

2023 City of Spokane Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate for: Mayor of Spokane

Name: Lisa Brown

Professional licenses or other relevant professional experience.

I am a former legislator representing Spokane for 20 years. I have served as state Senate majority leader, Chancellor of WSU Spokane, and Director of the Washington State Department of Commerce. I have a PhD in economics and have taught economics at Eastern and leadership at Gonzaga.

Find more information about the campaign:

lisabrownformayor.com

Tell us about your plan for downtown’s recovery...

How will you boost commercial activity downtown?

A clean and safe downtown is important for residents, workers, and visitors. I worked hard to save the Fox Theater because I know how important downtown and its institutions are to Spokane families and our quality of life. To revitalize the downtown experience, I will maintain an active City of Spokane presence downtown through employment and other activities in City Hall (which should definitely stay downtown!). As mayor, I’ll champion downtown events, incentivize a city employee presence, and promote our vibrant downtown business, entertainment and retail scene.

How will you ensure a vibrant downtown experience for people that live, work and visit?

These important services are strongest when we have strong partnerships across the city administration, the city council, DSP, and other stakeholders. The city must take an active role in facilitating these efforts, and I am excited to lead the city’s undertaking. To be successful, the city needs to manage its budget and programs efficiently, and we must be willing to build creative, visionary programs with businesses and other stakeholders.

How will you support new housing development downtown, especially for “missing middle”?

The city recently found that 40% of residents were cost-burdened by rising rents and the costs of housing. As mayor, I will take an “all of the above” approach to expanding housing supply. That means city departments working together better for permitting, zoning and land use measures, incentives, and active engagement by the mayor with key stakeholders and city council. I would ensure the city partners with developers and financial institutions to support attainable housing for residents at all income levels. We also need to take a broad look at new funding streams for housing. The state recently passed legislation putting millions of dollars on the table for cities like Spokane, and I would push to get Spokane our fair share so we can support new housing in walkable areas like downtown. I will work on an initiative with private and public funding to create some dedicated housing and studio space for artists, musicians and other creatives downtown.

How will you address public safety in downtown Spokane?

See my full plans for public safety and homelessness on my website. I believe we need fully funded and staffed first responders, both police and fire. The police department is currently short-staffed, which is causing officer morale and burnout issues, public frustration and sub-optimal response rates. I believe in transparency regarding police response rates and times by neighborhood and discussions with the public about levels of service to achieve public support for necessary funding levels. Street medicine teams should be integrated into our homelessness response and co-response between law enforcement and mental health professionals needs to be expanded. We can't truly improve public safety downtown until we have a more effective homelessness response.

What do you believe should be the City's role in addressing homelessness, mental illness and substance use on the streets of downtown Spokane?

The city deserves an experienced collaborative leader who can actually pull people together and implement an effective homelessness response. We have over 2000 people who are visibly unhoused in the county and only 1000 emergency beds. No one wants people camping downtown or in neighborhoods or by the river. In order to bring people inside we have to create places where they CAN be, not just legislate where they can't be. I have met with nonprofits, private developers and the Spokane Homeless Coalition and I believe we can create more safe humane places. Those places, by the way, are not parking lots - an inaccurate accusation that my opponent has made, and not huge congregate shelters like TRAC. Not everyone will take advantage of the resources, but many will if we approach them with street medicine teams and peer navigators who have themselves gotten through addiction and homelessness to the other side. I believe in a regional approach and know how to negotiate agreements and get there. I will implement a navigation center model that coordinates resources, does intake into a central data system, identifies people by name, coordinates assessments and referrals to services and housing, measures costs and outcomes and makes that information available to the public. I will ensure we receive our fair share of state resources for behavioral health facilities, homelessness funding and housing. People should be offered opportunities to be housed in dispersed smaller locations, not one huge shelter. People committing crimes should be held accountable by law enforcement. No neighborhood, including downtown, should bear the impacts of having too many facilities.

Investing in a clean and safe downtown is essential to attracting new businesses as well as workers, visitors, and residents. Given the fragile state of downtown's revitalization, how should the City of Spokane prioritize funding downtown recovery in its budget?

Funding downtown initiatives should always be a priority. Unfortunately, the city is facing a structural budget deficit, the general fund gap will be at least 20 million for 2024 and the current administration has drawn down city reserves to a level that threatens our credit rating. As part of my transition process, I will invite business and community leaders into a process to stop digging the budget hole we are currently in and begin replenishing reserves for the next rainy day. The city has not taken advantage of all state funds available and I will make sure we do. There are some exciting economic development opportunities that will create new good jobs for our region and I will be a leader in bringing them to fruition. I helped create the Film tax incentive and the creative economy is growing here as a result and this will benefit downtown recovery.

Is there any additional information you would like to share about your candidacy that you were unable to provide in the above responses?

I shop downtown. I dine and experience nightlife downtown regularly, and I have done so for decades. I spent years teaching night classes downtown. I had my legislative office downtown for 10 years. I love downtown Spokane.

I played a major role in saving the Fox theater, in securing state funding for most of the buildings on the University District campus, and in creating the WSU medical school. I still love biking and walking downtown, and I live in Kendall Yards because it lets me do just that.

I'm focused on getting results, and I've done that throughout my career. But it's not just empty talk. It takes a leader who is willing to collaborate, willing to bring people together, and willing to demand accountability. I want to bring new energy and steady leadership to City Hall, leaning into my service in the legislature and my expertise in policy, to activate new resources for our city.

It's clear what we don't want — more crime, more homelessness, and more division. It's time to talk about what we do want. What do we want our city to be in the next 4 years, the next 10 years, and longer? If elected, I promise that we will turn a page and build a stronger, healthier, and more vibrant city than ever before.

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