

## Local Area Planning Program

# Lessons Learned 2024



Since the establishment of the Local Area Planning Program, we have worked with thousands of participants to develop local area plans in Calgary.

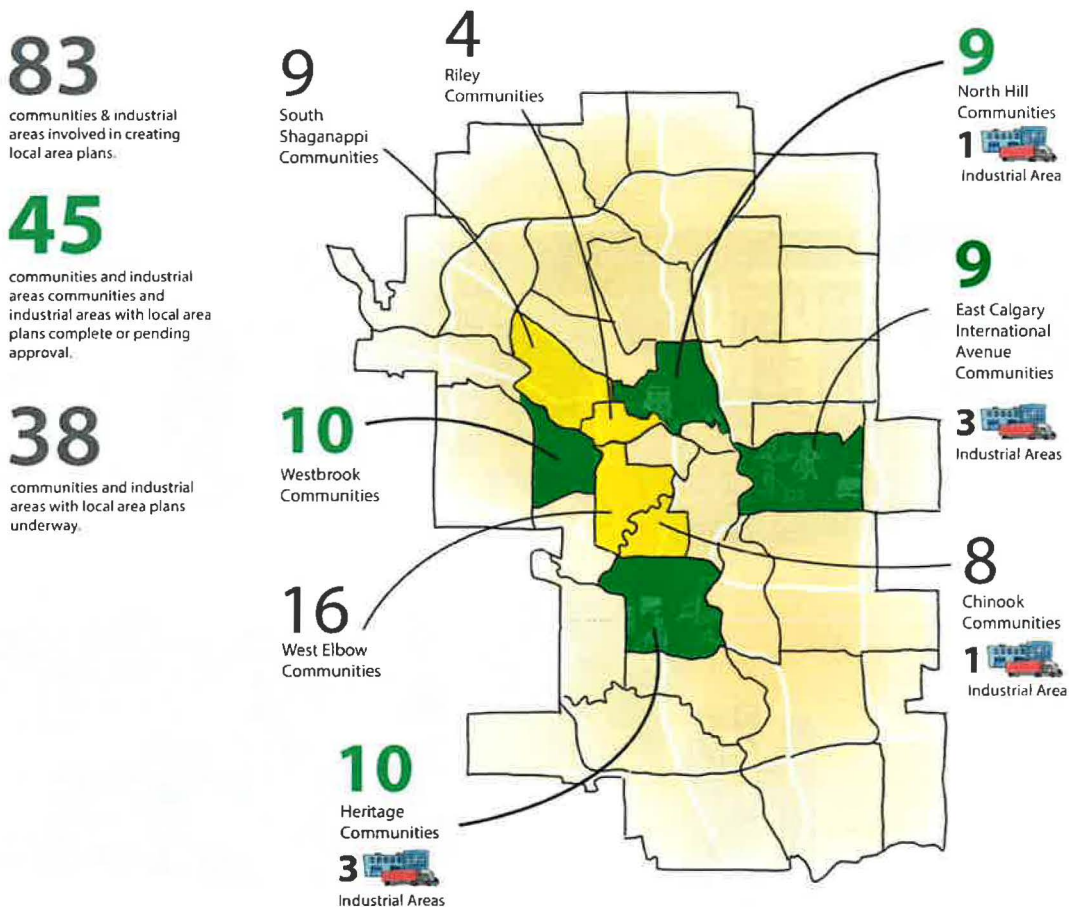
The Local Area Planning Program lessons learned for 2024 highlights innovative strategies and improvements made to the Program, engagement and local area planning over the past year.



## Program History

In 2018, Calgary's first multi-community policy plan, the North Hill Communities Local Area Plan, was launched as a pilot. As of November 2024, four local area plans have been approved or given first reading by Council, with four currently under development. Over the past six years, the Local Area Planning team in Community Planning has taken an iterative approach that continues to improve and enhance how local area plans are developed as part of the Local Area Planning Program.

The Local Area Planning Program Lessons Learned 2024 document provides an overview of key highlights of these innovative strategies and improvements, focusing on the Program itself, engagement, policy and internal processes. Additional background on history and learning from the first six years of the Program can be found in the first Local Area Planning Program Lessons Learned document, published in 2023.





