



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

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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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