Reimagining Railyards Bus Tour

This bus tour highlights five projects in Spokane, showcasing a variety of sites — from industrial, to park, to multi-use urban infill that used a variety of State of Washington and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant funding. Tour guides will explain how a variety of project partners — non-profits, cities, universities, and private developers — collaborated to make these projects successful. Learn about and see firsthand interesting and innovative approaches to brownfields redevelopment!

University District

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The University District is a former railyard that has been in the redevelopment process for the last 20 years. Historic rail lines left a legacy of petroleum, metals, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in soil. Various universities performed cleanups and turned the area into a hub for business and education. The University District Development Association, in cooperation with the City of Spokane and the University District Public Development Authority, created a center for research, innovation, and connectivity that they hope to expand to the surrounding community. They partnered with the City of Spokane, Washington State University, Gonzaga University, and the Empire Health Foundation for an EPA Coalition Assessment Grant to fund assessing up to 90 acres of land in the neighborhood.
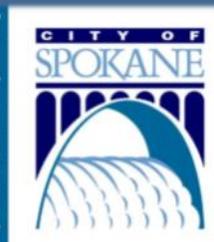
Spokane Combined Sewer Overflow Tanks

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The City of Spokane has been working with the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) to install a series of concrete combined sewer overflow tanks to reduce the spillage of untreated sewage and stormwater into the Spokane River during high precipitation or melting events. This is a huge step toward better protecting the Spokane River. The location of these tanks is crucial, as they are large and typically need to be along the river corridor. Land for these tanks is limited, so the City looked to properties it already owned. Many of these properties had a history of contamination, and in some cases, that contamination wasn't known until the tank installation process was already underway. The City partnered with Ecology and the EPA led to apply Targeted Brownfields Assessment funding at these properties to identify environmental risks in advance and address them when planning tank installations.

The Yard

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The Hillyard neighborhood has a long history of industrial use. Spokane's major railyard for north-south transit and many industries that needed rail line access were historically located here.

Over time, industrial activity led to contamination issues, including bulk petroleum, lead, aluminum dross, bunker C fuel, and solvents — all in proximity to residential neighborhoods. With the initiation of the North South Corridor highway construction project, there was renewed interest in addressing environmental risk while maximizing economic benefit and redevelopment opportunities. The City created Washington's first Brownfields Redevelopment Opportunity Zone, acquiring federal and state grants to assist: an EPA Assessment Grant, an EPA Areawide Planning Grant, and an Ecology Integrated Planning Grant. These were used to determine neighborhood needs and locations where City investment could be maximized to encourage redevelopment.

Kendall Yards

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This 77-acre parcel was home to the Union Pacific railyard from 1914 to the late 1970s. Several attempts at cleanup failed, and despite its location near downtown and the Spokane River, the property sat vacant for decades. In the mid-2000s, a private developer acquired the property out of bankruptcy and received over $3.5 million in brownfields revolving loan funds from the Washington Department of Commerce. They assessed and cleaned up the property through Ecology's Voluntary Cleanup Program. Greenstone is developing the site into a multi-use walkable community with connectivity to downtown Spokane. Local Revitalization Financing tools (TIF-equivalent in Washington State) and a multi-family tax exemption were incentives the City used in this neighborhood. locations where City investment could be maximized to encourage redevelopment.

Riverfront Park

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The Spokane River is the community's gem. Inhabited by native people for over 15,000 years, its waters have served as a giver of life and gathering place for several local tribes. In the 1870s, the 100 acres around the Spokane Falls were used as a hub for industrial development, starting with power generation and moving into commerce with log transport/ storage and the establishment of rail lines. Numerous supporting industries grew around it, including factories, train depots, rail services, industrial cleaning, and residences. In the 1950s, with declining industrial conditions, most operations fell into disrepair and were demolished for parking. In 1972, the City of Spokane acquired the railroad properties and turned the land into the site of the 1974 World's Fair, the first with an environmental theme. However, most contamination was not addressed given it predated most environmental cleanup laws. Recently, the City has undertaken a massive renovation of the park using publicly approved bond funding. In this process, the City is addressing the legacy contamination through excavation, consolidation, and encapsulation.

