

Neighbourhood Association Response



April 6, 2021

The City of Calgary
700 Macleod Trail S.E.
Calgary, AB T2G 2M3

Dear Members of the Calgary Planning Commission,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Beltline Neighbourhoods Association (BNA), we are reaching out to you regarding Land Use Amendment LOC2019-0100 (Redevelopment of the McDonald's at 1422 17 Avenue SW).

This is the BNA's third letter to the City regarding this application, and as noted in the previous two, we remain strongly opposed to this proposal. We do not support a new drive-through at this location, and do not believe that the applicant has adequately demonstrated a commitment to supporting the long term vision for the community. At its core, the amendment seeks to circumvent good City policy for mixed-use, walkable, urban redevelopment and is antithetical to the significant public and private investments that have been made along the 17 Avenue SW corridor in recent years.

Given the considerable volunteer hours we have spent bringing legitimate and reasonable concerns to the table on this file, we would also like to express our frustration at the apparent lack of willingness on the part of the applicant to consider a reasonable compromise. As noted, we have already submitted three letters: the first following the receipt of the land-use application circulation and following two in-person meetings with the applicant; the second leading up to the initial hearing at Calgary Planning Commission on February 4, 2021, after Administration's recommendation for refusal; and the third prior to the second CPC hearing scheduled for April 22. **We would note that following several rounds of review, the application has only received minor revisions and none of our three principal concerns have been satisfactorily addressed:**

New Drive-Through Uses: In accordance with the Land-Use Bylaw, 1P2007 and the Beltline Area Redevelopment Plan, new drive-throughs are not permitted in the Beltline. There is no existing policy foundation, emerging planning direction, nor grandfathered entitlement that can suitably rationalize the inclusion of this feature. We do not believe that a drive-through is in keeping with the 17 Avenue public realm aspiration and the planning frameworks that are in place to discourage automobile-oriented uses in the community. The drive-through also exasperates specific safety concerns around vehicular movements due to the quantity of cars exiting and entering the site and the proximity to the intersection of 17 Avenue and 14 Street SW (note that unlike the current situation, the access to and from 17 Avenue is now bi-directional, which arguably creates a more hazardous situation for pedestrians and other vehicles).

Pedestrian Safety: The existing drive-through already presents a safety concern for pedestrians utilizing the north sidewalk along 17 Avenue. The proposal further exacerbates this issue by creating amenity spaces on both sides of a poorly delineated two-way vehicle ramp. While we appreciate that the applicant has taken steps to create at-grade amenities, they are rendered functionally ineffective when they are bisected by vehicle access and serve only to draw attention to the fact that this feature is wholly incompatible with the 17 Avenue urban form and use patterns.

Urban Format: We can accept the reality that due to the size of the site and the fact that many customers will arrive by car, a parking area and pick-up window may be an appropriate use for the rear of the site, accessed from 16 Avenue SW. This feature, on its own, would not preclude the applicant from creating a continuous street wall along 17 Avenue. The 17 Avenue character is urban and pedestrian-centric. Given the continued evolution of the corridor and the many progressive, contextually sensitive developments that



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have been built over the past several years, we are disappointed that the applicant does not anticipate a more appropriate urban retail format. The 17 Avenue A&W at 4 Street and the recent urban-format Canadian Tire are examples of chain businesses that have put forward a more context appropriate model in the Beltline. Neither of these businesses have drive-throughs or large surface parking lots; it is reasonable to assume McDonald's can achieve the same or better while operating a successful business.

Further to the above, we would like to bring the following additional concerns to your attention, based on developments that have occurred since our last correspondence:

1. CPC referral and revised Direct Control wording:

On February 4, 2021, Calgary Planning Commission referred the application back to Administration with a direction to revise the wording of the proposed Direct Control district. The additional text included language supporting "urban design principles for street activation and continuity of the building edge", related improvements to the public realm along both the 17 Avenue and 16 Avenue interfaces, mitigation of safety hazards for all modes of transportation to and adjacent to the site, and further consideration of CPTED issues.

