

South University District Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

This document analyzes and makes recommendations for future development of the South University District in Downtown Spokane. It has been prepared by Moore, Iacofano, Goltsman (MIG), as an appendix to Spokane’s *Downtown Plan Update*.

STUDY AREA BOUNDARY

The *Plan Update* describes the western boundary of the South University District as Division Street. For the purpose of this analysis the study area boundary has been extended to Washington Street to include the entire length of Pacific Avenue—which runs west to east through the core of the District. The study area maintains the original boundaries to the north: Burlington-Northern/Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad tracks; Scott Street to the east; and Interstate 90 to the south.



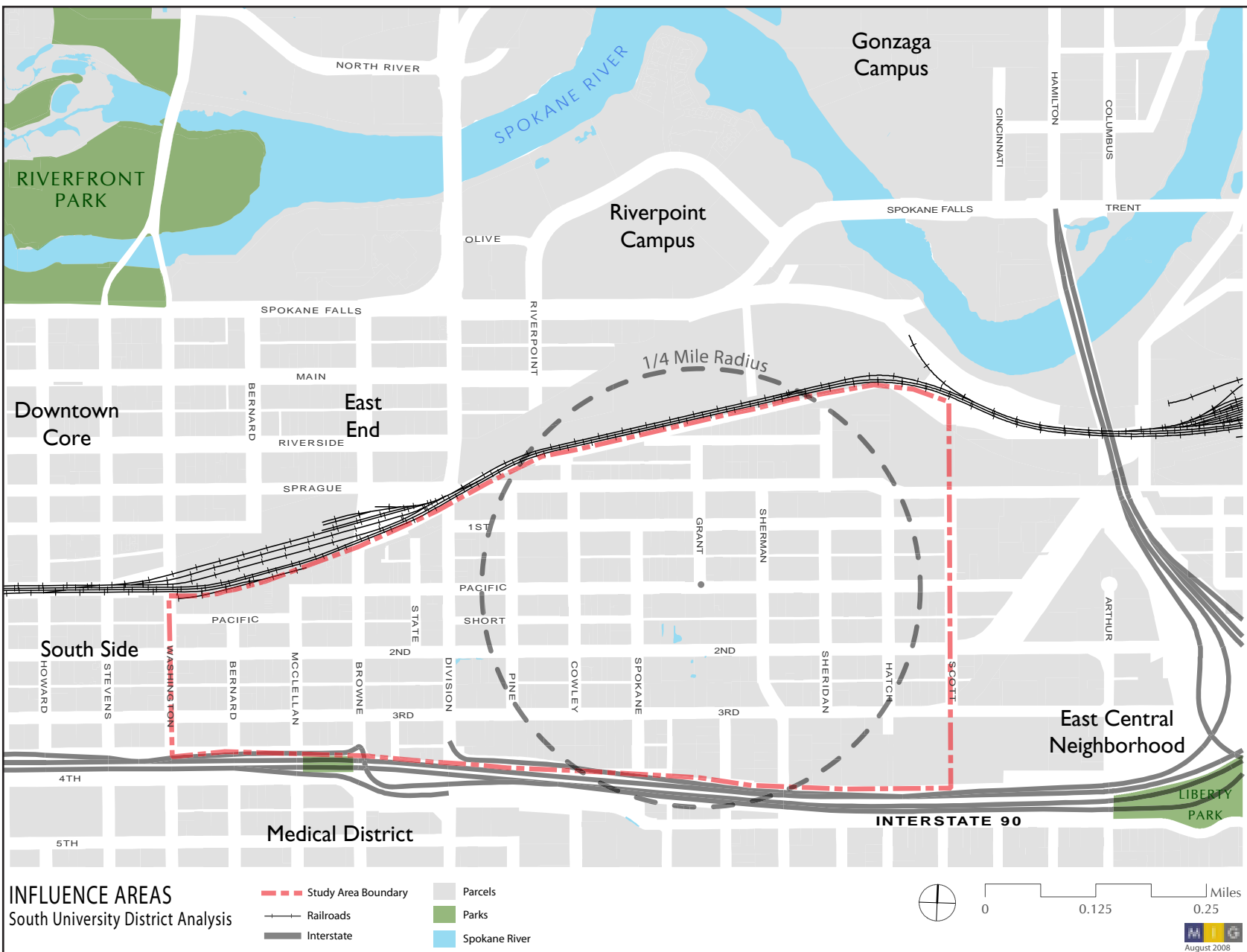
Although few in number the South University District does provide some existing housing opportunities



Some older residences have been converted into commercial uses along Pacific Avenue

CONTEXT

The South University District is uniquely positioned to benefit from the growth of Spokane's Downtown Core to the northwest, Riverpoint and Gonzaga campuses to the north, and the Medical District to the south. Significant transportation arterials link this District to the entire City of Spokane as well as the larger region. The majority of this area was historically residential, with industrial operations adjacent to the railroad corridor. In the 1960's, it was developed as industrial land, concurrent with construction of the Interstate 90 freeway. Today it supports a number of light industrial, commercial, civic, and office uses, as well as a few remaining residences. This area has great potential for infill and adaptive re-use opportunities.

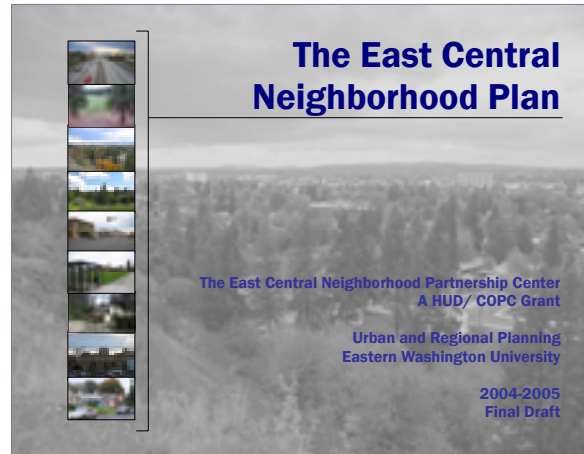


PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

The South University District area has been included in a number of previous planning efforts, but has not been analyzed as its own District. The previous plans are described below, with a focus on recommendations specific to this District.

