

Community Association Letters



August 31, 2021

Joshua Ross - File Manager
Circulation Control Planning and Development
P.O. Box 2100 Station M
Calgary, AB IMC 8201
cpag.circ@calgary.ca

RE: LOC2021-5558 (New Event Centre and Ancillary Spaces)

Dear Joshua,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Beltline Neighbourhoods Association (BNA) in response to the above-noted development permit application for a new event centre and associated ancillary uses, located at 519 12 Avenue SE.

Our Beltline Urban Development Committee (BUDC) has taken time to review the proposed application. We also had an opportunity to meet with the applicant on August 24, 2021 to discuss it. Although the BNA is happy to see this site developed and for a critical component of the Rivers District Master Plan (RDMP) to be realized, the application before us has a number of shortcomings that we would like to see remedied.

Given the significant contribution of taxpayer funds that will be put towards this project, it is critical for it to demonstrate meaningful and material public benefit. At this time, we believe there is ample room for improvement.

Public Realm and Active Edges

The applicant has noted that 12 Avenue is intended to work as a 'front door' to the new Event Centre, with retail and active uses continuing south along 4 Street SE (Olympic Way). This ambition is consistent with the principles set out in the RDMP and the Beltline Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP), which also identifies the intersection of 12 Avenue and Centre Street as a 'critical corner' and among the most important nodes for the new Culture and Entertainment District. Creating an active public realm, with spaces accessible to members of the public (including those who do not have the means to attend events in the building) is essential, is a fundamental responsibility of the applicant given the quantity of public funds that have been committed to the project. From a public accountability perspective, it is also vital that the project lives up to the goals set out in the RDMP and ARP – documents that benefited from significant public and stakeholder engagement. We note the following specific comments:

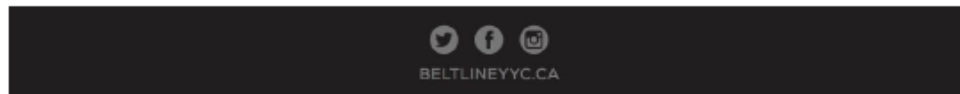
- More than half of the 12 Avenue facade is inactive, with critical sections of this elevation (such as the northeast corner) taken up with back-of-house and service spaces. While we appreciate that there are a number of building services and life safety facilities that need to be accommodated, we would strongly encourage the applicant to look at opportunities to locate or consolidate these functions in other parts of the building and take better advantage of the 12 Avenue interface.
- The applicant has gone to considerable effort to locate the building's main concourse at grade level. This requires placing the ice surface below grade and mitigating the resulting flood risk which exists at this site. Unfortunately, we do not feel that the applicant has made the most of this opportunity and has provided minimal permeability between the concourse and the street.
- We note that the applicant has accommodated a relatively large plaza on the southwest corner of the building. We are disappointed to see that a similar feature was not included in the northwest. Given that this corner of the

building is adjacent to the RDMP's 'critical corner' and corresponds to the primary access for users of the Green Line, we feel strongly that much more needs to be done. Given the number of people likely to be exiting from this side of the building after an event, a lack of high quality pedestrian storage space may also create safety issues given the proximity to major roadways.

- The City has made (and continues to make) considerable taxpayer investments in the area. Chief among these is the Green Line LRT. We continue to feel like the lack of a strong connection between the building and the future '4 Street SE' station is a significant lost opportunity, both in terms of accommodating pedestrian flows efficiently and strengthening the quality of the public realm. The means by which event centre patrons can efficiently access major transportation infrastructure and adjacent destinations will have a significant impact on the quality of the public realm, and indeed the quality of life for future residents of the area.
- The applicant has included a new double row of trees along the 12 Avenue facade of the building to replace the existing allee that will be removed as part of the construction. This feature seems to work against the urban design ambition of the project by creating an unwanted visual obstruction and constraining the space available for high gathering spaces. While we appreciate that the applicant has taken steps to reinstate this feature, we no longer feel that 12 Avenue is the right location for it, especially since parking lot screening will no longer be required. Given the setback on this side of the building, this space may also be more appropriately used by the building itself to increase the space available for active edges. The approach to landscaping on the 4 Street SE side of the building is more successful and much more conducive to enabling on-street activity.
- The 5 Street SE and southeast interfaces are disappointing. While we appreciate that these were never intended to be significant active edges with loading and service functions to be accommodated on 5 Street, we still feel strongly that this needs to be a 4-sided building. This issue is made more challenging by the inclusion of a parking garage, which is a curious and highly unnecessary feature given the substantial quantity of adjacent and nearby parking and proximity to public transit.
- A First Nations 'acknowledgement feature' has been accommodated on the 5 Street side of the building. Given that 5 Street is a less significant elevation, and has been treated as such, this decision feels like lip service. In consideration of current events and ongoing efforts toward reconciliation, we feel strongly that the applicant should consider more significant and meaningful opportunities to reflect this cultural context, through continuous and respectful engagement with the First Nations community.
- One of the BNA's major critiques of the RDMP was that the 4 Street retail environment would struggle to thrive given Stampede's opposition to residential development on the park and the consequential lack of directly adjacent population centres. We do not agree that Event Centre and BMO Centre events will be sufficient to drive the necessary critical mass to support these functions. The proposed restaurants are very large at 200-, 500-, and 800-seats respectively. Even with an increase in the number of events, it will be extremely challenging to keep these spaces full throughout the year. This is a trend we continue to see in entertainment districts throughout the world, and we would caution the applicant in thinking that they are uniquely able to overcome it without creating a very significant destination that will draw people in from further afield. We simply do not feel that sufficient population density exists in the area – today or in the future. Given that CSEC will operate these restaurants, we are also concerned that opportunities to support local business and entrepreneurship will be minimal (and adjacent businesses may in fact be unable to compete).

