

# DOWNTOWN SPOKANE 2024 policy platform



**DOWNTOWN SPOKANE**  
PARTNERSHIP



*Through advocacy and action, the DSP is championing a thriving downtown Spokane.*

A dynamic, vibrant, livable and sustainable downtown Spokane ensures the economic and social health of the entire Inland Northwest region. As the leading advocate for Spokane's urban core and the collective voice of more than 100 property and business owners, nonprofits, and residents located in the heart of the Spokane, the DSP is focused on the policies and decisions that directly affect the wellbeing of our region.

While small in geographic area, downtown Spokane is immensely valuable, diverse, efficient, inclusive, and resilient on multiple levels. From driving tax revenue and business activity to hosting a concentration of resources, amenities, and social infrastructure, downtown Spokane's impact reaches far beyond its physical footprint. With the quality of life for every Spokaneite inherently connected to the wellbeing of downtown Spokane, the DSP engages in policies that affect the vitality and viability of a strong urban center at the local, state and federal levels.

In 2023, the DSP emphasized immediate action to improve public safety and enhance public spaces, resulting in the successful adoption of state and local laws to address public use/possession of illegal drugs and prohibiting hazardous encampments near essential facilities in the City of Spokane. The DSP also prioritized solution-oriented approaches to building shelter and housing capacity with an emphasis on creating a regional, cross-jurisdictional approach to address homelessness with funding and services for people suffering from mental illness and/or substance use disorders. While ensuring downtown Spokane could be clean, safe and welcoming for all, the DSP continued to advocate against fees and regulatory impediments to develop infill housing and community amenities, resulting in successful reforms to condo liability, implementation of incentives to develop underutilized surface parking lots and phase in of impact fees.

In partnership with key stakeholders and policymakers in the private and public sectors, the DSP continues to focus on the policies that ensure downtown is more welcoming for businesses, residents and visitors. This year, the DSP will be a strong proponent for public safety initiatives and legislation that ensures everyone is safe in our community, building and expanding residential living with an emphasis on construction of workforce and "missing middle" housing in the core, initiatives that incentivize commercial activity, and efforts to enhance and activate our public spaces.

As a member of the DSP, your support, engagement and commitment to the following policy priorities is critical to growing a better downtown for all. For more information about how to get involved, visit [DowntownSpokane.org](https://DowntownSpokane.org) or email, [info@downtownspokane.org](mailto:info@downtownspokane.org).

In partnership,



Emilie Cameron  
Downtown Spokane Partnership  
President & CEO



**the downtown spokane partnership (dsp)** 2024 Policy Platform establishes the principles and priorities that serve as a frame to guide advocacy work of the DSP Board of Directors, members, and staff when engaging in policy in city, county, state and federal levels. This platform supports the continued implementation of the 2021 Downtown Plan Update and DSP's mission to create a dynamic, vibrant, livable, and sustainable downtown as the economic and cultural heart powering the entire region.

## DSP POLICY PRINCIPLES



### **cultivate commercial activity in downtown spokane**

Downtown's public spaces, transportation systems, private properties, and amenities strengthen Spokane's identity. Policies should support active transportation initiatives, invest in beautification and civic amenities, support development and incentivize job creation.



### **enhance a vibrant downtown experience**

Downtown is the community's living room and should be a welcoming and diverse place for everyone to experience. Policies should enhance and maintain the public space and rights-of-way, repair and maintain critical infrastructure, and address misuse and illegal obstruction with prioritization of Downtown's post-pandemic recovery.



### **build and expand housing options of all types, for all incomes**

Providing tools that reduce the barriers and costs to build housing, streamline construction and attract capital investment are critical to support development. Policies should expand infill and high-density residential development options in Downtown.



### **improve public safety; deter crime and negative behavior**

A safe, secure, and welcoming Downtown is critical for everyone but concerns about public safety, property crime and aggressive behavior threaten this. Policies should allow for enforcement and regulation of drug sales and use, property crime, violence, and threats to personal safety.



