



DOWNTOWN SPOKANE PARTNERSHIP



Natalie Poulson | State Rep. Legislative District 3, Position 2

Professional licenses or experience: Professional Certification in Education.

Campaign Website: <https://friendsofnatalie.com/>

Help us get to know you, what is your favorite event or small business downtown?

Hoopfest.

Cultivate Commercial Activity: Downtown depends on attracting investment, supporting businesses, and creating a place where people want to live, work, shop, and visit. What policies or investments would you prioritize to strengthen downtown's economic vitality?

Downtown's commercial vitality is a cost, safety, and occupancy problem, not a branding problem. Office vacancy in the core is near 30%. Storefronts sit empty. Visitors have come back, but too many workers, families, and investors still treat downtown as a place they pass through rather than a place they commit to. Commerce follows order, predictable costs, and a real customer base. I would prioritize four things at the state level:

1. Public safety as the foundation of investment. People spend money where they feel safe. Property crime, public drug use, and chronic disorder raise insurance, security, and lost-sales costs and chase tenants out. I will support laws that restore consequences for property crime and public drug use, focus resources on chronic offenders, and stop over-concentrating low-barrier facilities on a few downtown blocks. A district that is not safe will not fill.
2. Lower the cost of occupying and converting space. Ground-floor retail and office reuse stall when permitting is slow and fees stack without a proven nexus to impact. I will push to cut unnecessary regulation, require nexus analysis before new or increased fees, and treat vacant-to-occupied conversion as a measurable outcome. Aging buildings will not fill if reuse is more expensive than walking away.
3. Grow a downtown customer base with market-rate housing. Downtown needs thousands of additional market-rate units to support grocery, retail, and evening activity. I support faster permitting, fewer state-driven construction-cost adders, and conversion of underused commercial space into housing. Residents who live, shop, and stay after 5 p.m. are the most durable investment the core can get.



818 W Riverside, Ste I20, Spokane, WA 99201



509.456.0580



info@downtownspokane.org



downtownspokane.org

4. Keep employers and make it easier to open, not harder. Downtown works when payroll is downtown. I will favor policies that help existing employers stay and make it simpler to occupy space, not new mandates that assume every tenant can absorb another cost. Targeted public-private tools for blighted properties can help if they are time-limited and tied to occupancy. Blank-check spending is not a vitality strategy. I will measure success the way downtown stakeholders do: more occupied space, more people who want to be there after dark, and fewer reasons to lock the door for good.

Enhance a Vibrant Experience: Maintaining public spaces, investing in infrastructure, and enhancing accessibility contribute to downtown's long-term success. What role will your office play in maintaining and enhancing the public spaces and infrastructure that support a vibrant downtown?

A vibrant downtown starts with public space people trust: clean, lit, repaired, and open to everyone, not occupied by disorder. The Legislature does not sweep sidewalks. It sets the rules and steers the money. I will support laws that keep rights-of-way usable, including enforcement against illegal camping, obstruction, vandalism, and public drug use. I will direct state infrastructure dollars to maintenance first; sidewalks, lighting, drainage, and real accessibility. And I will oppose new “vibrancy” fees without a clear purpose and proven impact. Success is more people using downtown because it is safe and passable, not because we spent more announcing it.

Build and Expand Housing Options: A growing downtown population supports economic vitality and community resilience. Achieving our goal of 3,000 new housing units over the next 10 years will require reducing barriers to development and expanding housing options. What policies or actions would you support to build more housing downtown?

Downtown needs more homes that people can actually finance and build, especially market-rate units that support shops, safety, and year-round activity. DSP’s target of about 3,000 units in ten years will not be met with more process. I will support state policies that:

1. Cut the cost and delay of building: Streamline permitting and environmental review, limit last-minute mandates that add tens of thousands to each unit, and stop Olympia from piling on rules that make infill and office-to-residential conversion uneconomic. 2. Prioritize housing that fills the gap downtown actually has: Market-rate apartments and conversions of empty commercial space and underused lots. Affordable units have a role; stacking more low-barrier housing into the same few blocks without services or accountability is not a neighborhood strategy. 3. Measure success in units delivered, not plans adopted: If a state rule raises cost or adds months without improving safety or livability, it should go. A growing downtown population only helps if people want to live there and builders can deliver the housing. I will work to remove the barriers Olympia controls.



