

DISSENTION LETTER FROM COMMISSIONER YOTZ

To: Spokane City Council

From: Jill Yotz, Plan Commissioner

Date: 10/2/2025

Re: Opposition to Creation of New Neighborhood Historic Districts

I respectfully submit this dissension paper regarding the Cannon Hill Park Addition (CHPA) Historic District Overlay. While I appreciate the deliberation of my colleagues and the value of historic preservation, I cannot support the recommendation as forwarded.

As a Commissioner, my duty is to ensure policies align with the Comprehensive Plan. This historic district does not adequately balance commitments to equity, affordability, and inclusive growth. While preservation honors Spokane's heritage, I believe this district will deepen inequity and add unnecessary regulation, effectively keeping people out rather than welcoming them in.

Housing access is one of Spokane's greatest challenges. Based on testimony received, this proposal appears more a reaction to change than a preservation of a cultural resource for all.

Grounds for Dissent:

Equity and Access

The Comprehensive Plan calls for safe, affordable housing options for all income levels. Historic districts act as a form of "exclusionary zoning." They increase property values, raise maintenance costs, and limit homeownership opportunities, especially for first-time and working-class buyers. This reinforces inequities in who gets to live in high-amenity, centrally located neighborhoods. Additionally, by restricting infill and "missing-middle" housing, they reduce supply and drive prices up.

Existing Protections Already in Place

The Comprehensive Plan requires that preservation goals be weighed alongside commitments to affordable housing, equity, and growth management. Spokane has strong preservation tools.

SMC 17D.100 provides for designation and review of landmarks and districts where homeowners can apply for individual designations. Demolition of historic or eligible structures already requires review. Economic incentives (tax credits, Special Valuation)

support preservation. Given these protections, adding another layer of regulation is duplicative and unnecessary.

Spokane is a leader in Washington for forward-thinking policy that addresses the housing crisis. An additional layer of regulation contradicts the urgency for action to support all residents in Spokane having a viable place to live.

Policy Conflict

Historic districts add layers of design and demolition review that slow housing production, raise costs, and conflict with citywide goals to broaden housing supply and streamline permitting. This undermines Comprehensive Plan objectives on equity, housing access, and public health, as well as policies outlined in Building Opportunities for Housing and the Housing Action Plan.

Economic Context

The concerns expressed by neighbors centered on fears of incompatible development and rapid change. However, Cannon Hill is already a high-cost neighborhood with very limited vacant land. The substantial expense required to purchase and demolish existing homes makes large-scale redevelopment highly unlikely in the near term. In this context, a new historic district appears more symbolic than necessary.

Alternative Solutions

- Develop a citywide preservation strategy that balances historic character with equity and housing access.
- Create design guidelines and pre-approved plans for compatible infill and density.
- Require equity impact reviews before designating districts; offer fee waivers or grants for affordable housing and accessibility upgrades within preserved areas.

Spokane's motto is "we all belong." In the midst of a housing crisis, new historic districts risk sending the opposite message. Preservation is important, but not at the expense of equity and access. Spokane can honor its heritage without excluding future residents. As such, I reject this proposal until it fully aligns with Comprehensive Plan goals for affordability, inclusion, and livability.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill Yotz

Spokane Plan Commission