

Priorities Guiding the City Planning & Policy Service Workplan 2021

BACKGROUND

Since 2018, Planning and Development has been working to confirm that its resources are best allocated to achieving Council's priorities for the City Planning & Policy Service Line. The priorities have been consistent over these years, focusing Administration's resources on:

- Implementing the Municipal Development Plan/Calgary Transportation Plan;
- Developing a comprehensive and city-wide growth strategy;
- Modernizing our community planning approach and providing communities and developers with effective tools;
- Implementing Main Streets and Transit Oriented Development;
- Refining and improving the land use bylaw to remove barriers and deliver desired outcomes; and
- Making downtown more resilient and future-proof.

Over the last years, these priorities have enabled Administration to focus its resources on initiatives that provide communities, landowners and businesses with effective, modern planning tools. These tools remove barriers to desired development, create a level playing field for businesses and make the development process quicker and smoother. This supports private sector investment in Calgary's communities and enhances efforts to reinvest in established neighbourhoods as per the goals of the Municipal Development Plan.

2020

And then came 2020... Although the six priority areas remain valid, Calgary was confronted in 2020 with new and existential challenges and three areas of increased attention were identified for 2021:

Business Support and Economic Recovery: COVID-19's impact on the economy in general, and on individual business's specific ability to continue to operate under new constraints demanded an immediate response. Various initiatives were undertaken to enable businesses to operate in this new reality. The service line immediately shifted its engagement activities online, policies and rule changes were made to enable businesses to operate outdoors and on public sidewalks and parking requirements were removed for commercial operations. Council has directed Administration to continue to focus efforts on supporting business recovery in 2021.

A primary result of the need to shift attention to supporting businesses now is that land use bylaw team resources will be dedicated to this rather than on longer-term outcomes. Team efforts in 2021 will focus more on identifying amendments that support businesses and reinforce the opportunities in industrial land development, rather than on developing a fully new land use bylaw. These individual initiatives will, however, inform the bylaw renewal when that project commences. This change is visible in the six priority areas.

A further major shift resulting from this situation is how the service line is rethinking the Downtown. The traditional and previously highly successful model of an office-oriented, headquarters core of the city must be reconsidered in order to future-proof downtown. The Downtown Strategy has started the transition to a more diverse place that puts more emphasis on the quality of the lived experience

regardless of whether you are working, living or visiting the downtown. One of the major pieces of work to be delivered in 2021 will be a new plan to replace the Centre City Plan. This new Plan for what is now being referred to as the Greater Downtown will focus on building a “Next Generation Downtown” that reflects the need to evolve from the current state to one that attracts a new generation of workers and businesses and that enables a diversity of uses, including residential, cultural, educational, institutional, retail and office in new and innovative ways that reflect global trends in placemaking. It will also incorporate lessons learned from our response to the pandemic and the need to create an environment that can respond to sudden and dramatic changes in demand for public space. The newly defined priority of “Downtown Strategy – The Next Generation Downtown” reflects the renewed focus in this regard.

Equity: Events around the world in 2020 highlighted the need to advance social equity, eliminate discrimination and implement Council’s vision of a great city to make a living, a great city to make a life for all Calgarians. Council has re-emphasized that Calgary’s increasingly diverse population needs to be better considered and reflected in how we plan the city and our communities in the future.

The City Planning & Policy service line priorities support Council’s Social Wellbeing Policy by dedicating resources to initiatives that promote equitable and inclusive community growth as well as by enabling City investments in amenities that serve the community.

Climate Action: In recent years Calgary has experienced significant climate events with severe personal and economic impacts. The most recent being the hailstorm that damaged thousands of homes in June 2020. Calgarians and Council have expressed the need for action towards making Calgary more environmentally resilient and reducing the city’s greenhouse gas emissions. How we develop our communities, where we provide services and how we move around the city directly affect the city’s environmental footprint. By delivering the initiatives on the workplan, guidance will be provided for the growth of an environmentally more resilient community.

The new priority area of Corporate Initiatives and Legislative Requirements has also been introduced to more strongly reflect the need to ensure appropriate team resources are available to dedicate to supporting broader initiatives, such as Calgary’s Environmental Strategy and the Climate Adaptation Plan.

2021 PRIORITIES

Although the six priorities that guided the service line in 2020 remain valid, they have been refined to highlight where resources need to be focused in 2021 to address the increased challenges resulting from COVID and the economic situation. Refinement is also required to properly reflect corporate initiatives and legislative requirements. The proposed priorities for 2021 are discussed below.

