

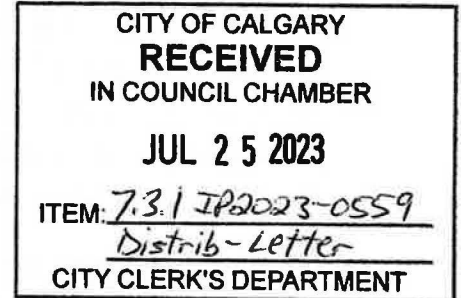
2114 2nd Avenue NW

Calgary, AB T2N 0G7

July 24, 2023

Re: IP2023-0559: Citywide Growth Strategy

Dear Mayor Gondek and members of City Council,



I am writing out of deep concern over the proposed changes to the City's Citywide Growth Strategy, specifically the proposed changes that would make it virtually impossible to achieve the target of 50% of population growth within established areas by 2069, as set out in the MDP.

For those of you who don't know me, I am a professor of Geography, Coordinator of the Urban Studies Program, and an adjunct professor of Planning at the University of Calgary. I have been involved in urban issues and analysis virtually my entire adult life, early on as a professional urban planner and over the last three decades as an academic, analyzing issues of urban growth and development, urban sustainability, housing, and urban inequality. I have served on numerous City of Calgary committees including Imagine Calgary (Urban Governance Working Group), the Plan-It Implementation Committee (I was one of two citizen representatives appointed by City Council), the GHG Reduction Working Group, the Community Representation Framework Taskforce, and I currently serve as one of two West Hillhurst Community Association representatives to the Riley Communities Local Area Plan Working Group. I care deeply about the City of Calgary and am committed to doing what I can to help Calgary be a North American leader in sustainable urban development.

I have three major concerns about the proposed change to the Citywide Growth Strategy. First, it represents a dramatic departure from the goals of the MDP, which were adopted on the basis of extensive democratic participation, and replaces them with a misguided notion of "following the market." The Imagine Calgary process, which laid the groundwork for all of the core goals of the MDP, is often praised as one of the most extensive citizen consultation processes in the history of North American planning. It was followed by another extensive citizen participation process leading to the finalization of the MDP, again with overwhelming citizen support. In 2009 Council voted to approve the MDP and CTP by a wide margin and, despite the concerted efforts of the suburban development industry to defeat Council supporters in the 2010 election, citizens returned a Council strongly supportive of the MDP to office. The wishes of Calgary's

citizens have repeatedly been made clear through democratic processes and there has been no indication of waning citizen support for the goals of the MDP. Indeed, recent Council approval of new communities on the fringe of the city has been met with widespread critique. It is quite concerning, then, that abandoning a core goal of the MDP is being considered without a citizen participation process of similar scope and depth to the processes that led to its adoption. Damage to the goals of the MDP will in all likelihood be matched by damage to the legitimacy of municipal democratic institutions themselves. If the extensive and widely-celebrated citizen participation processes that produced the MDP can be rendered meaningless, why would citizens have any faith in future citizen engagement processes?

A second, and related, concern is the notion that democratic decision-making processes can be replaced by “following the market.” As renowned economist Mariane Mazzucato has eloquently argued, markets are a product of the rules, regulations, and decisions we make, they are not free-floating independent institutions. For many years we have constructed markets that favour sprawl. The task we now face, in this time of catastrophic climate change and record inequality, is to construct markets that create sustainable forms of urban development. A key component of the MDP, designed to move us toward more sustainable urban development, is the 50% growth-in-established-areas target. We are now being told by suburban development industry representatives and some, but not all, city planning staff that this target is not achievable. But this assertion is unsupported by data and likely false. The current population density of Calgary is less than half that of Los Angeles. Are we to believe that Calgary cannot achieve densities similar to those of Los Angeles? More directly to planning practice, we simply are not doing what needs to be done if we are to achieve the MDP’s densification goals. As a member of the Riley Communities Local Area Plan working group, I can attest that working group members have made multiple requests for data on the development potential of the planning area under current plans, as well as densification/dwelling unit targets we should be aiming for, all to no avail. While the MDP is repeatedly invoked as the guiding document for the Local Area Planning process, the 50% growth-in-established-areas target is never discussed. Consequently, we have no idea what densification levels we should aim for. As one working group member pleaded, “tell us how many dwelling units you need, and we’ll figure out where to put them.” Virtually all established communities will get new Local Area Plans over the next few years, resulting in some degree on densification. Whether we hit the MDP’s densification targets depends on providing accurate target data, with some degree of flexibility to account for variations in critical infrastructure such as LRT, BRT and primary transit lines. The time to provide these targets is right now, not years from now after sub-optimal Local Area Plans are set.

Finally, should the 50% target not be achievable or, more likely, if Calgary’s population growth exceeds the assumptions of the MDP and new suburban developments are needed, it is critically important that new developments meet a much higher standard of sustainability than

current practice. As someone who regularly teaches field schools on urban sustainability (I co-taught a five-week European urban sustainability field school earlier this summer), I can report that standards of sustainable (sub)urban development in many European cities far exceed what is common practice in Calgary. Suburban developments that are transit and active-transportation focused, higher density with extensive public space and public amenities, integrating renewable energy and in some cases plus-energy housing (generating more renewable energy than buildings consume) are not uncommon, especially in Germany and Scandinavia. In this era when we are on track to exceed 3 degrees C of global warming, when we are seeing record levels of inequality and unaffordability across multiple realms of daily life, and when young people are losing hope for the future, we cannot afford to do any less. If we are to have new suburban development, it must meet a new much-higher bar for sustainability.

We cannot continue to pretend we are not in a time of crisis and we certainly cannot afford to backslide.

I wish you the best and, above all, courage in your decision-making.

Byron Miller

P.S. Please consider this letter as part of a larger submission from Calgarians for Sensible Growth.