THE EAST CENTRAL NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN 2004-2005

The Neighborhood Plan, was prepared by The East Central Neighborhood Partnership Center: Urban and Regional Planning, Eastern Washington University. It includes the South University District in the west end of

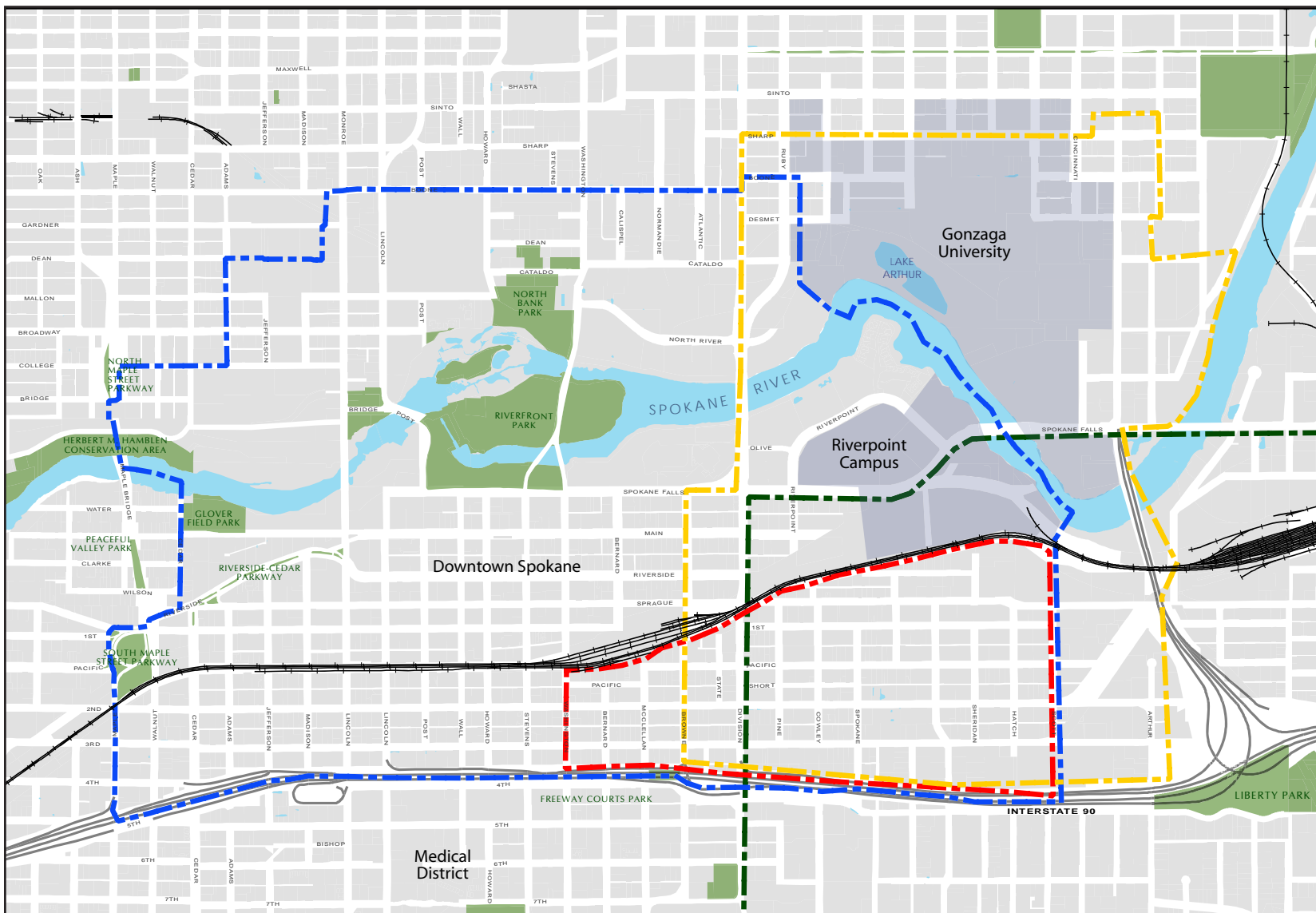


The East Central Neighborhood Plan (2004-5) study area includes all of the South University District

their study area boundary, and identifies the following recommendations:

- A transit stop near North Grant Street for a west/east light rail line that travels adjacent to the existing railroad.
- Way-finding markers to connect all parks, schools, and centers via trails, sidewalks, and pathways.
- A ‘trolley route’ that circulates through the South University District study area along Sprague Avenue and Sherman Street.
- A zoning change to the majority of the South University District area from *General Commercial* to *Type 2 (CC-2) Pedestrian Enhanced/Auto Accommodating*, to promote new center and corridor development and redevelopment that is pedestrian-oriented, automobile-accommodating, and provides incentives that allow for a higher floor area ratio¹ in exchange for the provision of greater public amenities.

¹ The existing maximum FAR is 2.5 (Spokane Municipal Code Section 17C.120.210)



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PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

South University District Analysis

- - - University Master Plan Study Area Boundary (2004)
- - - East Central Neighborhood Plan Study Area Boundary (2005)
- - - Downtown Plan Update Boundary (2008)
- - - South University District Study Area Boundary





The University District Strategic Master Plan (2004) study area includes most of the South University District

THE UNIVERSITY DISTRICT STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN, 2004

The University District Strategic Master Plan was prepared by the City of Spokane's Economic Development Department in 2004, with MIG as the consultant. The Strategic Master Plan describes the South University District area as a potential 'activity center' and a 'specific priority' sub-area with the following elements:

- A pedestrian and bicycle bridge to Riverpoint Campus.
- New medium to high density residential development along Pacific Avenue, including row-housing.
- New mixed-use development along Sherman Street.
- An 'activity center' concentrated on the block of Sherman Street between Pacific Avenue and Second Street.
- Streetscape improvements along Sprague and Pacific Avenues; as well as Grant and Sherman Streets.

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT/DOWNTOWN SPOKANE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN (2008)

The Transportation Improvement Plan, prepared by DKS Associates, provides a comprehensive assessment of the transportation needs in the University District and Downtown Spokane and includes the entire study area of the South University District. Detailed recommendations that apply specifically to the area within the South University study area boundary include:

- Streetscape enhancements to the pedestrian environment along Division Street.
- Construction of a Sherman Street pedestrian/bicycle (ped/bike) bridge south from the WSU Riverpoint Campus over the railroad tracks.
- Development of a bicycle framework network east/west along Fourth and Fifth Avenues.
- Fixing deficiencies to the intersection where Division and Browne Streets meet Third Avenue.
- Improve parking guidance by converting parallel parking to angle parking with individual parking meters on McClellan Street (between Pacific and Second Avenues) and Pacific Avenue; and removal of on-street parking on Browne Street between Second and Third Avenue.

