To: Chris Zimmerman, Smart Growth America
From: Boris Borisov, City of Spokane
Subject: Smart Growth America, Planning for Economic and Fiscal Health Workshop – 1 month report
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The City of Spokane participated in the Economic and Fiscal Health workshop facilitated by Smart Growth America in September of 2015. The workshop was attended by a diverse group of approximately 40 stakeholders. Below is our one month report to address specific recommendations provided in the Next Steps Memo dated December 7, 2015.

Focus the effort

*Focus within the focus area: the East Sprague TIP area is big.*

- The East Sprague TIP Advisory Board - responsible for the implementation of the East Sprague Targeted Investment Pilot (TIP) program – the East Spokane Business Association (ESBA), and neighborhood leadership have met several times with the City of Spokane Planning and Engineering staff to identify priorities for the planned E. Sprague streetscape project. These meetings occurred on October 20, 2015 and December 3, 2015. While the streetscape project boundary represents a small street section within the larger TIP area (approximately an eight block area stretching from Helena to Altamont), the group is working to further ensure that a portion of this eight-block section serves as the “hot spot” where a greater intensity of improvements will be explored. Priorities include: Utilizing stormwater filters to cut down on the size of stormwater facilities needed, preserving on-street parking, new pedestrian lights and street lights with a pedestrian light combination option, hanging flower baskets, adequate sidewalk space, the ability to add decorative lighting, and street trees.

*Start by getting a few really good blocks*

- In addition to intensifying pedestrian amenities in a four to five block area of East Sprague Avenue, TIP Advisory Board Members, community stakeholders, city staff and numerous partners are working to identify focused areas for housing rehabilitation and community beautification projects. The intent of and priority for this focused effort is to take advantage of new and planned investments that will afford limited rehabilitation and beautification dollars to make a significant visual impact, further spurring private investment.

*Make sure to fill the space in the small area, leaving no empty “missing teeth.”*

- Business recruitment efforts will be focused on filling in the missing teeth in the core of the project area. The district has already seen success in filling in vacant and/or underutilized properties with the
opening of Bennidito’s Pizza, IT Solutions, New Moon Art Gallery, and Mary’s Little Shop on the Ave to name a few.

- The City of Spokane is exploring its role in land banking critical properties to facilitate development of vacant properties. In the short term, staff is working with property owners to establish temporary uses such as mini parks and food truck courts on vacant and underutilized lots as part of the city’s annual “Spokane Gives” week and “Cleaning from the Core” event.

- TIP Advisory Board members are working to secure no or low cost appraisals for underutilized commercial properties on E. Sprague in order to assist in potential property transfers.

- Staff and the local business association are connecting willing property owners with potential buyers interested in district investment.

- The City is supporting a new housing development in the core area of the district. When complete the development will replace a car lot with 36 units of quality affordable housing.

- District leadership and partners are working with property owners to decorate empty/underutilized storefronts with seasonal signage. Several storefronts were decorated with a holiday theme in late 2015 and partners continue to work with a local non-profit “Window Dressing” to assist in securing vacant or underutilized storefronts for the display of local art.

*Go all out on the streetscape*

- While the streetscape project will stretch over an eight block area, the leadership is looking at a smaller area to provide a more intense focus as mentioned above. As soon as next week, city engineers may have a final design proposal to share with the community that incorporates the comments received and priorities indicated from the public, funding requirements, the city’s municipal code including Centers and Corridors Standards, Street/Traffic Standards and recommendations from Smart Growth America.

*Incorporate public art, trailblazing and wayfinding*

- The East Spokane Business Association is activity working to implement a business improvement district (BID) in the area. The BID is likely to have a role in developing a public art and wayfinding programs.

- As part of Spokane Gives week and the Cleaning from the Core event, city staff is planning a wayfinding project that will inform residents and visitors to the area about connections and amenities within the district. Examples include signage with the length of time it takes to get to downtown, the University District, Ben Burr Tail, and Liberty Park using multiple modes of transportation.

- The City and local stakeholders are discussing opportunities for the use of public art in streetscape projects - particularly in the gateway areas (which are part of future phases of the streetscape work).

- Members of the local business association are working with Window Dressing, a non-profit organization as well as owners of storefronts to place signage and public art installations in the area. Currently several contiguous storefronts have holiday signage and one Window Dressing project (nighttime projector show) is planned for installation in a business storefront after retail hours.
Bring every tool to bear to achieve near term success

- Staff finalized an incentive program for the area aimed at spurring investment and redevelopment. Some of the major incentives include: impact fees due at occupancy, brownfield remediation, blight remediation, and waivers for general facility connection fees (water and sewer).

- The City is reviewing and plans to remove self-imposed limits on housing rehabilitation dollars from HUD within the target area (allowing owner-occupied and rental rehab as well as facade/ exterior work when done in combination with other health and safety work).

- Cleaning from the Core, a downtown program is being expanded to include the E. Sprague TIP focus area in 2016. Volunteers will be assisting in neighborhood clean-up and residents/property owners will be provided low or no cost methods of removing unwanted items like junk vehicles.

- Staff is continuing to work with the TIP Advisory Board on grant opportunities for commercial/residential facade improvements as well as grants for other TIP priorities such as additional open space and greening of the neighborhood, murals, and public art.

