

Environmental GMA Update: Streets, Construction, Streetscapes, Snow Removal and Challenges

A review of policies recently adopted by Spokane County and its municipalities reveals a reliance on the GMA plan for direction rather than formal policy for street trees and open spaces. Policies reflect an engineering bias where the primary concern is the quality of street construction and the compatibility in construction of streets between jurisdictions that share a boundary.

Street Standards

Spokane County, Spokane Valley and Liberty Lake use the same standard for similar classifications of arterial, collector or local streets. The County follows the Washington State Highway Department's specifications for quality control. Local roads are determined by the original plat for the specific development. Spokane and Airway Heights have their own standards

Rights of Way (ROW) range on local streets from 50 to 80 feet. This allows for two travel lanes and parallel on-street parking. Airway Heights and Spokane publish standards for local streets. Spokane Valley, Liberty Lake and Spokane County determine ROW's by what is approved on sub-division maps or what is contiguous to the new construction. Local street types vary by neighborhood as do residential densities and land uses. The issue of road width has been particularly contentious with the engineering departments of the jurisdictions. Access of fire trucks, snow plowing and parking as well as concern for street trees and maintaining a pedestrian friendly atmosphere continue to create disagreements.

Collector ROW's vary from 60 to 80 feet. In some urban areas there may be four lanes of travel and, under certain conditions, on-street parking. Airway Heights and Spokane have standards for design and location of Collector Streets that differ from the other jurisdictions. This impacts Moran Prairie, the West Plains near Hayford Road and other boundary areas zigzagging through the Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) neighborhoods.

Arterial Street planning concentrates mostly on the

movement of through-traffic. Spokane has numerous arterial street types, unlike Spokane County. Airway Heights has two different arterial street designs. Arterials are 80 to 100 feet for up to seven lanes and on-street parking.

Sidewalks. In Spokane the sidewalk is required to be separate from the travel way and adjacent to the ROW boundary to insure pedestrian access to public transit during snow plowing. Other jurisdictions require curb-adjacent sidewalks.

Street Trees. Only Spokane includes street trees in its Municipal Code. The Code states "(Trees) provide aesthetic and economic value to property owners and the community at large." A document on the City of Spokane's web site, "Selected Comprehensive Plan Policies Related to Sidewalk Design and Street Trees" (November 2002) describes the results of citizen input adopted by City Council, May, 2001, to build sidewalks with buffer strips, or planting strips for both safety and environmental enhancement. These green areas would allow for other uses like trash cans, fire hydrants, and signage.

Land Use

An assessment of land use regulations along the periphery of the cities of Spokane, Spokane Valley, Airway Heights and Liberty Lake are:

- *Low Density Residential* – homogenous suburban development pattern, distant from commercial centers with minimal infrastructure reliant on the automobile.
- *Medium Density Residential* – multi-family housing primarily in the south, east and southeast portion of Spokane City.
- *High-Density Residential* – illustrated in north Spokane where high density residential abuts undeveloped industrial and rural land.
- *Highway Commercial* – strip commercial development has occurred regardless of jurisdiction.
- *Heavy and Light Industrial* – All four municipalities have industrial areas within their boundaries that adjoin the County or their neighbors. These are primarily along rail or highway corridors.

This stew of incompatible land use designations, zoning, and street design standards is illustrated in the street construction projects for Spokane County and two of its largest municipalities.

Street Repaving

In 2004, Spokane City passed a 10-year street paving bond. It is the source of the \$1.4 million the City will spend to pave Lincoln Street next summer. Originally slated for the 2012-13 paving season, the project will be a full curb-to-curb rebuild with curb extensions and storm water drainage. No trees will be lost. The Mayor has sent a letter informing the residents of the progress of the project which has taken extra staff time over the past year to insure neighbors' support. Prior to this effort, there was a public outcry because of the destruction of street trees during earlier repaving work. A full report on the progress of the Bond paving by the Citizens Street Advisory Committee is on the City's web site (www.spokanecity.org).

Since the 10-Year Street Bond program was passed, 40.685 miles out of 110 miles have been repaired throughout the City of Spokane.

- 21.4 miles out of 38 miles of major arterials and public safety corridors. These are complete curb-to-curb rehabilitations.
- 12.9 miles out of 51 miles of residential streets. These repairs include complete restoration, repaving and sealing.
- 4.485 miles out of 14 miles of unpaved streets. The City would help neighborhoods that form Local Improvement Districts (LIDs) pave dirt streets.
- 1.9 miles out of 7 miles of streets impacted by utility work. This would allow street rehabilitation on streets subject to underground utility work.