### **support funding, facilities and services for people to get the help they need**

The path out of homelessness, especially for individuals suffering from mental illness and substance use disorder, requires access to housing with wraparound services. Policies should focus on those in most need: those suffering mental health crises, are a danger to themselves or others, and/or are unable to care for themselves. These services should be distributed across the region, as close as possible to where people are from.

# 2024 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

## FOSTER DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT –

### expand incentives for commercial-to-residential conversions

The cost to develop and build new housing is especially high for urban infill and adaptive reuse projects. Expanding practical economic incentives in targeted urban areas through tax-deferral programs to target underdeveloped land and convert significantly underutilized commercial properties into housing – especially missing middle and workforce housing up to 115% AMI – can spur projects that will help Washington to meet its housing needs faster, and result in greater housing capacity at all levels.

- Expand E2SSB 5755 definitions to include underdeveloped property as well as historic properties eligible for rehabilitation and commercial-to-residential conversions.
- Align sales and use tax and any property tax deferral programs with the with the Multi-Family Tax Exemption (MFTE) program to establish a minimum of 20% of units set aside for affordable and workforce housing up to 115% AMI, without requirements for annual recertification after initial qualification.
- Allow applicants to submit up to the point of issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy.
- Support a tax shift or reimbursement fund to reimburse eligible development costs, similar to the federal Historic Tax Credit program.

### delay clean buildings act requirements

The Washington Clean Buildings Act (CBA) and Clean Buildings Expansion Bill impose significant and costly regulations to commercial buildings in downtown Spokane. With confusion surrounding multiple unknown requirements still under development, it is critical the Legislature provide clarity and delay implementation until it has fully explored and defined exemptions and compliance requirements.

## KEEP DOWNTOWN SAFE

### increase funding for law enforcement workforce

Washington has one of the lowest per capita officer-to-citizen ratio in the nation. The City of Spokane Police Department needs significantly more officers to continue to grow proactive/neighborhood policing activities. Providing state funding for recruiting, hiring and training is critical to keep the community safe.

### counter organized retail crime

According to the Retail Industry Leaders Association, Washington retailers lost an estimated \$2.7 billion to theft in 2021, contributing to increased retail costs, reduced sales tax collection, and violent incidents. Combating organized retail crime through disincentivizing the theft of goods, supporting the ORC Task Force and swift action is important to reduce the tremendous cost of this crime in our community.

### fund rights-of-way safety initiative

Continue to fully fund the state program which moves the unhoused into more permanent housing and ensures that state-owned properties do not become dangerous and unhealthy illegal encampments.

### restore ability for police pursuits

State law currently allows officers to conduct vehicular pursuits only in very narrow conditions. As a result, the deterrent of police pursuit when committing a crime is lost, evidenced by the 9.8% increase in property crime in downtown Spokane since police pursuits were greatly limited. Restoring the option to actively pursue criminals is an important tool to reduce crime.

## INVESTMENT CAPITAL IN CULTURAL AMENITIES

### cultural trail

The Cultural Trail is a proposed connection through downtown Spokane between Browne's Addition at its west terminus and the University District to the east. The project will infuse new branding and navigation and add permanent and curated cultural content that enriches the corridor. The project can be a catalyst for downtown Spokane, encouraging vibrant commerce along its route while simultaneously encouraging people to choose walking as their means to move through the city, fostering community culture and health.



## 2024 DSP POLICY PRIORITIES



### economic vitality

*Incentivize investment and job opportunities. Strengthen downtown Spokane as a healthy, sustainable, diverse and prosperous economic driver for the region.*

- Foster a diverse mix of commercial tenants, industries and development.
- Support recruitment and retention efforts of new and established employers.
- Encourage supportive infrastructure for entrepreneurs and startups.
- Incentivize connections with local higher education and entrepreneurship programs to integrate students and underserved communities into Downtown's workforce.

*Leverage new and adjacent areas of future growth and economic influence. With vacancy rates for office space growing, new development and attractions will be important catalysts for Downtown.*

- Encourage development in the West End and North Bank with enhanced connectivity to the University District in the East End.
- Leverage public-private partnerships and investment to reinvigorate blighted properties, preserve historic façades, enhance mobility and support growing industries.
- Support community investment in regional destination projects located in Downtown.



