

A Community Social Profile of Airway Heights: A Community in Transition

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It is with great pleasure that I introduce you to the monograph series of the Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis from Eastern Washington University. I hope this research from Eastern faculty sheds new light on a particular aspect of life in the Inland Northwest.

The goal of the Institute is for our highly-qualified faculty to provide analysis and data that are relevant to your lives. The vision of a regional university that our Board of Trustees has adopted speaks directly to the notion of relevance to the Inland Northwest. Without relevance to the communities that make up this dynamic and beautiful corner of our country, our university is not fully living up to its mission.

Of course, our main mission at Eastern Washington University is to educate students to the highest levels possible, for the sake of their own careers, the future of the communities in which they will reside, and ultimately their growth as individuals. An increasingly important mission of Eastern is also to encourage faculty research. Not only does this help keep our faculty professionally current, but makes them better teachers, through the sharing of research opportunities with their students.

However, not all faculty research at Eastern need be written for professional audiences. In this day of increasingly specialization and complexity, I see an imperative for an informed citizenry. What better source can our region find to translate this knowledge into jargon-free, accessible information than a university like Eastern?

Since coming here six years ago, I am convinced there is a level of excellence at Eastern Washington University that is worthy of recognition and support. The university is a catalyst in the progress of the region – its economy, culture and way of life. The Board of Trustees and I regard the Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis as a striking example of our commitment to this region. My office and that of the Institute director welcome all comments on how we might better serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. M. Jordan'.

Stephen M. Jordan, Ph.D.



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I. Executive Summary

A community social profile is based upon a widely accepted reconnaissance method developed over fifty years ago by Irwin T. Sanders¹. It superimposes the perceptions of persons knowledgeable about the community upon a variety of demographic and historical data. The approach allows the researchers to paint a broad picture of the social system in the town based upon the understanding of people living and working there.

The purpose of this profile is to consider the community of Airway Heights including: the people who currently live in the city, its past, the type of community it has become, concerns that are important to residents and leaders, and its potential future. This research draws a number of conclusions about Airway Heights.

- Airway Heights is a 'City of Growth.'
- It began as an area serving Fairchild Air Force Base and the local airports in the 1950s.
- Retired military and their families have been a predominant population.
- A growth spurt occurred in the 1990s due to the opening of a state correctional center.
- Recent development is taking place due to the proximity of Spokane, to its need for low to moderate-income housing, and to the Kalispel Tibe destination casino on reservation-owned property in Airway Heights.
- It is a city dependent upon external institutions, industries, facilities, and population.
- The city has a bifurcated population. On the north side of Highway 2 is a predominantly lower income, transient, residential population living in mobile homes and apartment units. Much of the south side is composed of single-family moderate-income residences.
- Problems and issues identified by local residents, workers, and business people include:
 - Conflict between north and south side residents.

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- Dependency on outside communities for water, sewage, secondary education, and medical facilities.
 - Lack of community organization and apathy of residents.
 - South side poverty, drug activities, alcoholism, crime and gangs.
 - Housing degradation with zoning prohibiting flight path area changes.
 - Belief the local government is changing but has had a ‘good ol’ boy’ orientation and a history of misappropriation.
 - Residents’ sense of a lack of both resources and empowerment.
 - Annexation concerns.
 - Need for children’s recreational facilities and programs.
 - Belief the correctional facility has higher-level offenders than promised and offers less city employment opportunity.
 - Concerns about the casino allowing teens and others the opportunity to lose money and degrade their living potential.
 - Conflict about expenditures of the city resources and who benefits.
- Projected growth in Airway Heights during the next decade is likely to yield 6,400 new residents in a community of less than 3,000 presently.
 - Further development will likely tax scarce human and natural resources.
 - A more involved community is essential for problem solution.
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II. Introduction

The City of Airway Heights is an unusual community. It could be argued that originally, it was “the town that shouldn’t be,” since it really was not an historic urban settlement. It simply did not exist prior to 1950. Instead, the town developed as an initiative around scattered businesses and residences. It emerged between Fairchild Air Force Base and the roadway linkage back to the City of Spokane along US Highway 2. Spokane International Airport and Fairchild Air Force Base imposed numerous restrictions for housing development, but apartment homes, mobile homes, and commercial/industrial land uses were allowed. The town started as a rather “fly by night” accumulation of businesses to serve base residents driving to and from duty.

Even with the incorporation as a city, Airway Heights was recognized less as a final destination and more as someplace people traveled through. This has changed during the last ten to fifteen years. New government facilities, as well as industrial, office, and commercial development, have created a destination with character. As the president of the West Plains Chamber of Commerce recently noted, “The West Plains is the most rapidly growing area in Spokane County, with new hotels, industrial and office development, and new residential development. Airway Heights, Medical Lake, Cheney, and a rapidly expanding West Plains represent a significant new focus for business, industry, commercial and residential development.” Spokane’s west plains, and especially Airway Heights, are definitely “in transition,” with large capital investments and major new developments completed recently or planned for the future.

The purpose of this report is to consider Airway Heights, the people who currently live in Airway Heights, its past, the type of community it has become, concerns that are important to residents and leaders within the community, and its future. With these insights we hope to offer a glimpse of how Airway Heights has become an important part of Spokane County as a place to live, shop, work, and play. As urban development expands along Highway 2 and new projects and plans are approved and put in place, Airway Heights will continue to change.

The community has always had adjoining employment centers of Fairchild and Spokane International Airports. Now, Airway Heights and the surrounding area boasts a destination tribal casino and associated development, a major outdoor recreation facility, industrial employment centers, a prison which is also an important force in the community, and significant proposed commercial as well as residential developments. The Spokesman Review identified Airway Heights as a “City of Growth,” an important development in the Spokane Urban Area. This report will present the background of the community, but focus on the values and issues currently identified by knowledgeable people in the community. A final section will address Airway Heights as a future focal community of Spokane County.

III. Methods

The research and analysis for this report follows the “Social Reconnaissance Method,” developed by Irwin T. Sanders². As the method proposes, the research team consisted of two urban and regional planning graduate students and three senior sociology undergraduate students from Eastern Washington University. These students were under the supervision of a community sociologist, Pamela Elkind, who was aided by an urban planner, Dick Winchell, and a criminologist, Dale Lindekugel, all professors at Eastern Washington University.

The social profile method is a way of using information generated by the community to describe its organization and the way it works. To accomplish this, the students first have undertaken a thorough collection and review of existing documents including: newspapers; historical books and articles; statistics as demographic data produced by various governmental agencies; and a variety of publications by businesses, residents and local facilities. Following an analysis of the accumulated documents, an interview guide was written to ask respondents about the issues and ideas culled from publications.

Simultaneously, students went to places where community residents work, shop, get services, recreate and procure information. In those places people were asked for the names of the most knowledgeable persons in the community with respect to business, government, education, family life, religion, social services, public issues and community problems. In short the students each generated lists of persons who understand aspects of the city of Airway Heights.

From these extensive lists, the persons most mentioned in each category were selected. In-person interviews were then arranged with sixteen of the most knowledgeable community members. Following the two-hour interviews, all names were erased and the data was computerized. The body of data was analyzed using a computer program that categorizes the data by issues and concepts.

After initial analyses were superimposed upon the collected published information, it was decided that several categories and issues were not well

articulated. Six additional interviews were conducted with appropriate respondents to better comprehend these issues. Thus, twenty-two interviews with knowledgeable community members superimposed upon publications and records form the basis of this report. The students and faculty members spent many hours discussing the data and its meaning. This report was drafted by the team members, reviewed by EWU faculty and community respondents, and finally edited to represent a joint effort with analysis by Dr. Elkind.