The 2008-2013 Street Master Plan for Spokane Valley includes a Six Year Transportation Improvement Plan, required by State law. It is an assessment of street paving conditions with a list of repairs needed for each project. Most of the streets are urban rather than rural and most are rated in 'very good' condition. The projects are estimated to cost \$77,000 over the next 6 years. The County has almost 30 projects planned throughout the area over the next three years. Currently, the Bigelow Gulch project which has been broken into six separate projects will cost in the neighborhood of \$6 million. The work on Country

Homes Blvd. from Wall to Hwy 395 is a little more than \$1 million project.

The lack of road repairs over the last quarter century should mean a boom for construction jobs. The weather has also affected city and county budgets.

Snow Removal

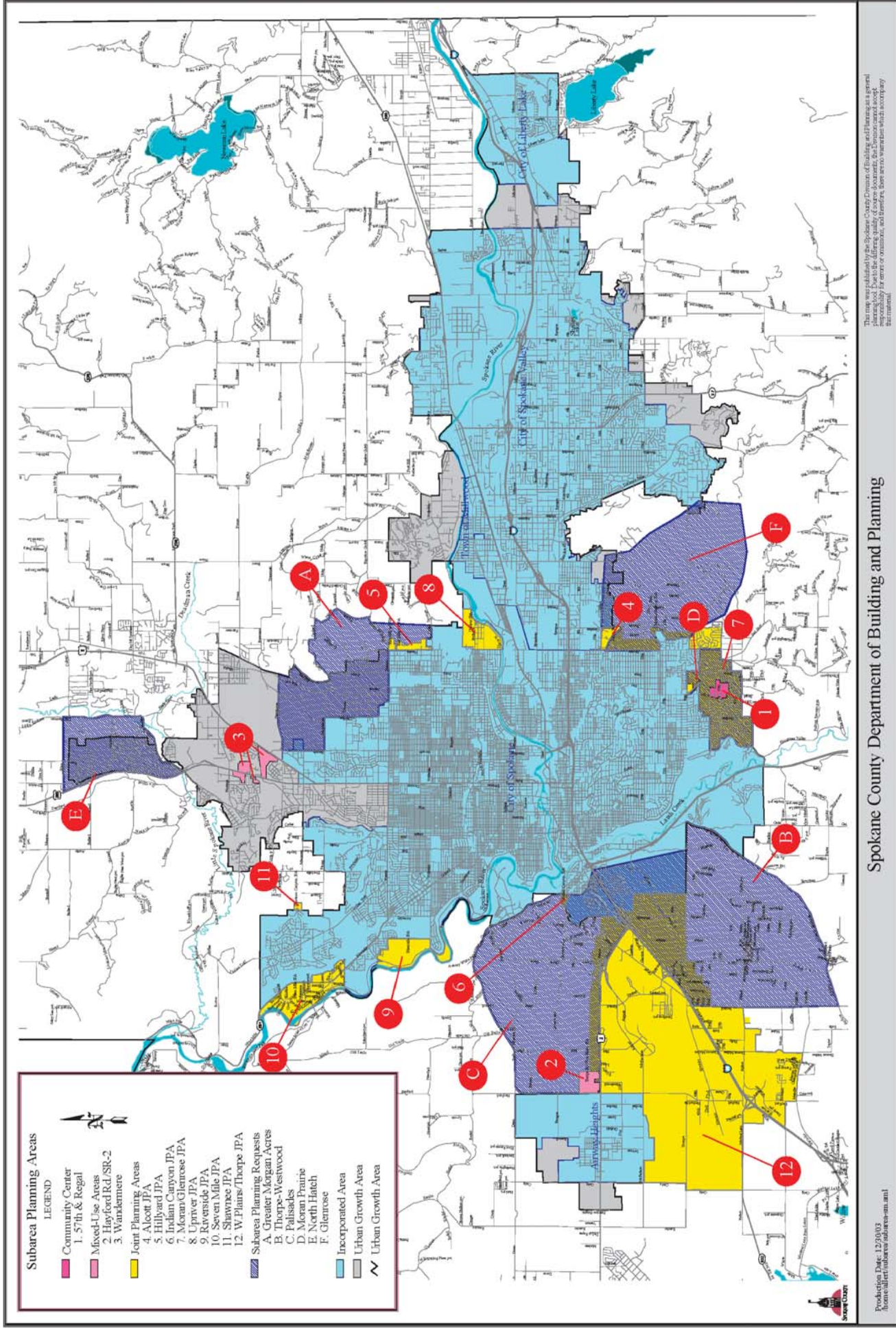
The last two years of record snowfall have led to changes in snow removal for Spokane. The City has purchased 11 new snow plows and implemented a new Snow Emergency plan. Citizens will be asked to follow parking restrictions and keep sidewalks, vehicles, hydrants and storm drains clear. **A Stage 1 Snow Emergency** will be declared when 2 inches of snow is on the ground and 4 or more are forecast. Citizens will be required to move cars off all arterials and bus routes. **A Stage 2 Snow Emergency** will be declared when 6 inches of snow is on the ground and more is forecast. Citizens will be required to park on only one side of the street. After this first year tickets will be issued for non-compliance of these infractions.

