Letter of Support: Urban Design Review Panel

May 23, 2017

Mr. David Down
The City of Calgary
800 Macleod Trail SE
Calgary AB T2P 2M5

RE: Support for Recommendations of the Urban Design Review Framework Project

Dear Mr. Down:

The Urban Design Review Panel would like to offer this letter of endorsement of the recommendations prepared by the Urban Design Review Framework Committee in both their objective and intent. As a panel we have been consulted as stakeholders on several occasions by UDRF, and have been kept apprised of developments. We have been provided opportunity to review final drafts and have provided comment. It is our belief that the process recommendations address our concerns regarding capacity, process, focus and arm's length independent peer review as detailed in our letter to PUD dated July 13, 2015 and appended here for reference. We further believe the process as outlined will provide greater certainty for applicants and will provide greater outcomes for the City of Calgary with respect to the Urban Realm.

Sincerely,

Janice Liebe Chair UDRP
Representative nominated by the Alberta Association of Architects
Architect AAA, AIBC, OAA, MRAIC
jliebe@dialogdesign.ca 403-541-5432

On behalf of:

Brian Horton Vice-Chair UDRP
Representative nominated by the APPI

Bruce Nelligan
Representative nominated by the APEGA

Yogeshwar Navagrah
Representative nominated by the ALAA

Chad Russill
Representative nominated by the AAA

Robert Leblond
Representative nominated by the AAA

Philip Vandermay
Representative nominated by the AAA

Terry Klassen
Representative nominated by the AALA

CC: The Alberta Association of Architects
APEGA
Alberta Professional Planners Institute
The Alberta Association of Landscape Architecture

LETTER OF SUPPORT: URBAN DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

July 13, 2015

The City of Calgary
800 Macleod Trail SE
Calgary AB T2P 2M5

RE: Recommendation to combine Calgary Planning Commission and the Urban Design Review Panel – For circulation to PUD Committee Members prior to the July 17, 2015 Meeting

The Urban Design Review Panel would like to offer this letter as a contribution to the deliberations regarding the current recommendation to combine CPC with UDRP. We offer these considerations as dedicated, practicing, Calgarian professionals who volunteer our time as a sign of our commitment to our City. We believe in the process that was established to recognize and underline the importance of Urban Design. As panel members and as practicing professionals we are in a unique position to view the process from both perspectives, and from the perspective of our clients.

The intent behind the proposal, as identified in the Executive Summary of the Decision Framework Document is the following:

> "*This report presents recommendations to realize a new model for decision making that* ***streamlines process, reduces redundancy, provides greater certainty early within the application process, and focusses the discussion of CPC, a technical review panel***."

We are in agreement with the overall goals and intent of the recommendation. We have comments to offer regarding the specific implementation plans to achieve these objectives. We would also like to emphasize that it is important to remember the purpose of panel, the goals that it addressed upon its' formation in 2004, and the implementation of its' wider mandate in 2007 so that these are not lost in the considerations for reformation.

Arm's Length Independent Peer Review and the Importance of Urban Design

The Feb 19, 2004 Stakeholder Group Review of CPC recommended the formation of an Urban Design Review Committee to act as a circulation referee on certain development applications as a three year trial. This was in response to a growing dialogue in the community regarding the importance of Urban Design issues:

> "An Urban Design Panel ... has the potential to be an **important catalyst in ensuring the commitment to design excellence. Its very presence will send a strong message to the public and to the design community that the quality of design is a vital ingredient in building the vibrant community**"

The vast majority of major Canadian cities currently have an Urban Design Review Panel (refer to the attached). While they may vary in name and in the specific make-up of the panel, the purpose remains the same: **to provide independent, professional peer review** of significant projects that have an impact on the urban realm. If Calgary proceeds with the current recommendation, it will become one of the very few major Canadian cities without a dedicated, independent panel for the purpose of reviewing Urban Realm design and impact. Indeed, it was one of the original terms of reference for the formation of UDRP:

> "It is critical that the members of the Panel are not only respected members of their individual professions but are seen to be **impartial and at arm's length from the Administration**" *By-Law No. 4722 June 16 2009*

With the proposed loss of UDRP and the role of urban design review folded within CPC, it can no longer be considered to be arm's length and independent as CPC membership includes the General Managers of Transportation and Planning, Development and Assessment in addition to two members of council.

