

New Science Center in the Works

An objective of the “One Spokane” initiative includes building a science center on the North Bank property in downtown Spokane. Spokane based non-profit “Inland Northwest Science and Technology Center (INSTC)” has been granted the bid to develop the center. Chris Majer with INSTC states the goal of the center. “The center is intended to generate interest in our kids in careers in science and technology. The intent is to provide a much deeper look into the world’s of science and technology than is available through the schools.” Further INSTC believes the project will provide jobs for construction and operation of the center. In the long term, they look forward to making Spokane the focal point for technological industries. New industries such as biotech, electronics, new energy technologies, and a tourism industry all have potential to be built around the new science center. The goal is to create an economic boom with new industries, businesses, and improved employment. Spokane County’s poverty rate is higher than the national average, with 1 in 8 families living below the poverty line as stated by local non-profit One Spokane. Improved employment and educational opportunities would idealistically lower these statistics.

Critics argue that the city cannot afford such a large project without raising taxes. INSTC plans to raise capital for construction through donations, grants, and corporate sponsors. Revenue to operate the center will come from memberships and visitor fees. To avoid raising taxes INSTC have some prospective plans in development. “We are working on a couple of innovative ideas that may provide an alternative to the historical method.”

Science centers are not a new concept and have been built in Seattle, Portland, Chicago, San Francisco and a host of other cities. Positive impacts on the economy have been noted in all of the above cities, although it is difficult to offer conclusive proof as there are many factors that contribute to the health of the economy. “A science center in Spokane would draw families across eastern Washington, Idaho, and Western Montana. We would have people coming from Canada. Each of them will need a place to stay, will need to eat, will want to shop and do all of that in Spokane,” states Chris Majer, all of which can be tracked. What is just as important however, he states is what cannot be measured by statistics or surveys. “How do you measure the impact of the kid who got inspired at the science center, went into biotech, chose to live in Spokane and raise a family here?”

INSTC plans to have more developments by the end of the year, including further information on sources of funding for construction and operation of the planned facility.