IV. Background

Location

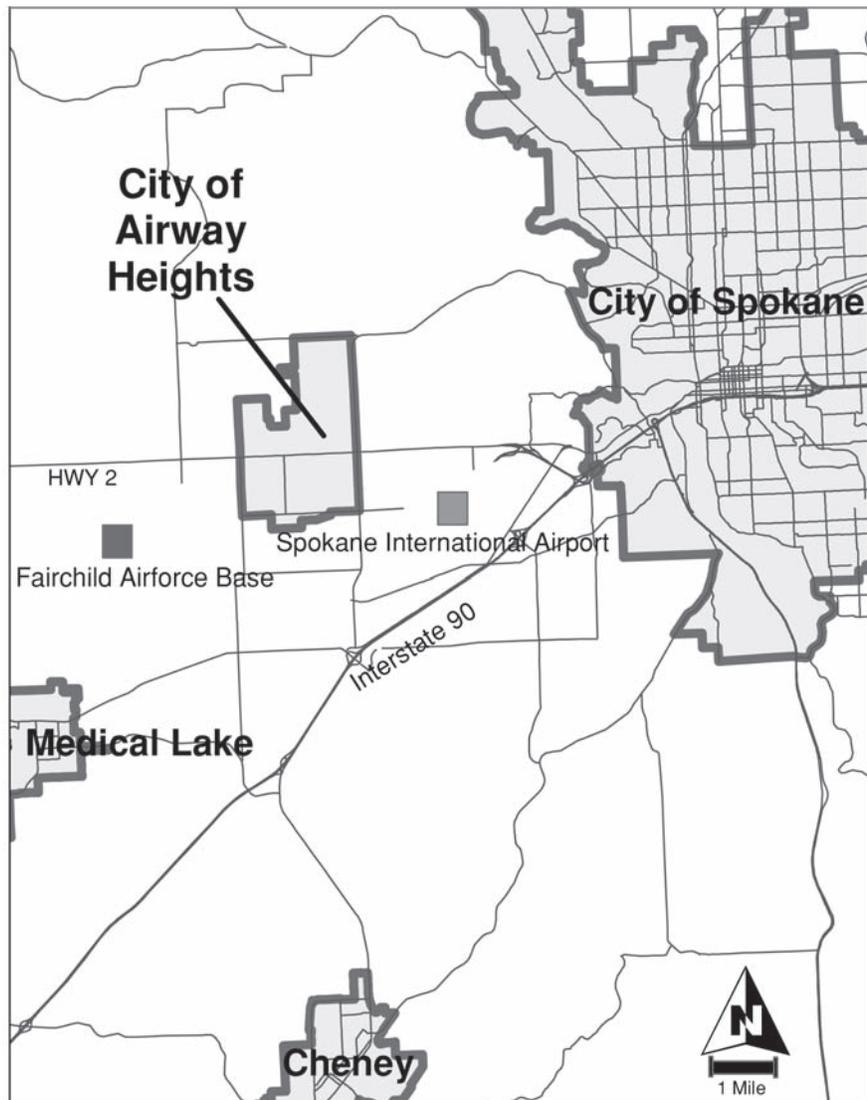
The City of Airway Heights is located in Spokane County, eight miles west of the city of Spokane and just north of Interstate 90 (see Figure 1). U.S. Highway 2 bisects Airway Heights, which has an incorporated area of approximately five square miles. Both Airway Heights and Spokane are expected to agree on annexations, which will establish a common boundary in the current unincorporated areas between the two cities, projected for urban development within the County's urban growth boundary. Two major regional transportation centers, the Spokane International Airport and Fairchild Air Force Base, are situated just outside Airway Heights. Within the city's boundaries

are the Airway Heights Corrections Center, Northern Quest Casino and Spokane Raceway Park, as well as numerous industrial sites and businesses, that encourage visitors and employees to live in and travel to the city. The topography is relatively flat with some rolling hills.

History

The area around Airway Heights lies within the traditional use areas of and was important to the Spokane and other Salish speaking Indian tribes prior to European contact. Initially, the area north of the city was called Indian Prairie.³ Early Indian trails, traditional use areas, and historic settlement areas

Figure 1:
Airway Heights
Location Map



have been identified in the area, including Deep Creek Colony, where 19 Spokane Indian families settled in 1878 and took up agriculture, just two miles north of Airway Heights.⁴ This group resettled to the Western portion of the Spokane Indian reservation in 1887, but traditional uses were maintained in the area. Contemporary development by the Kalispel Tribe's Camas Institute and Northern Qwest Casino, and a proposed new casino development by the Spokane Tribe continue the tribal historic linkages and attachments to the area.

Although Anglo settlers homesteaded in the area beginning in the 1870s, there were no permanent urban settlements in the area until after the establishment of two military airports. In 1940, the United States War Department transformed Sunset Airport into Geiger Air Base. One year later, the city of Spokane purchased and donated land in the Airway Heights area to the War Department for an air corps depot, which eventually became Fairchild Air Force Base⁵.

Urban settlement around Airway Heights was slow to develop, since other areas of Spokane County were more centrally located to urban activities or richer in resources; further, the prairies around Airway Heights lacked surface water and were not well suited for agriculture. In 1942, Carl and Flora Lundstrom, residents of Electric City, Washington (located in Grant County near Grand Coulee Dam), purchased a section of land for six dollars per acre on the north side of Sunset Highway. The officials of the air depot approved, as they saw a need for housing and business in the area. In 1946, with World War II coming to an end, three subdivisions were filed: Airway Heights Addition, Airway Heights First Addition, and Airway Heights⁶.

In 1948, the first area gas station between Wenatchee and Spokane was established in Airway Heights, located at Hayford Road on Highway 2, which also served as the community post office. In 1951, the Lundstroms donated land to the city for the Sunset School, which was incorporated into the Cheney School District. Initially, social gatherings and church services were held at the Sunset Highway Building. However, church services were moved to Sunset School until 1954, when the Lundstroms donated land for the Airway Evangelical Free Church⁷.

One square mile of the West Plains was incorporated to form the City of Airway Heights in 1955, and the new city had approximately 400 residents, a service station, café, furniture store, barbershop, and a lumberyard. The city was incorporated by a 50 to 8 vote of the residents, and the first city council meeting was held with Carl Lundstrom presiding as Mayor.

Population Growth of Airway Heights

Airway Heights continued to grow gradually, from 708 in 1960 to 744 people in 1969. A building and population "boom" occurred throughout the 1970s, with the city more than doubling its size to 1,730 residents by 1980, due to the expanding influence of Fairchild Air Force Base and new housing developments.

In 1990, the small city of Airway Heights had a population of 1,971, but by 2000 there were 4,526 residents, an increase of 147 percent. This growth was due largely to the addition of a prison within the city limits in 1992, which added 1,989 prison inmates as residents by 2000, and included impacts from related employment and prison activities. According to the 2000 census, non-prison community residents totaled 2,442 and occupied 958 households. About 70% of these lived in families and in almost half of the 40% of households with children the parent was a single female.

Population Change of the Surrounding Area

Over the same two decades, the surrounding area, from which most residents commute to Airway Heights for basic services, experienced an even greater population change (see Table 1). Formerly undeveloped land, the West Plains Area surrounding Airway Heights increased from 257 residents in 1980 to 5,936 in 2000. Fairchild Air Force Base actually witnessed a decline of 19% in resident population from 1980 to 2000, due to the evolving role of Fairchild in the U.S. military and to changes in base policy that has encouraged more off-base housing. Over the same decade, Spokane County experienced a growth of 122 percent.

