

Planning & Development Report to
SPC on Planning and Urban Development
2018 October 01

ISC: UNRESTRICTED
PUD2018-1065

Changes to Planning & Development Public Notifications

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Administration is recommending new options to improve communication with citizens about land use and development applications that are more visual, engaging, use plain language, and maintain The City of Calgary brand (Attachment 1 - Samples of Amended Notifications). Providing coordinated, easy to understand information regarding potential changes in a community due to a proposed development will create better awareness and increase opportunities for citizens to participate in the planning process. Using the work already completed for the revised Notice Postings, these improvements were expanded to apply to other forms of notifications (Attachment 2 – Notification Analysis). This means citizens will receive the same simplified information, in both style and content, whether it is in a letter, on a sign, or on Calgary.ca. The proposed changes to these communications and notifications will improve transparency and ensure The City is clearly communicating with citizens about land use and development applications in their community.

Additionally, Administration is recommending changes to the Land Use Bylaw (Attachment 3) to provide more flexibility in how citizens are notified of development permits and appeals. These changes will also mean the elimination of built in delays due to newspaper deadlines and give The City the ability to use other means for notifying citizens that are preferred by more Calgarians.

ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDATION:

That the Standing Policy Committee on Planning and Urban Development recommend that:

1. Council receive this report for information.
2. Council hold a Public Hearing on the proposed amendments to Land Use Bylaw 1P2007 (Attachment 3), adopt the proposed amendments, and give three readings to the Bylaw.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION / POLICY

On March 19, 2018, the following Motion Arising was adopted by Council:

That with respect to Report PUD2017-1140, the following Motion Arising be adopted:

“That Council direct Administration to revise print and other media 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 Q3”.

BACKGROUND

Planning & Development is continually working to improve the way The City communicates with citizens about land use and development applications in their community.

Council, citizens, communities, and Administration have raised concerns that the development notifications (letters, newspaper advertisements and signage on site etc.) sent to citizens and

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communities are hard for citizens and communities to understand. It is not always clear what is proposed, or how they can get involved in the planning process.

Posting a notice at the location of the application is one way The City informs citizens about development activity in a community. Beginning in 2017 Q4, new notices were launched that are larger, incorporate plain language descriptions, and include a map.

On 2018 March 19, Administration took Land Use Bylaw amendments forward to Council (PUD2017-1140) to facilitate the posting of the new development permit large format notices by customers. The revised designs were approved and will be implemented in the fall of 2018. During this discussion, it was requested through a motion arising to move forward with amending additional notifications.

Notification requirements are set out in both the Municipal Government Act and Land Use Bylaw depending on the type of application, detailed background on the current requirements of these two sets of regulations are outlined included in Attachment 4.

INVESTIGATION: ALTERNATIVES AND ANALYSIS

Incorporating Feedback

Several concerns were raised about the way The City notifies citizens and communities about development:

1. The reader is often unsure about what they should do with the information (what action needs to be taken);
2. The information is often too complex or technical for them to understand the impact on them or their community; and
3. The information looks visually inconsistent depending on whether it's a newspaper advertisement or a letter.

A review of all the ways The City notifies citizens and communities about developments was completed (see Attachment 2 – Notification Analysis), which included an analysis of how they are interconnected with other notifications, and identified opportunities for improvements.

The feedback received for the recently revised development permit and land use amendment notices was also utilized to improve the various notifications referenced in this report. That feedback included:

- Small map and directions for citizens to go to the Development Map, or to call 403-268-5311.
- Elements that do not create challenges to citizens with visual impairment.
- Different colour notices when possible to help citizens distinguish between the application type and stage of application.
- Wording on the top banner to help 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'.
- Using 'tell us what you think', rather than "learn more and comment".
- A 'Reference Number' instead of a file number under the Development Map link. This was done to make it easier for citizens to know what information will be needed when going to the online platform.

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Feedback also indicated the development description text should be presented in plain language that is easier for citizens to understand. Standardized text is being developed for staff to use so the wording is citizen centric and uses minimal planning jargon. The updated notifications will use this same standardized text developed for the new notice postings.

Current Communication Trends

The re-design also reviewed recent research data from a Citizen Perspectives Survey in February 2018 which focused on citizen perceptions of City Communications. Those results indicated that overall, preference for information sources is heavily influenced by age – online attracts the youngest audience. Print (newspapers/publications) attracts the oldest demographic and is more likely to be a source for those aged 65 or older.

