

Applicant's Submission

2019 May 30

The subject parcel is located in the community of Capitol Hill and consists of 0.1116 ha of privately owned land. RNDSSQR has retained CivicWorks Planning + Design Inc. and Gravity Architecture to undertake a concurrent Land Use Redesignation and Development Permit process to facilitate the construction of two four-unit residential buildings with front doors facing both 20 AV NW and an interior amenity space, with an attached 8-stall garage and no provisions for secondary suites.

The proposed use is based on the Land Use Bylaw definition of a Rowhouse, with the exception of the following characteristics: ii) where one façade of each Dwelling Unit directly faces a public street; and (2) no intervening building is located between the street facing façade of each Dwelling Unit and the adjacent public street. The proposed use is well-suited to the site, given its surrounding context, mid-block lot characteristics and location. In support of the proposed development vision, this application seeks to amend the existing R-CG (Residential – Grade-oriented Infill) District to an DC (Direct Control) District, based largely on R-CG District rules. The intent of the proposed DC District is to allow for a unique configuration of rowhouse-like buildings, with adequately wide and livable grade-oriented dwelling units on the subject lands. The proposed DC District and associated development vision demonstrate a unique approach to the configuration of mid-block sites, based on design best practice, industry experience and current market needs and realities.

R-CG MID-BLOCK SITES: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS + CHALLENGES

Residential - Grade-Oriented Infill District (R-CG) is a relatively new residential designation, primarily intended to accommodate rowhomes within established areas, while also allowing for single detached, side-by-side and duplex homes. Maximum building height is limited to 11m and the 75 units/hectare maximum density theoretically allows a typical 50ft. x 120ft. site to accommodate up to 4 units. Since Council first adopted the R-CG District in late 2014, it has seen healthy uptake by industry and market alike. However, this success has largely been limited to corner lots, with little to no uptake of mid-block sites. This is largely due to the unique characteristics and Bylaw rules for R-CG corner lots that allow developer-builders to realize both viable densities and desirable rowhome unit configurations that have so far been absent from the Calgary market.

In practice, achieving the same level of success and viable densities on mid-block sites is challenging if not impossible, given both design and market constraints. The District's current Rowhouse definition limits overall development potential by requiring all units to front onto a public street. This is further exacerbated by forbidding the siting of any building between a unit's street facing façade and adjacent public street. These requirements do not pose a problem for corner sites, which can achieve double frontage via two public streets.

Conversely, mid-block sites can only achieve a single frontage to accommodate all units. On mid-block sites made up of one or more parcels, these requirements limit the variety and practical density of rowhouse forms that can be achieved and create an economic incentive to limit unit width in order to maximize unit count, lot coverage and profitability. This style of development results in units that are unnecessarily narrow (as narrow as 4.2m/13.8ft, per the R-CG District minimum), difficult to market, and less desirable to those looking for alternatives to typical detached homes, infills or condominiums. While historic rowhouse widths in cities like Philadelphia and New York can be as narrow as 4.9m/16ft, it is architectural best practice for rowhome unit width to strive for a minimum 6.1m/20.0ft width in order to accommodate access, circulation and livability.

R-CG MID BLOCK SITES: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

RNDSSQR is committed to providing well-located, affordable and high-quality homes for inner-city families. As RNDSSQR continues to carry out this vision, the Banff Trail and Capitol Hill area is and will remain one of their most active areas of work, given the community's vibrancy, proximity to Centre City, and well-established multi-modal transportation networks. In order to continue providing innovative housing choices for inner-city Calgarians and achieve a viable development outcome, this application seeks to create a custom DC District, tailor-made to unlock the potential of mid-block sites and largely based on existing R-CG District rules.

The project team's substantial experience in the R-CG development space had directly informed this approach for

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sensitively scaled, livable and economically viable rowhome developments on mid-block sites. The current limitations of the relatively new R-CG District create an unfortunate trade-off for those looking to develop mid-block sites to their full potential: create units that are far too narrow to be an attractive housing option for future home buyers, or underutilize the already limited development space available in established inner-city communities. We hope that this application can be used as a pilot project for an alternative development typology for the R-CG District, and the existing limitations of the Bylaw rules be considered as the R-CG District continues to undergo further evaluation and refinement.

PLANNING RATIONALE

The proposed development vision will introduce new, innovative and more affordable housing options to the inner city, where single and semi-detached homes are increasingly out of reach. The subject site features numerous characteristics that make it especially appropriate for the proposed land use change, which will directly facilitate the development of new and innovative inner-city housing options for Calgarians:

Direct Lane Access: The subject site enjoys direct lane access, facilitating a development that orients vehicle access to the rear lane, creating an uninterrupted, pedestrian-friendly streetscape interface along 20 AV NW.

Collector Road: The subject site is located along 20 AV NW – a Collector standard road – ensuring both ease of access and traffic capacity for future residents.

Proximity To Transit: The subject site is within ~80m of a local transit stop (Route 404), located along 20 AV NW. Additionally, the subject site is within short walking distance of two Primary Transit Network corridors, 14 ST NW and 16 AVE NW, ~275m and ~475m from the subject site respectively. Primary transit stops along these corridors provide access to BRT Route 303 and Routes 19, 65, 89, 404, and 414.

Proximity To An Existing Corridor: The subject site is within short walking distance of the 16 AV NW Urban Main Street, approximately 400m to the south.

Proximity To An Existing Open Space / Community Amenity: The subject site is located approximately 150m south of the entrance to the Regional Pathway Network and Confederation Park, a major community and regional park space.

CITY-WIDE POLICY ALIGNMENT

This proposed land use redesignation and associated development vision is consistent with the city-wide goals and policies of the Municipal Development Plan, which encourage: the development of more innovative and affordable housing options in established communities; more efficient use of infrastructure; and more compact built forms in locations with direct and easy access to transit, shopping, schools and other community services.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

RNDSQR is committed to being a good neighbour and working with surrounding community members and stakeholders throughout the application process. As part of that commitment, RNDSQR and the project team have designed and undertaken a comprehensive community engagement process in support of this application and others like it to ensure a clear and transparent application process for all stakeholders. Stakeholders like the Community Association and Ward Councillor's office are actively invited to participate in our process, which focuses on informative and fact-based engagement and communications.

CONCLUSION

The proposed land use redesignation and associated development vision is in keeping with the city-wide goals and policies of the Municipal Development Plan and will facilitate a development vision that will introduce new and innovative housing options for Calgarians looking to live in established communities that enjoy excellent access to transit, existing infrastructure and community amenities. For the reasons outlined above, we respectfully request that Administration, Calgary Planning Commission and Council support this application.