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Guidebook for Great Communities What We Heard Report: March 22, 2021 Public Hearing of Council and Written Submissions

Introduction

The Community Engagement team at ISL Engineering and Land Services Ltd. (ISL) was contracted by The City of Calgary (The City) following the March 22, 2021 Public Hearing of Council to conduct an independent review, analysis and reporting of the input provided by respondents at the public hearing and additional written submissions received regarding the Guidebook for Great Communities. The following report was prepared by the ISL Community Engagement Team.

Project Overview

The City of Calgary developed the Guidebook for Great Communities as a key tool for citizens, stakeholders, and City planners to create community Local Area Plans. The goal of the Guidebook is to make sure Calgary remains a great place to live for citizens living here now and people who will move here in the future, and that Calgary's communities are vibrant and inclusive, with more choices to live, move and gather.

Engagement Overview

The three-day public hearing of Council that began on March 22, 2021 was to present the work done to date to help build the Guidebook for Great Communities. There were 126 citizens that provided their feedback at the public hearing, along with 201 additional written submissions.

As part of [Council's direction \(see Item 8.2.1\) within the official minutes](#), it was requested that a What We Heard Report be developed to summarize the March 22, 2021 Public Hearing of Council and additional written submissions received.

In the following sections you will find the key themes and a summary of input heard at the March 22, 2021 Public Hearing of Council and additional written submissions about the Guidebook for Great Communities.



What We Heard

The key themes heard from respondents that attended the March 22, 2021 Public Hearing of Council and the additional written submissions are included below.

- Respondents that were supportive of the Guidebook for Great Communities indicated that they felt it promotes sustainable growth for the city, improves accessibility to more amenities for Calgarians, creates more diversity in Calgary communities, and provides a strategic direction for future development.
- Respondents that were not supportive of the Guidebook for Great Communities expressed concern about the increased density and the potential impacts to their property values; the change in the character, integrity and heritage of the communities they live in; and their quality of life.
- Many respondents indicated that they would like to see more opportunities for all Calgarians to be meaningfully engaged on the Guidebook for Great Communities, specifically on how this document will influence changes to the communities in which they live.
- Some respondents requested that the approval of the document be delayed until after the 2021 municipal election so that Calgarians can hear the perspectives of their electoral candidates. However, some respondents felt that a delay in the decision-making process will impact the work done on other planning documents, including several Local Area Plans already in progress.

For a summary of the feedback provided, please see the **Summary of Input** section.

For a verbatim listing of all the feedback that was provided, please see the following:

- [Recoding of the March 22, 2021 Public Hearing of Council](#)
- [Additional public submission letters](#)



Summary of Input – What We Heard

The following summary of input was developed to reflect the diversity and frequency of the feedback heard during the March 22, 2021 Public Hearing of Council and the written submissions received. Included are quotes from respondents that attended the public hearing or provided written submissions.

Densification

The following is a summary of the feedback received pertaining to densification proposed in the Guidebook for Great Communities:

- Some respondents are supportive of densification for Calgary because it promotes sustainable growth and offers a range of housing options in aging communities with diminishing density, attracts newcomers and provides greater accessibility to amenities for all Calgarians.
- Some respondents expressed concern that the Guidebook will make it easier for City planners and developers to increase density in established neighbourhoods which could compromise the integrity, character, and heritage of the communities in which they live.
- Some respondents also indicated they were concerned about safety in their neighbourhoods, diminished greenspaces through lot coverage and negative impacts to their property values and quality of life because of higher density living.
- Some respondents would prefer to see density efforts focused on the city centre to take full advantage of the existing transit infrastructure, proximity to amenities, and capitalizing on the fiscal strain from maintaining infrastructure.
- Some respondents expressed concern about the lack of acknowledgement of the inner-city communities that have already gone through extensive revitalization to become more diverse and vibrant and where further change is no longer needed.
- Some respondents indicated their support for diversification in Calgary communities because it will create a more resilient city that

can withstand the changes in the new global economy.

