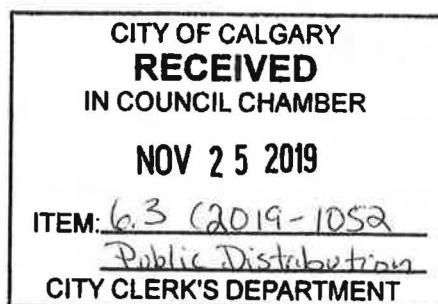




Monday, November 25, 2019

Poverty Talks!  
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The City of Calgary  
Councillors Offices (8001)  
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Dear Honourable Mayor and Councillors,

My Name is Susan Gwynn and today I am here to talk to you on behalf of Poverty Talks! The lived experience advisory committee that helps instruct and guide the Enough For All (E4A) strategy for the City of Calgary.

First, we would like to say the we understand the complexity and difficulty that is involved in making decisions that impact Calgarians each and every day and the council's desire to continue to try to protect Calgary's most vulnerable populations.

To that vain Poverty Talks! Would like to remind you of the effects of cuts to programs designed to remove barriers for our vulnerable populations.

Fewer Affordable housing units mean that the 81,000 Calgarians struggling to pay for their shelter costs and the 44,000 Calgarian households spending more than 50% of their income on housing are moved further away from hope and must continue to struggle as the waiting list for affordable housing continues to get longer and longer. That waitlist population includes 1377 seniors and 9726 children, according to the 2018 Calgary Housing Needs Assessment. That is 11,103 members of our most vulnerable Calgarians waiting for housing that would allow them a new higher quality of life and for the seniors we might add quantity of life as well.

The Calgary Housing Company says that the "waitlist provides a snapshot to understand the significant and consistent need for more affordable housing" and goes on to remind us that "the trend has been consistent - a steady increase in the number of applicants seeking affordable housing."

Providing less affordable housing comes at a much higher cost than can ever be reflected in any budget you could create.

Longer wait times for services like Fair Entry are a serious concern for vulnerable Calgarians for a number of reasons. It may seem like not a big deal to most people, but longer wait times for people with disabilities, certain types of mental health problems, seniors, the homeless, single parents and the working poor all experience this kind of delay more profoundly than the non-vulnerable populations. Missed appointments come at a cost that people living in poverty just can't afford and often when appointments are made for things like medical

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specialist and social support agencies the patient or client is not consulted as when they are booked. So delays in services can actually result in serious detrimental consequences that are outside of the applicant's control. These delays also impede low income Calgarians ability to participate in community activities or even come and address their concerns at their city council. The lines, both physical and virtual for services are already substantial. The physical line at the end of the month often leaves and stretch down the outside of the builds. This is a challenge, especially in the winter months and inclement weather.

Cutting hours, services and maintenance to places like public libraries and recreation centres takes away from affordable leisure, learning and physical activities for low income individual, families and youth. In my neighbourhood the public library is a hub of activity from the moment it opens until the closing time every single day. Like most libraries people go there to use the internet to search for jobs, find books for school projects and reports, newcomers learn English, study groups meet and support one another to the point where it is not an uncommon sight to see groups of people sitting on the floor because there are no tables available. These spaces give people a safe place to go and find a good book, get some exercise, take a class to learn a new skill, make a friend, to catch up on the news, fill out and print applications for low income housing, search and find mental health services, or maybe just be out of the weather and relax.

The proposed tax increase to homeowners is 3.03% or \$5.10 a month for the average homeowner. It is a significant increase, yes, but I would also like you to consider the fact that the lowest rung of the low income transit pass users, the very poorest of all Calgarians are about to experience an increase of 150% in order for that program to stay in existence for all Calgarian to be able to access it if they need it. A much need and welcome safety net for all.

I will leave you with this:

"The huge demand for this program is not because people got laid off from their downtown Calgary jobs. These are actually people we never knew existed, people living in extreme poverty in Calgary that we had no visibility of and it's important for us to be able to know who they are and help them in whatever way we can."

That is a quote from Mayor Nenshi in 2017 speaking about the surprisingly high demand for the low-income transit pass. When creating this budget, please keep those words in mind and honour their intent. For this city, our city, to know and help the most vulnerable members of our community in whatever way we can.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Susan Gwynn  
Poverty Talks! Steering Committee