FAST FORWARD SPOKANE DOWNTOWN PLAN UPDATE (2008)

The *Plan Update* defined the South University District as a sub-district of Downtown and expanded its study area boundary to include it. The following recommendations are made:

- Enhancements at the railroad underpasses of Washington and Division Streets.
- A major gateway at the highway/interstate interchanges at Division Street and Interstate 90.
- Identification of the South University District as a ‘Private Opportunity Zone’.
- A pedestrian and bicycle connection called University District Pedestrian Bridge (identified as a Public Opportunity Site), adjacent to a proposed multi-modal transit stop, with streetscape enhancements over the railroad at North Grant Street, linking the District to Riverpoint Campus.
- A residential strategy that identifies public open space, including a public plaza and park, and medium to high density residential land uses within the sub-district.
- Proposed primary land uses within the District including ‘mixed use urban village’ east of Division Avenue; office use west of Division Avenue and north of 2nd Avenue; and auto-oriented commercial uses west of Division and south of 2nd Avenue.



The Downtown Plan Update (2008) study area includes most of the South University District Study Area

The following land use strategy is recommended for the South University District:

Promote medium to high density development and a fine-grained mix of uses such as housing and/or offices located above retail spaces. Street layout and site planning should emphasize pedestrian over automobile movement. It is anticipated that older warehouse and light industrial spaces will be converted to residential and office uses. Retail should be focused along Sprague Avenue and Pacific Avenue.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

OPPORTUNITIES

The following opportunities within the South University District Study Area have been identified:

- A significant cluster of National Historic Properties and contributing historic buildings (described below).
- A central location that is ideally situated to take advantage of close proximity to Downtown, higher education, the Medical District, the Spokane River, and adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- Potential housing demand from employees of the medical District as well as faculty and students from the Universities to the north.
- Numerous vacant and under-utilized² parcels.
- Quick and convenient access to the Interstate and other local and regional arterials.
- Important connections via Division Street between Downtown and the Medical District; Sherman Avenue towards the residential neighborhoods to the south; Sprague and Third Avenue link to the East Central Neighborhood; the planned Ped/Bike Bridge to Riverpoint Campus and Gonzaga Campus to the north.
- Gateway opportunities along the length of Division Street between the Interstate 90 off-ramp and the railroad underpass; as well as the intersection of Sherman Street and Pacific Avenue.
- The historic railroad viaduct is a unique and defining feature of the area.

² *'Under-utilized' describes property wherein the value of improvements is one-and-a-half times the current land value, or less.*

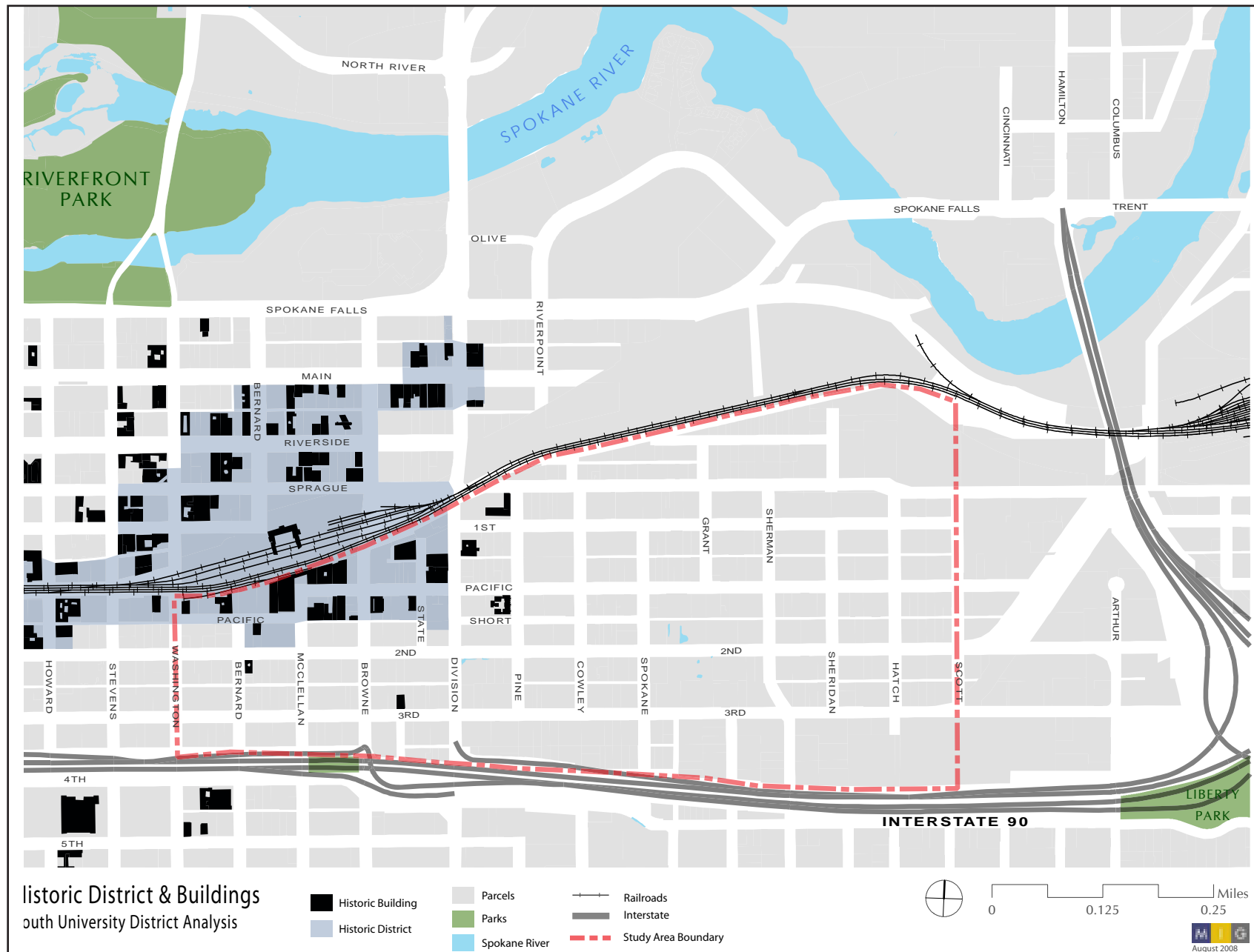
Historic Assets

Historic buildings and structures present an important link to our historic and architectural past. They provide continuity and link us to our roots. They are also resources that can be adapted and integrated into the fabric of the community. The South University District includes a portion of the East Downtown National Historic District and several properties that are individually listed on the Spokane and National Registers of Historic Places. This District has a mix of properties including single-room occupancy hotels (SRO's), warehouses, and a variety of commercial buildings. There is a high concentration of building types that represent railroad-dependent businesses consisting primarily of warehouses, but also of manufacturers and lodgings. There are also properties east of Division Street along Sprague Avenue and the BNSF Railroad corridor that have not been surveyed but may be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Several warehouse and mixed-use commercial/residential buildings are within this corridor.

