

Improving Communications to Citizens – Notice Posting Redesign

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Planning & Development is working to improve the way The City communicates with citizens about land use and development applications in their community. Posting a notice at the location of the application is one way The City informs citizens about an application in a community. The goal is to make communications with citizens more transparent and easier to understand.

On 2017 December 13, Administration brought forward a report (PUD2017-1140) to amend the Land Use Bylaw to require customers to post the large format development notices. Council amended the Administration recommendations, adding another recommendation that directed Administration to redesign the development notices, and report back through Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Development by 2018 Q2. The purpose of this report is to present the redesigned development notices to Council. The redesigned notices are more visual, engaging and incorporate plain language, while maintaining The City of Calgary brand.

In January and February 2018, Administration met with Councillors to discuss what Councillors would like to see on the development notice and what they like about notices in other municipalities. This feedback, along with feedback from citizens received during our 2017 survey, was used to redesign the development notices. On 2018 April 5, Administration sent a memo to The Mayor's Office and members of Council (Attachment 2), providing two design options for Council consideration and feedback. Administration considered feedback from Council, and the redesigned notices are included in this report as Attachment 1.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:

That the SPC on Planning and Urban Development recommends that Council receive this report for information.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

At the 2017 December 13 meeting, through report PUD2017-1140, Councillor Davison moved that the Administration recommendation contained in the report be amended by adding a new subsection c. as follows:

- c. To revise advertising notifications to the public to be more visual, engaging and to use plain language, while maintaining The City of Calgary brand, and to return to Council, through the SPC on Planning and Urban Development, no later than 2018 Q2.

This report responds to the recommendation and the redesigned notices are included in this report as Attachment 1.

On 2018 April 5, a memo was sent to Councillors asking for feedback on two options that were prepared in response to the direction above. The memo is included in this report as Attachment 2.

BACKGROUND

Planning & Development is working to improve the way The City communicates with citizens about land use and development applications in their community. In 2017 Q4, new notices were

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launched that are larger, incorporate plain language descriptions, and include a map. The notices that are currently posted are included in this report as Attachment 3.

On 2017 December 13, Administration took forward to SPC on Planning and Urban Development (PUD), Land Use Bylaw amendments to facilitate the posting of the new development permit large format notices by customers. The large format notices are four feet by eight feet and are posted on-site for land use and development applications. PUD recommended that the proposed Land Use Bylaw amendments receive three readings at a Public Hearing of Council.

During the discussion, PUD Committee members stated that they want the new notices to be redesigned. The purpose of this report is to present the redesigned notices. The work associated with this report does not respond to the 2018 March 19, Motion Arising, which directed Administration to revise print and other public media notifications. A separate report will be brought forward in 2018 Q3 to address this motion arising.

Three key goals were identified by the project team to guide the work:

1. To increase citizen awareness and understanding of planning and development in Calgary.
2. To encourage informed and meaningful public participation throughout the review of development proposals.
3. To make the planning process more accessible for citizens and communities.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

In 2017, the development notices were redesigned with input from the Federation of Calgary Communities (The Federation), the Building Industry & Land Development Calgary Region (BILD), and through two online surveys for citizens. Administration also researched what other municipalities are including on their notices as they redesign their notices. This input and research was also reviewed when the notices were redesigned in association with this report.

Engagement with Citizens

Engagement with citizens on the notices began in 2016, when two notices were piloted. Feedback was collected through an online survey and incorporated into the design, including showing the file number on the notice, and including a statement if there is a concurrent DP. In 2017, two notices were piloted using the new design, again collecting feedback through an online survey. The 2017 survey resulted in feedback from 413 citizens, summarized below:

- 72% saw an improvement in the new notices
- 80% said new notices clearly show what is proposed
- 83% said new notices clearly communicate how to learn more

This feedback was used to design the notices that were launched in November 2017, and this feedback was also used when the notices were redesigned in association with this report.

Research - Consultation with other Municipalities

Other major municipalities such as, Vancouver, Ottawa and Toronto have recently improved their notices. In 2016, Administration contacted municipalities to evaluate the information other

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municipalities show on their notices. This evaluation was considered in the design and information shown on the new notices in Calgary. Examples of a few of these notices were also shown to members of Council when soliciting their feedback.

The list of municipalities Administration spoke with or researched includes:

- City of Toronto
- City of Vancouver
- City of Edmonton
- City of Victoria
- City of Ottawa
- City of Richmond
- City of Surrey
- Corporation of Delta
- City of Denver

Notice Redesign Process

Planning and Development worked with Customer Service and Communications to redesign the development notices, incorporating feedback received from Councillors during meetings in January and February 2018.

Feedback received from Councillors during these conversations included continuing to show the map identifying the site of the application, and linking to the Planning and Development Map online platform. Other Councillor feedback included:

- Increasing the use of plain language (for example, not using the word redesignation, and instead referring to a proposed change).
- Instead of 'learn more and comment' to use 'tell us what you think' on the notices.
- Using the word 'notice' at the top of all the notices rather than the type of application.
- Using bigger font.
- For development permit notices informing citizens the land use is already approved.

The feedback received from Councillors was used to develop two design options. The project team also incorporated design elements based on citizen feedback that was received after the notice design launch in November 2017. The redesigned notices include the following elements:

Development permit and land use amendment notices

- The continued use of the map and direction for citizens to go to the Planning and Development Map online platform, or to call 403-268-5311.
- Elements that do not create challenges to citizens with visual impairment.
- Different colour notices to help citizens distinguish between the application type and stage of application.
- Wording on the top banner helps citizens understand in plain language the type of application and stage of application. For example 'Proposed Redesignation' has been changed to 'Proposed Land Use Change'.
- The 2017 notices said 'Learn more and comment'; Councillors suggested using 'tell us what you think', which has now been incorporated into the notice.

