

URBAN DESIGN REVIEW FRAMEWORK UPDATE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Urban Design Review Framework project is to achieve higher quality urban design outcomes through improvements to the urban design review process at The City of Calgary. The project focuses on refining the timing and effectiveness of urban design review within the application review process to ensure that design comments are consistently provided prior to significant design decisions being made, and to improve clarity and certainty for applicants and decision-makers. A Working Group was created to examine the role of urban design review within The City's development decision-making processes. It reviewed best practice research and conducted a program of stakeholder engagement with each of the four main stakeholder groups: Calgary Planning Commission; Urban Design Review Panel; Community Planning; and a group of invited experts in relevant areas of design and development with considerable application experience. Feedback from each session was used to build subsequent sessions and became a key influence on the final recommendations included in the Urban Design Review Framework document (Attachment 1). Together with the results of a review of current urban design review processes, the research and engagement results pointed to a number of actions which have been grouped into four recommendation themes supporting the proposition that in order to achieve better urban design outcomes, it is important to:

1. Champion the importance of urban design / urban design review;
2. Ensure early and ongoing urban design involvement;
3. Refine relationships and processes; and
4. Review scope, mandate and structure.

These recommendations themes and their accompanying actions are detailed in the Urban Design Review Framework document. Implementation of some is already achieved, others are underway or under consideration.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the SPC on Planning & Urban Development recommend that Council:

1. Receive the Urban Design Review Framework Document for information, and
2. Direct Administration to revise the Terms of Reference of the Urban Design Review Panel with appropriate stakeholder input, to return through the SPC on Planning & Urban Development to Council no later than Q2, 2017.

URBAN DESIGN REVIEW FRAMEWORK UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION OF THE SPC ON PLANNING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, DATED 2017 MARCH 08:

That Council:

1. Receive the Urban Design Review Framework Document for information; and
2. Direct Administration to revise the Terms of Reference for the Urban Design Review Panel **and provide a more detailed implementation plan**, with stakeholder input **including the Industry/City Process Improvement Working Group**, and return through the SPC on Planning & Urban Development to Council no later than **2017 July**.

Excerpts from the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the SPC on Planning and Urban Development, Held 2017 March 08:

WITHDRAW, Moved by Councillor Demong, that with permission of Committee, Councillor Demong withdraw his proposed motion, as amended, with respect to PUD2017-0219, as follows:

“AMENDMENT, Moved by Councillor Pincott, that Administration Recommendation 2, after Amendment, contained in Report PUD2017-0219 be amended by adding the words “, and to return with a revised Terms of Reference,” following the words “for approval timelines”.

CARRIED

APPROVE, AS AMENDED, Moved by Councillor Demong, that the Administration Recommendations contained in Report PUD2017-0219 be approved, **as amended and after amendment**, as follows:

That the SPC on Planning & Urban Development recommends that Council:

1. Receive the Urban Design Review Framework Document for information, and
2. **Direct Administration to include the Urban Design Review Framework project, as well as the draft Terms of Reference for the Urban Design Review Panel, to the Industry/City Continuous Process Improvements Initiative to consider process details, scope, resources, benchmarks and targets for approval timelines, and to return with a revised Terms of Reference to the SPC on Planning and Urban Development to Council no later than July 2017.”**

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

URBAN DESIGN REVIEW FRAMEWORK UPDATE

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

On 2016 June 20, Council directed “Administration to consult with interested stakeholders and report back to Council, by 2017 March, through the SPC on Planning & Urban Development, with an update on the process changes initiated, and recommendations to further improve urban design outcomes.”

On 2015 July 27, Council directed “Administration for further consultation with interested stakeholders and with members of the NextCity Advisory Committee, to return to Council through the SPC on Planning and Urban Development no later than Q2 2016.”

BACKGROUND

Great urban design is a critical component in the creation of a healthy, vibrant, and attractive city. It is best achieved through the coordination of all related disciplines, including planning, architecture, transportation planning, engineering and landscape design. Urban design excellence is a fundamental objective of Calgary’s Municipal Development Plan (MDP).

At the direction of Council and through discussion with the NextCity Advisory Committee, Administration has undertaken work to explore ways to achieve higher quality building, site and landscape design outcomes through improvements to the urban design review process.

The project involved research of best practice examples of urban design review in over 30 North American cities, and analysis of which process models might best suit the Calgary regulatory context. As well, extensive consultation was undertaken involving both internal and external stakeholders with relevant experience in design and application review processes. Urban Design formed and led a cross-representative Working Group with representatives of Planning staff, Calgary Approvals Coordination, Urban Design Review Panel and Calgary Planning Commission, which assisted in the creation and delivery of engagement sessions, synthesis of the stakeholder feedback, and crafting of recommendations for improvements.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

Two streams of work were undertaken to investigate and develop improvements to the design review process:

1. Internal Urban Design Review Process Refinements:

Application review process improvements are being tested, with an emphasis on ensuring that early design guidance, prior to formal development permit application, occurs on key project types or sites in alignment with Corporate Planning Applications Group (CPAG) processes, including:

- Formalized urban design specialist and CPAG circulation criteria have been proposed and are being tested for their effectiveness.
- Reporting of design recommendations is being reviewed for content and clarity.

2. Best Practices Research:

A number of commonalities were identified through a ‘best practice’ review of over 30 North American cities. Key elements of design review practice and design decision making were synthesised into four possible scenarios for discussion with the Working Group and each of the

URBAN DESIGN REVIEW FRAMEWORK UPDATE

key stakeholder groups. These scenarios tested, in particular, the ideas of early design review and greater collaboration between review bodies. (Refer to *Stakeholder Engagement Process* within the Document for a summary of feedback).

