

The Community Associations of Meadowlark Park and Mayfair Bel-Aire

March 2024

City Council
The City of Calgary
800 Macleod Trail SE
Calgary, AB. T2P 2M5

Via email

Re: Opposition to Blanket Up-zoning

Dear Mayor Gondek and City Councillors,

The boards of Meadowlark Park and Mayfair Bel-Aire Community Associations write you today in strong opposition to the proposed Land Use Bylaw amendment before you on April 22, 2024. We respectfully ask you to vote against this measure following the Public Hearing on this blanket up-zoning proposal.

We all agree that increased densities in established communities can benefit the city and communities themselves, provided re-development occurs in a thoughtful, well-planned manner. The blanket up-zoning proposal before you is not that - instead, it is a blunt and unsatisfactory instrument that eliminates public involvement in the re-development process, ignores community context, and offers a dubious “solution” to a poorly defined problem.

Citizen participation is a time-honoured and essential component of local government. As such, the most troubling aspect of the proposed blanket-up zoning bylaw is the de facto elimination of public participation. By categorizing RC-1, RC-2 and RC-G as one base land use, the proposed bylaw deliberately eliminates Public Hearings in low-density residential re-development. This is an unnecessary and unwarranted erosion of public accountability and transparency.

A Public Hearing is not “Red Tape,” a “community veto,” or a “hindrance to re-development.” It is an important, legitimate, and legitimacy-building component of local government. Elected officials, not bureaucrats, should be the decision-makers on matters such as community character and context. Regarding local development matters, allowing citizens to have five minutes unfiltered and direct with the representatives they elect is foundational. Citizens’ ability to “be heard” on consequential issues contributes to the validity of the Council’s decisions, whether or not speakers agree with them.

One can imagine the unintended message that approval of the proposed bylaw amendment would send to many citizens. On matters which may have little or no importance to you, weighty subjects like “What our official bird will be?”, Council is happy to hear from you directly at committee. But on matters that are likely important to you, such as redevelopment down your street, they have no interest in hearing from you, instead referring you to comment online to the file manager.

City Administration has suggested the proposed amendment is required to provide would-be developers with greater certainty. This ignores reality. Over this term, approximately 95% of the RC-G land use applications before Council have been approved. Beyond the automatic rubber-

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stamping of any and all applications, it's difficult to understand how much more "certainty" developers require.

Our communities agree that greater efforts can be made to streamline the process for RC-G land use applications, but not one that sacrifices Public Hearings. Processing RC-G applications for land use currently averages 120 days for administration, yet little or no effort has been applied to streamline this process (e.g. requiring concurrent land-use and development permit applications for low-density residential properties). This is a more appropriate avenue to explore than the proposed LUB amendment.

Perhaps the most frequently asked question by residents on this matter has been, "Why is The City doing this?", with the response from City Administration, "To solve the Housing Crisis".

Calgary's "Housing Crisis" is a catch-all tagline that The City has adopted, including various complex housing-related issues with varying urgency.

We strongly agree that our city has severe challenges concerning the availability of low-income subsidized housing, an extremely strained rental market, a lack of supportive living spaces for those experiencing mental health and addiction issues, as well as overall market affordability (driven by inflation, limited supply of housing stock, availability of trades, high-interest rates, etc.).

Embedded within The City's remedy to the housing crisis is the notion that a blanket up-zoning will facilitate greater housing diversity, thereby creating more supply and affordability. Compared to other issues falling under the umbrella of a "Housing Crisis," it is conspicuous in its lack of urgency and likely effectiveness.

To be clear, Calgary does not have a "Housing Diversity Crisis". We appreciate that City planners would like to see greater diversity in established communities, but suggesting it is a crisis requiring an extraordinary response is hyperbole and a distraction from more pressing housing issues.

We believe that a blanket up-zoning will have no appreciable impact on housing supply or affordability in Calgary. According to The City's own officials, the expectation following rezoning is a trickle of increased applications, not a deluge.

This is confirmed in academic studies of cities previously using blanket up-zoning. Take, for instance, Auckland, NZ. Initial studies suggested blanket rezoning contributed to a significant increase in housing supply. More recent and rigorous analysis (see Murray and Helm, "The Auckland Myth") reveals that considering regular building cycles and demolitions, there was not an increase in "net" new housing stock. Nor was there any impact on housing affordability.

A July 2021 report from the **New York City Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development** cautions that blanket re-zoning can have serious unintended consequences for less affluent and more vulnerable communities, suggesting it can often "cause more harm than good." In this, developers tend to purchase older, more affordable (and more often than not rental) properties, demolish them, and build new higher-density housing with higher prices/rents.

Anecdotally, we've seen this in our communities with older properties (often RC-2 and often rentals) being purchased for re-development into RC-G with higher per-unit prices than the original residences sold for.

City Administrators have positioned blanket up-zoning as the "silver bullet" for improving housing supply and affordability, yet it is likely to have little or no impact on either. But it will shut

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citizens out of decisions about their local communities and likely diminish their regard for how business is conducted at City Hall.

Mayor and Councillors, we strongly urge you to vote against the blanket up-zoning proposal before you on April 22, or at the very least, refer this matter to the Chief Electoral Officer to prepare a plebiscite question on the matter to be decided by voters in the October 2025 municipal election.

Sincerely,

Verna Leask, President
Marc Henry, Vice President
Meadowlark Park Community Association

Jeff Hyde, President
Peter Collins, Director of Planning & Development
Mayfair Bel-Aire Community Association

