



PARKDALE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

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June 25, 2015

Councillor Druh Farrell

Sent via email: ward07@calgary.ca

Dear Councillor Farrell,

RE: MONITORING REPORT ON CONTEXTUAL DWELLINGS

The Parkdale Community Association Planning & Development Committee (P&D) provided extensive input on the impacts of the contextual approval process to Matt Zablonksi, of The City of Calgary in February 2015. Our primary concern is not related to how improve the process but rather to question whether the process is appropriate for the redevelopment of inner city communities. Our perspective is the contextual process bypasses communities and adjacent residents and needs more than minor amendments.

As a committee that represents an inner city community, we agree with Council's direction to encourage redevelopment in the Developed Areas of the city and we support sensitive intensification. We also understand the intent of the Contextual Approval process that allows for quicker processing times and less cost for the developer. However, while one party experiences enhanced service, another often experiences reduced service. This letter provides our committee's views on PUD2015-0437, Monitoring Report on Contextual Development.

Parkdale is being heavily impacted by massive redevelopment through the contextual approval process. Some of the impacts on our community are itemized in more detail below.

Our request is that this entire process be given more careful consideration and that this report be tabled for further consultation on the impacts beyond faster approvals.

Impacts of the contextual process

1. Serial contextual redevelopments:

Parkdale has observed that builders and developers submit applications for one property at a time when over time they are actually redeveloping entire blocks, one property at a time. We view this as abuse of the contextual process. When four 50 foot lots are redeveloped with eight semidetached dwellings following the contextual process, the impact changes the entire nature of the street and also has significant impacts on the properties to the rear.

We suggest that planners more carefully monitor this type of activity and when several side-by-side applications are submitted they be treated together to ensure sensitivity to community being impacted.

2. Poor quality design:

The contextual process is often used for speculative development without consideration of the community within which development is occurring and the process has removed the opportunity for communities and adjacent property owners to provide input on design. A clear indication of the decline in quality is how long these “spec” buildings sit empty.

Our committee appreciates aesthetics and design are matters of personal choice, but quality and attractiveness benefit both the vendor and the community. As we pointed out to the City planner, we have noticed a decline in building attractiveness on many streets in Parkdale. In many cases the lack of front façade articulation, use of vinyl finishing, poor quality landscaping with sod and small trees, the loss of front porches, the installation of overlooking windows, in some cases where there are directly opposite windows of adjacent existing homes, and second and third level balconies which look into homes and private amenity space and the increase in massing through the three storey flat-roof design detract from the overall appearance and saleability of the properties.

We suggest that aesthetics and privacy be considered and that planners consider previously approved Infill Guidelines when considering contextual applications. New developments often have architectural guidelines and we suggest these be considered for the inner city communities as well. Meeting setbacks and building height requirements is not enough.

3. Inconsiderate construction processes:

The contextual approval process attracts many smaller builders and developers, enhancing their ability to work in the Calgary housing market. However, we have noticed a significant change in project management with little to no activity during the week days and an increase in weekend and late evening work, which disrupts the quality of life for adjacent neighbours. The lack of professionalism on the part of many construction crews and unsafe working conditions demonstrated by unskilled workers is noticeable. Signage is often lacking, trees are clear-cut, adjacent properties experience a loss of landscaping and retaining walls, site fencing is left open, temporary toilets are not secured and not cleaned often enough and trucks leave a trail of mud and gravel from the construction vehicles. The construction process often restricts access to driveways and rear access and the back lanes are frequently left in poor condition with potholes, damaged landscaping and debris.

We suggest more stringent and enforceable construction guidelines be put in place for all developers, especially those small builders who don't seem to care about reputation. These guidelines should include restoration of the rear lane plus front sidewalks and boulevards to pre-construction.

Finally, I want to echo the comments sent to you by Colynn Kerr, one of our P&D members. As he noted, in the application of IP2007 there are conflicted interpretations of the word "contextual". We have been informed that The City views "contextual" as a process to "rationalize workflows." However, in Division 2 of IP2007, Definitions and Methods, there are the following definitions:

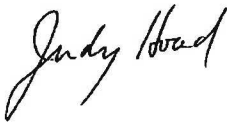
- "contextual adjacent buildings" means: the two closest buildings to a parcel...
- "contextual building depth" means: where there at least two other buildings....
- "contextual front setback" means: where there at least two other buildings.....
- "contextual height" means: the average contextual high point.....

To the lay person, the word "contextual" is consistent with definitions above, and development should be considered "in the context of its surroundings". We see only an expedited approval process with no opportunity for consideration or oversight by nearby stakeholders and developments are being approved with little or no sensitivity to the neighbourhood "context".

As stated at the beginning of this letter, we request this entire process be given more careful consideration and that his report be tabled for further consultation on the impacts beyond faster approvals.

Thank you for your interest in understanding how our community views the use of the contextual approval process. Please share our comments with your colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judy Hoad". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Judy Hoad
Chair, Planning & Development Committee
Parkdale Community Association