

Jamieson, Robyn

From: Haysboro President <president@haysboro.org>
Sent: Tuesday, November 05, 2019 10:26 PM
Subject: [EXT] My hot take - Guidebook for Great Communities
Attachments: why every community needs to adopt density.pdf

Hi All,

I've added many of you to the list to read my thoughts on 'why every community needs to adopt density'. With the guidebook going to PUD tomorrow (yes I know this is late email) and with many community members having emailed me in the past months with regards to the guidebook, I now need to speak up.

I cannot support the efforts to stall the work because there hasn't been community engagement. I understand there are city-wide implications but I need to be very vocal and say that residents are not experts - not when it comes to planning. What residents are is: committed, caring, and concerned. Their lack of information is exactly why they oppose change. I have seen public engagement and rarely do I see anyone out to listen, people want to be listened to. I say this as a resident who has spent the better part of three years learning as much as I can through learning experiences, attending facilitated sessions, and doing my own extra-curricular reading. I say this knowing every single person on this thread is a resident and that many have also spent time to learn and advocate for their communities. I say this knowing with all my work I have limited expertise when it comes to best practices of guiding land uses. I say this knowing we need to move forward with change in our growth strategies in our city.

Residents have a huge part to play in ensuring great communities. Supporting local businesses, getting to know their neighbours, attending community sponsored events. What kind of house you live in doesn't dictate your capacity for engagement. Opening this process to community engagement serves to create a situation where people get to play expert without taking in the facts and the reality of how growth can either enable our city to be thriving and conscious of best practices or alternately, how stubborn attitudes will hold us back from creating vibrant neighbourhoods of which we have examples in our own city.

I wrote a letter, it's very personal, and very vulnerable. I've attached it and sincerely hope you all take the time to read it. I am the reason every community needs density immediately.

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Why every community needs to adopt density.

Tomorrow the Guidebook for Great Communities is presented to the Planning and Urban Development Committee before it goes to council in December for approval. I've been fortunate to be part of the crafting of the guidebook through open houses, online and in-person feedback, and through conversations with community members, city administration, and my community association peers. The guidebook is a narrative about people who work and live in neighbourhoods, but we don't know these fictional people, so we remove ourselves from the story and instead replace it with our own. Our house, our street, our community. Our opinions become inherently selfish because there's no time in a planning document to develop a character which we can empathize with.

I am not a fictional character. My name is Kourtney Branagan and I'm the President of the Haysboro Community Association. I sit on our planning committee and am on two working groups with the City of Calgary for the Established Areas Growth and Change Strategy. Currently I work in community development in two roles that cover event management, communication strategy, and relationship building.

I am the mother of two girls who live within walking and biking distance of their school. I am the neighbour who has volunteered for six years in my community. I'm the neighbour who weeds her garden and shovels her sidewalk. My daughters swim at the JCC and take piano at our local community hall – also within walking and biking distance.

I am also the reason all communities need to adopt the guidebook and allow the City to move forward with blanket rezoning. I'm the neighbour who, because I separated from my husband this summer, now find herself renting in a new infill four-plex... but not in my community. I was fortunate to find a place that is still close enough for the girls to bike to school and it's not even too far to walk. It does require crossing a major intersection so I'm no longer comfortable sending them on their own. My new place is on Elbow Drive, arguably not an inner-community road.

The option for rental within my community existed – in houses I didn't want to maintain solo or in an apartment on Horton Road which is literally, on the other side of the tracks. I wanted the option to have a small yard and space to do container gardening while having a unit that didn't feel like we were living on top of each other. Without zoning in my neighbourhood to allow for multi-unit housing on the interior of my community my options for rental didn't exist. And if I had chosen to purchase my choice would have been a house in which to maintain or an apartment which didn't afford us the space I sought. I truly felt paralyzed because my community only offers two types of living. There are strong anti-density sentiments from many neighbours, or at least 'not on my street', which basically becomes every street.

The criticisms often present themselves in one or both of two scenarios.

Height. In order to achieve a minimum floor plan developers need to go up. Blame setbacks for that. In my old house the neighbours across the street have a two story house – the ceiling heights are, from basement up – 9 feet, 11 feet, 9 feet. The house is a monstrosity. But because it was a single dwelling unit on a RC1 property I doubt it received the scrutiny an infill would. Guess what else – I love my neighbours. They are amazing people and their fantastic personalities matter more than the exterior of the house.

Parking. My other neighbours. Lovely people. An older couple with no kids at home. They've got a double car garage in the back. They've also got two vehicles parked on the street out front because their garage is full. My other neighbours, those are the kids that babysit for me. They're a combined family with two adults and four kids under one roof. They've got a single car garage they use for storage and three vehicles parked out front. When one child comes home from university for the summer, there will be four.

There are more single people living solo than ever before, we have single parents, couples without children, and every other conceivable combination of people sharing a property in today's world. We are moving forward with secondary suites and backyard suites. We have boomers who will want to age in place in their neighbourhoods but have little option to find alternate living styles. By not adopting the Guidebook we are sterilizing neighbourhoods and making established communities exclusive a style of living that is based on a idyllic lifestyle portrayed in 1960s sitcoms.

The Guidebook should be adopted and implemented while work like the Established Areas Growth and Change Strategy continues an while Area Redevelopment Plans are rolled out city wide. The knowledge around planning best practices has evolved and so too should we in our approach to creating new opportunities to revitalize and support our aging communities.

Community is built by people practicing kindness, compassion, and acts of service. Community is built when you know your neighbour will always lend you eggs even though your political signs are oppositional. Community is built when people leave the walls and windows that house them and join together at events, for projects, and in company. Community is built around a shared value system. Failing to rezone signals an exclusionary value system, relying on a degree of wealth in order to determine if a person is 'good enough' for your neighbourhood to live in a detached home.

The next time you think about why density is bad for a neighbourhood, think about me and the options I could have had. Think about how it would have allowed me to stay. Think about how I am excluded after having given six years of dedicated volunteer time. Because of the lack of choice in my community I was essentially forcibly evicted from my own community.