Building Design

The Saddledome is one of Calgary's most significant visual landmarks. Expectations are that design of the new event centre will live up to it. Beyond aesthetics, we believe it is critical that the building demonstrates meaningful approaches to environmental stewardship, accessibility and equity, and its relationship to the existing and future built context. The proposal remains unresolved in several critical areas, including the design of the scrim and the treatment of certain facades (notably the south and parkades elevations). While we expect much of this to be refined over the course of the coming months, we would also like the applicant to consider the following comments and concerns:



- The architectural ambition does not appear to have been fully realized in the design that was presented. We understand that the project was conceptualized around a couple of key diagrams demonstrating an intention to organize, break of the scale, and ground the building vertically with a strong base (Earth), middle (Energy) and top (Sky) and horizontally by expressing the 4 Street interface and the arena as distinct masses bisected by a strong public 'tear'. Neither of these design narratives appear to be fully incorporated, and we would note that the elevations included in the DP are 'boxy' and visually complicated. The applicant should consider strategies to better integrate the concept, edit the design, and express the building's visual identity more fluidly and elegantly. In short, the design presented in the DP feels clunky, and does not live up to very high expectations that have been projected on the project.
- The south elevation needs particular attention. The treatment of the parkade is unresolved and not convincingly integrated into the building mass. The upper sections of this elevation also lack dynamism. We would like to see a more ambitious approach than to simply screen the parkade or cover up blank facades with murals or digital displays.
- The building's roof leaves much to be desired. We feel strongly that the roof should be treated like a fifth elevation, which is especially important given that many residents of adjacent developments will be looking down on it. The size and lack of rooftop services over the arena roof would lend it to the inclusion of an extensive green roof to reduce the visual impact and help manage water. The lower roof areas along 4 Street would lend themselves to the creation of public rooftop amenities (or and the very least, restaurant patios) that would do much to create a sense of vibrancy and nightlife.
- Given the taxpayer investments in this project, taking steps to limit its impact on our energy and water resources should be a given. There is a need to mitigate our collective environmental footprint and demonstrate real leadership when it comes to the development of major municipal infrastructure. This does not appear to have been a major focus or mandate of the project. The addition of features like a parking garage (when this building is in fact surrounded by parking on three sides and close to major rapid transit) sends the wrong message and runs counter to the City's environmental and transportation priorities.

In summary, the BNA supports this application and is of the mind that the building will do much to help realize the full potential of the Rivers District. That said, we believe that the proposal requires further development and a measure rethinking before it is able to live up to its ambitious urban design mandate, be accountable to the vision for the community and attain a positive return on the significant taxpayer investments that are being made.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback. Please feel free to reach out to me should you have any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Tyson Bolduc
Director of Planning and Urban Development, Beltline Neighbourhoods Association





INGLEWOOD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION
1740 24TH AVE SE
CALGARY, ALBERTA
T2G 1P9
PHONE: 403-264-3835
EMAIL: info@icacalgary.com

September 8, 2021

Development Circulation Controller
Development and Building Approvals #8201
Box 2100, Station M
Calgary, Alberta
T2P 2M5

Dear Joshua Ross:

Re: DP2021-5558, 519 – 12 Avenue SE

The Planning Committee (PC) has reviewed the application for the above noted development permit and the application's project/design team presented at the September 2, 2021 PC meeting.

The applicant's representatives spoke well to clarify member questions around bird-proof glass and stormwater management. One concern was raised concerning a design element of the treatment of the NW side which some perceive to be a blank wall, which we are sure will be addressed as the application evolves. Some committee members are still concerned about the activation of the public spaces/public plazas outside of the major events to keep the spirit of the new Event Centre alive.

The Committee appreciated the opportunity to meet with the project and design team who put together an extremely detailed and professional presentation. We look forward to seeing this area activated!

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Erin Standen'.

Erin Standen, Vice-President & Planning Chair
INGLEWOOD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION, Planning Committee