- Some respondents indicated they are concerned that costs to maintain existing infrastructure is not covered by the current tax base and will worsen with urban sprawl if the City does not start to densify.
- Some respondents indicated that the decreasing density in existing single-family neighbourhoods is causing schools and businesses to close without the demand to sustain their continuation. However, it was noted that not all neighbourhoods are experiencing this.

"I have a young family and we benefit from the proximity to the park, multiple schools and grocery stores all within walking distance... but we understand that for businesses to invest in communities, we need the residents to support them."

"Increasing density in our neighbourhood, having more traffic, less greenspace, fewer open areas, more massive buildings, less light and greater lot coverage does not make our neighbourhood great nor our city, rather it detracts from its charm and livability."

"I do not believe the changes in the document will be good for the City of Calgary. I am in support of preserving neighbourhoods of single detached family homes, as decided by the community themselves."



Land Uses and Zoning

The following is a summary of the feedback received about the land uses and zoning proposed in the Guidebook for Great Communities:

- Some respondents are in support of the potential diversity in housing options proposed in the Guidebook for Great Communities because it will allow for aging community members to move into smaller dwellings in their chosen neighbourhoods, and remain close to familiar amenities, friends, and family. This also protects small businesses in these neighbourhoods because these community members stay and continue to shop at their local and familiar retailers.
- Some respondents indicated that the Guidebook for Great Communities needs to be inclusive of a housing category to preserve neighbourhoods with single-detached family homes, with more protection of heritage homes, character-defining streets, and mature trees that maintain current lot coverage, lot width, height, and setback requirements.
- Some respondents indicated that maintaining the status quo in neighbourhoods, predominantly made up of single-family dwellings promotes gentrification and is exclusionary to racialized communities. These respondents are in support of the Guidebook’s potential to move away from this community model and offer more diversified and accessible neighbourhoods to all Calgarians and newcomers to Canada.
- Some respondents specifically mentioned that there needs to be more options for neighbourhoods in Sections 2.7 and 2.8 of the Guidebook to allow for smaller gaps in building heights and that commercial designations should not be allowed in neighbourhood residential streets.

“I support additional density in the inner-city vs sprawling suburbs however context of new increased density MUST take into account of surrounding adjacent land uses.”

“I do not understand how designating my century old neighbourhood to be more like other neighbourhoods contributes to greater diversity or preserves heritage.”

“We can't keep developing sprawl into infinity and beyond. We need to cap our [city's] geographic footprint and make use of the space we already have.”

“We love living in [Sunalta] and having access to transit, bike lanes, the river, and lots of other fantastic neighbourhoods. We love the diversity, the sense of community and amenities that this neighbourhood provides. Others who want to live in this kind of neighbourhood should be able to regardless of income bracket and this should not mean being relegated to the suburbs.”

“I am strongly opposed to the proposed zoning changes included in the Guidebook for Great Communities. There appears to be a lot of confusion (and misinformation) on the implementation of multi-family housing in single-housing communities...I am concerned that this will disrupt the uniqueness and character of these neighborhoods.”

“Single-family homes are an important characteristic of many existing Calgary communities, and I assure you that...people in single-family communities would not welcome new multifamily development in their communities...as this will affect negatively density, traffic, community character and property values.”



Community Engagement and Communications

The following is a summary of the feedback received about the community engagement and communications efforts done to date for the Guidebook for Great Communities:

- Respondents indicated that the document needs to be written in plain language and needs to be clearer regarding how it will be implemented.
- Several respondents expressed their frustration and their fear of uncertainty about the actual impacts to their communities due to misinformation shared about the Guidebook.
- Some respondents indicated that their support or lack of support for the Guidebook has been misrepresented by their Community Associations, other community members, and their elected representatives. Because of this, some respondents requested that there be more city-wide efforts to meaningfully engage with the public through an open and transparent process, then conduct a plebiscite for all Calgarians to decide on the approval of the document, rather than members of Council.
- Some respondents recommended that the approval of the document should be put on hold because many of the current members of Council and the Mayor will not be part of Council after the 2021 municipal election.
- Some respondents indicated that the speakers at the Public Hearing of Council lack diversity and are not reflective of the demographics of Calgary as a whole, nor are their opinions fully reflective of their neighbours' opinions.
- Some respondents indicated that the decision on the Guidebook needs to balance the voices heard during the entire project engagement process with the Public Hearing of Council process, because the overall engagement process for the project is understood to be more inclusive, and the public hearing format can be exclusionary due to the time commitment.