A. Implementing the Municipal Development Plan/Calgary Transportation Plan

The 10-year review of the Municipal Development Plan / Calgary Transportation Plan was completed in 2020. The review confirmed that the fundamental direction and vision of the MDP/CTP remains relevant. Stakeholders and Administration agree on the need to focus on implementation through policy, local area planning and enabling regulation.

The lack of strategic funding and investment tools has been identified as a challenge to implementing the Municipal Development Plan/Calgary Transportation Plan. This gap is addressed in Priority D: Connecting Planning and Investment.

Administration's ongoing objective is to provide tools that provide certainty and clarity for desired development and investment in Calgary's communities and economy. The planned review of the plans' core indicators represents a primary initiative towards enhanced implementation.

B. A City-Wide Growth Strategy

A focus in 2021 will be placed on delivering the Established Area Growth and Change Strategy and the Industrial Growth Strategy. Both strategies are key components of the city-wide approach to investment, funding and growth decisions. The Established Area Growth and Change Strategy will enable The City to identify appropriate investments and funding mechanisms and to leverage market activity towards desired growth in the established area. This will enable development and foster a balanced implementation of the Municipal Development Plan.

The Industrial Growth Strategy has gained enhanced relevance due to the economic shift of 2020 and the need to proactively leverage the opportunities that new trends and developments in the industrial sector afford Calgary. Work on this strategy will be accompanied by a review of the land use bylaw regulations that guide and govern development.

C. Modernized Community Planning & Transit Oriented Development

Calgary has long been considered one of the most livable cities in the world. Sustaining our status as a great city requires us to be competitive and attractive, both locally and globally. Cities around the world have realized that to attract businesses, they must first attract people. Investing in inclusive communities that serve diverse lifestyle choices is critical for Calgary's continuing economic growth. A liveable and vibrant city will attract residents and businesses.

For years, desired developments and the ability to better address the needs of Calgary's increasingly diverse population have often been obstructed by aging community plans that do not accommodate the same diversity of uses and buildings that are the foundation of inclusive, vibrant and attractive communities today. Addressing this issue and removing obsolete policy will remain a focus of the Service Line. The delivery of Main Streets and the implementation of the Transit Oriented Development Strategy also contribute to development in strategic city areas in alignment with the urban structure of the Municipal Development Plan.

The modern tools being developed by the service create a level playing field for businesses and make the development process quicker and smoother. This supports private sector investment in Calgary's communities and enhances efforts to reinvest in established neighbourhoods as per the goals of the Municipal Development Plan. Reinvesting in existing communities and installed infrastructure, as well as developing walkable, multi-modal communities advances our efforts to reduce Calgary's environmental footprint and promote the growth of an environmentally more resilient city.

D. Connecting Planning and Investment

Council has clearly identified the gap between community growth and City and private-sector investment and Administration is addressing the gap between strategies and policies and investment.

The City needs to be able to direct investment into specific areas to both enable, and respond, to increased development and growth. While the Established Area Growth and Change Strategy will establish a methodology to identify funding and investment needs, funding and financing tools must still be created to provide an effective, feasible and realistic means to address The City's ongoing development and growth needs while considering its financial capacity and economic situation.

In 2021 the Service Line will focus resources on developing a full-cost model to understand and forecast the costs of growth. It will investigate and evaluate other potential funding sources and develop a range of funding tools to support the other workplan initiatives.

E. Downtown Strategy – The Next Generation Downtown

The economic shift and the response to COVID-19 have multiplied the challenges facing Calgary's heavily office oriented downtown. Council's existing concern about the future viability and vibrancy of Downtown has been further heightened and efforts must be prioritized to future-proof downtown and develop the Next Generation Downtown. Initiatives that support the business community and help building owners adapt to the new business environment and that enhance the diversity of activities, from office, residential, cultural, educational, institutional and commercial in the downtown will be given high priority.

F. Corporate Initiatives and Legislative Requirements

Various events throughout 2020 highlighted the need to ensure the service line can support a diverse range of corporate initiatives, some of which are known in advance, and others, which are unanticipated, but equally important. One City, one voice only works when service lines have the capacity to support one another. In response, Administration recommends emphasizing this as a priority to guide our resource allocation.

The City of Calgary must also respond to new legislative requirements from other orders of government and this can place a significant demand on team resources. The City often does not have the ability to influence when we must respond to legislative changes. Competition for resources and delays to planned initiatives are at times the result. This new priority area brings attention to the need to ensure resources can be provided as required.