

Calgary Planning Commission Member Comments



For CPC2025-0098 / LOC2023-0359
heard at Calgary Planning
Commission
Meeting 2025 February 27



Member	Reasons for Decision or Comments
<p>Commissioner Damiani</p>	<p>Reasons for Approval</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This site provides the opportunity for strategic intensification to meet the City’s objectives of increased housing and transit-oriented development. <p>The site is identified as ‘Comprehensive Planning Site’ in the Westbrook Communities LAP with no urban form categories or building scale modifiers. Through the outline plan and land use redesignation process the applicant and Administration conducted review and analysis of the existing context, site conditions, infrastructure capacity, feedback from public engagement, and future requirements to inform a comprehensive plan for future use and form.</p> <p>The plan evolved through the process, with policy and land use changes to provide certainty by emphasizing contextually-sensitive and site specific policy and rules for redevelopment, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ARP amendments for building scale categories and urban form modifiers that consider the site topography and integration with existing development, - Direct Control land use district rules for setbacks and stepbacks along interface with existing low-density housing - S-SPR dedicated public open space. <p>The Outline Plan and Conditions include developer-investment into public realm and infrastructure to support the redevelopment and to integrate into the existing community, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased right of ways along interface roads with existing development, - Utility upgrades, - Mobility improvements of the 5A and road infrastructure, and - Investment in the BRT station.
<p>Commissioner Hawryluk</p>	<p>Reasons for Approval</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the proposed redevelopment of the Viscount Bennett school site.

It is proposed that the current Residential – Grade-Oriented Infill (R-CG) District be replaced with the Special Purpose – School, Park and Community Reserve (S-SPR) District and a Direct Control (DC) District based on the Multi-Residential – High Density Medium Rise (M-H2) District. The S-SPR District would create a public park and would be provided as Municipal Reserve. This part is 10% of the parcel, which is the maximum amount of land that a city can take as Municipal Reserve in the Municipal Government Act (MGA, 2025, 666(1-2)). The DC District would allow primarily residential buildings with a limited range of support commercial uses. Custom floor area ratios, maximum densities, and heights (4-16 storeys) would direct the growth towards Richmond Rd and Crowchild Tr where the ground is lower (~13m lower than the Southwest corner of the site) and nearest the southbound and northbound MAX Yellow BRT stations that exist at Crowchild Tr and 26 Av SW.

The current R-CG District would allow up to 345 dwelling units plus secondary suites, though the street layout would not allow for a functional development of this site with the R-CG District (Attachment 1, page 3).

The proposed DC District would allow up to 1,509 new residential units; 1,231 new residential units are anticipated (Attachment 1, page 7). Upgraded traffic signals will be required (at the Applicant's expense) if the site adds 1,250 units (Attachment 2, page 5, Condition 29). Attachment 1 notes, "Water connections to Crowchild Trail SW will be required, as well as to 25 Street SW and 24 Street SW. Additional hydrants are shown to provide increased fire coverage. ... An upgrade to the downstream sanitary main has been identified in order to reach the maximum allowable density and will be reviewed during development permit applications" (Attachment 1, page 9).

This application aligns with the Municipal Development Plan (MDP).

Crowchild Trail is part of the Primary Transit Network (MDP, 2020, Map 2: Primary Transit Network). The following comments from the MDP about the Primary Transit Network, especially where MAX BRT Stations are on the Primary Transit Network, support this application:

"Provide greater housing choices in locations close to job markets and in areas well served by the Primary Transit Network" (2.1.1.c).

"The MDP proposes a more compact urban form for Calgary by locating a portion of new housing and jobs within higher intensity, mixed-use areas that are well connected to the Primary Transit

Network. ... Accessible, safe and convenient public transit hubs along the Primary Transit Network.” (2.2.1).

The 26 Av/Crowchild Tr MAX Yellow BRT Stations are along the Primary Transit Network and ought to be accessible, safe, and convenient.

This application aligns with and updates the Westbrook Communities Local Area Plan (LAP).

The LAP does not use the term “Transit-Oriented Development” much, so there may be some abstract debate about whether this proposal is Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) or something more like transit-oriented, transit-friendly or transit-supportive development (MDP, 2020, page 156). However, the LAP clearly connected this site with the adjacent MAX Yellow BRT Station. Most of this site is within the Core Zone of the 26 Avenue/Crowchild Transit Station area, which the LAP glossary defines as “the area typically within 200 to 300 metres of a transit station that is the focus of a transit station area as identified in the Plan” (Westbrook LAP, 4.4). In fact, the entire site is within the 600m of two MAX Yellow BRT Stations: the 26 Avenue/Crowchild Transit Station Area and the Marda Loop Transit Station area.

