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Building an Urban Campus: Riverpoint Campus Master Plan

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Overview of the context for Riverpoint development: http://twurl.cc/1bmf
Riverpoint Campus Master Plan page with notes from workshops, presentations, and more to come as additional materials are received from the consultants: http://twurl.cc/1bmi

Barb Chamberlain, WSU Spokane
University District & Local Revitalization Financing

The City of Spokane recently initiated the Riverside Avenue Extension’s design phase, a project to reduce Spokane Falls Boulevard’s vehicular traffic between Division and Hamilton Streets, creating a consolidated, pedestrian-friendly Riverpoint Campus. The City of Spokane’s Business & Development Services Office is facilitating an application process to secure a funding mechanism for the University District. In 2009, the approval of Washington Senate Bill 5045 created Local Revitalization Financing (LRF) districts, a new type of tax increment financing authorized by Washington state legislators. The bill identified the University District Revitalization Area (UDRA) as one of seven pilot areas in the state. Under 58SS 5045, cities may create “revitalization areas” and may use certain future tax revenues which increase within the area to finance local public improvements including roads, pedestrian bridges, landscape, utilities, and sidewalks. Projects financed by tax increment financing must be expected to encourage private development and increase the fair market value of real property within the tax increment area.

Local revenue will be captured through a new financing tool similar to TIF and LIFT.

TIF, Tax Increment Financing, captures a portion of future property tax revenue. LIFT, Local Infrastructure Financing, captures a portion of future sales tax revenue. The pilot designation for UDRA allows Spokane to receive $250,000 in state tax revenue as long as we can demonstrate a potential match of $250,000 in new local tax revenue. There is no increase in the tax rate paid by consumers. The bill, in effect, allows growth to pay for growth.

Although Spokane has previously designated TIF districts at Iron Bridge and West Quadrant (Kendall Yards area), Local Revitalization Financing (LRF) provides a stronger potential revenue source for University District projects within the boundaries of the UDRA. The formation of a local revitalization area is accomplished by an ordinance passed by City Council, which requires a public hearing, currently scheduled for August 17. Community meetings regarding the UDRA were held on July 1 and July 14 at the WSU Nursing Building on the Riverpoint Campus. Business & Development Services continues to offer informational sessions and presentations regarding the initiative until the formal hearing is held.

Recent traffic calming examples are the newly restriped crosswalks with sidewalk and landscaping improvements for pedestrian safety on Riverpoint Boulevard. “This collaborative effort is another example of how we are supporting multiple transportation modes and making our community more attractive to pedestrians,” says the Mayor. Strategies to create a pedestrian-friendly streetscape include interpretive signage, distinct crosswalks, street furniture, and ample street lighting. Existing connections should be maintained and enhanced to reflect the area’s unique architectural character. Incorporating sustainable practices in redevelopment efforts as well as utilizing natural topography will exemplify the City’s support of “green” design.

To create a welcoming sense of arrival, a unified gateway and way-finding signage system will link the Riverside Extension area with nearby districts and neighborhoods. Integrating existing historic urban remnants into future developments’ design adds character and unifies the landscape and architectural elements to distinguish the district.

Construction of Phase 1 begins summer 2010, providing a half-mile extension of Riverside east from Division, curving to the north near the eastern campus border on the river’s west side, then connecting to Spokane Falls prior to the new Trent Avenue Bridge. An application is currently being reviewed to change the public right of way street name within the Riverside Extension to “Martin Luther King Jr. Way,” which will be heard at a City Council hearing in August.

In The District

With the recent relocation of her store, Peters and Sons Flowers and Gifts, to the University District, Susie Matteson felt it was a time to draw some attention to her new neighborhood. Combining their appreciation for the neighborhood and the arts, Peters and Sons partnered with Pacific Flyway Gallery to come up with something new. On July 11 twenty-four local artists set up shop on E. Pacific Avenue in the University District, to participate in the first annual University District Art Fair.

In the event was a success thanks to crucial volunteers, organizers’ efforts and live TV coverage by KHQ, in addition to a University District story that aired on both the 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. news. As a result, Peters and Sons and Pacific Flyway Gallery plan to expand the event in future years to include even more of the neighborhood, food vendors and additional activities for kids.

The most immediate task for the art fair, however, was to find a proper name for the event. A naming contest began the day of the fair, and will continue through the end of August. The contest winner will receive a prize and bragging rights for coming up with the name, so get your thinking caps on and submit a name before summer is over!

To submit a suggestion or to get involved in next year’s event, contact Susie at susanm@petersandsons.com or 509.624.4151.