land use designations continue unbroken northward for slightly less than two miles. Much of the corridor's development – other than what lies immediately adjacent to Gonzaga – is more than 30 years old, single-story and in generally poor condition. While the corridor can be considered as rich in potential, it has not yet experienced the spark of interest that might transform it into the vital, diverse, and walkable place the neighborhood envisions. One recent four-unit housing project, however, generated controversy upon its construction. Located at a very visible intersection and clad in metal, the project, – at least to neighborhood leaders – represented a step forward in terms of scale and type of land use, but fell short in terms of design. The likelihood that market forces may stimulate similar development, particularly as Gonzaga's increasing enrollment brings students looking for nearby housing, has residents concerned. Change is on the horizon, and whether it occurs slowly or more rapidly, the neighborhood wants it to be compatible and provide long-term benefits.
- 2. Transportation approach** – Hamilton carries a lot of traffic. So do many of the streets that intersect it. Trent, Mission, Indiana and North Foothills are important arterials, each reaching into distant areas of Spokane. Hamilton provides access to Gonzaga, the University District and I-90 to the south, funneling cross-town traffic to these regional destinations. Hamilton also provides alternative access to the north, sweeping into Nevada and ultimately leading to Highway 2 near Mead. Resulting congestion tends to slow transit and other traffic

through Hamilton and its major intersections, and the City is proposing roadway improvements to facilitate traffic flow. In the case of the Hamilton and Mission intersection, this focus has spurred the design of enlarged turn lanes and the removal of median street trees. Traffic flow is motivating the redesign of the neighborhood's streets, and there's concern about balance – that accommodating through traffic shouldn't undermine localized needs – creating a high-speed environment and eliminating character elements that support neighborhood-oriented business and make the area an attractive place to live.

3. **Neighborhood interest** – The Logan Neighborhood has a history of civic involvement, initially in response to development pressures surrounding Gonzaga University. The neighborhood has been concerned about its changing character and how development – if managed properly – can be an instrument to further enrich and add interest to the community. Student housing projects, roadway design, and a general decline in the quality of property management along Hamilton have crystallized the neighborhood into seeking more effective tools to preserve community character, arrest commercial decline, and enhance livability. The neighborhood wants to facilitate change where it can, including the City's development regulations as they influence land use intensity, development form and overall design. Issues such as property maintenance, traffic congestion, and public safety may have solutions in something other than zoning, but the neighborhood believes addressing development regulations may present important opportunities, giving them a chance to have a more direct influence on outcomes.
4. **Policy setting** – Spokane will soon begin the process to update its comprehensive plan and its transportation system plan, two significant policy exercises that will assess and revise, as necessary, the way the City manages growth, prioritizes budget items, and makes capital improvements. This study will be prepared in advance of the Comprehensive Plan Update and may serve to help inform new zoning approaches in centers and corridors and ensure compatibility with neighborhood and citywide interests.
5. **Education and community backing** – If successful, this process will educate participants on the application and nuance of form-based codes. It may also serve as a useful tool and template for future reference, guiding other neighborhood processes to assess and revise centers and corridors zoning and providing officials with a reliable and compelling vision of what such work can attain.

Product

This study will analyze and test the concept of form-based code along the Hamilton corridor, focusing on two nodes. The final document will contain a description of the issues that make this discussion relevant, a description of form-based zoning, a draft model code, and a detailed discussion on how findings may apply to the Hamilton corridor and, by extension, to other areas in Spokane experiencing similar conditions.

Process

Budget is limited to \$20,000, so the project must be run efficiently. The effort must generate useful material both in product and process, with the final study informed by the process and configured to direct future efforts. Considering the complexities of the topic and the need for stakeholder involvement and eventual support, this process must be based on clearly articulated assumptions and a defined scope, creating a model form based code focused on building orientation, street

design, neighborhood transitions, building massing and façade treatments for the selected portion of the Hamilton corridor. Our proposed process follows:

Step One – Assessment

Having a clear understanding of the contemporary context is essential, describing the issues that make this study worthwhile and the physical setting that comprises the Hamilton corridor. This work will include a day's interviews with stakeholders (nominated and scheduled by the City), development of base maps drawn from City GIS data, and a preliminary listing of relevant issues as compiled by the City and the consultant, including any recent work by the City and/of the neighborhood to identify and define an appropriate form-based vision for this portion of the corridor.

Step Two – Vision & Ways to “Get There”

This task includes a one-day charrette with a form-based code task force, discussions with City staff responsible for the implementation of City policy, the creation of a preliminary corridor vision, and the development of a preferred regulatory template. The charrette will educate participants on the distinctions between conventional zoning and form-based zoning and the reason for this model form-based code. It will be designed to encourage participants to refine the form-based regulating plan and code framework we will propose for the corridor, analyze different alternatives, and consider the physical and political consequences of form-based zoning. Work in this phase of the project will result in a preliminary regulating plan and an array of form considerations, illustrating how they may impact the public realm and development of private property in the study areas.

Step Three – Analysis and Documentation

This step produces the draft model code, consolidating the charrette's findings and our analysis into a graphically-rich report (with photographs and drawings). We will present the report to staff and to the stakeholders, collecting comments and making revisions as necessary. An open house to present the material to the neighborhood at large will be scheduled during this time.

Step Four – Delivery

We will present the final report at a single meeting to the Plan Commission, Design Review Board or City Council as deemed appropriate by City staff.