

April 4, 2024

Calgary AB

Yours Worship, Members of Council

Re: Blanket Upzoning Public hearing April 22, 2024

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the blanket upzoning proposal before Council. I have lived in four Calgary neighbourhoods over the decades and have lived in Mount Royal since 2007. I also am a Registered Professional Planner (RPP), employed as a neighbourhood planner (among other duties) at the City of Calgary until 2000 and was a CPC Commissioner from 2011-2017.

On March 7, CPC reviewed the recommendations of the Housing Task Force which included increasing housing choice in all communities, increasing housing affordability, and making the land use application process faster by eliminating opportunities for citizen engagement. These objectives should also align with the long-range strategy of the City and its Municipal Development Plan, its foundation document that guides us out to 2070. All laudable goals, but the methods to achieve them will likely not be successful, and in some instances will be counter productive.

1. The MDP and the City Vision

The Municipal Development Plan (MDP), adopted in 2009, sets broad principles for the growth of our City until 2070. Key principles include:

1. focusing future growth on nodes and corridors, activity centres and more recently, greater Downtown.
2. respecting the stability of established neighbourhoods.
3. focus more growth in established areas, achieving 33% of new growth by 2039 and 50% by 2070.

I spoke in favour at Council in 2009 suggesting that this was a well-reasoned, thoughtful forward-looking plan. However, many in the development industry spoke against it as it curbed their ability to develop in places to maximize profit, while advocates of compact growth argued the other way. It was indeed a compromise plan that struck a balance.

However, the blanket upzoning proposal ignores the MDP and throws it away, even though the administration suggests the blanket upzoning supports the MDP. The CPC report selectively chose five elements of the MDP to indicate alignment, but it did not acknowledge the three foundational and key principles outlined above.

It is Council's job to develop and approve policy. It has developed and approved the MDP, a logical plan, with appropriately zoned lands. Council has an obligation, in fact a duty, to indicate to the industry that "If you want to build in Calgary, follow the Plan and we will ensure the process moves fast." There is presently land zoned in greenfield and established areas to accommodate 440,000 more units that follow the Plan principles. This is not the time for Council to erode or ignore the central tenants of the MDP.

2. Affordability

The Housing Task Force and its supporters focused a lot of its attention on the “housing crisis” and affordability. The CPC report outlined new construction costs (\$1.6 million for single, \$.9 million semi and \$.6 million for town houses.) Those are not affordable and will not help the 84,000 households, including my children, who are struggling to find affordable housing. Unfortunately, the blanket upzoning proposal will, in some established neighbourhoods, displace existing affordable housing such as older single detached housing, some with basement suites and post-War low-rise apartments. These properties are likely to be “picked off” to develop new town houses, making the affordability crisis worse. In other, more expensive neighbourhoods like my neighbourhood of Mount Royal, new town houses will be built that will exceed new construction costs with even more luxurious town houses therefore undermine the goal to increase the stock of affordable housing. By way of example, a 1940’s bungalow at the corner of 14th St. and Joliet Ave was purchased for \$550,000 in 2019 and an RCG application was made to build four town houses with a price point of \$1.2 millions each. The developer decided to sell the property after community opposition and a new single detached home is being built now, that also does not meet any affordability goals.

Presently about 3.6% of Calgary’s housing stock is identified as non-market. That needs to increase; however, it is naïve to expect the private market to service that need because the private sector is in the business of making a profit, not to address a social need. It falls to senior levels of government to provide assistance for such housing if government believes housing is indeed a right, which I support. While primary responsibility lies with senior levels of government to address non-market housing, the City can and has contributed through use of its excess lands to build non-market housing.

3. Stability in established neighbourhoods

In the 1950’s and 1960’s, established neighbourhoods across Canada struggled, and many families moved to the new suburbs. Many older neighbourhoods saw speculative up-zonings, deterioration of housing stock, school closures and a general lack of re-investment. The federal government introduced 10 programs to the National Housing Act in the early 1970’s. Some of the programs provided funding for infrastructure, for non-profit and co-op housing and rehabilitation of housing. One program was the Neighbourhood Improvement Program (NIP) which required cities to firstly stabilize land use in neighbourhoods through local plans and secondly, develop a robust community participation program to build those plans. In Calgary, Design Briefs were first produced until provincial legislation recognized neighbourhood plans with the Area Redevelopment Plan process. I spent 20 years working in Calgary’s established neighbourhoods (1979-2000) helping repair damage resulting from the dis-investment and speculation we experienced in the 1950s and 60s. We downzoned thousands of properties and collaborated with neighbourhood groups. The result is the vibrant and healthy established neighbourhoods of today.

Blanket upzoning will re-create some of the same issues we faced in the 1960’s. Residents may start to leave established areas because they do not feel comfortable investing in their houses because indiscriminate redevelopment will undermine the stability of their street with town houses or apartments that are inappropriate. They may realize it is their land rather than their house where the value lies and “cash out.” These changes will not address affordability but rather destabilize our

neighbourhoods. If blanket upzoning is approved, in 20 or 30 years, Calgary will be facing the same challenges neighbourhood planners faced in the 1970's and 1980's.

4. More Housing Choices in our neighbourhoods.

The Mount Royal Community Association was established 90 years ago. It includes 17th Ave. as a mixed-use district, Lower Mount Royal as a transition area from high density Beltline to the single-family homes of the Estate Area and the Garden Suburb Area of Upper Mount Royal. Our housing choices are robust. Thirty-three percent of our housing is single and semi-detached housing (the City average is 61%). Fifty-five percent of our residents are renters (the City average is 31%). Mount Royal has matched or exceeded the principles of choice outlined in the Housing Task Force study.

It is true that our Mount Royal population has dropped by 8% since 1970, but we also increased our housing stock by almost 29% over the same period. Our schools are at capacity and Western Canada High is now using a lottery system to allocate spaces. Our community meets today's standards of a 15-minute neighbourhood, provides choice in housing, has a stable population, has significant tree cover, and combines a blend of historic and modern designs. Our community, like the others in Calgary, is unique. Blanket upzoning is a blind and blunt instrument that will destabilize our neighbourhood and other neighbourhoods in Calgary while not meeting its stated goals.

In conclusion, I would ask that Council:

- a. Abandon "Proposed Amendments to the Land Use Bylaw 1P2007" as outlined in Attachment 3, CPC2024-0213
- b. Respect and support the MDP in terms of directing growth to nodes and corridors and respect the stability of established neighbourhoods.
- c. Inform the development industry that the way to help build Calgary, is to embrace the concepts outlined in the MDP.
- d. Continue to use the Local Area Plan process to refine areas where additional growth makes sense from both the MDP and community perspectives.

Yours truly

Roy Wright RPP, MCIP