

## **Urban Design Initiatives Update**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Urban design has become an increasingly important aspect of Calgary's city building. In 2017, Council approved a revised Urban Design Review Framework (Framework). This was a major initiative to clarify the design review process and heighten the importance of quality built form in Calgary. This, along with a number of other urban design related initiatives underway to improve the quality of urban design in Calgary, represent a fundamental change in how The City defines quality and reviews urban design.

Specifically, as directed by Council, the outline plan design gaps project, redundancies in organizational bodies work, and the monitoring program (Attachments 1,2,3), are foundational pieces that will inform how we define, measure and monitor high quality urban design outcomes. Given the magnitude of this work, Administration wishes to confirm its interpretation of Council's direction for these initiatives. This report will also provide an update on backyard suites (laneway housing design guidelines).

### **ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:**

That the SPC on Planning & Urban Development recommend that Council:

1. Forward this report to the 2017 March 19 Regular Council meeting,
2. Receive for information the following:
  - a. Scope of Work - Outline Plan Design Gaps (Attachment 1)
  - b. Scope of Work - Redundancies of Organizational Bodies in the Design Review Process (Attachment 2), and
  - c. Scope of Work - Urban Design Review Framework Monitoring Program (Attachment 3)
 and direct Administration to report back on these items within a combined report not later than Q1 2019.

### **PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY**

On 2017 July 24, Council adopted the recommendations of PUD2017-0601, as follows:

That Council:

1. Approve the revised Terms of Reference for the Urban Design Review Panel;
2. Receive the revised Urban Design Review Protocol and revised Implementation Plan for information; and
3. That Council direct Administration to bring back a Report, through the Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development, that identifies and evaluates what, if any, design gaps currently exist in new outline plans, and determine, in conjunction with the development industry and stakeholders, how best to address that gap, and redundancies that may exist among the organizational bodies involved in the review process, no later than 2019 Q1.

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On 2017 January 23, Council approved PUD2017-0049 to defer “preparation of design guidelines for laneway housing into the city wide urban design guideline project, commencing in 2017 and reporting back to Council in Q1 2018.”

On 2016 May 16, a Motion Arising from CPC2016-110 directed Administration to “prepare design guidelines for laneway housing and to return to Council no later than 2017 Q1.”

### **BACKGROUND**

In support of heightened attention to quality urban design in recent years, there are a number of initiatives underway related to changing culture, structure and resources, policies and standards, and process with an aim to improve the overall quality urban design in Calgary (Attachment 4).

A major component of this work was a revised Urban Design Review Framework (Framework) process approved by Council 2017 July 24. This initiative clarified the design review process to ensure that it occurred at the most appropriate point in the approvals continuum, involving the available expertise most effectively. The new Framework was piloted in Q4 2017, coming into full effect in Q1 2018.

When the Framework was approved, Council directed Administration to identify and evaluate design gaps in relation to outline plan applications, and redundancies in organizational bodies in the review process, in addition to a monitoring program. Each of these pieces of work will be discussed in the Investigation section below.

Finally, Administration has previous Council direction to develop laneway housing design guidelines. (Note: the Land Use Bylaw term for laneway housing is “backyard suites”; laneway houses are a particular type of backyard suite.) Work on these has been affected by a larger piece of work on secondary suites that Council directed on 2017 December 11. An update on this work will be provided in the Investigation section.

### **INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS**

Administration has several urban design related projects underway as a result of both recent Council direction stemming from the Framework, and previous Council direction.

#### **1. Recent Council-directed work related to Urban Design Review Framework**

At the 2017 July 24 Council meeting, Administration was directed to examine whether there are design gaps in outline plans, and if there are redundancies in the design review process. Administration also committed to a full program of monitoring the new Framework. Each of these projects are described in detail below and are intended to confirm Council’s direction. Although work is underway, the projects are in the early stages and can be adjusted if required.

##### *a) Outline Plan Design Gaps*

Administration’s goal is to ensure development of high quality, well designed neighbourhoods. During the 2017 Framework stakeholder engagement, questions were raised regarding the role

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that outline plans play in community design, and whether to/how best to include these applications in the design review process. As a result, Council directed Administration to work with stakeholders to:

- identify and evaluate any design gaps that occur in outline plans and determine how to address these gaps; and
- evaluate any redundancies that may exist among the organizational bodies involved in the review process.