“Much of the narrative shared over the past two days has failed to recognize that diversity is a strength of great communities and cities. Diversity of thought, socio-economic backgrounds, cultures, ages and places... This [public hearing] process is broken as is inherently exclusionary to those who do not possess the means to wait for days for their five minutes to speak. It also undermines all of the public participation and feedback collected through the more inclusive engagement process.”

“Urgency creates mistrust, and trust can easily be achieved with transparency and working together in collaboration.”

“I do not believe there has been meaningful consultation on the Guidebook and the fact that it has generated such conflicting views and opinions has reflected that.”

“Many City Councillors are not returning next term and may not be concerned about their legacy, but taxpayers are here for the long term. Future generations require you to consider your decision carefully.”

“An initiative such as this should be the result of major public engagement and dialogue and based on the desires and will of a majority of the people.”

“There is the chance that the misunderstanding of the Guidebook and subsequent LAPs are not fully understood and need further engagement.”





Quality of Life

The following is a summary of the feedback received regarding the impacts to quality of life due to the proposed Guidebook for Great Communities:

- Some respondents expressed the importance of offering more housing options in Calgary communities to increase accessibility to amenities to all Calgarians and to offer the option for aging members of the community to relocate within their own neighbourhoods.
- Some respondents indicated that they appreciate the look and feel of the mature and heritage communities and would like to see efforts to maintain that with new developments in their communities.
- Some respondents expressed their concern about potential loss of privacy and sunlight if higher density dwellings are placed adjacent to lower density dwellings. In addition, some respondents are particularly concerned about the community look and feel changing due to building height differences, lot coverage, and the lot orientation of the higher density buildings.
- Some respondents indicated that they felt there would be impacts to safety, reduced parking, increased traffic, and too much pressure on existing infrastructure and schools in their communities if there is an increase in multi-family dwellings in their neighbourhoods.
- Some respondents indicated that offering a variety of housing types, as well as preserving heritage and historic areas, contribute to the vibrancy and livability of the city.

“Neighbourhood character is not dictated by housing type or appearance but that it is created by the diversity of residents and the engagement and interaction at the street level in the greenspaces and through the use of amenities.”

“Our concern with allowing multifamily developments in residential areas is the erosion of quality of life, loss of property values, loss of urban forest and permeable land surface, urban decay and significant churn.”



Cost of Living

The following is a summary of the feedback received regarding the impacts to cost of living due to the proposed Guidebook for Great Communities:

- Some respondents indicated that it is important to focus on providing affordable and diverse housing options in the city centre to attract newcomers and business owners who wish to relocate to Calgary.
- Some respondents indicated they are concerned that increasing density will not equate to more affordable housing in the city centre due to higher taxation rates and increasing property costs.
- Some respondents felt strongly that their financial investment in their chosen neighbourhoods will be compromised with a reduction in property values because of the proximity to higher density dwellings, and increased taxes due having to support changes to infrastructure to include higher density dwellings in their communities.

“We feel that documents such as [the Guidebook] help to create more opportunities for the development of affordable housing and ultimately, more diverse and inclusive neighbourhoods, which in turn supports the citizens that we serve no matter their cultural background, age, or financial means.”

“The assumption, that a range of housing types in our area will equate to more affordable homes, is highly unlikely based on the experience of our close neighbours Altadore and Marda Loop, where densification and infill development has not been reflected in affordability.”



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