

Lessons Learned

The Westbrook Communities Local Area Plan (Plan) is the second pilot project in the Local Area Planning Program, following the North Hill Communities Local Area Plan which was approved in 2021 September.

The Westbrook Communities team has incorporated lessons learned from the North Hill pilot (IP2022-1045) and made changes to our process and engagement while the Westbrook Communities Local Area Plan was being developed. Beginning in 2023, an annual report will be presented at the Infrastructure and Planning Committee for information with lessons learned as the Local Area Planning Program continues to be implemented.

Deeper conversations

During the development of the North Hill Communities Local Area Plan and as the Plan was developed, we heard that we needed time for deeper conversations with our Working Group, communities, and other participants. In the Westbrook Communities this led to an additional 2 Working Group sessions where we spent more time talking about different scales of housing and what that could look like in the Westbrook Communities.

Clarity

Members of community associations and the public expressed frustration and concern regarding a lack of clarity and consistency with previous planning exercises. They felt that previous policies had either been amended shortly after adoption, or were not clear enough regarding what types of developments were supported where. Specifically, members of the public were concerned about policy language that was vague and open to interpretation, or policy maps that did not clearly illustrate boundaries where a particular development would be supported. In response to this, we have added several policies to clarify map interpretation, specifically where urban form categories or scale modifiers “flank” a road.

More touchpoints with Community Associations

We heard that community associations wanted to meet with us more frequently throughout the development of the local area plan. Some community associations also had their representatives on the working group leave due to varying reasons, and wished to be informed about what discussions were being had about the local area plan. We also ensured we were providing opportunities to meet with the boards of all community associations prior to releasing our next phase engagement to the general public. This provided us with additional opportunities to gather feedback, edit wording for clearer understanding and provide more detailed information to community associations representatives so they would feel comfortable sharing information about our engagement.

We spent more time with community associations in their communities, going on walks where we could talk about planning ideas and concerns in the Westbrook Communities. We also attended different community association meetings when invited to provide an additional touchpoint to community association boards, members and the general public.

We continue to offer in-person and online opportunities throughout the process to connect with people in a way that works for them.

Engagement Booklets

We heard that some citizens weren't aware of the local area planning work that was underway in the Westbrook and Heritage Communities and that people wanted a variety of methods to provide us with feedback. So now we've created Engagement Booklets for each phase of the local area planning process. These Engagement Booklets are mailed to every home and business in the plan area to ensure information reaches people directly. These booklets provide opportunities to provide feedback through an easy tear-out and mailable sheet along with background to education people so they can provide a more informed response to our questions.

We also provide these booklets at other locations such as "My Idea Stations" located in communities, seniors' homes, libraries, and recreation centres to reach more Calgarians. Approximately 50 per cent of the feedback we received for Phase 3 of the Westbrook Communities engagement was from these booklets.

Meaningful Graphics

Following North Hill, we realized storytelling is a crucial component to bringing people along in the local area planning process. Our engagement is focused on storytelling, and we've created graphics that better tell the story of local area planning as the plan is developed. Illustrative interactive maps for example, are shown as a means to gather information and demonstrate what's special about where residents live, in a more illustrative and less corporate format. We are also ensuring that our materials reflect the diversity of Calgarians so people can see themselves in our documents.

Iterative Approach

When bringing the North Hill Communities Local Area Plan forward, we realized that sharing a final draft plan late in the process was cumbersome for the public to digest. We are now sharing local area plans in a format that better tells the story of the local area plan from policy to implementation and allows for more opportunities for feedback in more manageable, smaller pieces throughout the process.

Following our project pause due to COVID-19, we re-launched by beginning to release the draft plan chapter by chapter, instead of releasing one draft near the end of the process. Our participants can now provide feedback for each chapter as the local area plan is developed and see how the draft plan is updated based on their feedback throughout each phase of engagement.

Land Acknowledgement

During the development of the Plan, the Local Area Planning team developed an updated land acknowledgement in consultation with the Indigenous Relations Office following a recognition of the complexities of the traditional and treaty territories the city situates within. It also emerged from a recognition that there are people and perspectives missing from broader planning discussions and that there are larger moves we can make as an organization to build a more inclusive and equitable city based on our shared foundations.

Our everyday actions can create a ripple and change, and the land acknowledgement – specifically the second paragraph – the 'so what' is intended to recognize our collective commitment to change and new ways forward as guided by the Indigenous Policy and White Goose Flying. While discussions continue regarding our own actions and efforts as a department, this land acknowledgement makes a break with standard wording to acknowledge the limitations of our understandings, assumptions, relationships, and abilities to build a more inclusive and equitable city based on our shared foundations and how there are opportunities to redefine them.

This land acknowledgement can be seen as in interim land acknowledgement as once specific efforts and projects are carried out across Community Planning and Planning & Development Services it can be continually updated to speak to the changes and commitments, we are making to redefine our worldviews and approaches by learning directly from diverse and distinct Indigenous peoples within the traditional territory we situate within

Climate Implementation

Modernized local area plans are required to implement climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. Without updated plans, we cannot achieve climate goals previously set and new goals needed to address the Climate Emergency. Local area plans provide the policy guidance and implementation options that will propel this work. To supplement policy from The Guide for Local Area Planning, new local area plans will have additional policy that speaks to net zero homes and buildings, zero carbon energy transition and natural infrastructure. We will continue to enhance, innovate, and adjust our process as the program moves forward.

Lessons learned from the Westbrook Communities and the upcoming Heritage Communities continue to inform our approach and enhancements to the process for the next round of local area plans that are currently underway in the Greater Forest Lawn Communities and the Riley Communities.