The LAP left this as a Comprehensive Planning Site with no scale modifier “to reflect the undetermined future potential of the site” but included policy direction to “locate vehicle access to reduce conflicts with pedestrian movement and transit operations,” relocate “the southbound MAX Yellow BRT station to the south of 26 Avenue SW,” and “provide safe and convenient and universally accessibly pedestrian connections to the future transit station” (Westbrook LAP, 2.5.2.am-ao). This means that the Outline Plan and Land Use Amendment determine what is appropriate here and the LAP will need to be updated to align with the proposal.

The Local Area Plan amendments are convoluted (Attachment 3). Administration’s approach in adding the text in Section 2.3.7, shrinking the Core Zone of the 26 Avenue/Crowchild Trail Station map in Figure 18, are creating a 26 Avenue/Crowchild Trail Station Area Modified Building Height map in Figure 19 are technically acceptable, but are more complicated than necessary. A simpler approach would update Map 4: Building Scale with a maximum height of High (up to 26 storeys) throughout most of the site with transitions down to the other streets: Low (up to 6 storeys) along Richmond Rd and Low-Modified (up to 4 storeys) along 25 St and 30 Av. This would have the same height transitions that is marked in the proposed version of Figure 19 but would remove the need for the text amendment in Section 2.3.7. Figure 18 could remain as already approved; Figure 19

would not be necessary. The map would suggest that up to 26 storeys could be possible, but the DC District would still limit the heights of any future buildings.

During Commission's review, Administration suggested that complicated LAP amendments might ease residents' concerns. Yet, the Community Association's comments and other residents' public comments suggest that their concerns are with the Land Use Amendment, not with the approach to amend the LAP. Unless residents express support for Administration's approach to amend the LAP, a simpler approach might have been warranted.

According to Administration and the Applicant, engagement has been extensive. The Cover Report notes that the Applicant held "eight in-person workshops with the local community and multiple on-line and in-person open houses and townhall style meetings" and "Administration met with various members of the public and specifically met with representatives of the Richmond Knob Hill Community Association (CA) in-person on ten occasions, including an on-site meeting" (Cover Report, page 2, 3). Attachment 1 notes the number of revisions that were made during this process, which reduced the maximum heights and homes from 30 storeys (95m) and 2,500 homes to 16 storeys (30m) and 1,509 homes (Attachment 1, page 10). The Community Association remains "deeply opposed" to this application (Attachment 10, page 1).

Public opinion is an important factor, but not the sole factor in determining the public interest. There are multiple communities, multiple publics, and multiple interests. It is difficult but necessary to evaluate and harmonize or reconcile conflicting opinions and interests.

Some broader context should be factored when determining the public interest. "In 2021, the population of Calgary was 1,306,780, up 5.5 per cent from 1,239,220 in 2016."^[1] "As of April 1, 2024, Calgary's population is estimated at 1,491,900, representing a population growth rate of 4.9 per cent since April 2023."^[2] From 2016 to 2021, Calgary's population increased by 5.5%; from 2021 to 2024, by 14.2%. This is not a new phenomenon. Calgary's population has doubled in the last 30-35 years.

Calgarians may or may not like how quickly Calgary has grown and is growing, but it is our reality. As Philip K. Dick observed, "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away." Reality also includes Canadian citizens' and permanent residents' Charter right to inter-provincial mobility.^[3] Some of the

people who move to the Calgary region will want to live in Calgary. The question is how the City will respond to that desire.

This application would build homes for about 2-6 weeks' worth of growth in Calgary. The Applicant anticipates adding 1,231 new residential units, which might mean about 1,972 people (Attachment 1, page 7: 424 people/hectare x 4.65 hectares = 1,971.6 people). The 2019 Municipal Census recorded that Calgary's population grew by 18,367 people or about 353 people/week (1,972 people ÷ 353 people/week = 5.6 weeks). In 2024, Statistics Canada estimated that Calgary's population grew by about 69,000 people or about 1,327 people/week (1,972 people ÷ 1,327 people/week = 1.5 weeks).[2]

To keep pace with the lower growth rate from 2018 to 2019, Calgary would need to approve and build 40-60 projects like this in the 5-7 years that it would take to complete this project. In 2022, the City listed 24 emerging, prospective, and potential LRT and MAX BRT station areas with the highest opportunity for Transit-Oriented Development.[4] In other words, Calgary is growing faster than Transit-Oriented Development can exclusively deliver. This situation should encourage some humility about the limitations of betting all growth on TOD. It may also encourage acting when an opportunity comes to add homes without losing any existing homes in a location that is adjacent to a MAX BRT line that is on the Primary Transit Network and have the Applicant (rather than the City) pay to improve those MAX BRT stations.

[1] <https://www.calgary.ca/research/population-profile.html>

[2] <https://newsroom.calgary.ca/city-of-calgary-2024-mid-year-progress-update/>

[3] Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982, Section 6(2).

[4]

<https://www.calgary.ca/content/dam/www/transportation/documents/tod-station-area-info-sheets.pdf>