## Supporting Our Growing Population

Calgary is changing and it's changing rapidly. Every year we welcome tens of thousands of new Calgarians to this city and it is imperative that we plan for how our communities will change over time.

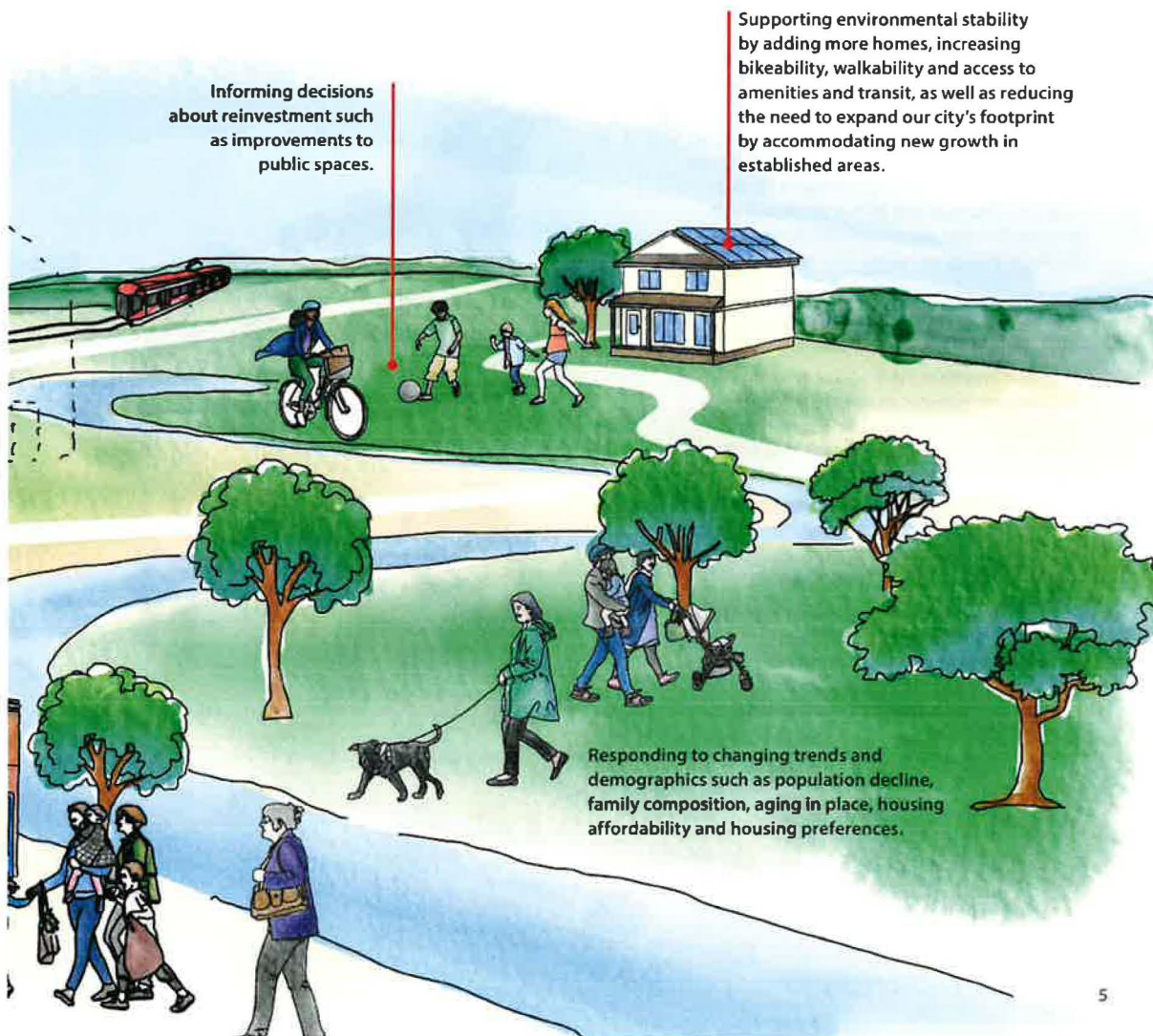
### Local area plans support communities as they change by:



Conversations about where, why and how revitalization and redevelopment should happen are essential to ensure there's a plan in place to help guide changes within our communities.