Scenario 1: Embedded Design Expertise explored the idea of disbanding UDRP and enhancing CPC with urban design expert members. This scenario was the least favoured by stakeholders as it removed the “arms length” aspect of the current UDRP, and increased the potential for urban design recommendations at decision, considered too late in the design process to make meaningful changes.

Scenario 2: Collaborative Design Expertise considered a collaborative relationship between the Urban Design Team and the Urban Design Review Panel, emphasising the importance of early design discussions through an iterative design review process, and a coordinated design recommendation resulting in a higher level of confidence at the time of decision. This was the most favoured scenario for its simplicity and potential to clarify recommendations.

Scenario 3: Collaborative + Distinct Decision-making assumed the collaborative urban design foundation with early design involvement, and tested the idea of separating Calgary Planning Commission into two bodies which would deal separately with development permit and land use issues. While it was acknowledged that this could be an effective way to elevate design recommendations, many saw it as adding additional complication and confusion and did not address the challenge of design recommendations being made at time of decision.

Scenario 4: Collaborative + Design Authority retained the collaborative relationship between the internal and external Urban Design review bodies and tested the idea of an urban design “authority” which could provide an urban design pass/fail for development permit application prior to the final Planning recommendation. It was felt that in order to be clear about what might generate a pass or fail, more prescriptive design/policy guidance may be required.

The results of both the research and engagement strongly favoured moving toward Scenario 2: Collaborative Design Expertise which prioritizes design discussions early in the application process. (Refer to page 15 of the Urban Design Review Framework document for more detail on *Scenario 2: Collaborative Design Expertise*). It was generally agreed that such refinements to the urban design review portion of the application process have the potential to minimize time delays by identifying and supporting the resolution of complex issues early on in the process and would help achieve better design outcomes. As well, in order to make the most effective use of the external expertise provided by the Urban Design Review Panel, it was felt that the Terms of Reference for the panel should be revised to include a broader comment mandate and a more flexible geographic range.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATION

A ten member Working Group was assembled that met bi-weekly between July and December 2016 to explore key issues, analyze the engagement results and to develop the project recommendations.

URBAN DESIGN REVIEW FRAMEWORK UPDATE

Key stakeholder groups included:

- A twenty-two member subject matter expert group including City of Calgary Community Planning, Legislative Services, external architects, planners, developers, and representatives of BILD (Calgary) and the Federation of Calgary Communities (FCC);
- Urban Design Review Panel (UDRP);
- Calgary Planning Commission (CPC).

Each group was separately engaged to identify issues, discuss ideas and respond to the preliminary recommendations through discussion sessions which were consistently facilitated across all stakeholder groups. Feedback from each session was used to build subsequent sessions and was used as a key component in drafting the final recommendations.

Strategic Alignment

The Municipal Development Plan (MDP) promotes site and building design that contributes to high quality living environments and attractive, walkable, diverse neighbourhoods and communities (MDP 2.4.2) and coherent and collaborative design of streets, building interfaces and public spaces (MDP 2.4.3).

Urban design objectives are also prominent in the Calgary Transportation Plan, the Centre City Plan, the Complete Streets Policy and the Urban Design Framework.

The Urban Design Team has been repositioned within Community Planning to allow for complete integration within the CPAG application review teams to foster ongoing internal design discussion during the review process, in alignment with Planning & Development Business Plan.

Proposed design review process refinements align with the ongoing initiatives of Calgary Approvals Coordination including the ongoing Initiative 5 Process Improvements project.

The Urban Design Review Framework project aligns with Action Plan 2015-2018 by aiming to improve transparency and understanding of the planning system; implement improvements to application processes; ensure early integration of urban design and public realm design into all aspects of the planning process and develop stakeholder relationships to achieve positive outcomes.

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

Social

Making decisions on urban design at the right point in the process and with the best use of internal and external design expertise creates a more transparent process for all stakeholders. Involvement of stakeholders in a discussion of the options for a new decision-making framework will help to ensure that it meets the needs of citizens and customers. An urban design review process that involves the right expertise at the right points of the development approval process with the right information will help result in improved urban design for Calgary.

Environmental

No implications identified.

URBAN DESIGN REVIEW FRAMEWORK UPDATE

Economic (External)

Improving the decision-making on urban design will result in greater transparency, improved clarity and more logical application approval. Greater certainty will result in increased confidence on the part of industry. Consistent early discussion of significant design issues will avoid costly changes and additional time spent later in the process. Involvement of stakeholders will help to determine the best way to achieve improvements to the review process.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

Internal process improvements will be part of Planning & Development's operating budget and completed through internal resources.

Current and Future Capital Budget:

No implications identified.

Risk Assessment

Changes to the way The City makes urban design decisions could risk opposition from development and building industry and community stakeholders. Continued dialogue on improvements to the urban design decision making process will help to ensure that the process meets the objectives of design input at the most effective point in the process, makes best use of available design expertise and informed design decision making while meeting the objectives of industry and citizens.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

In response to Council's direction, Administration has gathered information to formulate a range of recommendations for improving the urban design review portion of the application process that achieve timely and coordinated design input, optimize available expertise and better clarify urban design consideration in decision-making with the objective of achieving higher quality design outcomes.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Urban Design Review Framework Document
2. Urban Design Review Panel Terms of Reference (Draft)