For the 2009/2010 winter, Spokane Valley will contract with Poe Asphalt Paving to perform the snowplowing services. Winter snowplowing and de-icing of Spokane Valley streets is prioritized based on quantity of snowfall, road conditions, problem areas, and more. A web site will soon be available.

Spokane County's maintenance department provides snow and ice control for all county roads. Snow removal is organized by the following priority system.

1. Major arterial routes.
2. Secondary and collector arterials. Hillside residential areas.
3. Other rural access roads and residential streets.

When the roads are plowed the snow must be plowed completely to the curb line to insure mail delivery and to insure that water can reach drains. Trucks providing traction sand usually follow the plows. A liquid deicing solution instead of sand may be applied to the more heavily traveled arterials. Liquid deicer is used in an effort to minimize the amount of dust particles in the air. The County has also purchased 3 motor graders with snow wings and V plows to enhance snow removal capability. Information on roads is found at: www.spokanecounty.org under 'engineering'.



The map, “Subarea Planning Areas” from Spokane County Building and Planning outlines the various boundaries for different jurisdictions: municipalities are identified by name, numbers 1 through 3 are development designations, JPA’s are numbers 4 through 12. The sub-planning areas, letters A through F, are areas in the County that have formed neighborhoods, the boundaries of which sometimes overlap other jurisdictions.

Future Challenges

Differences in street regulations is an example of many other inconsistencies in requirements between the jurisdictions that have resulted in “eclectic neighborhoods.” These, as well as industrial and commercial areas in every jurisdiction, would require local planning if changes are to be made for development.

A recent article in the “Inlander” (September 30, ‘A Delicate Proposition’), quotes a local developer’s perspective on neighborhood land use planning as an environment full of fear and conjecture. Regulations vary greatly throughout Spokane County and its municipalities. Land use battles between jurisdictions sharing boundaries or changing boundaries through annexation have been as contentious as neighborhood planning meetings. In 2007, a collaborative plan was developed through a grant from Washington’s Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) that offered options for a process that would resolve discrepancies facing incorporated and unincorporated areas throughout the County (July 2007, “Collaborative Planning: Spokane County’s Metro Urban Growth Area”).

“All five jurisdictions wish to improve ways in which they work together. The UGA will continue to experience development pressures, and these jurisdictions must coordinate to ensure public services are provided at the level people expect and that neighborhoods function according to residents desires.”

Metropolitan Spokane’s UGA has a population of 300,000 people and a forecast for growth over the next 20 years. In 2007, Spokane County’s Growth Management Steering Committee of Local Elected Officials adopted a template for an interlocal agreement that would provide a structure “for identifying the various expectations and responsibilities, establishing a consistent format within which the individual jurisdictions can customize sections to meet case-by-case demands.” In February 2008, Spokane and Spokane County signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that is the basis for other agreements where joint planning in coordination with the Comprehensive Plan will take place where annexation is likely to occur. This has been no small feat. Following litigation, all governments in Spokane County

recognize that urban services will be provided by municipalities.

However, in a draft document on the financial situation of the County by the Collaborative Planning group, two challenges are presented.

- The first is an unsustainable revenue for the County. General property tax is the main source of revenue which is growing at 3%. The 2% beyond the 1% property tax limit is from new construction. Demand for services may grow 5%. In the short term, the County can wring efficiencies out of the system and/or draw down cash reserves.
- The second challenge is the County’s shifting role as a service provider. Spokane Valley’s incorporation in 2003 cut the County’s population in half. The formation of Liberty Lake and annexation of the West Plains exacerbated the problem. The County provides three types of services: Regional services like Superior Court, elections and juvenile detention are paid by all residents of the County. Contract services are provided to jurisdictions that pay for them. Local services, however, require a 30% increase in revenues to cover costs. Purchasing power of the County declines by \$1 million a year.

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