

Blanket Rezoning Didn't Deliver. Calgary Needs a Reset.

In the Spring of 2024, following months of community engagement and a 15-day Public Hearing of Council (the longest in Calgary history), Calgary City Council approved Blanket Rezoning in a 9–6 vote. The decision came despite clear public opposition: 62% of more than 700 speakers and 88% of over 6,000 written submissions rejected the policy. Council's justification was straightforward—more housing, faster supply, and improved affordability. I voted against and today, after consultation with realtors, urban planners, economists, community leaders, and some former Council colleagues, I've reached a conclusion that Blanket Rezoning has failed. Nearly two years later, those promises have not materialized and Blanket Rezoning must be repealed and eventually replaced when done right.

Blanket Rezoning was designed to unlock “missing middle” housing—rowhouses, duplexes, and small-scale infill—by making R-CG the default zoning across most residential areas. Instead, the data shows that less than six per cent of new development has come from these built forms. Calgary's housing mix remains largely unchanged: apartments continue to dominate, and the longstanding pattern of predominantly greenfield growth persists. In effect, the policy did not meaningfully alter what gets built or how much supply is delivered.

Affordability outcomes are equally underwhelming. As Calgary Real Estate Board economist Ann-Marie Lurie has noted, new inner-city development has not lowered prices—it has raised them. New builds are significantly more expensive than existing homes, pulling resale values upward to close the gap. In contrast, suburban markets—where new and resale homes compete more directly—have seen stabilization or modest price declines. The implication is clear: supply only improves affordability when it delivers comparable product. Blanket Rezoning failed to account for this basic market dynamic.

At the same time, land economics have worsened. Upzoning has transformed ordinary inner-city lots into redevelopment assets, driving prices from roughly \$700,000 to over \$1 million in many cases. These higher land costs are embedded into every new unit, eroding any potential affordability gains before construction even begins. The result is increased pressure on buyers and accelerated gentrification, with fewer attainable options for existing residents.

Administratively, the policy has also fallen short. By removing land use redesignation hearings, Blanket Rezoning shifted conflict downstream to the development permit and Subdivision and Development Appeal Board (SDAB) stages. Appeals have increased, timelines have lengthened, and project uncertainty has grown. Carrying costs associated with these delays—estimated at roughly \$34,000 per unit—are ultimately passed on to homebuyers. What was intended as streamlining has instead produced friction.

Beyond metrics, there is a broader consequence: Erosion of Public Trust. Blanket Rezoning has disrupted the perceived stability of neighbourhood planning, intensified community

opposition, and contributed to environmental trade-offs such as declining tree canopy. The result is a planning system that is less predictable, less trusted, and less effective.

Calgary should not abandon housing reform—but it must change course.

A more effective approach is targeted, data-driven planning: concentrating density along transportation / transit corridors and activity centre nodes, supported by detailed multi-community Local Area Plans that pre-zone appropriate locations with community context and precision. This should be paired with proven housing affordability tools—secondary suites, non-market ‘affordable’ housing, and community land trusts that remove land costs from the housing development cost equation.

Sequencing also matters. Attempting to amend Blanket Rezoning midstream risks compounding its shortcomings. The most effective path forward is to repeal the policy and replace it with a framework grounded in municipal development policy planning, updated land use bylaws, addition of market realities, and public expectations of community context (e.g. history, heritage, culture, vegetation, and investment legacy).

Calgary does not lack ambition. It needs discipline—policies that are precise, evidence-based inputs, and alignment with how the housing marketplace functions. Calgarians will not tolerate virtues, ideology, rhetoric, or wishful thinking anymore. Majority of this City Council was elected on repealing Blanket Rezoning and not fixing it through amendments on the floor of Council hearing and without a return for public hearing. Council must revisit of the housing strategy, policy, land use bylaws, and local area plans in a quality but expeditious manner, then through public hearing. We cannot afford to delay housing development but also cannot afford to make mistakes again.

With supply increasing and population growth moderating (i.e. we’re on a slower trajectory to 2 million population), the city has a window of time to get this right and Calgarians should demand City Hall uses it. A new housing policy should not be defined by federal housing agenda that are not applicable in Calgary. It should support mutually acceptable housing outcomes and proven techniques, not by inappropriate prescriptive approaches from afar...Ottawa.

I, along with five Council colleagues, opposed Blanket Rezoning in 2024—not because housing reform was unnecessary, but because this approach was the wrong way to achieve it. Let’s repeal Blanket Rezoning and work together towards a ‘Made in Calgary’ solution for Calgarians - young, old, and unable to find housing that they can afford.

Submitted by Terry Wong, former Ward 7 City Councillor.