Table 1. Population Change in Airway Heights City and Surrounding Region

Population	1980	1990	Change	2000	Change
City and Surroundings	1,987	6,061	205.0%	10,462	72.6%
Airway Heights City	1,730	1,971	13.9%	4,526	129.6%
AWH Correctional Ctr.	0	0	-	1,989	-
Surrounding Area	257	4,090	1,491.4%	5,936	45.1%
Fairchild AFB	5,353	4,854	-9.3%	4,357	-10.2%
Total Region	7,340	10,915	48.7%	14,819	35.8%

Many new residential subdivisions and businesses were completed during these two decades. Several more are proposed or under construction both within the city limits and in the surrounding area, so that both the City and the surrounding rural area will continue rapid population growth in the near future. There are still large tracts of undeveloped land in the unincorporated sections of the county between Airway Heights and Spokane, within the County's urban growth boundary. These areas are expected to be developed at urban densities over the next decades.

Socio-Economic Characteristics

Airway Heights is a low to moderate-income community. In the year 2000, 65% of the housing was valued at less than \$100,000.00 and 45% was rented. Nearly half of the dwellings were mobile homes, and an additional quarter consisted of multiple unit structures. The average annual household income was \$29,829 and 627 individuals were living below the poverty level. In 1999 the average full time worker earned about \$23,000.

The 2000 share of residents living below the Federal poverty rate in Airway Heights was 22%, compared to 12% in Spokane County, and 11.3% for the state. The share of *individuals* living in poverty increased from 1980 to 2000, but the share of *families* living below the poverty rate decreased during the same period. This suggests an increase in middle-income families in the community, most likely in newly developed residential subdivisions within the city and surrounding areas.

In a town that has historically embraced military families, the number of veterans located in Airway Heights has continued to grow, from 307 in 1990 to 726 in 2000. Veterans in Airway Heights and the surrounding areas increased from 1,011 to 1,744 during this same time. Retired veterans also increased from 34 to 74 within the City between 1990 and 2000, and from 156 to 247 in the City and surrounding areas. These numbers reflect the strong linkage of the area to Fairchild Air Force Base and related facilities and services.

Airway Heights is a community of racial and ethnic diversity, as Table 2 illustrates. In 1990, the largest minority group represented in Airway Heights was Asian (5.7%), twice the national rate of 2.8%. By 2000, the actual number of Asian population decreased from 96 to 80 residents, with most of the Filipino and Chinese residents moving away. The Black population was the largest category in Airway Heights by 2000, representing 10.5% of the population, compared to a national rate of 12.1% and a Spokane County rate of 1.5%. The Hispanic population share in 2000 was 9.9%, compared to a national rate of 12.5% and a Spokane County rate of 2.8%. These changes in 2000 are due to the addition of the correctional center population, but also reflect the diversity and mobility of the area's population linked to the military base.

Table 2: Race and Ethnicity, Airway Heights

Racial or Ethnic Group	United States		Spokane County		Airway Heights	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Total Population	248,709,873	281,421,906	361,364	417,917	1,917	4,500
% White	75.6	69.1	93.4	89.8	85.8	79.4
% Black	11.7	12.1	1.4	1.5	3.2	10.5
% American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.7	0.7	1.4	1.3	1.6	3.2
% Asian	2.8	3.6	1.8	1.9	5.7	1.8
% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	*	0.1	*	0.2	*	0.4
% Other Race	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	1.3	1.6
% Two or more races	*	1.6	*	2.4	*	3.1
% Hispanic or Latino	9	12.5	1.9	2.8	2.3	9.9

Source: U.S. Census, 1990 and 2000

According to 2000 Census statistics, 89% of Spokane County's adults were high school graduates, but in Airway Heights only 80.3% were high school graduates. Less than 10% of the adults in Airway Heights had college degrees, while in Spokane County 25% were college graduates. However, of the 939 Airway Heights citizens enrolled in school, one third were enrolled in college. This phenomenon was likely due to college courses on the base and in the corrections center, but also to student families from local colleges living in low cost housing in the community.

Of the employed adults, according to 2000 Census data, 73% traveled to work in less than 30 minutes, suggesting that most residents work within the local vicinity. About 17% of those over 16 years of age in Airway Heights carpooled and 2% used public transportation. In the county, 12% carpooled and less than 1% used public transportation, so Airway Heights' residents were slightly more likely to use public transportation than county residents.

The economy changed between 1990 and 2000, as represented by type of occupation of residents (see Table 3). The sectors with the most employment growth were services, which included educational,

health, and social services; arts, entertainment, recreation; accommodation; food services; and other services. Retail trade employment surprisingly dropped, despite the population growth that Airway Heights has experienced. About 40% of the working population living in Airway Heights was employed in some form of service industry. However, the service firms are not necessarily in Airway Heights, as the greatest percentage of workers commuted to Spokane or other communities in the county. A recent survey of city employers concluded that the eleven largest businesses employ a total of 1,900 workers. In these eleven largest workplaces, 28% of the employees live in the city of Airway Heights.

Table 3: Airway Heights Occupation by Residents

Industry	1990 Total	Percent	2000 Total	Percent
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting and Mining	4	0.6	9	0.9
Construction	39	5.6	37	3.6
Manufacturing	90	12.9	111	10.9
Wholesale Trade	14	2	35	3.4
Retail Trade	181	25.9	126	12.4
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	66	9.5	97	9.5
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, and Rental and Leasing	23	3.3	38	3.7
Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative, and Waste Management	75	10.8	92	9.1
Educational, Health, and Social Services	96	13.7	200	19.7
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation, and Food Services	7	1	99	9.7
Other Services (except public administration)	29	4.1	86	8.6
Public Administration	74	10.6	86	8.5

Summary

As an urban center, Airway Heights is a very young settlement. Founded in the 1940s and incorporated in 1955, it has demonstrated slow to rapid growth and constant change. The community itself developed around three early subdivisions, influenced strongly by Fairchild Air Force Base but also by the flight paths of both Fairchild and Geiger Field, which placed restrictions on residential development in some areas. As the City of Airway Heights has grown, most significantly impacted by the addition of Geiger Correctional Institution and 1,989 prison residents at Geiger Correctional Institution in 1992, the area surrounding the City has grown even more rapidly. It continues to expand through new large residential, commercial and industrial developments.

V. Community Structure

Outside forces, such as Fairchild Air force Base and the Geiger Correctional Center, have been shaping the city of Airway Heights since its beginning in the 1940s. Long time residents remember the small number of homes sparsely located and surrounded by orchards. Fairchild Air Force Base located its facility just west of what became the city. Military duty brought several of the first inhabitants to Airway Heights. It is no surprise that the Air Force Base had such an influence in the growth of the city. It has provided some of the most significant impacts on the city.

Even now, the majority of Airway Heights' non-prison population consists of retired military families. The residents interviewed agreed that more than half of the citizens have ties to the base. Living close to the base offers several benefits for local military personnel. One respondent fondly remembers, "They used to not plow Highway 2 back then. When it snowed I could still walk to work." The Air Force Base provided housing development to the budding city. The duplexes that provided the housing in the early city of Airway Heights used to serve as barracks on the base.

Residents interviewed explained that after military personnel have completed duty they often attempt to buy a home for their family. But since they have been dependent on the base for so long they often have few assets and little credit. Moving to Airway Heights is affordable and still in close proximity to the base with its commissary, medical facilities and other services for retirees.

Long time community members spoke about a strong bond between those early Airway Heights residents connected to, or retired from, the base. For example, one told us they worked together to generate a grant that would build a softball park. They felt it was an important recreational and community-bonding tool for adult residents. After accomplishing their goal they had the first softball leagues in the area and some of them participated in national competitions.

Although the local Air Force Base has played an important part in Airway Heights' history, its bonds have recently weakened, according to respondents. Rather than continuing to depend on the base, the city

seems to be more concerned with its future growth. One respondent gave an example of the dynamics between the city and Fairchild saying, "The AFB wanted to remove the Burlington Northern railroad for security issues, but this would have affected the long-term livelihood of the community. So there are now talks of re-routing the tracks."