Dishearteningly, the revised site plan demonstrates that the applicant has failed to capitalize on these recommendations with **very few significant or meaningful changes from the previous iteration**. In particular, we cannot find evidence that effective compromises were made to address the continuity of the building frontage, substantial activation of the public realm, or improvements to pedestrian safety (which we believe can only be addressed through a rethinking of the drive-through access regime). **Despite numerous discussions where these concerns were expressed, Administration's recommendation for refusal, and a subsequent referral back to Administration to strengthen the DC wording, the application before us is largely unchanged from one that was originally circulated, especially with respect to the overall configuration of the site.**

2. Public engagement:

17 Avenue SW is the beating heart of the Beltline and arguably one of the most successful Main Streets in Calgary. Incremental redevelopment has served to advance the goals of an even more walkable, pedestrian friendly corridor. The applicant has elected to proceed with the application in spite of a recommendation for refusal by Administration and reasonable opposition by the BNA and neighbouring community associations in Sunalta and Mount Royal. **In fact, the only letter of support that was included with the February 4 CPC agenda came from the 17 Avenue BIA and was signed by a board member who acknowledged that he had a conflict of interest during a March 11, 2021 stakeholder engagement meeting.**

In response to the requirements set out in CPC's referral, additional public and stakeholder engagement was undertaken. In an attempt to satisfy this requirement, the applicant launched an online engagement portal. Upon visiting the portal, several of our committee and board members expressed concerns around what appeared to be leading questions that neglected important context. For instance, one of the questions asked respondents to comment on whether or not the site plan successfully addressed the requirements set out in the DC (a topic that members of the public without a planning background are hardly equipped to fairly evaluate without additional information), and originally made reference to a comparison with the previous iteration of the plan which was not published on the website (this portion of the question was subsequently removed, but only after the portal had been live for several days).

It does not appear that the engagement portal was widely advertised. The BNA did not find any references at the restaurant (apart from two City of Calgary land-use notices along 17 Avenue and 16 Avenue), and it was not possible to locate using logical web searches. We have appended two figures to this letter to demonstrate the concern. **Figure 1** is a compilation of photographs of the site taken on March 27, 2021 demonstrating the lack of





signage directing people to the engagement portal. **Figure 2** is a screen capture of a Google search that yielded to link to the site.

3. What happens if a drive through is not approved?

Over the course of our conversations with the applicant and as expressed at the February 4 CPC hearing, the applicant has maintained that, if the application is not approved, the site will continue to persist in its current form for years, and perhaps decades, to come (to paraphrase). Given the CPTED issues at the site, and the current state of the urban blight that exists there, we are being asked to accept that this untenable outcome can only be avoided by supporting the applicant's proposal for a new drive-through.

In our initial meeting with the applicant, they acknowledged that the current situation was "embarrassing," and the CPTED issues unacceptable. This location is owned and operated by McDonald's Canada. It is not a franchise.

While we cannot speak for McDonald's and their business decisions, we have considerable difficulty accepting the reality that a prudent corporate strategy would involve retaining an unacceptable condition that may be bad for their customers, their staff and their brand. We cannot anticipate what McDonald's will do in the event that they cannot build a new drive-through, but we would implore CPC to look past this rhetoric and evaluate the application on its merits.

Planning decisions -- especially those that directly impact the quality of the place we want to create -- should not be made out of a fear that a hypothetical alternative might be worse. **We are looking for the best possible outcomes for our community and our City. We should not simply settle for "less bad."**

Good planning and urban design policy is in place to protect this from happening.

Apart from a desire to maintain the status quo (wherein apparently over 60% of their customers use the drive through), we haven't been provided with a rationale for a land-use amendment that can be reasonably defended through the lens City of Calgary policy or the development trajectory of the community. It appears to us that McDonalds is simply not willing to adapt the business model of this location to address the reality of the current planning environment, policy, and the interests of a vibrant urban community that is increasingly becoming less auto-centric. **We would be more than happy to consider an application for an urban-style McDonald's that embraces the future of the community and looks to new and innovative approaches to drawing in customers that do not depend on a drive-through.** It should be noted that pick-up windows are a permitted use and are employed by many other successful fast food restaurants in the Beltline.

To put it succinctly, the stakeholders in this community have, through their support of the ARP, indicated that drive-throughs are not a desirable use and provide minimal direct benefit to the people who live and do business here.