Tour Map

The Yard ③

Kendall Yards ④

Riverfront Park ⑤

University District ①

Spokane CSO Tank ②
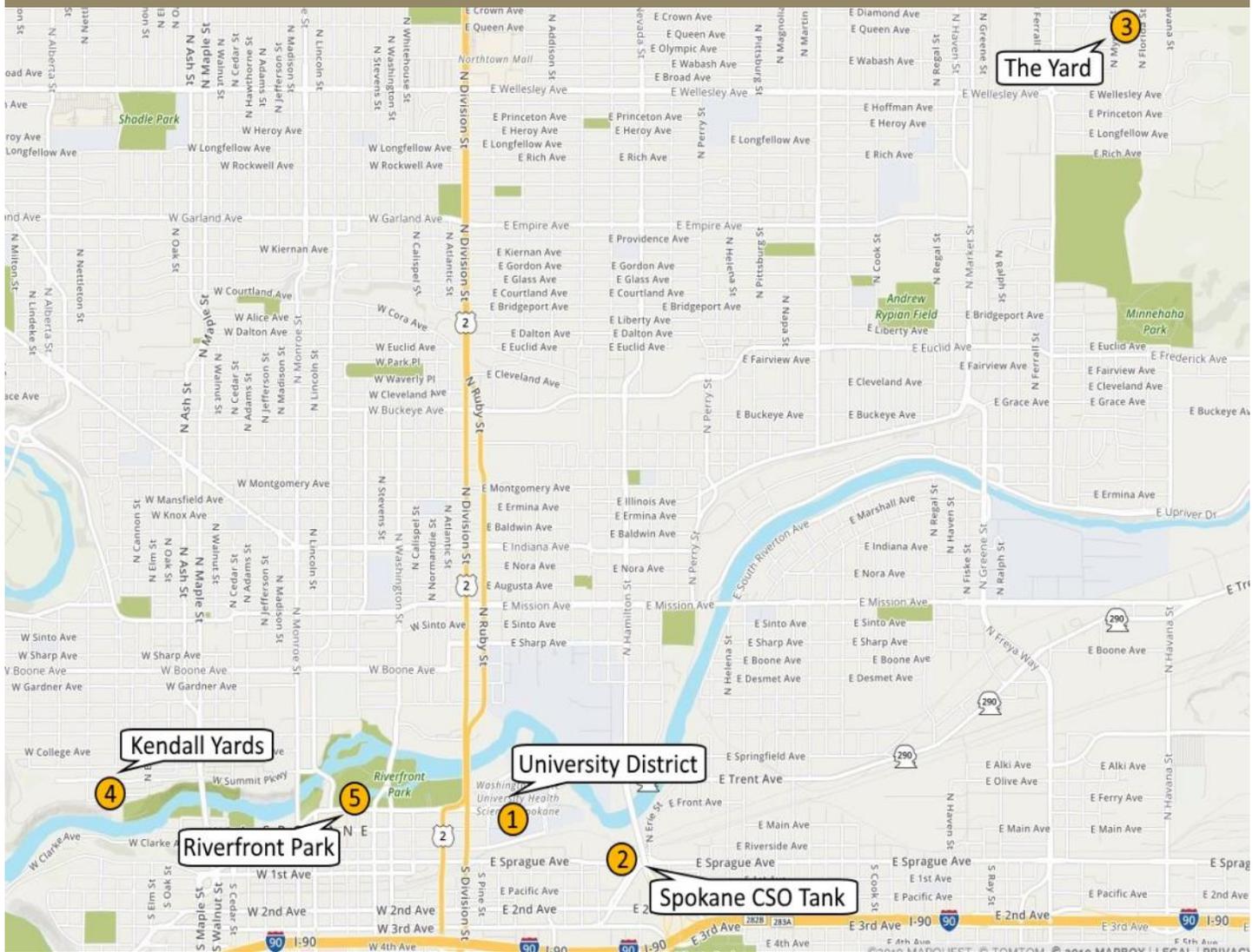
Tour Guides

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