During the interviews of Airway Heights citizens, it became evident that there were two main sections of the city. Community leaders categorized Highway 2 as dividing the town into the North side and the South side. Most respondents agreed that there are diverse groups of people that inhabit Airway Heights generally. Yet throughout the interviews there was an acknowledgement that conflict exists between the two sections of Airway Heights. This was considered a predominant, divisive element by community members.

The North Side was perceived as an area housing retired military and blue-collar workers with moderate incomes. The residents generally are believed to have lived there for many years and they have raised their families in Airway Heights. Some of their children have remained in the community and started their own families. Most homes in this sector of town are owned, though some have been federally subsidized. There are also new housing developments being built, like Haven Meadows in the northwest corner of town. One participant viewed the new houses as more attractive single family homes suited for middle class residents. Also, there has been a new skate park built in the area for the children of Airway Heights. Residents on this side of town were pleased that the city has recently paved the surrounding streets.

Several Airway Heights citizens identified a strong Korean presence on the north side of the city, the major Asian population. One local resident identified the Korean community as hard working people that own several small businesses within the city. They are seen as not being involved in the larger community, however.

Another participant believed that the Asian community has been comprised mostly of Korean women who are married to American servicemen, and retired

servicemen. These women generally came from low-income homes in Korea near military bases and have married American service men from similar economic backgrounds. The women spoke very little English and similarly their husbands spoke very little Korean. The respondent continued to explain that these marriages were often functional but each spouse had his or her own friends and activities.

Their American-born children often learned English from the father, extended family, school and friends. They are not fluent in Korean and often reject their culture in search of an “American” way of life away from Airway Heights. The local resident speculated that since fewer American military bases exist in Korea, though the same experiences may be seen today as in the last two generations, there are fewer Korean immigrants moving into the Airway Heights area. Some respondents said the Koreans choose to “stick to themselves,” while others suggested some covert prejudice in the community.

Interviewees indicated that the South side of town has experienced a growth spurt during the past decade. One local resident perceived that the population has tripled in the last ten years. It is mostly comprised of trailer parks, commerce, and industrial development. Many of those interviewed agreed that the area carries a heavy stigma. This side of town was perceived to have more residents in poverty, alcoholism, crime and drug problems. Families headed by single mothers were thought to be abundant on the south side. A belief exists that the transients and “Californians who have moved to the Spokane area have caused problems in Airway Heights--drugs and crime.”

There is a large transient population that migrates through the south side, living there for a year or less, often in substandard trailers. A concern about the living conditions these trailers provide the families has been voiced repeatedly. One participant recalled entering a trailer with weeds growing through a crack in the living room floor. A city official asserted that the Landlord-Tenant Association was currently doing inspections to upgrade the standard of living and appearance of housing. Most of the respondents speculated that many of these families may be residing in Airway Heights due to ties to the prison, since prisoners’ wives, companions, and children relocate

temporarily from the western Washington urban corridor.

There are many obstacles which residents on the south side face, including the effects of poverty, sewage and zoning problems. One local citizen said that every south side resident feels that they are being discriminated against. Interviewed residents were grateful for the new addition of Shorty Combs Park and looked forward to adding a soccer field. However, community leaders also expressed concern about unpaved streets, as well as need for better lighting and sidewalks for the south side. Degradation of housing was pervasive and perceived to be that way due to zoning.

Besides stark differences between the North and South side populations, there also appeared to be the “in” group and those with little power (the “out group”) in the city. Many of Airway Heights’ first residents have raised children in the area and these residents have become very knowledgeable on the workings of Airway Heights. Historically, these families have formed an active participatory body in the community. A few of them own small local businesses and participate in the local government. This “in” group interacts with the city council and has a positive outlook on the future of Airway Heights.

Other residents, having lived locally for generations as well, comprise the “out” group, frustrated with the local government and believe change needs to come more quickly. Their views were often seen as radical in comparison to those shared by the “in” group. Because of this, it is difficult for these members to become active within the community framework. For example, one long time resident “lost during a local election despite obvious qualifications.” This group was often regarded as “troublemakers” or “loudmouths”, but they identified their need to be vocal in order to promote change. The “in” group appeared somewhat influential and was seen as the “good ol’ boys.” When some respondents were asked if issues were usually resolved within the community they answered, “Well, it depends on who you are.” Others believe the city council has become more “liberal” since this new form of government has replaced the strong mayor of the past.

VI. Institutions

Business

Several respondents said that most of the change in Airway Heights is due to new business development. Many welcomed new business, but believe that long-time business owners, many of whom live outside Airway Heights, are beginning to feel the competition from new businesses, especially from food services and restaurants. The ma & pa shops of the past are slowly being threatened by the larger and newer chain establishments nearby. Highway 2, running through the middle of town, is where the majority of businesses are located. Triumph (previously Boeing), Zak Designs, and Yoke's are the more recognized large businesses in the community, employing many people from the region.

The Casino and the Prison

Northern Quest Casino and Airway Heights Corrections Center have also impacted the city, but most respondents did not see fiscal or employment benefits to the city residents. They felt that only a small number of city residents work in the prison or casino, as those institutions draw from the adjacent areas for their employee base. The businesses along Highway 2 reported having been slightly affected by transients, since those traveling to the prison or casino frequent the restaurants and gas stations.

Some saw the casino as “good neighbors,” since they were quiet and “kept their distance without causing too much trouble.” One resident pointed out that the prison offers prisoners that will perform “cheap labor” for local projects, including shoveling snow. Although local citizens regarded the prison and casino as nice neighbors, these developments appear to have made more of an impact than noticed. Acting as a powerful external force on Airway Heights, these two facilities have dominated much of the travel into and through the area.

Community leaders admitted the casino acts as an economic benefit for the community by fueling growth in the city. In 1996, the Federal government proclaimed 40 acres of trust land in Airway Heights would be added to the Kalispel Indian reservation. After gaining approval from the Department of Interior and

Governor Gary Locke in 1998, the 59,000 square foot gaming complex was built and opened by December of 2000⁸. The casino has continued to grow, and in 2005 will build a second addition to accommodate a larger restaurant, as well as non-smoking gaming and show rooms.

The city received an unprecedented “up-front impact fee” of \$300,000 for this addition⁹. Northern Quest casino donates over \$500,000 a year to the city of Airway Heights and local charities, and sponsors charitable events¹⁰. The Kalispel Tribe negotiated an agreement with Airway Heights that stipulated the city will receive which ever is greater, \$374,000 or 2 percent of the net earnings, annually¹¹.

One community leader recalled that the casino tax money “bought new police cars and new additions for the fire station.” In fact, with an average number of 4,000 customers per weekend¹², community leaders speculated that “area wide” money is coming into the town and is being invested in the community. This notion is supported by a reported decrease of 40% in the other Spokane area casinos' revenues. Several of our respondents expressed gratitude for the casino's donations to the community. It, for example, has participated in giving Christmas and Thanksgiving baskets, and providing vouchers and coats to Airway Heights' poor, as a good neighbor.

The Kalispel Tribe has developed the Camas Institute so that casino and other tribal revenues will support long-term development and involvement for tribal members. The tribe has further plans for Airway Heights, including the development of a successful business enterprise that will provide employment opportunities for tribal and community members¹³. The expansions now under consideration by tribal leaders include an entertainment complex and a hotel. The casino has already purchased 140 acres west of the casino to accommodate future plans¹⁴. A Camas Institute leader interviewed was very positive about increased cooperation between the tribe and the community, saying “It just makes sense to talk to people and cooperate.” He suggested that cooperation could even mean a new school for example.

