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March 26, 2010

Spokane City Council  
W. 808 Spokane Falls Boulevard  
Spokane, WA 99201

Re: YMCA & Conservation Futures Funds

Dear Council President Shogan and City Council Members:

We take this opportunity to provide you some key points in support of voting to accept the use of Conservation Futures funds to pay the debt service for the purchase of the YMCA:

1. Conservation Futures is the appropriate funding mechanism for creating and preserving open space (see the attached before and after pictures for inspiration). We know some of you are concerned about spending 4.3 million dollars of Conservation Futures funding for less than an acre of land. Of the 1.6 million generated annually for Conservation Futures the debt service payment equals only 21% of that amount and does not limit future purchases within the City boundaries. Because 2.5 million citizens visit Riverfront Park each year, that is a better measure of bang-for-your-buck than acreage.
2. The approval of the use of Conservation Futures funding has been through the entire Spokane County nomination and approval process (Land Subcommittee, Park Advisory Committee, and Board of County Commissioners). This is the same process that has approved all Conservation Futures purchased property in Spokane County. Few properties within the City limits have received this Conservation Futures funding and this is an excellent opportunity for City tax payers to directly benefit from this program.
3. Removal of the YMCA building will provide prized open space in Riverfront Park that will be valued by generations to follow. It will not only be the views that will be improved but the entire frame around the falls will be improved. A citizen's complete experience from standing on the newly created open space, the suspension bridge, Canada Island, or the blue Howard Street Bridge will be unparalleled in our region.
4. Open space creates economic benefit by drawing citizens and visitors to Downtown's natural asset. Showcasing the falls and making them more visible and connected to the downtown will draw visitors and contribute to the vibrancy of Riverfront Park.
5. Neither Spokane County nor City of Spokane Attorney's offices have said that this is not a legal use of Conservation Futures funding. There have been several similar purchases throughout the state and all have been deemed legal and appropriate. We believe a challenge to the use of Conservation Futures funding has a slim chance of success.
6. We have conducted a scientific citizen survey showing that a majority of citizens supported the use of Conservation Futures and the removal of the YMCA.
7. Last summer you asked us to complete a Highest Best Use Analysis. That analysis determined that accepting Conservation Futures and removal of the building was the highest and best use. The costs to improve the building outweighed the projected revenue.

8. You have conducted an RFP process that has resulted in three private sector responses. None of those responses show that the building has a viable economic future with predictable revenue to cover the \$350 K annual debt service.
9. It is true that the YMCA building may be eligible to be on the Register of Historic Places as a building less than 50 years old, but only if it is of "exceptional importance." Examples from the actual criteria that the Landmarks Commission would have to use include the launch pad at Cape Canaveral from which men first traveled to the moon, the home of nationally prominent playwright Eugene O'Neill, and the Chrysler Building in New York City. Although the YMCA has a very interesting history, we firmly believe that it will be difficult for the Landmarks Commission to find YMCA to be of "exceptional importance" and keep it from being demolished.
10. As your own RFP process has shown, the YMCA does not provide economic opportunity. Given the Shoreline Master Program regulations and all the access issues, this property will be difficult to develop. Fortunately, Parks has ample north bank properties that do provide economic opportunity. This amazing open space as a part of a program to revitalize Riverfront Park will create far more economic opportunity than any viable use imagined for the YMCA building.
11. We are confident the necessary permits will be obtained to demolish the YMCA. We will develop an erosion and sediment control plan that will protect the Spokane River and any streams. The Department of Ecology has already provided in writing that the demolition will be exempt from a Shoreline Substantial Development Permit – removing the YMCA will be an absolute shoreline improvement. We may have to obtain a permit from the Corps of Engineers and a Hydraulic Permit from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Finally, wildlife that could be impacted by the demolition will be protected or relocated with guidance and assistance from Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife.

We commend you for your due diligence on determining the future of the YMCA building and property. It is all your hard work and tough questions that have confirmed that accepting Conservation Futures funding and removing the YMCA building is the most fiscally conservative, citizen responsive and visionary decision you can make.

You have an opportunity to support the single best improvement in Riverfront Park since Expo 74 that complements our Riverfront Park Master Plan.

You have an opportunity to share with the entire community the power and opportunity of the Conservation Futures program.

If you approve the use of Conservation Futures funding you have the support and backing of no less than the Spokane Board of County Commissioners, Mayor Verner, the Spokane Park Board, the Spokane Parks and Recreation Director and Division Managers, Spokane County Parks Department, and a majority of citizens as shown in the survey. Talk about being part of a winning team!

Sincerely,



Spokane Park Board  
Spokane Parks and Recreation Director  
Division Managers of the Parks and Recreation Department.