### destination enhancement

*Support ongoing efforts to beautify and revitalize key areas of Downtown. Streetscape, entryways and the public realm in Downtown merit improvements. These areas should feel safe and be welcoming to support activity and vitality.*

- Improve and enhance railroad viaduct undercrossings and gateways.
- Leverage on-street parking revenue from the City's parking system fund, American Rescue Plan Act funds, and other grant programs to invest in public space maintenance and improvements.
- Address declining street tree infrastructure, establish lighting standards, repair hazardous sidewalks, abate litter/graffiti, enhance cleaning and sanitation, and direct new capital investments needed to enhance the pedestrian experience.
- Administer code enforcement proactively and expand special abatement emphasis in hot-spot areas to address health and safety concerns on public and privately owned property.
- Support businesses and organizations that activate Downtown, foster art, place enhancement, and cultural programming and make it as easy as possible for people to create activity in public spaces, plazas, courtyards, alleys, under viaducts and private spaces.

*Support transportation enhancements and initiatives to improve mobility. Improve access and connections that link people and neighborhoods to Downtown.*

- Leverage the Spokane Transit Authority's 10-year plan to expand reliable, accessible, convenient, and safe service routes for which there is demand.
- Energize streets for pedestrians, cyclists, and other forms of micro-mobility with integrated, managed public spaces along high-density retail corridors.
- Utilize existing resources to improve parking management through on-street/off-street shared inter-modal wayfinding.





*Reduce barriers and costs while streamlining housing construction in Downtown. Demand for rental housing has outstripped supply resulting in near zero vacancy rates.*

- Support the continuation of successful programs that spur high-density development like the multi-family tax exemption (MFTE) and adopt additional incentives with an emphasis on under-utilized sites.
- Leverage and enhance federal, state and local economic incentives to support commercial-to-residential conversions, development of surface parking lots, infrastructure improvements and the use of the renewed Projects of City-Wide Significance program.
- Support incentives to create new housing at all levels of affordability and oppose state and local legislative efforts and regulations that would delay or harm the ability to do so with an emphasis on supporting construction of more workforce and "missing middle" housing.

*Pursue redevelopment of surface parking lots Downtown.*

- Explore public-private partnerships including incentives for new development and improvements.





## public safety

**Support clarification of laws and regulations to address sale and use of illegal drugs. Passage of ESSB 5536 in the 2023 Legislative Special Session strengthened penalties for drug possession and use but ongoing vigilance is necessary to address the continued threats to personal safety and property that result from the sale and use of illegal drugs.**

- Address rapidly rising drug overdose deaths and strengthen law enforcement's ability to address criminal networks distributing fentanyl and other drugs.
- Incentivize treatment-focused jail diversion programs, including use of Community Court, Therapeutic Drug Court, and Mental Health Court for people suffering from mental illness and substance use disorders, including removal of convictions for completion of treatment programs while maintaining legal accountability if diversion programs are not utilized or individuals continue to reoffend.
- Maintain criminal penalties for drug possession and use, including the potential for felony conviction.
- Oppose further drug legalization initiatives.

**Correctly interpret and apply the *Martin v. City of Boise* decision by defining time, place and manner limitations in camping ordinances and eliminate shelter requirements in the enforcement of the City's sit-lie ordinance since there is no legal correlation.**

- Restore law enforcement's ability to engage in pursuits based on reasonable suspicion, including crimes affecting property.
- Support initiatives and funding that encourage proactive/neighborhood policing strategies by Downtown Precinct officers, including regular foot and bike patrols, emphasis patrols, and investments that deter crime.
- Encourage planning, design and development standards that incorporate and incentivize crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED).
- Establish policies to deter and address nuisance behavior at locations with captive audiences, including hospitality amenities, financial services, and transit activities.
- Broaden the tools available for security personnel and police to manage transit facilities and ensure only transit-focused activity occurs at transit facilities and stops.
- Protect downtown retailers by supporting initiatives and laws which counter organized retail theft.