Preference for mail/letters is universal across the age groups but is more likely to be favoured by those who are responsible for paying rent/property taxes (21 per cent vs. 10 per cent among those not responsible).

Broader studies were considered that measure consumers' changing media consumption across all media as digital technologies impact the lives of Canadians. Print media, including newspapers and magazines, continue to experience a decline in popularity, most commonly due to favourability of digital versions. While consumption of hard copies of newspapers continue to decline, there are still opportunities for digital advertising through the online formats of news media.

Overall, the data indicates that preference for printed news media is declining and being replaced with digital means. Age plays a significant factor in preference, with older citizens still preferring printed information. This is reflective of feedback received from The Federation of Calgary Communities when they were consulted on the proposed elimination of newspaper advertisements for development permits.

Current State and Proposed Changes

The Notification Analysis (Attachment 2) outlines the improvements Administration has made to align other notifications with the improvements that were implemented for the recently redesigned Notice Postings. The analysis shows which notifications will be changed and updated to be more visual, engaging, use plain language, and maintain The City of Calgary brand, as well as those that will be discontinued.

Most communications fall into a few categories based on action and type. Organizing all notifications into these categories and visually aligning the notifications of a similar type will allow for consistency and continuity between methods – the letters, notice postings and information posted online will all use the same language and look similar. These improvements makes the notifications more visual and engaging.

One of the categories is Public Hearing Notifications. The requirements of the Municipal Government Act limit The City's ability to change much of the means through which citizens are notified of planning matters that are being considered as part of a Public Hearing. Changes to these notifications were made to the fullest extent that are permitted within the current Municipal Government Act requirements, samples of the amended notifications for Public Hearings can be seen in Attachment 1 – Samples of Amended Notifications.

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The text of the notifications has been reviewed for plain language to ensure the action is clearly communicated, the anticipated impacts are clearly explained, and the reader will know where they can find more detailed information if they are interested in learning more or wish to become involved.

Samples of the proposed amended notifications, including what they looked like previously, are included in Attachment 1 – Samples of Amended Notifications. Many of these improvements will continue to be adjusted as they are rolled out and as communication trends and needs change.

Recommended Land Use Bylaw Amendments

The Land Use Bylaw provides regulations that direct how The City notifies citizens of development permits and the appeal process for subdivision and development permits. The Bylaw currently specifies that these notifications must be done through a local newspaper. With the shown research on the decline of newspaper use, Administration recommends amending the Land Use Bylaw to eliminate the need to advertise in print for both development permits and appeals.

Administration is not proposing to eliminate the need to advertise overall, but given new technology and availability of information, administration will utilize existing alternatives as more cost effective and efficient ways of notification. This transition will have many benefits, including making information easily searchable, more immediate (no waiting for the newspaper to be printed), and align with The City's goal for paper-use reduction.

See Attachment 3 – Proposed Amendments to the Land Use Bylaw

Alternative methods for citizens to get this information include:

- Continue the use of the Development Map for sharing development permit information as many citizens and community associations are already aware of this site;
- Investigate an email notification opportunity where interested subscribers such as Community Associations or neighbours can receive information directly (dependent on City's myID program roll out);
- Continue to retain a copy at City Clerks and post it on the information board at City Hall;
- The Subdivision and Development Appeal Board is proposing to move all their advertisements for a hearing online;
- Contact their local Community Association; and
- Call our 311 services.

These other means of accessing information on planned development tend to be more visual, engaging, use plain language, and continue to maintain The City of Calgary brand.

This change does not impact the way Community Associations are circulated on applications or their ability to submit comments. If the proposed changes are approved, The City would work with Community Associations through the Federation of Calgary Communities to ensure this transition is clearly communicated.

Should this Land Use Bylaw change be approved by Council, Administration is proposing to stop newspaper advertisements of development permits by the end of Q1 2019. During the transition, advertisements in the Herald will continue and will also communicate the upcoming

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change. Additionally, a comprehensive communications strategy will complement the ads to ensure a smooth transition to the alternative methods of notification. Administration will work with Community associations and other organizations impacted by these changes.