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- The file number is now identified on the notice as the 'Reference Number', and it is shown under the Planning and Development Map online platform link. This was done to make it easier for citizens to know what information will be needed when going to the online platform.
- Plain language descriptions: The project team heard that the development description text could include language that is easier to understand for citizens. The project team continues to work with Planning and Development staff to ensure the notices include plain language. Standardized text is being developed for staff to use so the wording is citizen centric and uses minimal planning jargon.

Development permit notices

- Development permit notices prior to November 2017 were blue, and the redesigned notice is blue. This colour was used because it is recognized by some community associations and citizens as the colour used on a notice for a development permit.
- The option to include a building rendering on the notice.
- A statement that has been added to development description portion of the notice to inform citizens the Land Use allows for the proposed development.

Two design options were sent to Councillors on 2018 April 5 (Attachment 2), with a request for Councillors to provide feedback to Administration. The options were also sent to The Federation for comment. The major difference between the two options that were developed was that one included the word 'notice' in the top banner. This feature was an element of notices in other municipalities that Councillors preferred. However, when provided the two options Councillor feedback indicated that the preferred option was the design that did not include the word 'notice'. Based on this feedback, the option that Administration has presented today for our final design is the design without the word 'notice', included in this report as Attachment 1.

Accessibility

Particular attention was given to designing the notices for people with vision impairment. The use of negative space and spacing between the lines of text helps to increase the ease of readability. The text size has also been designed to be as large as possible based on the hierarchy of the content and function. High contrast colours with large white text on a dark background makes the text more legible and easier to read. To accommodate colour blindness, Administration will refer to the notices by type rather than banner colour. The use of red on the notices has also been minimized as this colour is very challenging for people with colour blindness to see as intended.

Connection to other Initiatives

The City of Calgary uses several means of communication to inform citizens about land use and development applications in their community. Administration recognizes the importance of a consistent, engaging and inclusive approach to citizen communication across all channels. This project is aligned with other improvement initiatives The City is working on including the Planning and Development Map online platform and adjacent landowner letter improvements. These improvements will lead to more consistent and transparent opportunities for citizens to be informed about a proposed development.

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A key feature of the redesigned development notices is the direction for citizens to ‘tell us what you think’ by going to the Planning and Development Map online platform. Although not associated directly with the notice posting redesign project, Administration is also evaluating language translation opportunities within the online platform. When The City develops a corporate framework or policy for communicating in other languages, the development notices and the Planning and Development Map online platform will be reviewed in tandem to ensure alignment.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

Following the 2017 December 13, SPC on Planning and Urban Development (PUD) meeting, Administration arranged one-on-one meetings with Councillors, as summarized above, to ask what they would like to see on the notices and what they like about notices in other municipalities. New designs, taking this feedback into account, were created and circulated back to Council in 2018 April, with a request to provide feedback regarding the redesigned notices. The feedback that Administration received was incorporated into the final design, included in this report at Attachment 1. The redesigned notices are intended to be more engaging and visual for citizens, while incorporating more plain language.

The Federation of Calgary Communities (The Federation) was also provided the opportunity to review the two options. Their feedback was incorporated into final design where possible. Other feedback received from The Federation will be used to work with Planning and Development staff as standardized development descriptions are developed for the notices.

Strategic Alignment

Notice improvements align with Section 2.3.7 of the Municipal Development Plan (MDP), which has the objective to, “promote community education and engagement”. This section states that:

“All Calgarians should be provided with opportunities to participate in shaping the future of their community. This means encouraging on-going education, engagement strategies and collaborative neighbourhood planning processes that consider MDP strategies and local community-based aspirations”. (Page 2-28)

The redesigned development notices meet The City’s Brand and Visual Identity Guidelines. Administration engaged the Advisory Committee on Accessibility so the design team could understand issues that arise for those who are visually impaired, and then incorporated what they learned into the redesigned notices.

The notice improvements satisfy the Engage Policy by continuing with, and enhancing, “consistent and clear engagement practices” using the notice posting process.

The Plain Language Policy was reviewed when developing plain language for the notices. Language used on the notices is clear, concise, well-organized, and easy for citizens to understand.

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

The key goals of the project are linked to positive social outcomes such as: increased citizen awareness of applications in their community, encouraged citizen and community involvement

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in approvals in the community, and increased access for citizens to the approval process. The redesigned notices along with other initiatives underway will achieve these goals.

Environmental and economic impacts for posting small format and large format notices were considered and incorporated into the posting process and requirements. Discussions with sign manufacturers have resulted in applicant posting standards that reduce waste, and costs for applicants in the case of the large format notice. Cost and waste reduction was also considered when determining the size of the small format notice. Where possible, The City will use materials for the small format notice that can be recycled.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

There are no impacts to current or future operating budgets as a result of this report.

Current and Future Capital Budget:

There are no impacts to current or future capital budgets as a result of this report.

Risk Assessment

There are no risks associated with this report.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

Administration is recommending that this report be received for information. Valuable feedback has been received from Council through this redesign process. In addition, Administration took feedback from citizens and stakeholders, laying the foundation to redesign the notices. The development notices have been further improved for citizens based on this feedback. The redesigned notices are more visual, engaging for citizens, and incorporate plain language, while maintaining The City of Calgary Brand and Visual Identity Guidelines. This recommendation will allow for the continuous improvement of the notices, including the ability to respond to changing corporate standards without the need to formally report back to Council with each change.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Attachment 1 – Redesigned Notices
2. Attachment 2 – Memo Sent to the Mayor's Office and Councillors - April 5, 2018
3. Attachment 3 – Current Notices