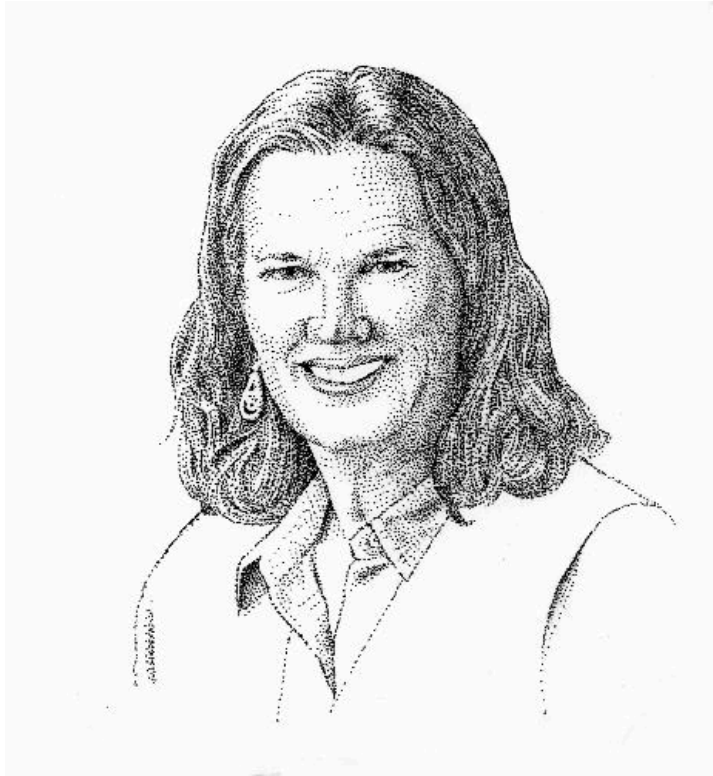


Neighborhood councils need city to hear concerns



SUE LANI MADSEN SPOKESMAN COLUMNIST

When Mayor Lisa Brown issued a news release announcing a \$1.8 million grant to relocate Compassionate Addiction Treatment to 1819 E. Springfield Ave., the neighbors reacted. That surprise announcement may be the best thing to happen to the Chief Garry Park Neighborhood Council and Spokane's neighborhood council system as a whole.

The proposed relocation site is in a neighborhood of about 6,700 residents, according to council member Jonathan Bingle, who represents the area on the Spokane City Council. A business coalition came together to quash the mayor's move, many related to the building trades and business-to-business services. They tackled the issue like they'd tackle a project for any critical client.

The city "knew in June they were looking at this piece of property," according to local neighborhood advocate Colleen Gardener. "If they'd come to the neighborhood council, they would have had four months to work with businesses and the neighbors to see if it could work. But when you get 24 hours'

notice? That's not my idea of transparency."

Gardener was referring to how the decision to site the CAT sobering facility was announced in a news release from the mayor's office, without involving the neighborhood in the planning.

She pointed out the business coalition also ignored the neighborhood council process. "They thought all they had to do was talk to the chairman" before launching their campaign.

Would the neighborhood council have supported the signs and the website? Probably would have, according to Gardener, but the business owners are learning the value of being involved in the neighborhood council and have committed to staying involved within the process.

"That's music to my ears," said Luc Jasmin, Chief Garry Neighborhood Council chairman, at a meeting last Friday. "We are in communication now."

Adjacent businesses were reacting to the chaos surrounding a Jewels Helping Hands drop-in center that operated in 2022 at the same Springfield address. When Brown announced the 25-year CAT lease in August, business leaders contacted an attorney, created a website, ordered signs to alert the neighborhood and talked to anyone in power who would listen. Thirty-five businesses joined the coalition. An "emergency" meeting of the neighbors was called for Friday.

On Sept. 12, Brown reversed her decision and withdrew the city funding, putting the CAT move on hold.

The Friday meeting went on as scheduled with council members Michael Cathcart and Bingle in attendance. Cathcart and others cautioned the crowd this was not a victory celebration. The process for the city to transfer the \$1.8 million in city ARPA funds was flawed, according to a message Cathcart said he received from the auditor's office, but that doesn't preclude the state Department of Commerce from finding a way to award money out of state or federal funding. "At the end of the day, this is not just about Chief Garry," Cathcart said. "We have 29 neighborhoods and we don't have a policy for siting city-funded services" to ensure they are spread equally across neighborhoods in accordance with the comprehensive plan.

Cathcart expressed his frustration with the lack of a siting process, and the continuing deferrals by the City Council majority of his attempts to bring up ordinances to solve the equity issue. When asked on Wednesday about his latest attempt to run an ordinance, Cathcart replied in an email, "It did not survive. Nothing I respond back with will do justice to the injustice from last week's briefing session."

The city of Spokane has a system of neighborhood councils written into the city charter to advise the city on such issues.

Doug Trudeau from the East Central Neighborhood Council suggested working through the community assembly process to bring concerns and ideas before the City Council. "Talk with the four or five neighborhoods most impacted now," Trudeau said.

Gardener is a huge proponent of the city charter's neighborhood council process and justifiably proud of her track record working in the neighborhood council system for more than 17 years.

She said she was once described as "a force to be reckoned with" by former Mayor David Condon.

Her advice to Brown is that the mayor needs to "understand you don't need to make adversaries out of us, we will be your biggest cheerleaders."

With the city closing the large TRAC shelter and leaning in to the scattered site model, questions of fairness will be a hot topic at the community assembly. Using property values as an excuse to limit which neighborhoods bear the burden and continuing to put homeless services in poor neighborhoods with low property values “creates a doom loop,” Bingle said. “We need you guys to reach out to the other council members, need these personal stories, tell them you don’t hate homeless people, you just don’t want your windows broken,” Bingle said.

Gardener welcomes the business community as partners, although her first response to one newly activated business neighbor was blunt. “Where the hell have you been for the last 20 years?” she asked him. Now she’s glad to welcome them all into the neighborhood council process and invited the mayor to come along.

“I don’t know that anyone at that level has ever read the city charter related to neighborhood councils. We have smart people here who care about their neighborhoods and their city.”

Gardener would like you to be one of them, to be part of the collaboration and compromise that is essential to making the city of Spokane system of neighborhood councils work to support equitable and effective city services.

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