

Community Association Letter

From: [Renfrew Planning](#)
To: [McLeod, Fraser A.](#)
Cc: [Renfrew President](#)
Subject: [EXT] Re: LOC2018-0201 - Circulation Package
Date: Monday, October 15, 2018 6:17:06 PM
Attachments: [image.png](#)
[image.png](#)
[image001.png](#)

Hi Fraser,

Below are the Renfrew Planning Committee's comments on behalf of the Renfrew Community Association Board:

LOC 2018-0201 (1101 Russet Road NE):

This has been a difficult redesignation for our committee. The residents nearest to the subject site universally oppose it because they expect more parked cars, more traffic, and that these homes may become rental units. Some comments have included odd comparisons, most notably those comparing Renfrew to Mount Royal. This is ahistorical and ignores that Mount Royal was built as an exclusive enclave for Calgary's affluent citizens; the subject site is within the part of Renfrew where CMHC built homes for veterans' families after World War II. Likewise, Mount Royal is a neighbourhood where a professional couple cannot afford to retire because of the high property taxes, which is a future we do not want for Renfrew.

In spite of the valid concerns, we support this redesignation for three main reasons:

First, small homes with two or three bedrooms have been an essential part of our community's character, since CMHC built Renfrew in 1949 as veterans' housing. Similarly, rowhousing has been part of Renfrew since 1955 when the townhouses now collectively known as Regal Park were built. To argue that rowhouses with two or three small bedrooms are inconsistent with our community's character is to forget how and for whom we built when our neighbourhood was created. Indeed, though residents may argue that our neighbourhood is largely single family houses, according to the 2018 City Census, 41% of our dwellings are single family homes; 26%, apartments; 14%, townhouses; 11%, duplexes; and 8%, converted structures, which we understand to be mainly detached homes with secondary suites (http://www.calgary.ca/CA/city-clerks/Documents/Election-and-information-services/Census2018/Civic_Census_-_at_a_glance_booklet.PDF pg. 95 and 109).

Second, as a neighbourhood with schools and parks, we view RC-G as the next incremental step to allow new residents to join us and enjoy our amenities. We hope it will provide more family housing at a lower price point so Renfrew can continue to be a mixed-income community for all ages. Rowhomes should have lower maintenance costs because of the shared building envelope and condo arrangement than semi-detached homes. Given our proximity to downtown, and commercial and industrial sites to the east, active transportation should make it possible to lower one's living costs in our neighbourhood.

Third, and most importantly, one of the objects of the Renfrew Community Association is "generally to encourage and foster and develop among its members a recognition of the importance of agriculture in the national life." When that was written in 1955, it may have been interpreted as encouraging residents to grow their own food. We lament that most yards are not used productively, but for swaths of lawn as a form of conspicuous consumption.

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Consequently, the best way we can recognize "the importance of agriculture in the national life" today is to preserve agricultural land outside of Calgary by using this lot more productively and allowing more people to enjoy Renfrew. Because the Renfrew Community Association's bylaws require that board members, including the planning director, promote and act in concert with the Association's objects, we must include the broader question of agriculture in this land use redesignation.

A few other comments:

Well-placed rowhousing is appropriate in Renfrew. We expect that rowhouses will age better than semi-detached homes because they have a small condo structure to support maintaining building envelopes, and mechanical and electrical systems.

There are concerns about amenity space. Renfrew has public amenity space. One is always within 450 metres (as the crow flies) of a public or semi-public green space in the neighbourhood. No single detached home or rowhome can compete with the size of the park in the middle of Reader Crescent. Residents living at 1101 Russet Road can cross one street to get to that park; the same number of streets as residents of Reader Crescent have for seventy years. That park also gives lots of street parking for those willing to walk 200m. If anything, we need to work harder to turn our green spaces into genuine, loved, named places.

Russet Road curves here, which causes concerns about pedestrian safety at the intersection of Russet Road and Remington Road. Curb extensions at the corner would be one way to ensure that people are safe as they walk around the neighbourhood. Creating a community fund into which developers contribute would pay for these improvements. Ideally, curb extensions would be tested and installed in an incremental way using the techniques of tactical urbanism before pouring concrete.

Given neighbours' opposition to this land use change and density, this might be a better location for the proposed designation of rowhouses without secondary suites (currently referred to as R-CGx) than R-CG. If that designation existed right now, the applicant would be wise to apply for it. Doing so might help reduce neighbours' concerns.

As individuals, we tend to think of others who are most like us. As a committee, we are aware that our role is to be reflective of the whole community and we are trying to do so. Similarly, according to the 2018 Calgary Census, 50% of Renfrew's dwellings are owner occupied and 49% of people in Renfrew live in detached homes. Yet, most of our committee members own their homes (or have a mortgage) and live in detached home. To better represent the whole neighbourhood -- those of all ages, those who own and rent, and those who live in a variety of housing types -- we are trying to think beyond ourselves as individual committee members and the neighbours who are most like us.

DP 2018-4442 (1101 Russet Road):

What are the strengths and challenges of the proposed development?

