



#### TOOLKIT

## Interlocal Express

*A new annexation process takes wing in Airway Heights.*

**ANNEXATION CAN OFTEN BE** a time-consuming process. From finding enough interested landowners to holding a special election, it can take years—and it may never happen. But if there is a spirit of partnership, annexation can be a smoother process.

Ask the City of Airway Heights. Working with Spokane, Spokane County, and the area fire districts, the city had a lot ahead of it to move forward with annexation. But with the passage of Senate Bill 5808 during the 2009 legislative session (legislation promoted by AWC), Airway Heights became the first municipality in the state to use a flexible new tool to ease the process: interlocal annexation. Under this method, if an annexing city or town can come to an agreement directly with the county and any fire districts, a vote or voter referendum is no longer required.

In many ways, Airway Heights shows the potential of interlocal annexation.

While annexation of the target area had been discussed for years, it has always been a Joint Planning Area involving Airway Heights, Spokane County, and the City of Spokane. Under previous processes, annexation would have entailed numerous petitions, votes, and referenda. But now, according to Albert Tripp, city manager of Airway Heights, it became "a collaborative discussion on how each entity could annex the portion of land it was interested in and could do so in a process that was a win-win for other parties."

But that doesn't mean the city cut out public involvement. "We continued to have numerous discussions with citizens and business owners in the annexation area," Tripp says. "It was very beneficial for us to understand their concerns and to keep them informed of how the process would unfold."

Among other initiatives, Airway Heights created a section of its website

full of information relating to the annexation. It was driven not by citizen demands, but rather by the city's recognition of the benefits of open communication. "From our perspective, we wanted to be transparent about any issues that were arising and next steps," Tripp explains.

For Airway Heights, knowing its goals and understanding and acknowledging Spokane's and Spokane County's interests, the interlocal method has worked well: annexation will go into effect on January 1, 2012.

"The key to the interlocal method lies in considering the broad interest that may be associated with annexation," Tripp asserts. "After a city considers the various interests, the interlocal method provides a vehicle to address them. That's the real key. I think the interlocal method provides a clean-cut process to move forward with an annexation when those interests and solutions can be identified." ☐



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