By 1992, the Airway Heights Corrections Center (AHCC) opened just north of the community of Airway Heights. It was “sold” to the community as a minimum-security facility that would employ local people. A key interviewee who worked as an officer at the AHCC when it opened and for several years after, described a process that has taken place, which includes a transition from exclusion to integration of the center by the community. When it first opened, the prison was not wanted by most of the people. It was not uncommon for AHCC staff to experience a “cold shoulder” from local businesses and residents in the community. That response was short lived, however. Within a few years, the prison became accepted as an important part of the community, and now uniformed staff are often offered a cup of coffee in local businesses, according to this respondent.

Interviewees told us the AHCC is active in the community in a variety of ways. The prison and the community work together in maintaining a Community Alert System. If an escape occurs, key members of the community are immediately notified, along with authorities, and act as extra sets of eyes and ears reporting their observations to the appropriate authorities. There is also a supervised inmate work force that, on any given day, is out shoveling snow, delivering wood, painting, and doing a variety of other tasks. Members of the community often contact the prison regarding requests for work to be done.

The corrections respondent acknowledged those promises and reiterated that it was originally intended as a minimum-security facility only.

Two enduring issues were mentioned by community leaders regarding the prison. They were originally promised a minimum-security facility that would hire local people. The corrections respondent acknowledged those promises and reiterated that it was originally intended as a minimum-security facility only. It was because of the changing needs of the State regarding space for different classifications of inmates, that the decision was later made to expand the AHCC to a medium as well as minimum-security unit. Also, when the facility first opened, he said, there was a policy in effect that required 50% of the workforce to be hired from the local community. It is likely that the policy did not achieve the outcomes that some in the community envisioned due to its temporary nature and because of the lack of appropriate workforce available in Airway Heights.

This respondent mentioned that such a policy would be temporary or it would eventually become discriminatory against qualified candidates from other areas. Also, the better paying, more visible positions require a college degree and/or considerable experience, qualifications that are in limited supply in the community. Many of the local people were hired into service positions such as office or kitchen staff, positions that often have a high rate of turnover. Additionally, because of the differential pay scale of the correctional staff compared to the local economy, many staff chose to live in more upscale neighborhoods in Spokane, including some who had lived in Airway Heights. Today, most of the AHCC staff live in the City of Spokane and most new employees are generally hired from Spokane County.

The AHCC has had two significant impacts on the community of Airway Heights: the addition of a special population and consumers for its businesses. Most of the facility’s 2,000 plus inmates come from lower social class backgrounds in the urban areas on the west side of Washington State. Spouses, families and significant others of the inmates often lack both the means to drive there for weekly visits and connections to locals that could house them for visitations. The result is a temporary migration to the local area around the prison. This migration brings a transitional population to the community that revolves through lower rent residences. It also places more demand on local services including social service agencies and law enforcement.

There is said to be a minimal impact on the community stemming from recently released inmates, since most prisoners are released to the same areas from which they came. Yet one long time resident summed up a widely held community perception that “crime has increased significantly, especially drugs, theft and robbery. This increase is largely due to the prison.” Additionally, a resident questioned whether the recent presence of “gangs” is at least partially due to acquaintances of the prisoners.

Another significant impact on the local community is financial. As a State correctional facility, the prison pays no taxes to Airway Heights, but contributes about \$95,000 per year in fire department impact fees. The AHCC has played a substantial role in the economic development of the Airway Heights community, though it does not contribute to the local tax base directly. Since the prison opened, numerous businesses have opened in the community, including restaurants, service stations, convenience stores, motels, and grocery stores. The AHCC continuously brings people in from outside the area for various forms of training, and local motels, restaurants and other businesses are among the beneficiaries.

However, the greatest economic impact is from those employed at the prison. Even if most of them live in Spokane, their participation in the local economy is significant. A key informant summed it up this way, “imagine 600 people eating, gassing cars and buying groceries”.

The correctional facility will continue to aid in the migration of families to and through the area. However, Fairchild Air Force Base has had more historical impact on that component of the community than either the casino or prison.

Local Government

Historically, the government sector of Airway Heights has been viewed as having the good ol’ boy mentality. But many respondents were quite clear about this mentality changing and felt issues are finally being resolved. Almost everyone interviewed recognized that moving to a city manager form of government from a strong mayor has been a good change for the city. Yet, one resident responded that a few people still rule the majority of the community in Airway

Heights. Another said, “a lot of the city hall people live elsewhere. This creates a problem with the needs of the people since they don’t know what’s going on. They just enforce things”.

Comments about the city council as a whole were ambiguous. On the one hand, it was noted that they are “trying hard” to connect with the citizens. To do that, they conducted a study which convened a public forum to tell them about the needs of the community. At the same time, it was agreed that past leaders have made mistakes, and there are still communication problems, disagreements, and some mismanagement of funds. Overall, the consensus was that their situation was no worse than anywhere else. “It is a constant struggle,” said a long time resident, “but good improvements have happened.” There is now more of a feeling that the citizens’ needs and desires are being heard. The community members in Airway Heights view the government officials as “conservative,” but perhaps becoming more “liberal.” In fact they indicated that recently “Issues have been getting resolved.”

The police and fire department were regarded highly by community members. These agencies are seen as very involved in projecting a positive image in the community. Respondents believe that their response time is excellent and value their concern for community youth. For example, if children are seen with a helmet on, local firefighters or police reward them with a free ice cream coupon. The fire department has increased its number of fire engines and equipment, in part by money received from the casino and prison. Local firefighters can be seen donating time at the annual Q6 food drive.

The police department has experienced a lot of personnel change, including a new police chief. Respondents expressed a feeling of safety within the community, though they acknowledged crime in Airway Heights. One respondent said the police ride by regularly and neighbors “keep an eye out” for each other, which helps her feel safe. Yet, some mixed feeling exists. Teen respondents were concerned about the small number of police in city areas of drugs and gang activities. In fact, they asserted some drug involvement on the part of one police representative.

Religion

Religion is an important institution in Airway Heights. Several churches serve the community, including the Airway Community Evangelical Free Church (its first church), Airway Heights Baptist Church, West Plains Christian Church, Unspeakable Joy Christian Fellowship, and the Hayford Community Church. The Baptist Church is one of the largest in Spokane County; it serves the English speaking community and also holds services in Korean. The leaders of the churches remarked about the cooperation between ministers, and several community members mentioned the cooperation between the churches and the community. They often participate in community events. Membership has been “high and low” over the years. A local resident recalls, “One church in particular almost closed up its doors two years ago.” “However,” the participant adds, “since that time, church attendance has more than doubled” due to an influx of people.

Within the county, four Asian churches serve the function of integrating Korean immigrants into the community. One local resident explains that once part of the church, immigrant women develop into close knit groups resembling extended family. She believes that these groups become exclusive and do not trust one another or members of the other churches. Then, due to the exclusiveness of these groups, the women withdraw from the greater community and lose interest. The interviews further revealed that the

The community voiced concerns about lack of a secondary school in Airway Heights, discussing the need for their own hometown high school.

church, acting as a powerful internal force, has a “great deal of influence over their lives” including time, family, morality and expenditures. These churches support a devoted membership, encouraging their loyalty and donations.

Education

Sunset Elementary School is located next to Sunset Park and covers two acres. The school has two baseball diamonds, a small playground, and an asphalt playing area. Sunset Elementary is the city’s only school and is one of the important focal points of the community. It is a place where children feel safe and where people from the community meet. The school was praised highly by the members of the community who were interviewed. As the City of Airway Heights has grown over the years, so has the school. Originally built in 1951, and part of the Cheney School District, it has seen many expansions over the years, the most recent being in the year 2000. After the school day and in the summer, Sunset offers a “21st Century Community Learning Center” program where children learn various educational and social skills. Respondents praised the quality of the counselors who work with the school’s children. Free and reduced price lunch programs are offered to many students who are from the city’s large low-income population.