Thank you for giving the BNA an opportunity to share our perspective.

Peter Oliver
President

Tyson Bolduc
Director of Planning & Development



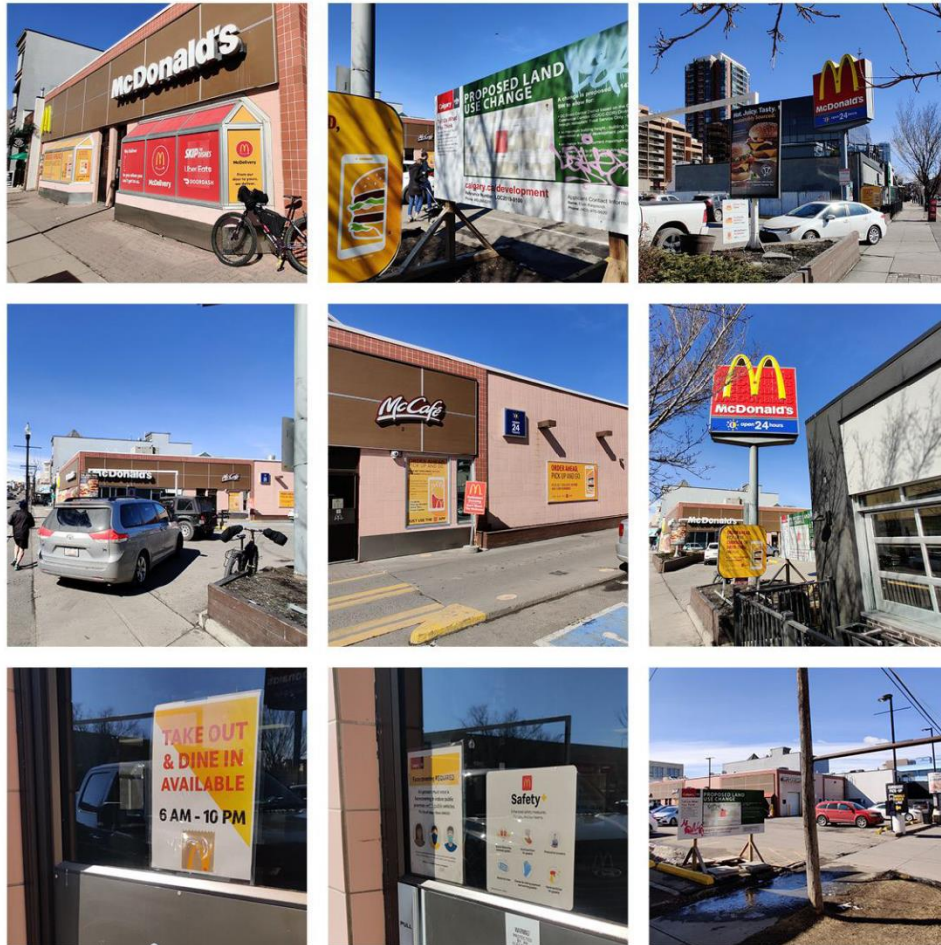


FIGURE 1: Collage of photographs of the exterior of the McDonald's site (taken March 27, 2021) demonstrating that only a minimal attempt was made to draw customers to the online engagement portal via the mandatory City of Calgary development notice signage.





The image shows a Google search interface. The search bar contains the text "mcdonalds mount royal engagement calgary". Below the search bar, there are several search results. The first result is a LinkedIn profile for Rachel McDonald, a Business Development Associate. Other results include a directory listing for Mount Royal University, a news article about a teaching passion, and a TripAdvisor review for a McDonald's location. On the right side of the search results, there is a detailed view of a McDonald's restaurant. This view includes a map, the restaurant's name "McDonald's", a 3.2-star rating from 1,563 reviews, and details such as address (1422 17 Ave SW, Calgary, AB T2T 0C3), hours (Open 24 hours), and menu options (Dine-in, Drive-through, No-contact delivery). There is also a "Popular times" chart and a "Reviews" section with user comments.

FIGURE 2: One of two attempts to locate the online engagement portal via Google search. Neither attempt appeared to yield a desired result (captured on March 29, 2021).