**Support legislation and judicial policies that can deter crime, drug use and violence. Every opportunity should be taken to hold offenders accountable, provide treatment and rehabilitation for return to the community, and when possible, restore impacts to victim(s) and/or property.**

- Establish a "High-Utilizer" designation to identify, address and reduce chronic offender recidivism.
- Support laws and regulations aimed at addressing pedestrian interference, sit-lie, illegal camping, aggressive panhandling and property and chronic nuisance crimes, including law enforcement's ability to enforce these policies.

**Expand jail capacity, supervised mental illness services and addiction treatment. Downtown serves as the hub for public safety and emergency services with a super-concentration of services and subsidized housing for Eastern Washington, creating a ready-made market to prey upon the most vulnerable in our society.**

- Ensure there is jail capacity to hold offenders accountable.
- Strengthen jail release procedures to prevent overnight discharge and ensure individuals can connect to community support systems, including access to return to their community of origin.
- Oppose the establishment of no-cash bail or exemption of the graduated re-entry program to prevent exposing the community to harm.





## homelessness & social services

*Support partnerships and resources to confront mental illness, addiction and homelessness. Spokane's fractured approach to homelessness and behavioral health is in crisis and needs enhanced coordination, collaboration and accountability*

- Encourage initiatives, governance and funding to align and strengthen mental health and addiction services regionally.
- Streamline services, coordinate communication, and maximize joint investments among local governments, service providers and the private sector.
- Develop new public-private partnerships that assist in accessing affordable housing, mental and physical health services, and address homelessness.
- Launch and maintain a new region wide Community Management Information System (CMIS) intake and reporting tool.

*Expand programs that assist homeless in accessing a range of shelter and housing options and services. Insufficient shelter for Spokane's growing number of people experiencing homelessness results in hazardous urban camping on sidewalks, viaducts and alleyways.*

- Support and expand emergency shelter options.
- Preserve and increase funding from federal, state and local sources that support permanent supportive housing with services.
- Support the establishment of emergency stabilization centers for individuals experiencing mental health crises.
- Require coordination among regional housing partners and providers when addressing uninhabitable properties.
- Ensure availability of detoxification facilities in Spokane County accepting referrals from law enforcement, fire departments, service providers and DSP Ambassadors.

*Ensure equitable distribution of additional emergency shelters, low-barrier housing, intake/navigation centers, and public restrooms regionally. Concentrated co-location of these facilities in Downtown is making the area unsafe, including for the people these facilities are intended to serve.*

- Require transparency in the development of social service and public facilities through public notification processes, including public postings, neighborhood notifications and conditional use permitting.
- Ensure placement of shelters, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing minimizes over-concentration in any one neighborhood and require 24/7 management and staffing with enforceable "good neighbor" agreements in place prior to opening.
- Oppose additional emergency shelters, low-barrier housing, and new stand-alone public restrooms in Downtown to address further over-concentration.

*Expand conservatorship and assisted outpatient treatment to get help for those that do not have the capacity to accept or understand their need. Mechanisms for helping people with severe mental illness can help them transition from the streets to residential psychiatric treatment.*

- Utilize the Involuntary Treatment Act and similar policies for those who do not have the capacity to care for themselves and/or pose a significant risk to themselves and others.
- Advocate for expanded behavioral health funding and services, including designated funds for additional treatment identified in SB ESSB 5536, opioid settlements, and behavioral health programs, to keep those suffering from addiction from entering or continuing in homelessness.



# MEMBER PARTNERS

*The Downtown Spokane Partnership serves as Spokane's premier central city advocate. Established in 1995 to ensure Spokane's urban core remains a healthy regional center of business, retail trade, government, education, transportation, and living, DSP membership is open to any and all individuals, partnerships, firms, corporations and businesses interested in the welfare and development of downtown Spokane. Member organizations elect to pay annual dues to fund the strategic agenda and position DSP as the downtown advocacy group.*

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VIP Production Northwest  
Vista Title and Escrow LLC  
Windermere City Group  
WS Property Management LLC

## in-kind association

BOMA  
Greater Spokane Incorporated  
Visit Spokane  
University District



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