Attachment 1 contains a Scope of Work specifically related to examining possible design gaps in outline plans. The project will focus on policy, process, and product (the built environment) to help clarify which parts of the full outline plan process may trigger design gaps at the community level, if gaps currently exist.

Administration will make recommendations to Council on this item, as appropriate, as part of its 2019 reporting.

### *b) Redundancies of Organizational Bodies in the Design Review Process*

The Framework introduced significant process revisions to avoid unnecessary redundancies between organizational bodies involved in the design review process. However, when the Framework was approved, Council engaged in further discussion regarding perceived overlaps between the design review roles of Calgary Planning Commission, Urban Design Review Panel and Administration. Administration was subsequently directed to investigate “redundancies that may exist among the organizational bodies involved in the review process” as part of its direction regarding outline plans.

Administration will take a broad approach to Council’s direction and will look for any remaining non-productive redundancies for all items reviewed through the Framework, as a part of the monitoring program outlined below. A Scope of Work can be found in Attachment 2; however, the specific tools used to determine if there are remaining redundancies in the review process are contained within the monitoring program (Attachment 3).

### *c) Urban Design Review Framework Monitoring Program (Attachment 3)*

The Framework’s Implementation Plan outlined a high-level monitoring program to ensure that the process changes operate as intended, including identifying any remaining non-productive redundancies within the design review process.

Administration has further defined the monitoring program to address these process-focused topics:

- perception / experience of how the process works for applicants, Urban Design Review Panel, Calgary Planning Commission and Administration
- the number of projects / applications referred for design review to Administration and Urban Design Review Panel
- the number of Administration and Urban Design Review Panel comments acted on by applicants
- the impact of urban design review on timelines

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- the impact of design comments on decisions made by the development authority.

In addition, Administration sees the monitoring of the Framework as an opportunity to gather input to inform the work of defining quality design expectations. Specifically, the use of and discussion around the Municipal Development Plan (MDP)'s 13 urban design elements at Urban Design Review Panel, and Calgary Planning Commission will be tracked and analyzed. These elements form the basis of The City's design guidelines and are used to evaluate planning applications. Monitoring these elements will give Administration a clearer understanding of:

- the most common design problems / areas of misunderstanding in applications, as well as those that are understood and well-applied in applications
- key areas of concern / attention by both the Urban Design Review Panel and Calgary Planning Commission, and
- the overall functionality and relevance of the elements, within the Calgary context.

Monitoring the 13 urban design elements through 2018 will provide data to determine what changes and tools are required to address gaps in definitions and understanding, and tie directly into the Getting to Quality Development work defined below.

## **2. Other Related Projects**

### *a) Getting to Quality Development*

As previously presented to Council in 2017 November budget deliberations, Attachment 4, outlines a number of initiatives to enable a greater focus on realizing and defining consistent expectations around quality urban development. The quality development project is intended to define what quality is, describe quality planning outcomes, and develop measurable criteria to provide greater clarity for customers, staff and citizens.

Ultimately, the results from the Framework initiatives and the quality development work, will come together to provide a comprehensive picture of what quality urban design is and how we achieve it. This will define The City's expectations of quality design; and inform what, if any, additional policies, amendments, tools, and processes are needed to help realize the goal of high quality design outcomes.

### *b) Backyard Suite Design (Laneway Housing Guidelines)*

Administration has previous direction to develop laneway housing guidelines (backyard suites). The guidelines are intended for use by applicants, communities, and staff to assist in understanding how the current Land Use Bylaw rules can be creatively applied to produce better design results for backyard suites that face the lane.

Administration completed contextual work for the backyard suite guidelines, including best practice research and analysis. Administration also created graphical representations of how backyard suites facing laneways can be implemented under the current Land Use Bylaw rules, and drafted a brochure for users.