Local area plans provide direction on future development, investment and community improvements that residents, landowners, builders/developers, City Planners and Councilors can commonly refer to when new development and investment ideas are proposed. Since the Program's inception, over 300 events (including open houses, public sessions, working group sessions, community association sessions, industry sessions and community walks) have been held with thousands of participants to discuss growth and change in our communities.

As our Program advances, we continue to develop new and innovative strategies and focus on continuous process improvements to support the creation of local area plans.





# Program Approach

Foundationally, the Local Area Planning Program's approach is one that pilots, tests and tries new processes and methods of engagement. While we are always looking for ways to evolve and improve, there are some fundamental aspects of the Program that have proven to be successful and have become part of our standard practice.

## Iterative Approach

- We share local area plans in a format that better tells the story of the local area plan from policy to implementation.
- We release draft plans chapter by chapter, instead of releasing one draft near the end of the process. Our participants can 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.

## Storytelling and Meaningful Graphics

- The Local Area Planning Program develops engagement and education materials focused on storytelling; we've created graphics that better tell the story of local area planning as a plan is developed.
- Illustrative maps are developed to highlight what's special about where residents live in each plan area.
- Our materials reflect the diversity of Calgarians so people can see themselves in our document.
- We've incorporated more storytelling including why local area plans are beneficial for communities, how population changes impact communities and what is required for community populations to recover to support local shops, amenities and schools.



## Engagement Booklets

- One of our most successful strategies for education and engagement are our Engagement Booklets. These booklets are 16-20 page magazine-style booklets that are mailed to all addresses during each phase of the process. Over half of all feedback we receive from public participants now comes from our Engagement booklets, which have a pre-paid postage feedback component.
- We know planning for the future is crucial and our Youth Engagement Booklet allows The City to understand what is important to youth; how they move around their communities, what they love about their communities (and the city), and what they wish they had more of in their community.
- Working internally with social programming, Youth Engagement Booklets are distributed in all of the active LAP areas through the engagement stations. We are also distributing these to kids across the city at the social programming park and play events, and summer camps that focus on community building.
- Engagement booklets are unique to the Local Area Planning Program at The City.

## Inclusive Process

- As local area plans are developed, the needs of participants are considered throughout the process, and project teams work to remove as many barriers to participation as possible. Effort is made to ensure public engagement is accessible to all, despite potential limitations that might prevent them from being included in the process. A key objective is to ensure that at the very least, people within the area are aware of the opportunity to participate and understand that we are interested in hearing from them. Accessibility accommodations are also available for engagement by request via 311 and local area planning project pages on the Engage Portal are translatable into ten languages.



## Engagement Highlights

A robust engagement process is at the heart of the Local Area Planning Program. Continuous process improvements through lessons learned will continue to enhance our Program as new plans are developed across Calgary.





## 1. Innovative Strategies

### Student and Youth Engagement

- We heard from university students that we need to engage more on campus. In response, as part of the South Shaganappi Communities LAP process, we hosted five student engagement events at the University of Calgary and its satellite campus from late 2023 to early 2024, with more sessions planned for the rest of 2024. We are also building connections with other post-secondary institutions.
- Over the summer, we held two workshops for youth and young adults aged 12-30 to gather feedback on effective engagement strategies. Key suggestions included hosting events where youth already spend time, offering participation incentives, making events fun, ensuring easy access for non-drivers and using social media. This feedback will guide our future engagement activities.
- Using our Youth Engagement Booklet for children aged 5-12, we began attending City Hall School to discuss community planning with kids. These sessions allow the Local Area Planning team to explain planning in a personal way and hear children's hopes for their communities.