There are strengths to this design. Often the space above a garage is unused. This design finds a clever way to use that space. The doors and front face the commercial building across Remington Road instead of neighbours' homes on Russet Road. Having three or four bedrooms in a home should make this more desirable than some of the two bedroom, four

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bathroom semi-detached homes in the neighbourhood. The roof peaks avoid a flat roof, about which neighbours often comment, and are practical for shedding snow in Calgary's winter.

However, there are several difficult parts of this design. Most importantly, the building poorly addresses Russet Road, its height and massing is a serious concern, and residents generally do not approve of its appearance.

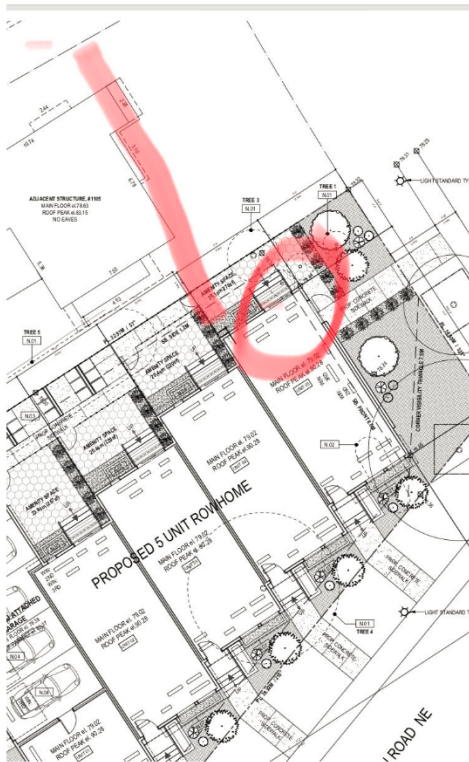
The height and massing is a concern. At a maximum of 11.94m, this is almost 12m, the maximum height of M-CG, albeit with a lower lot coverage. This causes concerns about overlooking and privacy, especially due to 25 windows on the second and third floors facing the neighbour to the North at 1105 Russet Road. Also, because Russet Road runs generally North-South, the shadow caused by this project will fall largely on 1105 Russet Road. Given that one of the objects of the Renfrew Community Association is "generally to encourage and foster and develop among its members a recognition of the importance of agriculture in the national life," we do not want to keep the residents of 1105 from growing anything in their yard. While we do not normally fight to preserve front set backs because front yards tend to be used only for lawn mowing, Russet Road's North-South course means that this unit's shadow into the 1105's front yard will also prevent it from being used for anything more productive than growing lawn. There are likely streets in Renfrew where this height would be appropriate but this is not one of them. We look forward to the North Hill Local Growth Plan helping us decide where and how buildings of this height fit best.

Are there changes that could be made to the proposed development to make it more compatible or beneficial to the area?

Our primary suggestion is to make this a four unit rowhouse, retaining the home designed partially above the garage. Each garage stall would be larger, and more effective. This could also reduce the height and bring it to R-CG's maximum. Height could also be reduced by reducing the ceiling height, lowering the basement so the main floor is level with the yard (making the homes more accessible), or both.

More thought needs to go into the unit closest to Russet Road (labelled unit number 5). Unit 5's design makes the entire home turn its side and back to Russet Road. Russet Road is a gateway to the neighbourhood. Thus, unit 5, because it protrudes past the front facade of 1105, needs to be attractive from all three sides. This is shown in the drawing below.

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Having identical floorplans saves money but the unit 5 should be the most valuable unit and warrants a separate design to maximize its location's value and treat the neighbours using the sidewalk and street more respectfully. With more thought, it would be possible for unit 5's main entrance to be on Russet Road. With minor changes to the design, windows could be added to the east elevation. On the main floor, they could be above the stove; on the second floor, each bedroom could have East-facing windows if both closets were on the West side of the room; on the third floor, the bedroom could also have a window above where a bed would likely go. This could be further improved by placing the entrance on Russet Road.

The other units' amenity spaces act as a buffer between 1101 and 1105. Given the lot configuration, unit 5 loses the benefit of a larger backyard amenity space. We ask that unit 5 be made shallower to provide at least the same amount of backyard amenity space as unit 4 has (by bringing the north wall in line with unit 4's north wall).

The design is angular, boxy, stark, and generally 'hard.' That's quite a contrast from this area's historic character-defining elements of "steeply pitched side-gable homes, and ... medium pitched side-gable or hipped-roof homes" with "soft landscaping and human scale of the street" (https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/c8cf61_395c4ab241d6411da98cf7b582db1e3c.pdf pg. 4 and 5). Though changes and contrasts draw one along the sidewalk while walking, this design's jarring juxtaposition when compared with the nearby original 1949 CMHC homes does not appear neighbourly or respectful of the existing built-form's characteristics. Using a stark colour scheme of black and white amplifies the angular, boxy appearance. Changing

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colours or adding other materials might help soften its appearance. Reducing the boxy and angular elements would be another way to soften the appearance.