The school, although seen as a positive community asset, has its problems as well. The transient nature of the community is reflected in school enrollment, which has noticeable fluctuations throughout the school year. Some parents voiced a disappointment in the teachers of Sunset Elementary, including their activity level and support towards the community of Airway Heights. They noted the low attendance records for the children in grade school and also a recurring head lice problem in the classrooms as a result of poor hygiene. There were comments about the high number of free and reduced lunches that are served.

The community voiced concerns about lack of a secondary school in Airway Heights, discussing the need for their own hometown high school. Secondary school students in Airway Heights are bused to Cheney, where they attend middle and high school. Parents with adolescent children responded negatively about busing them to the Cheney High School. They

feel the other students “mock their kids,” and there are few opportunities to attend after school programs and sports due to busing.

Other respondents voiced a concern about the lack of parental involvement in the children’s education. Some claimed it has led to poor performance in the schools. A significant number of interviewees correlated situations of deviance with education. They perceived that poorly educated children and adults are responsible for the local drug problems, crime, and unsanitary environments.

Recreation

Airway Heights has two primary parks: Sunset Park, which is on the north side of town; and Shorty Combs Park, which is on the south side of town. Shorty Combs Park is a recently built park. Sunset Park has seen additions in the past several years, the largest being a skate park that was added on the northwest corner of the property. The privately owned Spokane Raceway Park, which holds drag racing and other regional and national car races, is also in northeast Airway Heights, as is the Spokane Motor Sports Complex that is used by area ATV and motorcycle enthusiasts. There are several recreation opportunities for adult members of the community including rugby, softball, and volleyball offered by Spokane County Parks Department.

While there are a number of recreational options in the area, several citizens voiced concern about the children of Airway Heights. Community members said that there are not enough activities for the children, believing this causes mischief. For example, one year local teenagers managed to turn off the entire water system of Airway Heights. A local citizen recalled that it cost the city \$4,000 to get everything running again. Most respondents agreed that kids were “like any other kids any place else.” Some blamed boredom for the mischief and some blamed bad parenting.

One respondent summed it up by saying that “There is nothing for the children to do and they get into trouble and drugs.” It was also considered a problem that kids are forbidden to use the ‘adult’ baseball field. The city offers a Summer Adventure program for children age 8-13 for \$65 a week, which involves activities such as going to the beach and water slides.

The recreation department in Airway Heights is headed and operated by one person, but this department has recently been involved in research on the recreational needs of the community. More than 400 residents surveyed have indicated an overwhelming need for a youth recreation center. Several of our interviews were concerned about the price of the present programs; in fact, one resident questioned the logic of offering expensive programs to a disadvantaged youth population. Many community members were hopeful that a swimming pool would be built in Airway Heights. The need for youth recreation is a widely-stated community issue.

Community Organizations

Respondents saw several organizations as “community minded”. Most often mentioned were the churches, food bank and community center. These entities were regarded as the most concerned with helping citizens that are in need, and having the ability to work together for a common goal. All of the churches were seen as helpful, due to their open door policy and assistance to the needy. The churches are able to help by offering food, clothes and other services to the community. But pastors are concerned about their limited resources.

The local community center was seen as supportive to the community. Several respondents spoke of its benefits, especially the positive atmosphere for the city’s children. The center offers several programs that cater to youth including recreational and educational activities. Federal programs are also offered that meet the city’s wellness needs for children and families in poverty. On Tuesdays, the center offers reduced price lunch for seniors. A food bank is also available to help feed families. They serve clients from the city of Airway Heights, as well as residents from other neighboring communities such as Thorpe, Reardan, Geiger, Fairchild and Ford. “In 2002, they supplied food for 1,641 low-income families.”

VII. Unresolved Issues

As a city of change, Airway Heights is faced with many problems and issues. Some of these problems, such as the “fight for water” in a town that lacks surface water, have always existed. Others arise as the city continues to grow and change through time. Airway Heights is a community that is affected by its proximity to Spokane International Airport and Fairchild Air Force Base. But the benefits are accompanied by hazards and challenges for the city to balance.

One of these challenges is balancing the desires of the citizens on the south side of Airway Heights with the mandates related to Air Force operations as imposed on the community. Potential flight path environmental hazards have ignited a conflict within the city. Land use regulations and zoning appear to be negatively impacting the south side citizens of Airway Heights.

It is difficult for these citizens to accept that their property is controlled so strictly under the current land use regulations. The current land use regulation has most of the area south of Highway 2 zoned commercial due to flight path restrictions. Consequently, the residential housing units within this area are in direct conflict (non-conformance) with the commercial zoning regulation. In cases of an unfortunate circumstance, such as a home being burned down, these residents cannot replace the family home.

Many of their homes are in mobile home parks built in the 1950s and 1960s that have become very dilapidated. However, most modifications to their homes cannot be made to update them because of these regulations. Community members are negative about the restrictions and regulations placed on upgrading their homes. It was said that the people “used to be able to do what they wanted”. Several of the South side’s residents believe that the city administration “wants to run the residents out and turn the land into an industrial area.” Many worry that their property has lost its value. For example, one resident complains that their property has possibly become “totally worthless.” All of the Airway Heights interviewees identified the zoning issues as one of the most controversial topics in the community. Yet for City Planning, these regulations are seen as

maintaining the general health, safety, and well being of the community.

The rationale behind these regulations is partly due to the Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (AICUZ). The AICUZ is a program conducted by the Air Force base to ensure the compatibility of surrounding land uses with base activities. The AICUZ, last updated in 1995, aims to protect public safety, the economic benefits of the base to the surrounding community, and the ability of the base to accomplish its national defense mission.

In the current land use regulations, the city has taken into account the recommendations from the Air Force Base that residential housing units not be in a location with noise levels above 65 decibels. Yet, as much as 30 percent of the community is affected by this regulation, and many of these residents view these regulations as devaluing their property. While aircraft accident potential does not warrant acquisition by the Air Force, land use planning controls are strongly encouraged in these areas but not mandated by the federal government. It is a city matter that has posed a dilemma for the community, with no clear-cut resolution to the conflict.

Resentment was also voiced about water and sewer, on both the north side and the south side, toward the city of Spokane. The sewer system serving Airway Heights is an extension of the Spokane City sewer system. One local resident commented that, “We live by the arm of Spokane.” A main extension of the sewer line was connected to the prison from Spokane and then to Airway Heights, during the construction of the prison. Since the prison is located on the north side, the new sewer system was completed on the rest of the north side first. However, many residents on the south side of town are still without a connection to a sewer line. One person commented that everyone knows that the north side is hooked up, while the south side still needs completion. South side citizens are angry and don’t understand why they are paying for the service when they are not hooked up to it yet.

Most respondents were unhappy about having to pay the city of Spokane for the sewer system. For

example one resident said, “A sewer treatment plant is necessary, (but) we are paying Spokane too much for service.” Receiving service from Spokane is costly, which is why many think developing their own lines and treatment center is the best option.

The lack of surface water in Airway Heights has been a constant problem, particularly as the community has grown. The bulk of Airway Heights’ water is coming from six different wells located throughout the area, varying in depth and capacity. Additional water has also been supplied to Airway Heights from Spokane as needed. Currently, the newly established Craig Road well is facing controversy. Both the Four Lakes Water District and Medical Lake feel the new Airway Heights well may be affecting the water tables in their communities negatively and want resolution.¹⁵ Community members voiced concerns about new development in the area when it is such a difficult task to provide for essential utilities such as waste management and water.

