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February 4, 2020

Tom Ward  
Manager, Heritage Conservation Advisory Services  
Culture, Multi-culturalism and Status of Women  
Old St. Stephen's College  
8820 112th Street  
Edmonton, AB T6G2P8

Re: Scarboro Heritage Conservation Status

Dear Mr. Ward:

On behalf of the National Association for Olmsted Parks [NAOP], I am writing to support the Scarboro Community Association's application to designate the neighborhood of Scarboro for special and significant Heritage Conservation status. This community retains a remarkable degree of its original design integrity, remaining a vital example of the visionary artistry and practicality intended by its creator, John Charles Olmsted, a pre-eminent landscape architect of his era.

This neighborhood, originally called Sunalta, was designed in 1910 for the Canadian Pacific Railroad which was, at that time, seeking to transform the "frontier" city of Calgary into an important business destination with attractive residential enclaves for family life. By hiring John Olmsted, senior partner of Olmsted Brothers, and son and former partner of the late Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., the Railroad had engaged the premier landscape planners of their time, renowned well beyond the American borders for their innovative yet respectful landscape shaping, whether for public, institutional or private residential projects.

Olmsted Brothers' suburban planning was characterized by careful attention to the natural features of a site – the "genius of the place," whether in topography, vegetation or viewsheds. Their design axiom was the creation of residential lots of diverse shapes and sizes, set back from the well-drained, carefully graded tree-lined streets to secure a sense of privacy and domestic leisure in contrast with the fast-paced gridded business districts. A picturesque and generous street pattern, canopied by mature trees, curving throughout the community, created small parklets for neighborly gatherings or recreation. This design pattern reinforced asymmetry and a park-like ambiance throughout the neighborhood.

Caveats running with the land included appropriate architectural scale for each lot; ample setbacks from streetscape and neighbor; attention to view corridors and vistas; and regulations regarding use, auxiliary buildings, fencing, etc. Such covenants, frequently written by the Olmsted firm for their clients, were the means to ensure for the future retention of the unique artistic character of the design with its attendant fiscal value.

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Additionally, the Olmsted Brothers paid special attention to the place and purpose of their residential projects within the context of the whole urban environment. John Olmsted was very aware of Calgary's development in his planning for Sunalta-Scarboro, maintaining that such a high-quality and aesthetically laid out suburb would enhance the "future good of the city." [Letter to J. Lonsdale Doupe, January 11, 1910].

How fortunate for Calgary that within its environs it contains three residential projects benefitting from Olmsted Brothers' planning. At this point, it is unclear to what degree the intended Olmsted designs for Bridgeland and Mount Royal were implemented, or have been altered. In Scarboro, however, much of its intended design, spatial layout and aesthetic beauty are still present and cherished by the community.

Therefore, the NAOP supports the designation of Scarboro as a Heritage District, including the strict application of all existing caveats which run with the land, such as the George Anderson Caveat, which prohibits commercial use, stipulates only single-family dwellings per lot and requires sufficient setbacks. Any contemplated changes to city ordinances should not be allowed to undermine applicable caveats and community spatial considerations. It is critical to recognize Scarboro's historic and cultural significance for Calgary, its province, its nation and for its place in the Olmsted design heritage

For 40 years, the National Association for Olmsted Parks has been dedicated to advancing Olmsted principles and the legacy of irreplaceable landscapes that revitalize communities and enrich people's lives. We are now actively engaged in planning for the Olmsted Bicentennial in 2022, to recognize and celebrate the extraordinary and expansive heritage of well-designed places across both our nations.

NAOP looks forward to including Scarboro in this celebration of landscape heritage.

Cordially,



Anne Neal Petri  
President and CEO

CC:

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