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While work was underway on the backyard suites brochure, on 2017 December 11 Notice of Motion C2017-1249 directed Administration to complete a broad scope of work regarding secondary suites, which by definition includes backyard suites. This work will go to Council on 2017 March 12.

A Motion Arising further directed Administration to produce implementation plans for secondary suites, including an application guidebook, to be undertaken following Council's March 12 direction. The backyard suite design graphical representation work complements this larger secondary suite implementation guide. Pending Council's decision, Administration will include the graphical representation of backyard suites as part of the larger secondary suite implementation guidebook.

Once the results of the monitoring program are understood, the final form of the backyard suite guidelines, included potential Land Use Bylaw revisions, will be more fully considered.

### **Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication**

*Outline Plan Design Gaps:* A series of internal and external stakeholder workshops were held in 2018 January to start the discussion about possible gaps in policy, process and product (the built environment) that affect community design at the outline plan stage. Further work with stakeholders will occur throughout the year (Attachment 1, Appendix 1).

*Urban Design Review Framework Monitoring Program:* Engagement with customers and Urban Design Review Panel occurred throughout the pilot period between July and December 2017, as monitoring tools were refined. Further work with these groups as well as internal stakeholders and Calgary Planning Commission will occur throughout 2018 to understand their experiences with the new Framework and to identify process improvements, as required.

*Backyard Suite Guide:* Discussions with industry experts and internal stakeholders to identify ongoing issues with backyard suite applications have occurred. Engagement with communities and industry will be undertaken if Land Use Bylaw or other policy amendments are ultimately proposed.

### **Strategic Alignment**

Urban design is one of the MDP's primary goals. The MDP identifies site and building design that contributes to high quality living environments and attractive walkable diverse neighbourhoods and communities (MDP 2.4.2) and coherent and collaborative design of streets, building interfaces and public spaces (MDP 2.4.3). The monitoring and outline plan work outlined in this report will help ensure that new urban design review processes are working effectively for all levels of development and will inform any necessary future work to further improve urban design in Calgary.

A larger body of work on secondary suites is ongoing. Any urban design initiative related to backyard suites must align with Council direction regarding this broader corporate work.

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### **Social, Environmental, Economic (External)**

Citizens ultimately benefit when a city provides high quality environments in which to live, work and play. Cities with high qualities of life may also attract new residents, business and investment. An urban design process that is working efficiently and involves review in the early stages of a project ultimately saves time, money and resources for staff and customers involved in the design review process.

### **Financial Capacity**

#### ***Current and Future Operating Budget:***

This work can be accommodated within the current operating budget.

#### ***Current and Future Capital Budget:***

none

### **Risk Assessment**

The current Council direction and scope of work associated with the Framework and its implementation plan have maximized Administration's resources. The outline plan design gaps project and the monitoring program are foundational pieces of work within this new Framework. The information that will be gathered through the monitoring program will inform and influence the direction and form of future urban design initiatives. If any additional work were to be directed, it would put these foundational pieces at risk.

The monitoring program involves, to some degree, quantifying intangible concepts. Administration is continuously evolving the tools and performance metrics to ensure the monitoring program is capturing the right information.

Not undertaking work to clarify the review of outline plans will result in continued lack of clarity and ongoing discussion, which may have an impact on application quality, timelines and policy.

### **REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):**

2018 is the foundational year for the Urban Design Review Framework. The outline plan design gaps project, redundancies in organization bodies work, and the monitoring program, will all give Administration a clear understanding of whether the new process is working well, and what new processes, policies or other tools will be needed to further promote high quality urban design outcomes in Calgary.

For Council's consideration, Detailed Scopes of Work have been provided for the outline plan design gaps project, redundancies in the design review process and the monitoring program. Given the critical nature of this work, Administration wishes to confirm its interpretation of Council's direction for both of these initiatives at this time, as outlined in Attachments 1, 2 and 3. Although work has been started on these projects, they are still in early stages and can be adjusted, if required.

### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

1. Scope of Work - Outline Plan Design Gaps
2. Scope of Work - Redundancies of Organizational Bodies in the Design Review Process

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3. Scope of Work - Urban Design Review Framework Monitoring Program
4. Getting to Quality Development