CONSTRAINTS

The site constraints of the South University District are listed below:

- Heavy arterial traffic from important freight routes along Sprague to the north; Second and Third Avenues to the south; and Browne and Division Streets to the West create perceptual barriers.
- The railroad to the north and the Interstate that wraps along the southern and eastern edge of the study area are significant physical barriers.
- Perceived public safety issues, especially after dark.
- Lack of pedestrian amenities and an uninviting streetscape.
- Potential brownfield sites based on historic uses.



CIRCULATION FRAMEWORK

Connections to adjacent neighborhoods, such as the Medical District, residential neighborhoods to the south, the Universities to the north, and the Downtown Core, will be a major factor in the success of this District. Vehicular access is fundamental to desirable commerce and business activity, as is the quality of the pedestrian and bicycle environment. A more integrated approach towards pedestrians and other modes of transit will be necessary.

With limited streetscape and pedestrian amenities, the District lacks a clear identity and unifying character. The sense of place can be strengthened with streetscape and pedestrian amenities. There is a clear need to enhance streetscapes, add street trees, and create gateways that foster a sense of place and extend a warm welcome. The visitor experience can also be improved by implementing a wayfinding and signage system that efficiently directs people to local destinations and the regional transportation system. Also, improvements for bicyclists should be made with the redevelopment of this area.

STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

As described in the *Plan Update*, Complete Streets are landscaped, tree-lined corridors designed for multiple modes of transportation. Nearly all are meant to balance the various needs of pedestrian and vehicular use. Some include bicycle and transit improvements as well. Pedestrian amenities on Complete Streets may include street furniture, decorative lighting, wide sidewalks with curb extensions (bulb-outs) at street corners, decorative crosswalks, public art, outdoor restaurants, plazas, and improved sidewalk-building interfaces (e.g., awnings, street-oriented retail activity).

The following streets have been identified as high priority projects for streetscape improvements:

- Pacific Avenue
- Grant Street
- Sprague Avenue
- Sherman Street
- Division Street
- Alleys

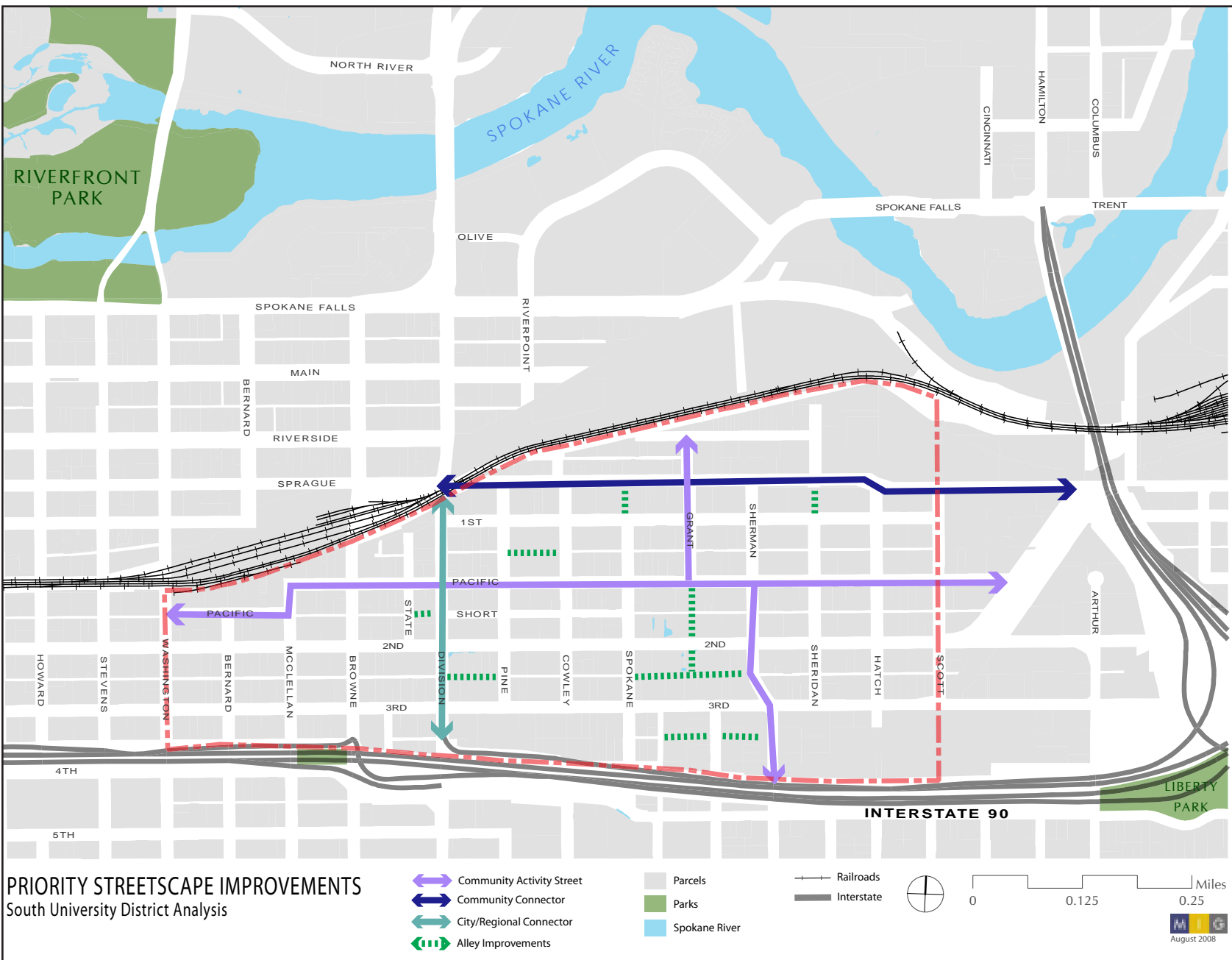




Illustration of possible streetscape from the University District Strategic Plan (2004)—Tony Janson

Pacific Avenue and Grant Street—Community Activity Streets

A Community Activity Street (Type I Complete Street) is described in the *Plan Update* as a slow, two-way street with wide, well-maintained sidewalks, and pedestrian amenities to encourage strolling, walking, and shopping. Both Pacific Avenue and Grant Street should have streetscape improvements that foster Community Activity Streets:

Objectives for Pacific Avenue include improving the character of the street and providing for increased pedestrian and bicycle usage. Vehicular traffic is currently minimal on this street.