The nearby Spokane International Airport provides controversy from time to time. One citizen said, “The airport has expanded its flight path and now you can’t build near there. Airway Heights might like to annex it.” However another complained, “now the airport wants more land annexed.” Also, annexation to the east has been one of the hottest issues in Airway Heights according to respondents. Both Spokane and Airway Heights have been debating the potential annexation of the West Plains. Neither has yet developed a successful proposal.

Additional concerns of the respondents included not having direct access to a family doctor without driving. Medical facilities are in Spokane. Approximately 60% of Airway Heights’ citizens are considered lower-income. Many of these individuals face obstacles of mobility and have a reliance on public transportation that is viewed as barely adequate. They were concerned about potential loss of public transportation. One local respondent was especially thankful that the Ronald McDonald vehicle was able to make occasional visits during the summer.

Local value differences were seen as a major problem. Citizens who were interviewed responded that the teaching of appropriate values “occurs in 1) school, 2) church, and 3) family.” Some suggested that many of the residents’ “social values” are negative. One

respondent explained this by informing us that there are very low-income people who live there and thus, they believe, inappropriate values and behavior. This points to several respondents’ perceptions of poverty and the outcomes of poverty. A good deal of blaming the poor takes place in Airway Heights.

Even though there is an overall consensus that the casino has been a cooperative and beneficial entity for Airway Heights, there are concerns by some in terms of ethics and morality. Concern was voiced about high school students being allowed in the casino. There was also an expressed disappointment that some of Airway Heights’ residents have lost their housing units and have extensive financial and family problems due to excessive gambling.

Residents also complained about The Spokesman-Review, the region’s largest paper, which occasionally mentions Airway Heights. The residents expressed the opinion that news coverage by The Spokesman-Review was overwhelmingly biased and negative towards the community, giving the community a poor reputation. When good news is reported about the city, it is perceived by community members that the newspaper refers to the community as “West of Spokane,” instead of Airway Heights. However, mention was made of recent positive articles about expansion in Airway Heights as well.

The poverty of south-side residents is seen as a continuing issue involving crime and degradation. Along with the degradation of south side neighborhoods, teen respondents reported active “color” gangs. It appears that the older members of several outside gangs have rented residences in Airway Heights for recruiting members, drug sales, and other activities. A growing fear in the city youth is evidenced by the caution they take not to wear specific colors or brands of clothing. Some public areas are not considered “safe” for non-gang youth and there are reports of opposing gang activities.

A few of the respondents spoke about housing issues. One said the new regulations on owned property are too strict. Another believes that there is more affordable housing now, and one respondent was not happy about rent prices going up. Yet the community was especially pleased with the new middle income housing in Airway Heights and residents hope to see more development.

VIII. Airway Heights in the Future: Moving Toward a Changed Community

Urban Growth

Airway Heights is recognized within Spokane County's urban growth area, including an area from Deno Road on the north to Hallett Road on the south, from Fairview Heights and Craig Roads on the west to Hayford Road on the east. This area, more than twice the current city limits, is in the Airway Heights Urban Growth Area. This land and a larger portion of the West Plains have been proposed for annexation both by the City of Airway Heights and the City of Spokane. The cities are working together to resolve the final boundaries, but the entire area located within the two urban growth boundaries can be identified as prime land for development during the next ten years.

Adjoining the airport, with destination services and employment centers within a short commute to downtown Spokane, this large area of relatively flat, vacant land has high potential for urban density development. As a current Boundary Review Board assessment of the proposed annexation stated, "The West Plains area including Airway Heights and surrounding lands was included in the urban growth area because it is an area where adequate public facilities exist or can be provided in an efficient manner." Development of the larger area recognized in the Airway Heights urban growth boundary and the City of Spokane Interim Urban Growth Area suggests this land is suitable and available for urban development.

The total expected residential growth in the next five years is in excess of 6,400 people.

The development of the greater West Plains, and the remaining vacant land in and around Airway Heights to the south and east, will likely follow a different pattern than the original city, which evolved slowly. The current land in this expanded area is held in larger parcels, and many are already under some level of proposed development. These developments comprise phased projects over 100 acres each, with mixed-use development and mixed density in some cases.

Currently, housing is becoming available in the \$80,000 to \$120,000 range. As these larger tracts of land develop, generally in middle-income price range for residential units (\$120,000 to \$220,000 per unit), the number of these units will likely create a middle-income community. The older, original areas around Airway Heights will remain, but development will bring new people with a mix of incomes, requiring additional services. Airway Heights will remain a center of the growth, but the population mix will likely be very different from the current population.

It is likely that growth will come from younger residents with families, first-time home buyers who may work anywhere in Spokane County. These residents will have new issues and concerns, and the city will be required to make changes. As the vacant land fills in with development, Airway Heights and the West Plains will become a "changed" rather than a changing community. Yet, as in any dynamic community, there will always be change in businesses and residents. In fact, the City of Airway Heights anticipates the completion of at least 1,840 residential units in the next five years, a potential population of 4,700 new residents moving into the City and an additional 670 units housing 1,700 people within the city limits. The total expected residential growth in the next five years is in excess of 6,400 people.

Community Vision

Community vision for the future of Airway Heights is generally very positive. The changes for the future may bring many obstacles, but none are seen as insurmountable. Respondents would like to see their



children complete all of their schooling in Airway Heights without being tied into a completely different community. Citizens would like to see a middle school and a high school that helps build a sense of community and togetherness among the citizens.

A number of respondents mentioned a lack of cohesion and claimed that a sense of community is an important component of the future of Airway Heights. One community member observed that the lower income people do not get involved. A local resident said that “community” is a high priority and reflects a sense of “providing for.” However, respondents felt that most Airway Heights residents have not participated greatly in community discussions or community advocacy. They are hoping that this will change with increased residential development and the new council government.

When asked about the physical character of the city, not many had positive responses. One person commented that there is an overall problem with the way the city looks and that both businesses and homeowners along Highway 2 need to clean up. Comments in particular about the south side needing help came from several interviewees. One person went so far as to say “it’s an ugly town.” Another said, “Airway Heights is known for being unkempt; people don’t want to say they live here...a low income area.” There were also statements about the need for more trees, as there is a lack of shade and wind barriers. One respondent believes residents need to see more green space to take personal pride in the appearance

of the city. One local resident suggests planting trees and flowers along Highway 2 to create a “buffer zone” and a more attractive place.

Very positive comments were made about the city having a community center, a skate park for the younger kids, a food bank and donations that come from the Lions Club. More than one participant spoke happily about Shorty Combs Park. They found it pleasing both esthetically and that it is named after a long-time resident who loved to volunteer in various activities after he retired. The community is hopeful that even better recreational facilities will be available for youth in the future.

Community members appear to be looking for the day-to-day services that make families want to stay. These services they mentioned include a medical facility, swimming pool and recreation center for children, a more efficient sewer system, and better services for those people in need within the community. There was a spoken desire to be in a community that is focused on livability. As part of their future, the respondents were generally positive about the potential continuation and development of the major external government facilities and businesses in Airway Heights. One respondent told us that Spokane is becoming overdeveloped and thus people are moving west to Airway Heights which needs “all the growth it can get and more.” Still another resident observed that “the city needs more people who have vision and the capability to make that vision work.”

IX. Social Analysis

Each community like Airway Heights has a special, historically developed style or way of doing its work. Its style evolves due to the sorts of people, geographic location, political and economic contingencies, and especially due to its reasons for being a community. These qualities are tied together in a particular fashion for each community.

