



460 - 5119 Elbow Drive SW P 403.201.5305
Calgary, Alberta T2V 1H2 F 403.201.5344

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City of Calgary
800 Macleod TR SE
Calgary, AB
T2P 2M5

ATTN:

Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development (PUD) Members

RE:

6 November 2019 Meeting of PUD
Item 6.1 - Guidebook for Great Communities (Guidebook)

Dear Committee Members,

I send my regrets as I will be unable to join my fellow Panel Members in their discussion with Committee Members about the draft Guidebook.

Through October, the Panel Members have had the opportunity to engage with Administration and among each other on the importance of draft Guidebook and the role it will play within an emerging new planning system for Calgary. I have had an industry stake in that dialogue, as my firm, CivicWorks, is a Calgary-based urban planning consultancy that supports developer-builders in Calgary's Established Areas.

Building on the letter previously submitted by CivicWorks dated 25 September 2019 forming part of the public submission record for this item, I reiterate our key message:

The Guidebook will be used by a wide range of stakeholders and become the foundation on which we build all future Multi-Community Local Area Plans and the new Land Use Bylaw (Calgary Code). While perfect shouldn't get in the way of good enough, CivicWorks is concerned the Guidebook is not ready to be deployed.

The Panel Member perspective I offer to the Committee is summarized below.

What's the big deal?

With the goal of achieving a solid beginning for the Guidebook—a beginning all external stakeholder Panel Members want—I see the big deal as:

1. This is a game-changing step—Calgary's next-generation planning system will be born with the Guidebook.
2. These are not guidelines—these are statutory policies of the highest order, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Council's MDP.
3. The Guidebook policies will come to trump all others—the one ring to rule them all.
4. It will be the statutory policy foundation to directly shape all Multi-Community Plans to come, and the era of dated protectionist single-community Area Redevelopment Plans is seemingly at an end.
5. It will be the statutory policy foundation to directly shape the next Land Use Bylaw (Calgary's Code), and the era of zoning that protects the single-detached dwelling in the Established Area is seemingly at an end.



Why all the tension?

I see the key concerns raised at the heart of the tension being felt by external stakeholder Panel Members as:

1. There is limited shared understanding by external-to-Administration-stakeholders about the content and meaning of the Guidebook and, more fundamentally, there is a lack of understanding that this is game-changing statutory policy.
2. There is limited shared understanding by Council that this is game-change policy that will supersede much policy that exists and influence all planning policy and Land Use Bylaw reform to come.
3. Administration will not be ready to consistently apply the Guidebook and that there is a lack of understanding about who will be Administration's keeper and champion of the Guidebook's meaning.
4. If we're all agreed (and that must include Council) that this will be a next-generation "living" policy document, there is a lack of understanding about the ready-to-launch and fully resourced framework for testing, monitoring, sustaining, and amending the Guidebook in the long-term.

All of the above has CivicWorks concerned because the premature deployment of the Guidebook is akin to launching a new "operating system" with a high risk of bugs and without users having been able to beta test it first. CivicWorks believes the tremendous promise of the Guidebook could be compromised by this reality and may have unintended consequences in achieving good city building outcomes—consequences like:

- Community stakeholder confusion, frustration and amplified opposition to development applications of all types.
- Administration's review resulting in variable interpretation of policy that increases development application processing complexity, time required, and uncertainty in realizing recommendation outcomes.
- Council confusion and frustration resulting in increased uncertainty of approval outcomes.
- Increased frequency and complexity of SDAB matters arising following development approvals by the Administration

Got a suggestion?

Before becoming the law of the land, the draft Guidebook needs more developmental steps and time to demonstrate to all stakeholders the clear links and its translation within the first Multi-Community Local Plans, at the very least North Hill (not yet public), and those first Multi-Community Local Plans should be used to test and demonstrate the land use resignation and development permit translations of Guidebook intent.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
CivicWorks Studio

David White | Principal
B.A., M.Sc.Pl., RPP, MCIP