### Age-Friendly Conversations

- We attended several events to engage specifically with seniors about their lived experiences within their communities. Their feedback highlighted concerns about mobility and safety, helping the team validate the plan's core values and identify community improvements. The local area planning team will continue to seek opportunities to engage seniors as a specific target audience.

### Cultural Connections Engagement

- As part of the East Calgary International Avenue Communities Local Area Plan process, we launched *Creating Cultural Connections*, targeted engagement to support cultural planning and equity. Through this process, we co-hosted sessions with cultural leaders and organizations, reviewing content and gathering advice to ensure cultural relevance and participation from their communities. These efforts aimed to build trust between the Local Area Planning Team and cultural communities.
- Through this initiative, we engaged over 700 community members and co-hosted sessions with seven different cultural groups, including Vietnamese, Filipino, South Sudanese and Indigenous communities, Ethiopian and Eritrean business owners, Alex Community Food Centre and Eastview Basketball Association.

### Educational Materials Developed

- The calgary.ca/LAP webpage now features educational videos, an interactive map and additional educational information about the Local Area Planning Program.
- We created six educational videos to explain the Program, participation opportunities, the importance of housing choice and the three key phases of engagement. These videos are available on calgary.ca/LAP.
- A comic-book style piece was also developed to illustrate the need for local area plans. This engaging visual tool has been translated into Calgary's top ten languages.

### Professional Knowledge Transfer

- Members of the Local Area Planning team presented at the Canadian Institute of Planners national conference in July 2024. This was an excellent opportunity to promote The City of Calgary, showcase the Local Area Planning Program's successes and share lessons learned with other municipalities. It also allowed the team to learn from other municipalities and identify best practices from across the country.
- We continued to build relationships with planners at the City of Edmonton by sharing our experiences in developing local area planning policy.
- The team also presented to students at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary as well as planning staff at the City of Edmonton.





## 2. Improvements

### Engagement Booklets Refined

- Key takeaways from 2023 focus groups were incorporated into our Engagement Booklets. Participants emphasized the need for clearer calls to action on the cover and first few pages, immediate clarity on what is being asked and upfront details of engagement opportunities, including dates, times and locations. They also suggested adding a QR code linking to the online engagement page.
- Participants appreciated the overall design of the Booklets, especially the diverse visuals, detailed maps and illustrations. Moving forward, a continued focus will be to make information more visual, and less text based wherever possible.

### Language Translation Enhanced

- For the East Calgary International Avenue Communities Local Area Plan specifically, the project team undertook a number of language translation initiatives to remove barriers to participation throughout the planning process. This included print advertising in multiple languages, advertising on local ethnic radios, specific outreach to cultural groups with local language interpreters on-site and interpretation services available to community members at the City Council public hearing.

### LAP Reconnect

- In 2024, we returned to approved local area plan areas for the first time to reconnect with people about their local area plan and to update the plans to align with direction from *Rezoning for Housing and Home is Here – The City of Calgary's Housing Strategy*, as directed by Council. Through these initial LAP Reconnect sessions, the Local Area Planning team has gained insight into additional education and connection opportunities that could be implemented in the future in approved LAP areas.



Phase 3 Engagement Booklet



Translated Comic Book



## Policy Highlights

Policies in local area plans guide future growth and change. As the Local Area Planning Program continues to evolve, additional policy considerations and enhancements are being introduced into local area plans.



## 1. Innovative Strategies

### Accessibility and Clarity

- We launched legacy webpages for approved local area plans to provide a summary of the local area plan by chapter, information on projects being implemented from Chapter 3/Appendix A and a summary of engagement that was undertaken as the local area plan was developed. These pages will be maintained over time and could be expanded to provide additional information on how the local area plan is being implemented.
- Based on feedback from community members, in the Riley Communities Local Area Plan, we tested the creation of a colour-blind accessible version of the Building Scale map.
- We created a one-page summary of the Urban Form and Building Scale categories to provide an easy-to-read overview for participants.

