



Michael Luis & Associates

## MEMORANDUM

To: Ken Garceau, Ken Mewhinney, Rob Higgins, Steve Taylor  
From: Michael Luis  
Date: 2-20-07  
Re: Notes from workshop

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During the discussions at the workshop, the following issues seemed to jump out as areas in need of further research and clarification:

**Demographics and in-migration.** Participants were interested in the evolving demographics of the Spokane area and the implications for housing. Specifically, there is interest in future in-migration of retirees and telecommuters. Participants were intrigued by the scenario developed by the demographics professor suggesting that a huge wave of retiring baby boomers is heading into Washington.

*Follow up: Further flesh out the demographic picture, with more detail from census data, OFM projections and market research reports. Look at national trends in retirement, second homes and telecommuting. Use focus groups to explore the reasons people are relocating to Spokane.*

**New housing types.** The discussion of new housing types revealed two distinct points of view. One view is that the Spokane market is not yet ready for higher density, infill projects, and the other view is that the market is there, but not yet tapped. Market research could shed some light on this question.

*Follow up: Use focus groups to explore the receptivity of first-time buyers and new in-migrants to various higher-density products. Propose regulatory options to allow such models to be built in existing developed areas.*

**Infrastructure.** Spokane faces the same problem that other mature communities face: aging, undersized infrastructure that needs to be replaced and upgraded to accommodate growth. This need soaks up the available funding, leaving little money to extend infrastructure into growing areas.

*Follow up: Build on the experience of Kendall Yards to develop consensus methods of financing the infrastructure needed for higher density infill development.*

**Affordable housing tools.** Like other areas of the state, low income housing providers do not have the resources to build enough housing to meet the needs of those who require some form of subsidy.

*Follow up: Work with builders, non-profits and local governments to develop a workable program for density bonuses and other incentives to include affordable housing in for-profit developments.*

**Land availability.** Urban growth boundaries have made finite the amount of land available for development, but it is not clear just how much vacant and redevelopable land exists within the boundaries, and in what configurations. Spokane County has not been subject to the “buildable lands” requirement of GMA, so has not gone through the measurement exercise.

*Follow up: Request a report from the county GIS department that shows the amount of land considered vacant and redevelopable (using an accepted ratio of land value to improvement value), listed by parcel size and zoning designation.*

**Definition of “affordable.”** The public discussion about housing affordability would benefit from some clear definitions that lay people can understand.

*Follow up: Create a fact sheet that defines affordability from the perspective of formal programs (i.e. using percent of median income) and from the perspective of occupations and wage levels. It should explain assumptions about the percentage of income that should be spent on housing, and what that buys.*

**Housing for seniors.** The aging of the population in general, and the expected popularity of Spokane as a retirement destination, suggest that the area will need more housing that is appropriate to seniors. This means features like fewer stairs, easier access and lower operating costs.

*Follow up: Develop an inventory of existing models for senior housing and research additional models that would be appropriate to the Spokane market.*