Grant Street will link the South University District to the proposed Ped/Bike Bridge by facilitating pedestrian traffic to and from Riverpoint Campus. As the area develops, streetscape improvements between Sprague and Pacific will be necessary.

Sprague Avenue—Community Connector

A Community Connector (Type II Complete Street), is designed to move traffic and pedestrians. These streets provide some of the major pedestrian connections to surrounding neighborhoods and Districts. Sprague is defined as a Community Connector.

Significant improvements are recommended to improve the vehicular and pedestrian environment along Sprague

Avenue. Providing on-street parking, pedestrian safety, and a pleasant pedestrian and bicyclist environment are the objectives of the Sprague Avenue improvements. Sprague Avenue has also been discussed as a possible Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route between Downtown and East Spokane.³

Sherman Street—Community Activity Street/ Neighborhood Street

Improvements to Sherman Street will create a better environment for pedestrians and bicyclists traveling to and from the Medical District/South Hill; and between the South University District and Riverpoint Campus. Recommendations include safety improvements and amenities for bicyclists and pedestrians. Sherman Street is described as a Community Activity Street (Type I Complete Street) south of Pacific Avenue; and a Neighborhood Street (Type IV Complete Street) north of Pacific Avenue. Neighborhood Streets carry very little through-traffic and tend to have less commercial activity than the other types of Complete Streets. They also tend to have generous sidewalks, landscaping, and street trees. DKS Associates recommended that Sherman Street,

³ *DRAFT University District/Downtown Spokane Transportation Improvement Plan, DKS Associates: April 2008.*

between Sprague and Fifth Avenues, be re-stripped to a three-lane cross-section, with six-foot bicycle lanes on both sides of the street.⁴

Division Street –City-Regional Connector

Division Street serves as an important transition and connection from the freeway into Downtown. It is prioritized because of its visibility as a main entrance from Interstate 90. Division Street is currently a northbound one-way, four-lane street, with some on-street parking. It is classified as an urban principal arterial and a freight route and a twelve-foot minimum lane width is required: thus, Division Street does not have existing or proposed on-street bike lanes. Division Street is a City-Regional Connector (Type III Complete Street); its primary function is to move automobile traffic and provide connections with other parts of the city and region. These attractive, landscaped arterials have street trees, sufficient sidewalks for pedestrian circulation, and safe pedestrian crossings. Pedestrian improvements along the Division Street corridor can create a more pedestrian-friendly environment and provide an opportunity for enhanced gateway aesthetics:

- Speed reduction to 25 or 30 mph through modifications of signal timing;
- Special paving for crosswalks and sidewalks;
- Reduction of off-peak cycle lengths at signalized intersections to shorten pedestrian waiting times;
- Streetscape enhancements such as street trees, public art, street furniture, and pedestrian-scale signage; and
- Safety improvements at the intersections of Division Street with Sprague and Third Avenues.

It may be possible to reduce the lanes along Division Street on the block between the railroad underpass at Second Avenue to allow for on-street parking that would increase separation between the pedestrian realm and moving vehicles.⁵ All improvements that could potentially reduce capacity along Division Street must be coordinated with the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*



The railroad to the north of the study area creates a significant physical barrier to Riverpoint Campus

Alleys

The scale of Spokane's alleys provides an extra dimension to the transportation and public space network within the South University District. All vehicles using alleys should be subordinate to other users, such as pedestrians, bicyclists, and wheel chair users. Alleys should be well-maintained and activated to provide critical mid-block connections.

BICYCLE FACILITIES

There are very few existing bicycle amenities within the South University District Study Area. Currently, there are shared bicycle routes⁶ along Second and Fourth Avenues; south along Sherman Street from Second Avenue; and east along Third Avenue from Division Street. A number of recommendations for bicycle facility improvements are listed below.⁷

⁶ *The Spokane Comprehensive Plan defines shared bicycle routes as motor vehicle routes that have signage to indicate that the street is also a bicycle route.*

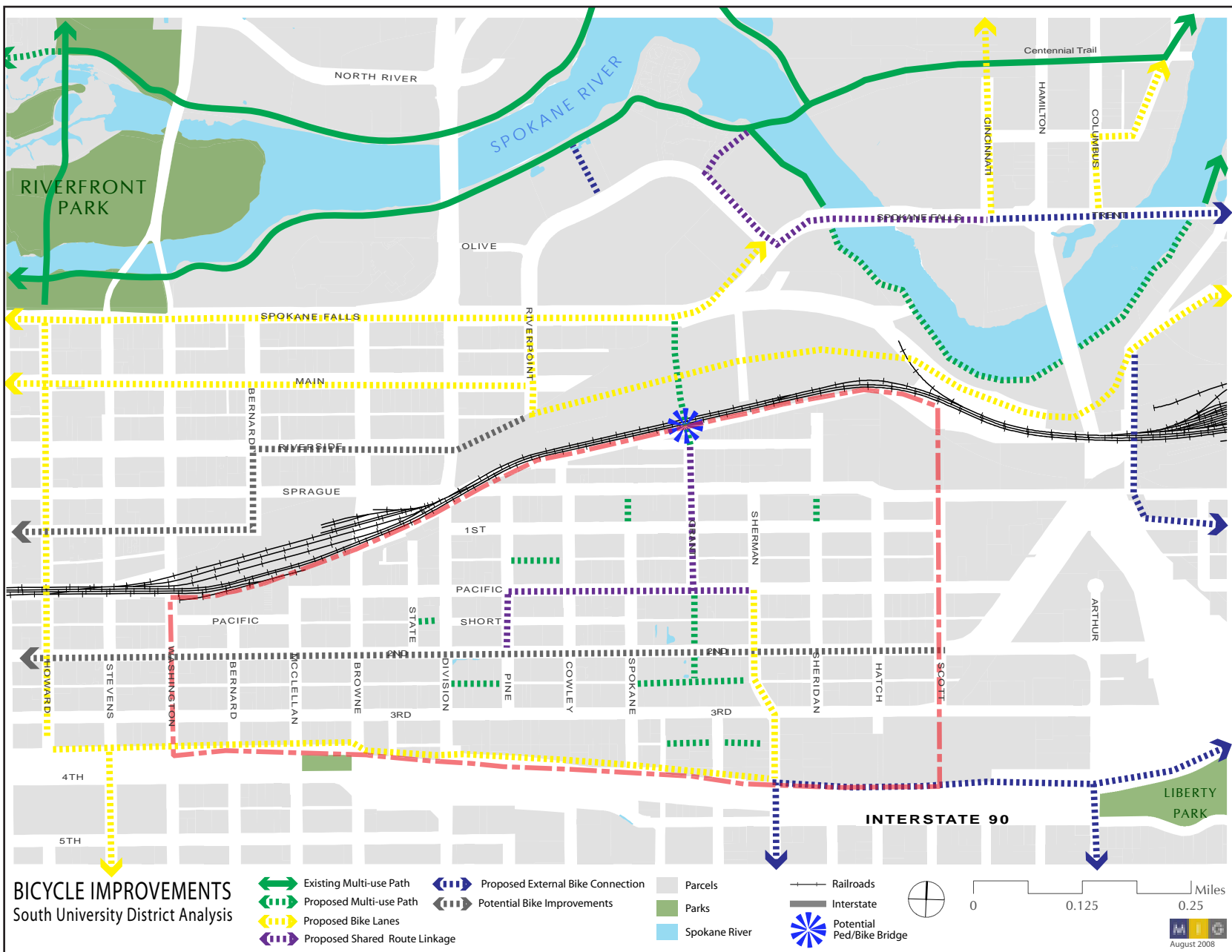
⁷ *DRAFT University District/Downtown Spokane Transportation Improvement Plan, DKS Associates: April 2008.*

