

# EQUITY WORKING GROUP

## MARCH MEETING NOTES

**Location:** 421 W Riverside Ave, Suite #500  
**Date:** March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
**Time:** 4:15 – 5:15 pm  
**SRTC Staff:** Michael Redlinger, Savannah Creasey, Lois Bollenback  
**Attendees:** Jared A., Cristina A., Allison Z., Cari R., Madeline A.

Michael welcomed the group and kicked off the meeting and invited in-person attendees to grab snacks, drinks or any SRTC-branded items that were available for attendees at the March meeting.

The group's first agenda item was a presentation by SRTC's Executive Director, Lois Bollenback. Lois asked group participants to introduce themselves and share something about their background or talk about their interest in the Equity Working Group. SRTC staff also introduced themselves for the benefit of first-time attendees.

Lois then introduced herself and spoke about her family and personal background, including her valuable experience during a tour in the U.S. Air Force and putting herself through college. Lois discussed her lessons learned along the way as they relate to SRTC work. Lois spoke to the benefit of having a direction and a plan – and the value that planning agencies such as SRTC aim to bring to the Spokane region. As part of developing a plan, agencies set the key steps that will move their planning areas or jurisdictions towards their long-term goals.

Lois also commented on the value of building and maintaining important relationships and the critical role that Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) play in regional coordination. MPOs bring people around the area together to discuss, share information, and pursue common goals. As regional agencies, MPOs must also listen – to our partners and members as well as the public.

Lois emphasized that peoples' voices matter – individually, but even more so when voices come together, connect, and align messages. She further emphasized the value in physical voice and presence – that there is no substitute for showing up and participating when you are trying to get something done. More voices at the table also helps planning agencies to make better decisions. Lois then thanked the group at the meeting for attending and participating in the Equity Working Group, and participating in SRTC more broadly.

Lois commented on the present context and SRTC's place in the changing government world. SRTC is federally funded as an MPO, and SRTC must adapt to changes at the federal level. When it comes to transportation in our region, the facts are the facts, and no ideological shift or change in federal direction is going to change the facts we're seeing in the data and on the ground. In that sense, the context of the work SRTC does has not changed. SRTC continues to prioritize doing good transportation planning work for our region and bringing value to the community. Lois assured listeners and attendees that SRTC's guiding principles have not been reduced in any way – the agency continues to plan in alignment with its vision for what is good for the future of the Spokane region. She then opened the floor for questions and discussion.

Jared A. asked Lois about the threats facing SRTC and the Spokane community as they relate to changes in federal direction. Lois spoke about changing criteria to access funding, and how that may influence the projects and activities that SRTC pursues. Adapting to new guidance and new criteria to access funds can pose a challenge. She also described lack of clarity during the period of transition, and how a previously-awarded safety grant may be impacted.

Madeline A. commented that the preferred language in transit plans has quickly changed, forcing STA to be careful to avoid a situation where the language in their plans restricts what they are able to do. Agencies may face situations where plans need to be updated or redone. Each time a plan needs to be updated, public outreach is required, and people may be unwilling to engage and share information. STA has had to develop additional materials to accompany surveys to help educate respondents on why the information is collected and how it will be used.

Lois also spoke to SRTC's responsibilities to the state of Washington as an RTPO and the divergence of state and federal guidance intended to guide SRTC work. She provided an example from her past work in Florida and emphasized that, even if the language used to describe important work changes, the facts are what they are and important work will continue.

Cristina A. asked about SRTC's public outreach program. Lois commented on concerns that people are becoming more closed-off and spoke to the importance of getting out in the community, meeting people where they are, and building awareness.

Savannah commented on SRTC's public outreach successes taking to community members face to face at community events, including the spring Bike Swap and bilingual outreach at El Mercadito. Lois described the process to bolster and re-establish SRTC's community outreach after the pandemic. Jared A. suggested the Hillyard Bike Meetup on April 26<sup>th</sup>. Madeline and Lois commented on community members mistaking SRTC and STA.