The Subdivision and Development Appeal Board asked for input from Calgarians on their notifications through a survey conducted in 2017 October. The survey results showed a strong preference for electronic methods of communication in addition to the Notice of Hearing letters mailed to affected and potentially-affected individuals. It is expected that a small percentage of Calgarians will prefer to see the continued publication of ads in the Calgary Herald. However, Administration feels that its resources are better spent on the methods of communication which are generally the most effective and citizen-friendly.

The Subdivision and Development Appeal Board will continue to publish notice of appeals on its website, through a self-subscribed e-newsletter, and through letters mailed to those property owners whom The Subdivision and Development Appeal Board considers may be affected by a given appeal. This approach is a more cost-effective, customer-friendly, forward-looking means of notifying Calgarians of development permit appeals.

Stakeholder Engagement, Research and Communication

The changes to notifications considered the research that was done for the notice posting improvements. That research included consulting with other municipalities, online engagement with citizens and feedback from Councillors and Customer Service and Communications.

Administration met and discussed the changes with the Federation of Calgary Communities, their comments on the proposed changes can be found in Attachment 5.

Additional citizen and stakeholder research was done by The Subdivision and Development Appeal Board in Fall 2017.

Strategic Alignment

The proposed Land Use Bylaw amendments align with Council's priority for a well-run city, and specifically Strategic Action W2 ("Be as efficient and effective as possible, reducing costs and focusing on value-for-money") and W7 ("Continue to transform the organization to be more citizen-focused in its approach and delivery of service"). Administration's plans to continue notifications is intended to maintain transparency and accountability.

These notification 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)

This work aligns with the efforts of the Community Representation Framework goal to:

"Revitalize City processes related to planning and development so they are more open, inclusive and welcoming to a broad range of community groups"

The redesigned notifications meet The City's Brand and Visual Identity Guidelines.

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

Social, Environmental, Economic (External)

The notification changes are linked to positive social outcomes such as: increased citizen awareness of applications in their community, encouraged citizen and community involvement in approvals in the community, and increased access for citizens to the approval process. The redesigned notifications will achieve these goals.

Environmental and economic impacts for discontinuing the two types of newspaper advertisements and encouraging online communications were considered and incorporated into the changes. The long-term sustainability and flexibility of online notifications, and reduced timelines for development permit notifications will provide benefits to citizens and applicants.

Financial Capacity

Current and Future Operating Budget:

There are operating budget savings related to the elimination of the requirement to use local newspapers to notify citizens of development permits and Subdivision and Development Appeal Board notices.

The City spent \$274,504.43 in 2017 on the weekly development permit notifications advertisements. This cost is supported by a fee collected from development permit applicants (\$32 based on the 2018 Planning Applications Fee Schedule). While the funds collected will no longer be used towards newspaper advertisements for development permits, The City will be using these funds to support other notification methods outlined in this report. While better serving the needs of citizens, these options will still require resources. For example, adding colour to letters sent to adjacent homeowners will allow more consistency with notice posting signs and approach. However, Administration intends to monitor this fee going forward and should the cost recovery be less, can be address that in subsequent years fee schedules.

Eliminating the requirement for publication of The Subdivision and Development Appeal Board notifications in a newspaper will save The City approximately \$50,000 per annum currently expended on advertising in the Calgary Herald, plus the unquantified staff costs associated with preparing and reviewing ads on a weekly basis.

Current and Future Capital Budget:

No impacts are anticipated.

Risk Assessment

It is possible those who currently rely on print newspaper advertising as their only source of information on development permits or appeals may be slow to adapt to new options. Administration is mitigating that risk by launching a coordinated communication and notification campaign that will ensure new options are clearly explained and information is readily available.

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REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S):

The improvements to citizen notifications on development in Calgary will be a big step towards making our planning process more transparent and accessible. The Land Use Bylaw changes will provide Administration more flexibility in how citizens are notified of development permits and appeals. This will allow The City to find other, more adaptable and desired ways of communicating with citizens. These changes will also mean the additional time and accompanying delay to accommodate newspaper deadlines will be eliminated from our approvals process.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Attachment 1 – Samples of Amended Notifications
2. Attachment 2 – Notification Analysis
3. Attachment 3 – Proposed Amendments to the Land Use Bylaw
4. Attachment 4 – Additional Background Information on Municipal Government Act and Land Use Bylaw Regulations
5. Attachment 5 – Letter from the Federation of Calgary Communities