

Anchoring the UNIVERSITY DISTRICT GATEWAY BRIDGE

by Anthony Gill

IT'S EASY TO BE BULLISH on the University District. Since it was first established as the Riverpoint Campus in the late 1990s, the campus has grown to include students from five major universities, including two medical schools and Washington State University's dedicated health sciences campus. The facilities have blossomed as new lab, classroom, and support spaces support a growing student population. And the urban environment—the streetscapes, the pedestrian environment—around the campus has improved by orders of magnitude from the post-industrial warehouses that once occupied the site.

Now, the City of Spokane has taken the next major step in the district's transformation, breaking ground last month on the University District Gateway Bridge, a pedestrian bridge linking the WSU Spokane campus with the south side of the train tracks along East Sprague. Construction will continue through late 2018, but developers are already eyeing progress on the project.

At the north landing of the bridge, Seattle developer Wally Trace and Spokane-based McKinstry have partnered on a major mixed-use redevelopment of the iconic former Jensen-Byrd warehouse. That project, likely valued at more than \$60 million, will also construct a 4-story office building

aimed at high-tech firms, a parking garage, a retail and fitness center, and a destination restaurant.

At the south landing of the bridge, a subsidiary of Avista Utilities has begun land acquisition and preliminary planning discussions for what it calls the "Catalyst Project," constructing a five-story office building, with potential for additional retail, office, and residential space in future phases.

And indeed, all around the project, preparations are underway for the changes the bridge will bring. The

photo courtesy of Courtesy of University District

University District Board members celebrate the groundbreaking of the University District Gateway Bridge. Pictured from left to right: Lisa Brown, WSU; Tom Johnson-STCU; Mireya McKay - Community Volunteer; Mark Richard-DSP; Ben Stuckart - City Council President; Kim Pearman-Gillman - McKinstry; Andrew Worlock - City of Spokane; Christine Johnson - SCC; Steve Trabun - Avista Utilities; Karl Otterstrom - STA; Catherine Brazil - UW; Mayor David Condon



City of Spokane is completing Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, and a major streetscape redevelopment of East Sprague gets underway this spring. The University District has initiated planning for a new type of urban neighborhood, potentially on a scope and scale comparable to Kendall Yards, which would feature a unique focus on walkability, sustainability, and making better use of public space.

It certainly seems that all the pieces are in place for a major transformation of this area of our city.

How will the University District change as a result of these improvements? How will downtown change? East Sprague? What about Spokane as a whole?

Certainly we'll see new development, new residents, new businesses, and maybe even a new major employer or two. But more compellingly, the bridge—and the development it generates—has the potential to grow innovation and creativity, as some of the foremost medical experts in the Pacific Northwest connect with emerging and entrepreneurial young minds in this new urban district. Medical residents, MBA students, engineers, and seasoned professionals will all soon converge on this once-industrial piece of otherwise unremarkable property, as will many, many others.

And as creative thinking increasingly becomes a prerequisite for success in the 21st century, that's something to which we can all look forward. **S**

Anthony Gill is a Spokane native and recent graduate of Santa Clara University. He is the founder of Spokane Rising, an urbanist blog focused on ways to make our city a better place to live.



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