Multi-use Paths

Multi-use paths are also known as pedestrian/bicycle (ped/bike) paths, shared-use trails or bicycle paths. The Spokane Comprehensive Plan defines them as bikeways that are physically separated from motor vehicle traffic by either open space or a barrier of some kind. Multi-use paths are recommended within the District to increase connectivity throughout the District by reinstating the alley and right-of-way grid and to link the proposed Ped/Bike Bridge to Riverpoint Campus.

Bicycle Lanes

Bicycle lanes are created when a portion of the roadway has been designated by striping, signing, and pavement markings for preferential or exclusive use of bicycles. Designated east/west bicycle connections through the South University District that link Downtown Spokane to the rest of the city are currently lacking. Bike lanes are planned along Fourth Avenue between Howard and Sherman Streets just south of the District. A north/south bike lane would travel along one block of Grant Street south of the Ped/Bike Bridge; one block along Sprague Avenue connecting Grant and Sherman Streets; and south along Sherman Street from Sprague Avenue; to connect Riverpoint Campus to South Spokane. In addition, future consideration should be given to long term bike improvements such as bike lanes, along Second Avenue.



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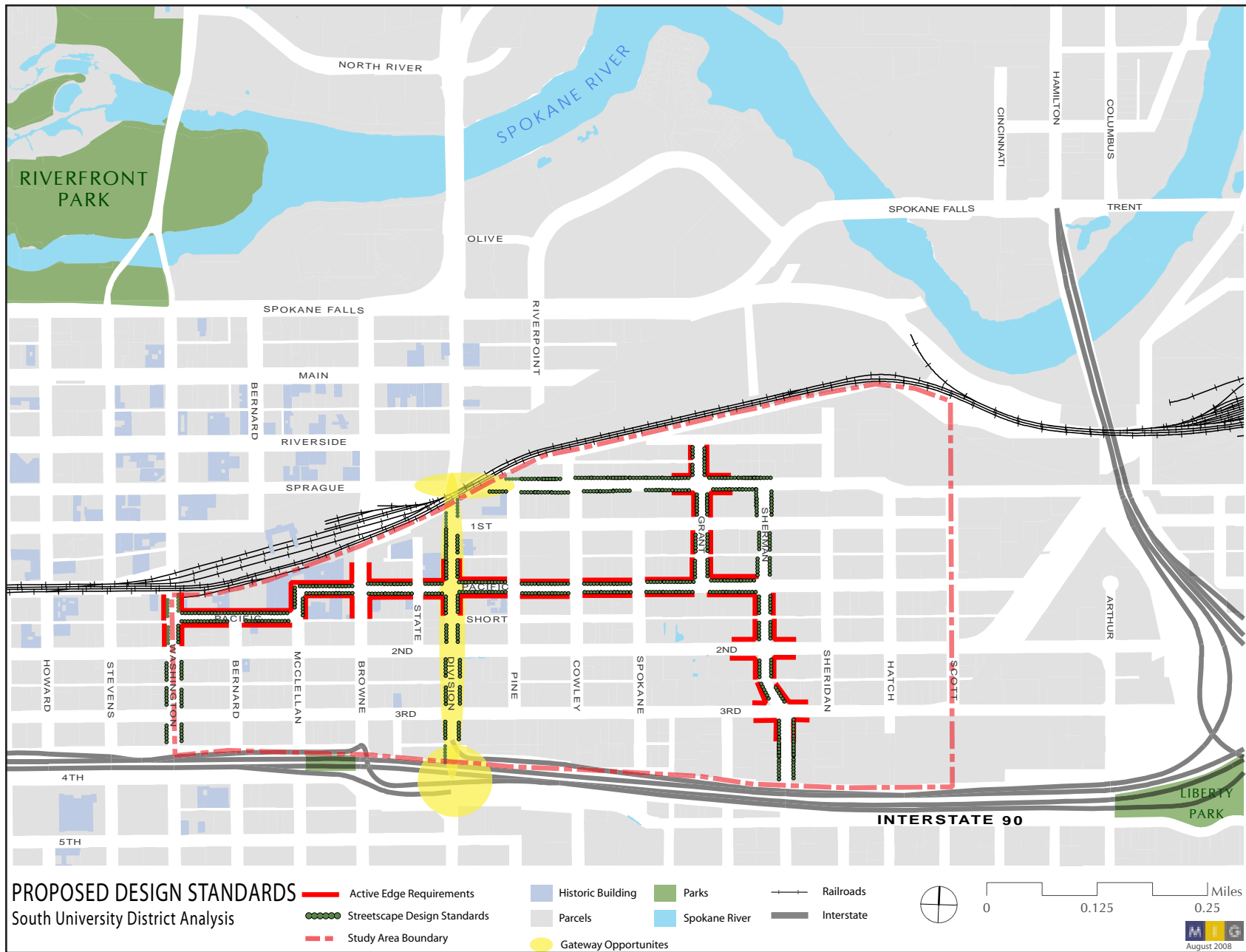
GATEWAY OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of locations for aesthetic gateway enhancements to this District. These include underpass enhancements at Washington and Division Streets, where the road passes beneath the railroad, and at Division Street where the Interstate exits. As previously mentioned, the Division Street interchange off of Interstate 90 is a major entry point into Spokane. Division Street should be improved with landscape design, signage, and lighting, creating an attractive entry boulevard from Interstate 90 through the South University District, and into Downtown.