### New Area Specific Policies

- In the South Shaganappi Communities Local Area Plan, the first local area plan to have a significant area of existing curvilinear street patterns, we developed a new cul-de-sac policy which requires redevelopment to occur comprehensively in cul-de-sacs. This policy will also be used in the Chinook Communities Local Area Plan.
- In the Chinook Communities Local Area Plan, we heard through public engagement that there was a desire for portions of the Manchester Industrial area to continue to evolve and welcome additional uses beyond industrial uses. In response, we developed the Manchester Special Policy Area, to provide additional policy guidance to encourage complementary non-industrial uses that will serve a new residential population in close proximity to existing and potential future LRT stations.

## 2. Improvements

### Policy Consistency

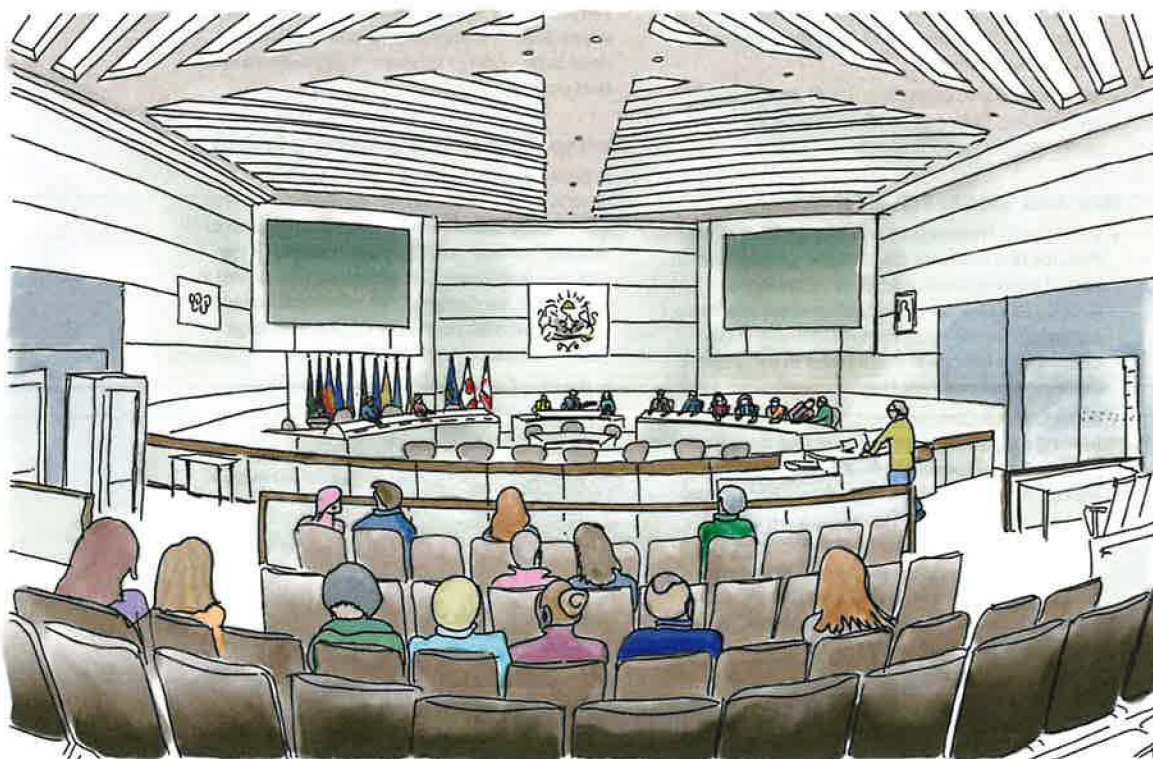
- The Local Area Planning team continued to improve consistency and alignment in policies through regularly scheduled, collaborative 'Consistency Meetings', in which planners from each team review, compare and update plans with the most up-to-date language and best policy options. Consistency across plans makes it easier for planners, industry and the public to read and interpret LAP policies when dealing with projects in different areas throughout the city.
- The Local Area Planning team also started to track where policies in approved local area plans may need to be updated in future to align with current best practice.

