

# Building Opportunity for Housing community roundtable

Event Summary

January 2023



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We would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the agencies and individuals who were able to attend our Community Roundtable at the City Central Library on January 24, 2023. We were thrilled to hear from so many of you and we continue to consider the many points raised during the discussion. In an effort to ensure we've captured some of the main points, as well as an attempt to help keep these topics moving forward throughout the process, the following summary was created.

## Community Roundtable Overview

Following on the heels of the successful [Building Opportunity and Choices for All interim ordinance](#), the Building Opportunity for Housing project intends to develop lasting [Comprehensive Plan](#) and [Municipal Code](#) amendments that increase housing choice and diversity in the city. A significant component of those updates is robust community engagement to inform the vision of housing in Spokane. One spoke of that engagement wheel was a community roundtable held on January 24, 2023.



*Community roundtable on January 24, 2023.*

For this event we purposefully reached out to organizations that work with and for communities that may be disproportionately impacted by the housing crisis. This includes communities of color, aging populations, persons with physical or mental disabilities, immigrant populations, and other marginalized and intersecting identities. Planning Staff is appreciative of the 33 participants who showed up and spent their afternoon talking with us about housing in Spokane.

## Identified Opportunities

Participants at the roundtable were asked: “What opportunities are out there for Spokane that we might be missing?” Identified opportunities included:

- Repurposing of existing structures for affordable housing (e.g., hotels);
- Development of incentives for supportive services and food security;
- Inclusion of *accessible* housing into the conversation, not just *affordable*;
- Encouragement of mixed-income developments and neighborhood nodes;



- Considering “retainable” housing in addition to “attainable” housing by improving community connections and providing support;
- Developing vacant or abandoned properties, with the ability for the communities historically pushed out of the neighborhood to direct use and potential development;
- Viewing housing as a way to retain and increase diversity;
- Identifying barriers to housing for mixed-status families and immigrants;
- Focusing on quality of life, beyond just providing a roof over someone’s head;
- Providing housing and resources to both low income and low-middle income residents;
- Educating the community on the process of changing the development code and providing feedback to the City;
- Improving the transparency within the development code process;
- Addressing the impact of Short-Term Rentals (Air BnB, VRBO, etc.) on the housing market;
- Considering the special needs of pregnant individuals and adults leaving foster care;
- Paying community members to participate in community planning, which leads to cultural sustainability; and
- Protecting and assisting renters just as much as homeowners.

## Identified Barriers

During the roundtable discussion, the group identified and discussed some barriers to the housing opportunities discussed in the first part.

- Access to transit, specifically when the focus of all growth is within Centers & Corridors, transit is less likely to expand within neighborhoods;
- Building Code requirements making 3+ units infeasible due to costs (Commercial Review);
- Restrictive HOA covenants and historic deed restrictions;
- Gentrification in Spokane pushing all-income residents out, both historically and today;
- Unclear regulatory process and how community members can advocate for themselves;
- Stormwater standards—the lack of allowed new technologies;
- Design standards that don’t necessarily improve quality of life;
- The view of housing as a business, rather than a human right; and
- Socially exclusive Neighborhood Council meetings disenfranchising renters and marginalized communities.



## Accountability

At the end of the roundtable discussion, participants were asked what accountability looks like for City staff. As in, how can staff ensure participants feel heard and that their input was going to be considered when making recommendations to the appropriate decision makers? The ensuing conversation included the following recommendations and thoughts:

- Continue the conversation, both internally and externally;
- Maintain connections with the community organizations;
- Work to break down any barriers by working internally and externally;
- Do not say “we can’t do that”, but rather find out who can;
- Ensure a transparent process by explaining the next steps and reasonings;
- Provide clear intent of every action; and
- Create change that is innovative and not recycled placation.

To that end, the Building Opportunity for Housing Community Roundtable Summary document is the first step in showing accountability, by ensuring transparency and continuing the conversation. However, staff knows there is additional work to be done.

## Parking Lot

During the conversation, specifics concepts were brought up that are not within the purview of the Building Opportunity for Housing project. However, there is recognition that successful community planning relies on the interconnection and collaboration of services. As such, a “parking lot” was established to capture these ideas so they could be sent to the appropriate project teams, City Department, or decision maker. Where we have already identified which department or City function is either currently addressing those issues or will be in the future, we have included their name in parentheses after the item.

- Re-evaluate the concept and purpose of Centers and Corridors designations (Planning & Economic Development<sup>1</sup>);
- Provide adequate staffing to ensure robust consideration of all planning or other city-led projects (City Council and Mayor’s Office);
- Create a robust mechanism for land banking, particularly with the direction of historically disenfranchised communities;

<sup>1</sup> Already underway. Contact Colin Quinn-Hurst with questions at [cquinnhurst@spokanecity.org](mailto:cquinnhurst@spokanecity.org).



- Connect the concept of attainability to homelessness and providing unhoused individuals with housing attainable to their situation (CHHS);
- Invest in more supportive programs, particularly wrap-around support (CHHS);
- Improve rental support and how Section 8 is distributed (CHHS); and
- Support the health of residents, recognizing the financial ramifications of medical needs.

## Next Steps

The first part of the Building Opportunity for Housing project involves an update of [Shaping Spokane](#), the city's comprehensive plan. The updates will be targeted to the vision of housing and related policies that are necessary to improve access to housing choice in Spokane. Once the comprehensive plan is updated, development regulations within the [Spokane Municipal Code](#) will be updated to modify housing requirements and allowances.

Both the comprehensive plan and development code amendments will first go to [Plan Commission](#) for recommendation of approval, before going before [City Council](#) for the final decision. City Council decisions are then sent to the [Mayor](#), to sign, veto, or leave unsigned. Of course, we will also keep in touch with you throughout the process and let you all know when there are opportunities to speak/write to City Council as they consider the changes.

As far as engagement, the community roundtable was the first stage in an engagement plan aimed to increase participation in the process. Department staff intends to follow-up with organizations that were unable to attend, as well as further conversations that occurred at the roundtable. Additional engagement efforts for the project will include a [multilingual survey](#), focus group conversations by District, and one-on-one meetings with organizations and agencies that can inform the project. Informational open houses will occur as milestones are met during the process. Department staff is also available to answer questions or receive feedback anytime, at [developmentcode@spokanecity.org](mailto:developmentcode@spokanecity.org).

