

The City of Spokane

## Weekly News Update for Nov. 30

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*Information about COVID-19 is evolving rapidly, and our important work as a City is continuing. We want to make sure our City employees have up-to-date information on both COVID and employee news. We will provide this update, as needed, to communicate what you need to know, while we work to reduce the spread of this disease in our community and continue to provide critical public services.*

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### **A Message from Mayor Woodward**

Today marks another milestone in the continuation of the spectacular transformation of the North Bank of the Spokane River.

Breaking ground on the Spokane Public Schools downtown stadium is the culmination of the passion, drive, and determination of many individuals and organizations in our community over the past several years. All we have to do is look around us to see the payoff. The activities that will be enjoyed within walking distance of this impressive collection of family friendly amenities are quintessential Spokane and memories waiting to be made.

Think about it, depending on the time of the year, you will be able to enjoy a game, a performance, or a concert. Your choices will be a professional or high school soccer game, hockey, a play at the Civic Theater or musical at The First Interstate Center for the Arts, an indoor track, volleyball, or wrestling event, a football game, high school basketball, a pickup basketball game on the Hoopfest Court, exploring the playgrounds in Riverfront Park, riding at the skateboard and wheels park, ice skating at the Numerica Skate Ribbon, and a concert at one of two outdoor venues or inside the Spokane Veteran's Memorial Arena.

Each of those is nestled along a river that runs through our downtown and defines the hometown feel we love about Spokane.

Redevelopment of this area has come a long way through imagination, perseverance, courage, and partnership. Walking through the park this summer and fall you could feel the energy and passion as the community embraced the evolution of the extension of the region's front porch.

We are so lucky to have people who have shared their energy and enthusiasm for our community as the impetus for taking Spokane to the next level. This is one of those defining projects that we will look back on and enjoy for years to come.

Congratulations to all involved and thank you for investing in memories still to be made.

## **Health Risk Assessment**

Does your position fall under one of the below Associations or Unions?

Your collective bargaining agreement requires you to complete a Health Risk Assessment under your health insurance plan in order to avoid being charged a monthly \$30 Administration Fee. The Health Risk Assessment should be completed by **TODAY, Nov. 30.**

- Managerial & Professional A & B
- Mayor
- Fire Managerial
- Exempt-Confidential
- City Council
- City Council Staff
- Judges
- Court Commissioners
- Local 270 Prosecuting Attorneys

Employees who complete the annual online Health Risk Assessment will have their monthly Benefit Administration Fee waived for the 2022 plan year. **(Benefits Administration fee is \$30 a month/\$360 a year)**

### **Premera Members**

Premera members must send a copy of their Completion Certificate to the [Employee Benefits Department](#).

After signing into your account at ([Premera.com](#)) go to Benefits Coverage>Wellness Tools>Start Wellness Tools>Health Risk Assessment tile

### **Kaiser Permanente Members**

After signing into your account ([kp.org/wa](#)), go to the "Health Profile" tile on the bottom of the main page. Click on "Complete your Health Profile"

The **Health Risk Assignment should be completed during Oct. 27 – Nov. 30, 2021** If you experience problems logging in, please call the Benefits Department at 509-625-6565.

## **Mandatory Payroll Tax Effective Jan. 1, 2022**

Taxation of employees in Washington state for the new WA Cares Fund (Long-Term Care Tax) begins in January 2022. The one-time opt-out period has ended. To qualify for an exemption from the tax, you must have purchased a private Long-Term Care plan and have the plan in force prior to November 1, 2021. If you have done so, below are the necessary steps to obtain an exemption. Please read carefully:

1. [Create a SAW account](#). This account also provides you access to Paid Family Medical Leave benefits.
  - If you have used Unemployment, Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) benefits or renewed vehicle tabs online in the past, you should already have a SAW account.
2. Visit [WA Cares Fund](#) to complete an exemption application.
  - You are attesting that you have individual coverage. At this time, no specific information regarding your policy is needed. **However**, it is our understanding, the State is creating an auditing program for exempt residents.
  - Proof of ID will be required. Please have this image ready to upload beforehand.

3. **Once approved, kindly submit a copy of your exemption approval letter to [Accountingpayroll@spokanecity.org](mailto:Accountingpayroll@spokanecity.org).**

- Your exemption letter must be submitted prior to December 31, 2021 to ensure you are not paying the tax beginning January 2022. Please allow additional time for Payroll to process.
- The turnaround time for receiving this letter, after completing your application, can fluctuate. The letter will be mailed to you and uploaded to your SAW account.

**Important things to note:**

- Neither Employee Benefits nor Payroll are not able to assist with your login credentials to SAW.
- The WA Cares Fund Exemption website is overloaded and occasionally crashes; the best times to access the site is evenings and weekends.
- If you do not submit your letter of exemption by December 31, 2021, you will be required to pay the tax through, at minimum, March 31, 2022. Payroll can only remove the tax, on behalf of an employee, quarterly.
- A screenshot that you have submitted an exemption will not suffice, you must provide the official letter to be exempt from the tax.

The City of Spokane Payroll Department and Employee Benefits Department have no additional information to share other than referring you to the [WA Cares Fund website](#).

**Paid Family Medical Leave Rate Change Effective Jan. 1, 2022**

For the first time since Paid Family and Medical Leave launched, the **premium rate will increase**. This change goes into effect Quarter 1 of 2022. The split of the employer and employee share of the premium rates will also change in the new year.

**Starting Jan. 1, 2022, the premium rate will be 0.6%.**

The new premium rate of 0.6% takes effect on Jan. 1, 2022. But for now, the current rate of 0.4% is in effect until Dec. 31, 2021.

Employers will pay approximately 27% of the total premium and employees will pay about 73%. For more information on Paid Family and Medical Leave, [click here](#).

**More Information to Assist You**

*Here are some more resources from our Employee Assistance Program:*

- [Keeping Holiday Stress at Bay](#)  
Some people look forward to the holidays all year, while others see the holiday season approaching and are overcome by a sense of dread. [Click here](#) for tips on managing the stress that seems to be built into the holiday season.

- [Losing the Holiday Blues](#)

You may be wondering if you have symptoms of depression. One way of determining that is to take a brief screening online or with your doctor. Only you will see the results of the online screening. You can then choose to print a copy of the results for your own records or to give it to your physician or mental health professional. If you decide to do a screening with your physician, they can assist you in determining a treatment plan.

**Employee Information Portal** ([covid19.spokanecity.org/](https://covid19.spokanecity.org/))

Remember, this Employee Information Portal is a great resource for employees to stay current on what's happening with the COVID-19 response. The [Employee Information Portal](#) can be accessed from work or home, using a computer or mobile device. All of the emailed information we have sent to employees is archived here.