Improve Public Safety: Improving public safety requires balancing enforcement, prevention, and long-term community investment. How would you approach those priorities in supporting a safe and welcoming downtown?

A safe downtown is not a balance between enforcement and everything else. Enforcement is what makes prevention and investment possible. People will not live, work, or shop where they do not feel safe. Enforcement first. I will support laws that restore consequences for property crime, violence, public drug use, and chronic offenders; give officers the tools to arrest and pursue; and stop catch-and-release that returns the same people to the same corners. A small number of repeat offenders drive a large share of downtown crime. They should be in custody or in a program they cannot walk away from, not back on the sidewalk by morning.

Prevention that requires accountability. Addiction and serious mental illness are real. Enabling street disorder is not treatment. I support capacity for detox, involuntary treatment when someone cannot care for themselves or is a danger to others, and diversion that is earned by completion, not by declining services. Long-term dollars should expand treatment and stabilization regionally, not pile more low-barrier facilities into the same few blocks. Public space stays public. If a program cannot show fewer victims and fewer repeat calls, it is not an investment. My standard is simple: fewer crimes, fewer people afraid to walk downtown after dark, and a core that feels welcoming because it is orderly, not because we lowered the definition of safe.

Support Funding, Facilities, and Services for People to Get the Help They Need: Addressing homelessness, behavioral health, and substance use requires coordination across multiple levels of government. Recently, the Safe & Healthy Spokane Task Force released a set of recommendations to improve public safety, behavioral health, housing, and system coordination. If additional public resources become available, what investments related to the Safe & Healthy Spokane Task Force recommendations would you prioritize?

The Task Force names the right problem: people with untreated mental illness and addiction cycling through jail, the ER, and the street, while downtown absorbs the cost. If additional public resources become available, I would fund the recommendations that break that cycle and can be measured not another coordinating layer first.

1. Treatment and stabilization with accountability. Detox, crisis stabilization, and involuntary treatment when someone cannot care for themselves or is a danger to others. Optional services on the sidewalk are not a system of care. 2. High utilizers. A small number of people drive a large share of crime, ER visits, and bookings. Target them with treatment they complete or custody they cannot walk away from. 3. Facilities that serve the whole county. Modern justice and behavioral-health capacity, placed regionally, so downtown is not the default site for the region's hardest cases. 4. Data before the next dollar. Track bookings, ER visits, repeat calls, and whether people stay in treatment. If a program cannot show fewer victims, it should not be renewed. I support integrating safety and health. I will not support new money that concentrates more low-barrier housing and services on the same downtown blocks without 24/7 management and results. Additional resources should buy capacity and consequences, not another plan.





Setting the Foundation: Public resources are limited, and elected officials are often required to balance competing priorities when making investment decisions. How do you evaluate competing funding priorities, and what principles would guide your decisions when investments affect downtown Spokane?

Public money is finite. A new program for downtown is a program something else does not get. I evaluate competing priorities with four tests. Core functions first. Public safety, usable streets and sidewalks, and a justice system that can hold people accountable come before new amenities and new layers of administration. The question needs to be asked: Does it raise occupancy or only spending? I'll ask whether the dollar will fill space, keep an employer, or make a block safe enough that customers return. If the only output is a plan, a task force, or a fee with no proven impact, it waits. Also, who pays, and is the link real? New taxes and fees should have a clear nexus to a specific cost. Downtown already carries vacancy and disorder. I will not stack charges on the same businesses and property owners because Olympia or the city wants a revenue stream. Results, then renewal. I want fewer crimes, fewer empty storefronts, and more people who choose to be downtown after dark. Programs that cannot show that do not get the next appropriation. Downtown does not need every good idea funded. It needs the few investments that make it safe and worth committing to and the discipline to say no to the rest.

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

I am a lifelong Spokaneite running for the House seat that includes downtown. I taught in Spokane Public Schools for nearly two decades, I am a mother of three, and I will take direction from the people who live and work here, not from Olympia's default of more process and more cost. Downtown is the economic and civic heart of this district. It will not recover on press releases. It will recover when it is safe to walk, cheaper to occupy, and possible to build. That is the standard I will use in the Legislature.