The use (if identified – not applicable for single-detached houses, semi-detached dwellings or duplexes)

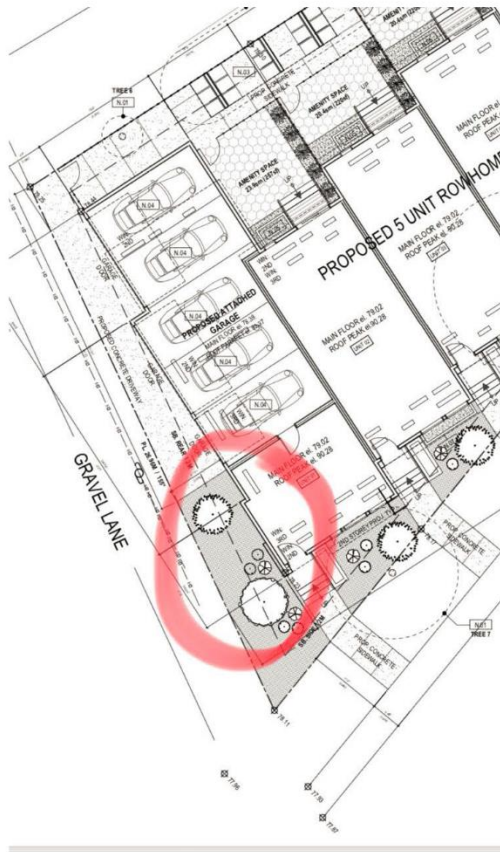
See our comments above on the concurrent land use amendment LOC 2018-0201.

The site design

Gas meters: We would like to keep gas meters away from the street front and closer to the garage and alley. Perhaps the north side of the garage would be a good place to keep the meters out of the public's sight.

Garbage, recycling, and compost: We are glad to see that there is space designed to store fifteen bins. We also understand neighbours' concerns about having five or ten bins in the lane for collection. We suggest using a consolidated waste management system, such as a Molok system (<https://www.molok.com/molok-products/molokclassic>), in the location marked below. This would also give more amenity space for units 2 and 3 or give a place for more plants or trees between 1101 and 1105 Russet Rd.

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Air conditioning: Air conditioning units are not shown in the drawings. If they are installed before turnover, we ask that air conditioning units be installed in the yard instead of facing the street.

As always, we wish that the City would encourage planting more and larger trees by counting trees planted in the public portion of the property.

The building design

The aesthetics are lacking. The neighbours who have written to us note their displeasure with the appearance. No one on the committee spoke in favour of, or defended its appearance. We support R-CG in Renfrew. When we try to describe what the R-CG land use means to our neighbours, we describe it as something like terrace houses, brownstones, greystones, or, to use a local example, Fairey Terrace in the Beltline. The interesting thing about those traditional examples is that they are successful without being flashy. For instance, there are often requests for more articulation and variety of materials in designs. Yet, a two storey column of bay windows provides natural light for residents and vertical and horizontal articulation. It is a simple design, perhaps with moderate detailing, which has warmth and appeal that this design does not. Bay windows, as much as we may love them, are not a

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requirement but an example of how designs can be simple but effective. We have had attractive R-CG in the neighbourhood that reference existing home designs. We have had innocuous R-CG that have not been objected. If residents' first thought when discussing R-CG is a design for which there seems to be general, likely universal, disdain, there is a risk that this design will poison the well for future R-CG applications in Renfrew. That will make it harder for us as a committee to help our neighbours think of R-CG as the next incremental step in our neighbourhood's development and something that fits in our neighbourhood. The likely result would be that neighbours will push for taller towers along the perimeter of Renfrew instead of fine-grained, ground-oriented homes that blend well with our neighbourhood, which will make it more expensive for families to live in Renfrew. In short, the applicant may find that fighting for this design would be a Pyrrhic victory.

The garages are small. There may be an argument that they are similar to the garages that were built in this area during the 1940s and 1950s. Some neighbours have predicted that the garages will be used for storage instead of holding cars. It is also possible that the residents will recognize they can ride their bikes to work downtown or walk to get groceries in 15 minutes and choose to use their garages to store bikes and belongings without putting any cars on the street.

It is hard to make predictions, especially about the future. The only prediction we can make with certainty is that if this is approved, the neighbours will appeal it at SDAB.

Has the applicant discussed the development permit application with the Community Association?

Yes, the applicant attended our planning committee meeting, 26 September 2018, and showed the plans and documents included in the land use and development permit applications. Two neighbours attended and commented on this application. The committee members discussed it further after the applicants and neighbours left.

Please provide any additional comments or concerns regarding the proposed development.

One of our committee members works for the applicant. She has recused herself from this discussion. Some neighbours have argued that this is a conflict of interest. We have excluded her from reviewing these comments and have done our best to separate that association from the discussion. Barring the creation of a third party committee to review this application, which would be unreasonable, we are not aware of any other solutions to this situation.

It appears that the North arrow points to the South on drawing A.100, so the side facing Russet Road is mislabeled as the West elevation in drawing A.102. Our comments refer to the true orientation.

Thanks,
Nathan Hawryluk
Director, Planning
Renfrew Community Association