

31 October 2019

Planning and Urban Development Committee

Re: Guidebook for Great Communities, 6 November 2019

As the Renfrew Community Association's Director of Planning and representative on the North Hill Local Growth Plan's working group, my experience with the Guidebook for Great Communities through the North Hill Local Growth Plan is relevant to this committee's discussion.

#### North Hill Local Growth Plan

In fall 2018 and winter 2019, the North Hill Local Growth Plan working group met to understand the planning system and to use online input to create a vision for the growth plan. In April, we had an activity looking at where we expected people would be and what activities they'd do. Essentially, it was an area map showing body heat — where many people would be moving around by many means and where few people would be. In May, we took the area map magnified so the scale worked with Lego blocks and talked about the height of buildings. In June, we reviewed specific sections of the area to go over details about activity and scale. It wasn't until our session in September when we were introduced to the Guidebook that I realized that we weren't just piloting local area plans that included more than one community, we were piloting the new Guidebook.

Those sessions from April and May make me trust the Guidebook, but I doubt I or other working group members have fully digested the Guidebook's contents. I expected the new Guidebook would add a few new forms (ideally including urban townhouses and rowhouses so we can have abundant, dense, family-sized homes) and we'd just slide some streets up the scale in the last Developed Areas Guidebook by a certain number of increments. That method might work but wouldn't produce homes for all the people who want to live in Calgary in the next generation or two. The Guidebook's method does that more effectively and allows more flexible designs than my idea or our current system.

#### What I don't like about the Guidebook right now

1. It's long. Could an external technical writer or editor go over it? A high school graduate with an hour or two should be able to understand the land use bylaw and have a hope of developing something. Developers shouldn't just be people who can hire consultants to work through the code and lawyers to fight through the application and appeal process. A shorter, simpler Guidebook should make it easier for many people to be small scale developers. A compact code is more likely to produce a compact city.
2. There has been talk of removing heritage policies from the Guidebook, which is concerning.

3. Our built form policy and our stormwater management policy don't seem to align with each other. I'm sure industry has pointed out other technical details where City policies disagree with each other.

4. There's a sense that there hasn't been enough engagement or acceptance of the Guidebook. Having time for more engagement and discussion so the Guidebook and North Hill go to Council together, or two weeks apart so North Hill can be updated if needed, seems to be a remedy.

#### What I like about the Guidebook

1. Life happens at street level. The Guidebook's focus on what happens on the ground should help us better consider trade-offs between buildings' street level design and height. I hope the Guidebook's approach allows for more lovable and durable buildings, so we see replacing aging buildings as an upward trade.

2. The parking section of chapter 3 is an improvement. Notably, the direction that parking requirements should be based on geographic location, not the type of use, should produce better local buildings and encourage adaptive reuse. A few months ago, an applicant wanted to put a restaurant with a residence above in a century-old brick building on Edmonton Trail. The current work-live parking requirement of five stalls makes parking consume as much land as the building. This is an unproductive use of valuable land. It would be better to remove red tape and let businesses decide how much parking they need. Until then, the Guidebook is an improvement because it doesn't require a building on Edmonton Trail to have as much parking as a building in isolated places.

3. Finally, the Guidebook's provision for a single low-density district will be essential in how Calgary grows while retaining abundant, attainable family-sized homes. I hope it allows for widespread incremental growth that allows families to adapt as their circumstances change. Done right, it should help us have children in neighbourhoods with schools, help our local businesses be profitable and stay open, and perhaps produce a range of unit sizes so three generations of a family can live within walking distance of each other.

The low-density district is an example of deregulation. Our current planning system doesn't prevent local redevelopment; it only ensures that existing detached homes will be replaced by larger detached homes with one door, instead of those with two or more. Allowing market-rate, attainable housing throughout the city would give us a competitive advantage over other cities like Vancouver and Toronto that, instead of a free market, believe that a detached home should only be replaced with a larger home for residents who are as rich or richer than current residents.

Our neighbourhoods may change as a result. However, those changes may be better than the alternatives. As Alex Bozickovic, a Toronto-based architecture critic, describes, "The 'character,' in the way we often think about it, will change. There will be more front doors. But the alternative is a city that shuts out new

arrivals, or shunts them into illegal rooming houses, and grey-market basements, and condos on old industrial sites. If that is the city we end up building, it will say a lot about our character."<sup>1</sup>

We may begin to see 'stability' as many small changes on every block rather than neighbourhoods that are emptier than they were a few years or a generation ago and schools that are kept open by bussing children across the city. Parts of Renfrew show what a low-density district could look like in Calgary with multi-unit or clustered housing types that are compatible in scale with detached homes.

Today, some neighbourhoods contribute more to MDP growth goal than others because zoning prevents growth. If that continues, residents of the neighbourhoods that grow will likely want more and larger amenities, adding more public infrastructure that we won't be able to afford to maintain.

Cities are complex, adaptive systems consisting of people and land. If we're like other North American cities, we're functionally insolvent. Fortunately, Calgarians can decide what to do with our land in response to this predicament. I don't know how much private investment we're going to need or how much public infrastructure we'll have to stop repairing to balance our private-to-public investment ratio. Maybe I shouldn't be enthusiastic about what that means for my neighbourhood. However, I'd much rather have all of Calgary's neighbourhoods allowing many different types of small changes, than have Renfrew punch above our weight to get Calgary's finances in order while other parts of the city get a pass because they claim 'heritage' or 'character.' It took us decades to get here. Like post-flood clean up, it's going to take many people to get us out of this mess.

Thank you for considering my perspective,

Nathan Hawryluk

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-term-neighbourhood-character-is-a-euphemism-for-something-ugly/>

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