An example is New Bedford, an old whaling/fishing port city, located on the Atlantic Ocean half way between Boston, Massachusetts, and Providence, Rhode Island. Because of its coastal nature and urban proximity, New Bedford was settled by Portuguese fishermen recruited by, and working for, the major fishing lines and canning industries. The Portuguese lower income families formulated a life style and developed businesses, churches, celebrations, etc., that were also comfortable for Hispanic immigrants from a number of countries. The dynamic of life in New Bedford includes the imbedded political relationships of the poor and working class peoples with the wealthier owners of larger businesses and industry, many of whom are from generational Anglo American families. A community power dynamic and economic pattern have developed, due to a large degree to the geography of the town and the rich history of its poor fishing and laboring Latino families.

Airway Heights, like New Bedford, has a special mix of characteristics and a historical reason for existing that has influenced its development. Its evolution has, as in other communities, resulted from a combination of external and internal forces. Externally-created policies from the state, county, and federal government, such as regulations, mandates and funding of their activities, greatly influence the city. Industry headquartered outside Airway Heights, absentee owners, government facilities, national religious organizations, regional employers and national chain stores are all external forces acting up on the community as well. However, the community dynamic also includes internal forces as independent citizens, community organizations, local government, small businesses, and such locally developed facilities as independent churches, recreational facilities, and professional practices.

It is the very intricate equation of external and internal resources of a community that illuminates its historically determined, political style. An important effect of the particular internal/ external resources equation is found in the ability of the community to confront and resolve problems. Two astute policy researchers, Roland Warren¹⁶ and John Walton¹⁷ have addressed this dilemma. They argue that dependence on external networks and resources diffuses the power rather than concentrating it within the community. In the cities where internal elements are most important and external influences are highly restricted, residents are unable to solve their problems due to lack of resources. A careful analysis of the historic evolution of Airway Heights, its reason for being, the characteristics of the people, geography and political/economic development of internal or external resources will aid us in comprehending the past, present and potential future of this community.

Knowledgeable citizens of Airway Heights understand that the community was created due to the proximity of a military base, and that it has further developed due to the location of a correctional center. These government facilities, along with a regional airport and an Indian reservation property casino, bring a multitude of regulations, needs and mandates associated with them. Externally regulated facilities create numerous impacts upon the community while offering valuable resources for its development. They provide fiscal benefits and employment opportunities, as well as purchasing business services from the community. However, the cost of having such facilities in the area is a loss of internal community power.

Other external resources, such as large industry and non-residential businesses, also offer economic benefits to the community and are often good neighbors. However, these powerful organizations, with an external profit motive, have interests that do not always coincide with the best interests of the community. Their interests, along with those of governmental facilities, can affect patterns of development, land uses, zoning decisions, and business profitability as well as local revenue. Due to their size and external power, local business leaders

and city officials at times perceive alliances with external organizations as necessary. Yet competition and conflict often arise among these entities causing disorganization in the community. In itself, disorganization can be useful to external sources, as it divides residents and limits the city's ability to establish cohesive local government/citizen decision-making. Creating disagreement among community leaders also engenders a lack of dedicated active citizens, since there is no clear cut leadership structure to follow.

In addition to the internal vs. external power conflict is the internal struggle between the north and south sides of Airway Heights. Community-wide problems caused by poverty, mobility and transience are also evident. The result is a community with a very powerful external presence and a weak internal system. At present, Airway Heights lacks the balance necessary to empower citizens to make decisions necessary to improve their community unless they are backed by external interests.

Balance requires active empowered citizens and local organizations agreeing on, and acting in, the best interests of the community. Included in local interests for this community is the overarching need to provide additional services for the poor and children, as well as for those needing health care, social services and transportation for the population at large. Should community leaders work with those in need of services, and the previously disenfranchised populations, they are likely to find active citizens who will help coalesce the internal structure while in the process of addressing their own needs.

Some in the community claim that the south side residents "lack values," and look to those types of personal characteristics to explain their perception of the high levels of crime, substance abuse and other social problems in that part of town. While it may be true that such problems do tend to be differentially located in that area, sociologists long ago identified factors such as social disorganization in a neighborhood or community, high turnover of transitional populations and lack of sufficient legitimate opportunity structures as reliable predictors of high rates of social problems community members lament. When those more fundamental sources are removed or mitigated, the rates of the problems correspondingly subside.

When recruited to address deficiencies, some empowered residents are likely to become active leaders. As middle-income, stable families buy homes in the new developments, active citizens may be joined by new residents who are orientated to community organizations. Long time, north side residents and the empowered south-siders could be joined by the new families to create a dynamic, cohesive citizenry, if present problems are being resolved. As this occurs, a different external/ internal equation for decision-making within the community is likely to evolve, creating a more livable city.

The result is a community with a very powerful external presence and a weak internal system.

X. Conclusions and Further Research

This community social profile is a basic level analysis of Airway Heights. It has uncovered some of the issues in the community that are likely to affect its development. However, it is merely a first step toward understanding how the community operates and its specific problems and needs. The solutions will thus require additional analysis.

From this limited research, we have begun to understand that Airway Heights has developed as a community dependent on external entities. Due to the city's Fairchild roots and proximity to the Spokane airport, the federal government has played a major role. The correctional facility is a State organization, and the casino is on reservation trust land governed by the Kalispel Tribe with federal agreements. Larger businesses and industries are generally divisions of corporations located outside the community, as are the organizations developing the land.

The city is dependent on outside communities for resources such as water, sewage, secondary education, and health care. The greatest number of workers is employed in other Spokane County communities and dependent on the region for jobs. Community based programs for people in poverty, children and the aging population are funded via state and federal organizations serving a large percentage of the population. Many of the families not in poverty live on federal military pensions. In sum, Airway Heights is more externally dependent than most communities.

The city is predominately made up of a lower income population on the south side and a working poor to middle income population on the north side. Furthermore, close to half the families have a military retiree and more than half of the remaining families are female single parent households. Much of the south side population, and especially single person households, turnover in about one year, suggesting a highly mobile community. The rapid mobility is due to the short stays of persons connected to the Air Force base, families and significant others connected to prisoners, and a variety of persons from the region seeking low cost housing.

The externally-based facilities also generate a good deal of movement through the community. Workers, casino clientele, and those of other recreational venues drive through town and stop in local businesses, as do those visiting the correctional facility. Attending meetings or training sessions at the various facilities, some visitors stay in local motels.

Poverty is a major problem, and with poverty comes additional transience, crime, drug activity and alcoholism. One of the problems of poverty is the housing degradation on the south side. Housing remains poor due to flight path restrictions and city zoning. Poverty and transience increase division and conflict between the north and south side communities.

Internal citizen-based power mostly exists within the north side's more affluent long-term residents. Though these residents appear united in their distaste for south side residents and problems, the north-siders are diffuse in their views about community needs and form a variety of alliances.

Thus, the community is very divided and agreement or consensus is difficult to achieve. Without residential stability and agreement, problems get little treatment or resolution. This is exacerbated by rapid turnover in city government and city agencies. It is hoped the new form of government will help.

Development is beginning to occur as regional speculators are purchasing parcels of land. In fact, 6,400 new residents are projected for the next five years, in this community of less than 3,000 people. It is likely that these residents will be young lower middle class families employed throughout the region.

Research about the new population and its effects on the existing town is the next necessary step of analysis. A variety of studies, including a social impact assessment of the potential developments and their population-based changes is essential to project impacts on internal and external physical, fiscal and human resources. These could cover several questions.

- How will the new developments find resources such as water and sewer?

- Will further degradation of the south side occur or is gentrification more likely, displacing those in poverty?
- How will crime, drugs, gangs, etc., affect or be affected by the incoming population?
- If the external orientation remains, is there likely to be more or less organization in the community?
- What are the necessary forces required to create organization and responsiveness to problems?
- Will a change in the stratification system of the community create needs for education, medical facilities, transportation and social services that must be resolved by a stronger internal structure?
- What steps might the city take to begin a process involving present constituencies to resolve potential issues of rapid development in Airway Heights?
What are the ramifications for the business community?

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