

## City Council

Office of the Councillors | The City of Calgary  
PO Box 2100, Stn M | Mail code #80011 Calgary, AB T2P 2M5

### Re: Please support TT2020-1397 - Sound Wall Lifecycle Replacements for Critical Locations

Dear City Council,

I'm not one that writes letters to City Council often, but I feel it is critical for Council to support the motion to fund lifecycle replacements for sound walls in critical locations.

There are many compelling reasons to do so:

- 1) The Standing Policy Committee on Transportation and Transit, who is meant to do the heavy lifting on these types of issues, recommends it;
- 2) There is no way the chain link fence that will replace the current sound walls can meet the requirements of the City's Surface Transportation Noise Policy;
- 3) The poor conditions of these sound walls are a result of chronic deferred maintenance and have now reached the critical point of needing immediate replacement;
- 4) The amount being asked for (\$4 million in one-time funding) is very little in the context of the city's budget; and,
- 5) Most importantly, these sound walls strike a delicate balance between the need for connectivity and the need to manage large amounts of traffic noise. Taking them down erodes quality of life and negatively impacts property values.

But that of course, is information you already have or can likely extrapolate for yourselves. I'd like to give you some personal context about what has led me to write you today.

### Learning to live with (and love) the sound wall

My family has lived next to 14<sup>th</sup> Street for 49 years. Our home – 1423 Klondike Ave. S.W. – is one property removed from the sound wall that runs between 14th Street S.W. and Kew/Kootenay Street S.W., from 70th Avenue S.W. all the way to Glenmore Trail.



As a family, we remember when the wall was built. In fact, I grew up walking along the sound wall and berm. Now that I'm living in my family home again, I trod the same path with my children today. We've always looked at the wall as protection from noise and traffic, but also a great place to traverse – part of the trade-off of living in Kelvin Grove.

Over the years, we've seen many iterations of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, including the latest SWBRT expansion. We have learned to live with the increased traffic and bus noise (and the seemingly never-ending construction 😊), knowing that we all have to live with the need for connectivity and mass transit.

The old sound wall, while not sound proof, certainly meant that we could go out and enjoy our yard in relative peace outside of rush hour. We could enjoy weeding in our vegetable garden or watching my kids chase each other under the shade of our trees. And back when we were allowed to have friends over for a BBQ, it meant we didn't have to scream at each other over the sounds of busses and transport trucks.

These may not seem like epic things, but these little moments are what make up one's quality of life. They're the memories we build as friends, families and neighbours.

#### **Lack of project communication has added to frustration**

I know that, as councillors, you have 50,000-foot view of day-to-day operations which is absolutely appropriate. However, I need to point out that the engagement around this issue was very poor and did not set anyone up for success.

Although we live only one house away from the sound wall, we were never contacted by the City about this issue. It was actually a neighbour directly facing the wall that received a letter informing him that the wall was coming down. He, in turn, began knocking on doors to inform adjacent neighbours. We, in turn, informed our community association that this was happening as well as Councillor Farkas.

Flash forward to now (January 14 & 15, 2020), and there are all kinds of construction vehicles and workers tearing down the wall. To date, we have still not received an email or letter, talking about what's happening or why it's being done. Not even a simple sign was posted by the wall as you'd see with other infrastructure projects.

I have no idea what the City's communication policies are, but this cannot be the impression you want to create with residents when there are so many simple, low-cost and low-effort communication solutions. I would sincerely appreciate this feedback being passed along to the appropriate administrative people.

#### **Unanticipated SWBRT noise impact by tearing down the wall**

Regardless of how anyone felt about the SWBRT in our area, it's now just a part of living in Kelvin Grove that we've all come to accept. And isn't that part of being a community? Saying your peace and then coming to live with the outcomes, even if you disagreed in the past.

As a neighbourhood, we were assured during the whole SWBRT engagement process that there would be no increased sound issues, even with larger accordion busses coming online. This was because we had an existing sound wall in place to deal with the bus and traffic noise of 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

I know the lack of funding for sound walls isn't directly SWBRT related (as in we never expected our sound wall to be replaced as part of that project). I'm just highlighting that we were promised that the noise level would not increase when this project was completed.

If we no longer have a sound wall and only have a chain link fence, then how can that SWBRT promise be fulfilled to citizens? And how is this fair to residents, or community associations that supported the project because of this assurance?



*Our backyard in Spring. You can see why we love spending time out here.*

### **This isn't your fault, but you can make it right**

I can't speak to the other walls, but the Kelvin Grove sound wall reached the end of its lifecycle 10 years ago. That means that three Councils ago or so, this type of funding was kicked down the road. The thing is, it's now gone past the point of being good enough to critical.

Unless you vote to support this critical and necessary funding today, this important issue will once again get kicked down the road to some future Council. And with each year of delay, costs will go up as quality of life and property values for the adjacent residents goes down. Most likely, other, newer infrastructure will need attention.

As councillors and mayor, I can imagine there are so, so many quality-of-life and neighbourhood issues that tear at your attention. Not to mention we're in the middle of a pandemic, and even

when that passes, we're facing the decimation of the oil industry and a near 30% vacancy rate in downtown office space.

What you and all levels of government have had to deal with this past year is unprecedented; what we as the public have sacrificed is unquantifiable. So please believe me when I say, I know there are many issues piling up and many more that you can't even begin to fix, even if your budget was unlimited.

But that is exactly why I'm asking for your support today. Unlike so many issues you can't change or directly impact, when you support this recommendation, you will have direct, immediate, and positive impact on affected neighbourhoods. It's not a study or some other intangible that will deliver returns at some future date. It means helping Calgarians right now, within this fiscal year.

As I've sat here in my dining room working on this letter that last two days, I can literally hear the traffic noise increase with each passing hour. This cannot be left this way.

You have the opportunity to make this right. On behalf of my family and my neighbourhood, I urge you to do so.

Respectfully,

The Bruzga Family

c/o Anne-Marie Bruzga-Luchak  
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