Improve connections to the surrounding neighborhoods

- The East Spokane Business Association (ESBA) and the Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD), Neighborhoods Matter program have worked diligently together in 2015 to ensure the residents that surround the business community are engaged in the dialogue and revitalization efforts. Members of the residential community in conjunction with the SRHD, conducted door to door surveying to better understand neighborhood concerns. Lack of alleyway lighting was identified as a top concern. Residents completed a lighting assessment to ascertain the depth of the issue and shared the results with neighborhood stakeholders, including the Spokane Police Department. This has resulted in a partnership between Neighborhoods Matter, Spokane Police Department, Avista Utilities, ESBA and the City of Spokane to install over 150 lights in alleys to improve security. Implementation of the alley lighting program began in the fall of 2015 will continue into 2018.

- 1st avenue which is in the residential portion of the district was repaved in the summer/fall of 2015. The project included ADA ramps and painted sharerows to improve access for pedestrians and cyclists alike.

- The construction of the Benn Burr Trail connection is underway. Once complete, the trail will connect residents in this area to the Centennial Trail and to the extended neighborhood to the south on the opposite side of I-90.

- A new restaurant and multiple art galleries that opened in 2015 are bringing significantly more traffic from the neighborhood into the business district.

- Several businesses are participating in 1st Friday - a monthly art event that brings the residential population into the business district as well as outside visitors.

- The district held its annual Art on the Ave event in September of 2015 which set a record for the number of resident participants. Artists who participated from the district included metal artists, t-shirt designers, painters, stained glass artists, and a children’s book author as well as teachers and students from the area’s new charter school. This effort not only brought a lot of visitors and area
residents to the event, but showed support for those artists who lived in the district but don’t have a regular venue to show their work. This event has helped build strong relationships between the resident and business community.

**Establish place management**

- The East Spokane Business Association has been working on the establishment of a business improvement district. The current proposal would raise approximately $71,000 annually and pay for clean & green programs, district beautification, branding/marketing, safety & security, and administration. Shortly after the Smart Growth Workshop, the district launched a campaign to garner support from ratepayers. Current rate of support is at 43% with a goal of reaching 50-60% in the coming months.

**Use complete streets to build value**

- Complete Streets principles will be utilized in the East Sprague rebuild project slated to begin spring/summer of 2016.

**Improve Transit Service**

- The East Sprague Corridor currently has the most frequent bus service in Spokane (15 minute headways). It has also been identified as part of Spokane Transit Authority’s high performance network; however, funding for upgrades was rejected by voters in a recent ballot measure. Due to unwanted activity in the area, stakeholders have elected to postpone the installation of amenities like bus shelters until such time that the neighborhood feels that the addition of these amenities will not produce additional unwanted activity. Steps are being taken to make sure that the new road design will accommodate additional transit and pedestrian amenities at a future time.

**Align regulations on private development with public goals for the sector**

**Parking**

- Centers and Corridors zoning in the East Sprague TIP area currently allow for significant reductions in parking. This includes the ability for commercial and housing developments to count adjacent on-street parking and bicycle parking toward the total parking requirements. In addition, change of use standards allows new uses that do not require more than five additional spaces to forgo additional parking requirements even if the prior use was non-conforming. Staff will continue to review the parking regulations as the district develops to see if any changes are needed to benefit the district.

**Commercial signage**

- Staff reviewed current sign codes to assess their friendliness towards small businesses and entrepreneurs. The City’s current sign codes allow for awnings and marquees that contain signs to extend into the right-of-way. In addition, temporary signs are allowed in the right-of-way (sandwich boards, A-frame signs, etc.) as long as they do not impede pedestrian traffic and block views. Staff will continue to engage business owners to see if any changes are needed.

**Use of public space**
• Spokane allows for the usage of sidewalks for commercial activities including sidewalk cafes. The city’s ordinance views sidewalk cafes as a benefit to the public and the code aims to make the process of attaining a permit simple.

*Encourage mixed-use developments*

• Current zoning along East Sprague allows for a mix of uses including residential on the first floor. The city may explore different options including form-based zoning in the future depending on market conditions and needs of the district.

*Develop a comprehensive housing strategy for the area*

• The Housing Committee has outlined several goals including the rehabilitation, redevelopment and infill of 35% (approximately 100 units) of TIP area housing units and/or vacant lots. The committee also set an aggressive goal to increase home ownership to 50% from the current 30% to create a healthier, more stable residential mix of owner and renter occupied housing units. Another goal is to maintain the same percentage of affordable units into the future to address the negative consequences of gentrification. The housing committee also identified a gap in housing funding sources as issues. Current resources effectively act to further concentrate poverty in this area and do not address the need for a better mix of incomes and household types. Staff and stakeholders are looking for sources of funds and strategies to attract a wide range of income earners and household types in order to reverse this trend of concentrated poverty while planning for long term affordability in the area.

*Resolve outstanding issues to stabilize the residential neighborhoods*

• District leadership and staff will continue engagement with Washington DOT to work toward resolution regarding the construction of US 395 (North Spokane Corridor) and impact on the neighborhood.