



SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, PLANNING & LANDSCAPE

OFFICE OF THE DEAN
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, AB, Canada T2N 1N4
ucalgary.ca

May 20, 2025

RE: Office to Post-Secondary Conversion Program

Dear Mayor Gondek and City Councillors,

The downtown conversion program for converting underutilized office space for post-secondary use has been key to the University of Calgary's ability to secure the space in 801 7 Ave SW for the new home of our School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape (SAPL). On behalf of our students, faculty, and staff, I express my heartfelt thanks for helping us create a distinctive design school that will enhance our research and teaching of next-generation city-builders and have a positive impact on revitalizing an underutilized area of downtown's west end.

As we have worked through this first application to the conversion program it has become clear that post-secondary uses are more diverse than originally considered and our use of space extends well beyond the typical classrooms that many people associate with an educational institution. The mandate of a research-intensive university, such as the University of Calgary, encompasses a broad range of activities across three primary areas – teaching, research, and service, each of which requires different kinds and types of spaces that are then used in multiple ways, depending on the specific academic program involved. As we discovered in the design of our space at 801 7 Ave, the areas of value for a post-secondary can also extend beyond the typical definition of 'office space' and it is important that the conversion program be flexible enough to accommodate these additional areas.

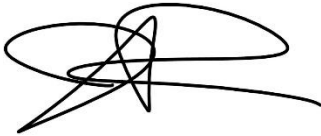
For example, SAPL requires space on the ground floor of the building with direct outside access to accommodate our community-facing uses such as the Design Justice Lab and our participatory design workshops. The vacant restaurant space adjacent to the main lobby is ideal for these functions as it can be accessed both from the street and the main lobby. However, as it was not classified as 'office space' in the tax roles? there was a challenge with the current wording of the program to have it included in the conversion program, even though it had been vacant for a number of years and had been deemed to not be a viable location for a restaurant. Occupying this main floor space with students and community groups meets the broad goal of the conversion program and will, arguably, make a bigger contribution to downtown vibrancy than a similar floor area on an upper tower floor.

Similarly, SAPL requires a substantive amount of space on-grade and in close proximity to grade for the fabrication workshops and advanced robotic labs needed for research and teaching. The two floors of the vacant conference centre in 801's annex building is ideal for these uses, along with one loading dock bay that is being converted into an all-weather large-scale assembly space in which full scale architectural mock-ups will be created as part of our teaching and research programs. The conference area and loading dock also fall outside the conventional definition of 'office space' and there was a similar challenge with having these areas included in the conversion program.

Again, both these uses are critical to the functioning of our research and teaching programs and contribute to downtown vibrancy. The second-floor robotics lab will have glazed walls onto the +15 walkway and the assembly-space will be used to create large-scale installations that will be placed in the parks and public spaces of downtown.

The City of Calgary has shown great vision for revitalizing our downtown with the office conversion program and the extension to non-residential use is an important next step in the evolution of the program. However, to effectively meet the sometimes-eccentric needs of post-secondary institutions, and achieve the broad program goal of revitalizing existing buildings to improve vibrancy, I strongly recommend that the terms of reference for the program be expanded to include areas that fall outside of the conventional 'office-space' category.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. John Brown, PhD, Architect MAAA, FRAIC-PP
Dean and Professor
School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape
University of Calgary