STREETSCAPE STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

Streetscape improvements encompass all of the physical features encountered by pedestrians including: sidewalks and crosswalks; roadway design including lane width and surface treatments; lighting; street trees, grates, and landscape buffers; public art; street furniture such as benches and trash receptacles; wayfinding signage; on-street parking design; bus stop amenities; and building awnings. Streetscape amenities can provide significant

improvements to the aesthetics of a street; the perception of safety; and the desirability of investing in a community. Streetscape standards and guidelines that promote active edges and pedestrian-friendly environments on the streets identified in the Proposed Design Standards map, are strongly encouraged to create a sense of cohesiveness along key streets within the South University District. For example, the built form—composed of buildings, streets, sidewalks, and public open spaces—plays a crucial role in the vitality, perception, and livability of a District. Elements of built form such as the percentage of transparency in a facade, uniformity in setbacks, and allowed materials can be regulated or influenced by design standards and guidelines. Transparency refers to the visibility between private buildings and public spaces. When the edges of buildings are referred to as “active,” it is because the activity within the building engages the street environment and vice-versa. Numerous buildings within the South University District have blank or opaque facades, which weaken the pedestrian experience and reduce neighborhood safety.



PROPOSED DESIGN STANDARDS
South University District Analysis

- Active Edge Requirements
- Historic Building
- Parks
- Parcels
- Spokane River
- Railroads
- Interstate
- - - Study Area Boundary
- Gateway Opportunites



LAND USE FRAMEWORK

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Current land uses within the District include retail, commercial, residential, office, light industrial, auto-oriented uses, civic, and health care related uses. Surface parking lots dominate the District, and there is a significant amount of vacant and under-utilized land. These parking lots consume valuable land that could be devoted to higher-value uses.

General Commercial zoning is applied to the greater area of the South University District. The boundaries are defined by Interstate 90 to the south, Division Street to the West, Scott Street to the East, and the railroad to the north. A full range of retail and service businesses with a local or regional market as well as industrial uses are allowed. Industrial uses are limited in size to ensure that they do not dominate the character of the commercial area.

VACANT & UNDER-UTILIZED SITES

There are numerous vacant and under-utilized sites within the District; including many surface parking lots where new development could jump-start the revitalization of entire blocks or streets. The District's historic building stock also offers extensive redevelopment opportunities.