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Capacity, Process and Focus

We have concerns regarding the capacity of CPC to handle the increased workload to provide two reviews to applications. As the recommendations suggest, reviews are best provided early in the process. We would like to take this opportunity to go on record that UDRP has long expressed that the timing of the review is far too late to be impactful. Although early recommendations for the circulation of documents to UDRP were to be within 35 days of the application, UDRP in practice receives documentation very late in the review process, well after conversations have been had with city staff and CPAG comments have been provided – certainly well beyond the 35 day guideline recommendation. We can certainly understand why this may make the committee comments seem redundant and perhaps wasteful to applicants – we sit on both sides of the table. We support the recommendation to have an early review.

We emphasize that this does not remove a review– it moves the responsibility of initial review from UDRP to CPC, and maintains a second review by CPC for final approval and reference to council. UDRP is a volunteer committee. With approximately 20 - 3 hour meetings a year attended by a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 9 senior members of the design community this represents a significant added value to the City and the community. As CPC is also largely a volunteer committee with challenges for quorum noted in the recommendation, we therefore have questions regarding capacity of CPC to handle the additional review scope.

Finally, UDRP is singularly focussed on Urban Design. The mandate for CPC is much broader. It is our feeling that result of combining the two committees will be a lessening of the discussion and focus on Urban Design issues.

Given the above concerns we would like to suggest that hosting the UDRP review within 35 days of DP application as stated in the existing guidelines and providing commentary at the same time as the CPAG would serve the same purpose as the recommendations on the table. Maintaining UDRP would alleviate the pressure on CPC to host multiple reviews and would offer the benefit of a fully independent peer review – one that is fully focussed on Urban Design.

We support and encourage the growth and importance of input by Urban Design and Heritage within administration. However, independent peer review is the mechanism that is most broadly used by communities to comprehensively adjudicate the evolution of the urban realm and we believe Calgary will benefit from maintaining our contribution. Indeed, the Urban Design Review Panel Evaluation (October 23, 2007) found that 70% of respondents were supportive of the UDRP role and its' continuance, and administration's position was that it "clearly added value to the development review process". The removal of the panel at this time will signal to the broader community that the importance of the delivery of quality Urban Design in Calgary is diminishing.

In conclusion:

We agree that the process as it is currently established could and should be improved. It is in our professional and community interest to provide thoughtful and constructive commentary – all in an effort to build a better Calgary. To that end, we would like to be part of the conversation on how best to transform the process. While UDRP was informed that changes were being contemplated, it was not until the Planning, Development and Assessment Report to SPC on Planning and Urban Development regarding the Decision Framework Project was published on July 10th that we were able to see what was proposed. We have tried to iterate our concerns above and would like to see greater detail on how the recommendations are intended to be fully implemented. We ask that more time be set aside to allow for fuller consultation and consideration of the impacts of the recommendations prior to approval. **We ask that this letter be circulated to PUD members for review in advance of this Fridays' meeting, and be included in full in the report to Council.**

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Sincerely,

Janice Liebe Chair UDRP
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Brian Horton Vice-Chair UDRP
Representative nominated by the APPI
MPLAN, MCIP, RPP

Jade Kanevski UDRP Panel Member
Representative nominated by the AAA
Architect AAA, AIA

Doug Leighton UDRP Panel Member
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Judith MacDougall UDRP Panel Member
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Bruce Nelligan
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Keir Stuhlmiller UDRP Panel Member
Representative nominated by the AAA
Architect AAA

Matt Williams UDRP Panel Member
Representative nominated by the AALA

cc: The Alberta Association of Architects
APEGA
Alberta Professional Planners Institute
The Alberta Association of Landscape Architecture

Enclosure: "Urban Design Review Panels across Canada"