Lois then asked Allison Z. about her thoughts on the current direction and the next few years. Allison commented on the emphasis on equity and environmental justice in university curriculum. Allison also commented on her work, describing the challenge of translating community outreach and even project work to successful implementation. Allison suggested the need for complementary community programs – such as adding additional crossing guards along Safe Routes to Schools to support active transportation improvements. Cultural shift and community-focused communication are both needed for effective implementation of transportation improvements. Lois described government challenges to timely action and how they can make it difficult for government agencies to establish realistic expectations, even when they receive great community input.

For the next agenda item, Jared presented information on the in-development Hillyard Subarea Plan – on behalf of the Northeast Public Development Authority (PDA). The Northeast PDA is intended to help drive economic development within its boundaries, which are centered on the Hillyard neighborhood but also extend beyond it to include sections of both the City of Spokane and Spokane County. The Northeast PDA secured a planning grant for the Subarea Plan, which is intended to help guide the development of the area in a way that benefits the local community.

Jared described how the Subarea Plan will fold into the City of Spokane's City Improvement Plan (CIP). The Plan will be a guiding document for the Hillyard area with regard to how they hope to develop. The Plan is estimated to be completed in Q2 of 2025. Lois asked Jared about

the horizon year for the Subarea Plan, and Jared commented that the Northeast PDA is currently chartered to exist until 2040.

Jared emphasized the importance of economic growth in a way that doesn't affect housing or property prices such that local residents might be displaced. He displayed a graphic featuring the area's urban framework and land use while describing the unique character of different parts of the PDA. Unpaved roads remain a challenge in Hillyard, though the PDA is upgrading several roads already and hopes to continue to pave roadways and increase commercial access. Jared also commented on remediation of brownfields in the Hillyard area as a goal for the PDA.

Next, Jared presented in depth on four important active projects in the Northeast PDA area. These include construction of a childcare center and workforce housing at 3011 E. Wellesley; a redesign of the area around Freya and Wellesley which would include water main and roadway safety improvements; the pursuit of Creative District designation from Washington state; and paving along Myrtle Street in east Hillyard. Jared also provided references to media articles that address the area's need for additional childcare and workforce housing and planned work at 3011 E. Wellesley.

If Hillyard earns Creative District designation from the state of Washington (through Arts Washington), it will be the first such designation within Spokane County. Through this effort, the PDA is looking at the area's economy through the lens of the creative economy – culinary, arts, music, entertainment, and a variety of other forms of creative commerce.

Additional highlighted projects included rehabilitation, active transportation, water main, and safety improvements along Freya from Garland to Wellesley (est. completion late 2025 or 2026); a full street rebuild of E. Wellesley from Freya to Havana which would include widening, green infrastructure, active transportation, and water improvements (est. completion 2026-2027); and paving on Myrtle St. south of Rowan Ave. to improve air quality and reduce community environmental impacts. Paving also encourages commercial development which can enrich the local economy.

Lois mentioned that the dust risk posed by unpaved roads in the Hillyard area could be complicated by the nearby brownfield, while Jared emphasized the role of particulate pollution as the primary known environmental risk. Jared also shared information on public engagement related to the Myrtle St. paving project and discussed some important next steps in plan development. Key next steps include a suggestion to move the existing freight corridor through Hillyard onto the North-South Corridor (NSC) to reduce transportation conflicts and community impacts. Jared also commented on the hope to turn Greene St. through Hillyard into a festival corridor for future events. Lastly, Jared noted the importance of the NSC on Hillyard and voiced hopes that NSC completion will not be further delayed.

Michael provided short closing remarks to those in attendance who needed to leave the meeting at 5:15 and provided a brief preview of the May Equity Working Group meeting, including a planned presentation from Urbanova.

Lois inquired to Jared about the Northeast PDA's Board structure as well as local funding, grant opportunities, and potential funding disruptions. Jared described the Northeast PDA's primary reliance on the local tax base as its source of income – and the benefits that can come from bolstering the economy within the PDA.