### Heritage Guidelines and Working Groups

- In previous LAPs, heritage guidelines were developed after the plan was approved. The Riley Communities Local Area Plan was the first plan to develop heritage guidelines concurrently as the plan was developed. This process has continued in the West Elbow Communities, which will include approximately 80 percent of Calgary's heritage guideline areas.
- In the Riley Communities, heritage guidelines include the creation of a heritage density transfer policy.

## Internal Process Highlights

Continuous process improvements are integral to the Local Area Planning Program. We consistently seek opportunities to enhance our methods, workflows and ways we work together to create and sustain local area plans.





## 1. Innovative Strategies

### Sustainment and Monitoring Capacity

- In 2024, resources were hired to support monitoring, sustainment, implementation and continuous improvement of the Local Area Planning Program. This is a notable advancement in the Local Area Planning team's capacity.
- Work will focus on systematically monitoring and reporting on key local area planning metrics and indicators with the goal of improving local area plan implementation, policy development and informing updates to approved local area plans.
- Sustainment and monitoring will ensure continuous improvement to the Local Area Planning Program by evaluating the success of policies, implementation options and community improvements identified in local area plans, as well as providing education and support to communities.

### Local Area Planning in Greenfield Communities

- In 2024, we began work on four area structure plan (ASP) projects in greenfield communities, adapting the phased approach and processes developed for local area plans in the established areas.
- The West Macleod Area Structure Plan, Nose Creek Area Structure Plan and Aurora Business Park Area Structure Plan are currently underway, and the Prairie Economic Gateway Initiative is pending approval. These new and amended plans will provide planning guidance and direction to approximately 1,869 ha (4,600 acres) of lands that are either within the city limits or identified within Calgary's Intermunicipal Development Plan.
- As an evolving business practice, First Nations Traditional Knowledge Keepers have offered their experiences and knowledge through guided walk-throughs of sites pre-development. This has led to significant awareness building that will inform place-making policies of the plans.

## 2. Improvements

### Internal Coordination and Efficiency

- We established a cross-corporate team and developed program governance for the Local Area Investment Fund. In 2024, the first seven projects to receive funding were selected.
- The Local Area Planning team continued the approach of "sister" LAPs that follow a similar timeline, finding it to be a highly efficient, effective and collaborative way to develop local area plans concurrently.
- In the Riley Communities Local Area Plan, we established a monthly project coordination meeting that brought together groups working across the corporation on projects within the plan area, from planned maintenance work to community improvement projects. This improved our coordination of public engagement and collaboration on the development of Chapter 3 investment opportunities.
- We continued to innovate our coordination with our Creative team, using weekly meetings and Teams channels to provide quicker and more proactive coordination between and across local area planning project teams.

### Calgary Planning Commission

- Calgary Planning Commission now holds a special closed session meeting for reviewing local area plans, instead of scheduling them at the end of the regular agenda. This reduces staff overtime and provides efficiency for Calgary Planning Commission members.
- Local area plans now go to Calgary Planning Commission earlier in the process for a closed session workshop, to ensure that feedback from Calgary Planning Commission can be incorporated into the draft plan prior to Phase 3: REFINE being launched.

## What's Next?

As the Local Area Planning Program advances, we will continue to gather feedback and lessons learned from the next generation of local area plans under development. Processes within the Program will continuously improve and evolve over time as more plans are developed.

In 2025, we expect to bring the Riley Communities Local Area Plan, South Shaganappi Communities Local Area Plan, Chinook Communities Local Area Plan and West Elbow Communities Local Area Plan forward for approval. Updates to the North Hill Communities Local Area Plan, Westbrook Communities Local Area Plan and Heritage Communities Local Area Plan will also be brought forward to align with *Rezoning for Housing and Home Is Here – The City of Calgary's Housing Strategy*.

Over the next year the Program will continue to build out sustainment and monitoring efforts to evaluate success of the Program and identify continuous improvements. Started in 2023, internal engagement with City of Calgary staff who use and implement local area plans, will be expanded. Other work planned for 2025 includes the development of a Planning Liaison program, continued coordination and alignment with the future Calgary Plan and Zoning Bylaw and planning for an enhanced education session on the Local Area Planning Program for members of Council following the 2025 municipal election.