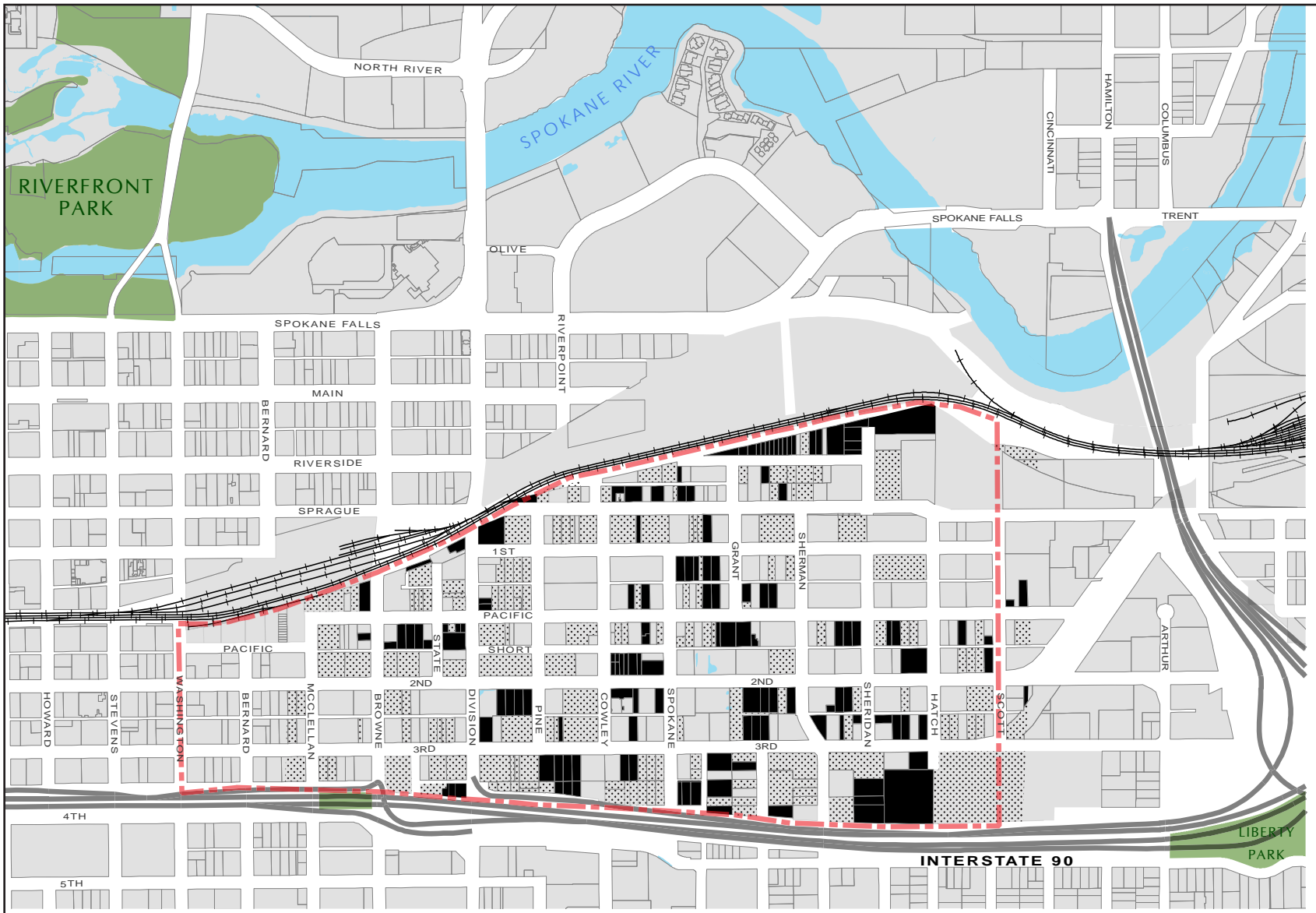
PROPOSED LAND USE

The *Primary Land Use* map illustrates the recommended land use concentrations within the South University District. The overall land use concept for the South University District is described in the *Plan Update* as 'Mixed Use Urban Village', and reiterated below. This appendix recommends primary land uses for different areas within the District. In other words, vertical mixed-use development is promoted and particular areas are designated for retail, residential or office concentration to create the critical mass necessary to develop a viable neighborhood center.

This land use framework was developed to encourage mixed uses throughout the South University District; promote unique, vital, and complementary retail spaces; rehabilitate and re-use existing structures for office, retail, and residential uses; support the development of the biomedical/health sciences campus at Riverpoint Campus and the Medical District with complementary facilities; and activate the South University District.

MIXED USE URBAN VILLAGE

The mixed use urban village concept is discussed in detail in the *Plan Update*, and supports a high density of development and a fine-grained mix of uses such as housing and/or offices located above retail spaces. Street layout and site planning emphasize pedestrian over automobile movement. The South University District, envisioned as a mixed use urban village, will include conversions of warehouses and light industrial buildings, as well as new mixed use office, retail, and residential space. A mix of residential, office, and commercial uses will foster a pedestrian-friendly, transit-accessible urban environment and contribute to making the South University District into an active place, day and night.



Vacant and Underutilized Parcels
South University District Analysis

- Underutilized
- Vacant
- Parcels
- Parks
- Spokane River
- Railroads
- Interstate
- Study Area Boundary





A-Economy Building is a mini-storage warehouse operating in the South University District

Retail/Commercial

Retail and commercial uses will be promoted in the northwest quadrant of the District, from Washington Street to Division Street, and Second Avenue to the railroad. Commercial uses include retail, service, and entertainment uses such as restaurants, specialty retail, department stores, banks, post offices, dry cleaners, grocery stores, and theaters. Retail uses will especially be encouraged; this includes the sale of goods as well as food and beverage services. Concentrated pockets and/or strips of pedestrian-oriented, ground floor retail and restaurants that stay open on evenings and weekends will create a lively commercial atmosphere that attracts people from the rest of the City and region. The businesses in the area

are encouraged to develop a unique marketing identity for their center. This will allow the City of Spokane and partner organizations to direct customers seeking their niche of goods, services, and development to that area. Retail and commercial uses, as well as ground-floor standards that promote active streetscapes, will also be encouraged at the ground floor of:

- Pacific Avenue,
- Grant Street, and
- Sherman Street.

Office/Biomedical

Office and biomedical primary uses are recommended along the Second and Third Avenue couplet due to the presence of arterials and the freeway for commuters and clients, as well as proximity to the high concentration of biomedical facilities in the Medical District to the south.

Residential

A concentration of residential use is recommended in the north-central portion of the South University District. Residences in this area would be adjacent to the proposed pedestrian/bicycle bridge that will span the railroad tracks at Grant Street, and connects to Riverpoint Campus. Residential uses appropriate to this area would include student-oriented apartments, single-room occupancy facilities, townhouses, and condominiums. Residential

units may often be located above ground floor retail and office uses. High-density residential is recommended along Grant Street and Pacific Avenue between Sheridan and Pine Streets, with recommended ground-floor retail or commercial uses.

Light Industrial/Research and Development

Some light industrial and distribution uses as well as arts-related manufacturing uses exist in the South University District, including a small foundry, welding shops, fabrication shops, and glass blowing shops, among others. East of Sherman Street, there are a number of light

industrial uses such as storage, wholesale, auto-oriented commercial, and light manufacturing businesses. It is recommended that this portion of the South University District maintain its current uses, while promoting small-scale manufacturing, artists' workspaces, business incubators, and research and development projects, within this area.

OPPORTUNITY SITES

Potential opportunity sites were identified on the map to the right and will be instrumental in stimulating future private investment in the South University District. These sites have a high potential to act as a catalyst for further infill development in the area due to their key locations or roles in the District. It is recommended that vacant or under-utilized sites at the following key intersections be given special consideration, as these intersections are likely to be at the center of much future activity:

- Division and Pacific
- Grant and Pacific

Additionally, larger parcels to the south have the potential to support office or bio-medical facilities with significant floor-plates.

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT PEDESTRIAN & BICYCLE BRIDGE

The proposed Ped/Bike Bridge would span the existing Burlington-Northern/Santa Fe railroad tracks at Grant Street and arrive at the planned central pedestrian mall of Riverpoint Campus. Depending upon the final alignment of the Riverside extension, a bridge could span both the railroad tracks and Riverside Avenue to provide a strong link to the campuses to north and open the South Univer-

sity District for development. The existing pedestrian and bicycle crossings are at Division and Erie Streets, but their distance from one another, and their existing, auto-oriented character pose a significant barrier to connectivity.

This is an important opportunity for the South University District, and of high priority. Completion of this project will create a connection to the universities to the north and spark mixed-use projects as well as high-tech and bio-medical research and development in the area. This project will also facilitate connections between the Nursing School and the Medical District as well as connections to Downtown from the lower South Hill.

“... this project should become the icon of the District since it symbolizes the goals to overcome obstacles with creative, bold ideas and connect to Spokane’s optimistic future.”⁸

⁸ *The University District Strategic Master Plan: Driving the New Economy Vol. 1. The City of Spokane Office of Economic Development : November 30, 2004.*

In the University District Master Plan the vision for the pedestrian/bicycle bridge includes a pedestrian plaza with shops along it; a terminal for future transit development and catalyst for substantial mixed-use redevelopment; a farmers market; and a promenade to the south. However, it is appropriate for the community to revisit this vision and develop a design concept that takes into account new projects like the Riverside Extension; the proposed mass transit right-of-way and station; as well as impacts to Spokane Falls Boulevard to the north due to expansion of the pedestrian zone. A design competition could be held to develop the design of the bridge with the intent to create a community icon and focal point of the entire University District.

