

Mayor Jyoti Gondek
City of Calgary
800 Macleod Trail SE
Calgary, Alberta
T2P 2M5

April 21, 2024

sent via email

Re: Meeting with Community Associations Re: Blanket Upzoning

Dear Mayor Gondek,

Many thanks for your invitation and for meeting with us on Saturday. We greatly appreciate the time you took out of your busy schedule, and we felt it was a productive conversation.

As a recap, we remain steadfast in our collective opposition to blanket rezoning. Furthermore, we do not want band-aid amendments that fail to address the severe flaws in this proposed planning policy.

We respectfully request that you vote against blanket rezoning.

There are too many unanswered questions about the potential impact of rezoning the entire city to a base land use of R-CG. Why is this proposed land-use change process being rushed? What does success look like? How will blanket upzoning be assessed? Does blanket upzoning remove red tape or does it create even longer delays in a different part of the application process?

We understand the need for more housing, especially affordable housing, but increasingly the evidence shows that blanket upzoning fails to improve affordability. In fact, cities around the world are having better success in increasing housing supply by restricting short-term rentals. Receiving the results of the study on short term rentals is crucial before a vote on blanket upzoning.

Administration has been eager to promote densification through infill development but less than transparent with citizens as to how it is going to happen and what it is going to look like when added into an existing community, often next to a much smaller house or even a bungalow. Few people agree that a 2 or 3-storey multi-plex infill with two sets of row houses plus four secondary suites plus a backyard suite is “gentle density”. HOW and WHERE we allow density is not just an important part of the equation, but rather it should be the starting point for ensuring that infill redevelopment is contextual, sensitive,

and respectful of the neighbourhood in which it will be built. That has not been the case for many of the examples that we have witnessed.

Density can benefit the city and communities if it is smart, thoughtful and well designed. R-CG land-use is suitable in some, but not all, locations. Density without regard for community context can have a significant negative impact on the adjacent neighbours.

The Municipal Government Act, part 17, outlines that a municipality's responsibility is to achieve orderly and beneficial development and land-use is to do so without infringing on the rights of individuals for any public interest, unless it's necessary for the overall greater public interest.

The need for more housing is not the only interest that we should be concerned about. We need to balance these needs with heritage preservation, protection of the urban tree canopy and lifestyle preferences.

Blanket upzoning does not align with the Municipal Development Plan which promotes sensitive contextual development on an incremental basis. We want targeted density where it makes sense and less disruption within existing communities. We agree with the MDP principle which calls for increased density along activity nodes and corridors including LRT stations. Attention must also be paid to infrastructure requirements including schools. While some schools are below capacity, many are full and with a lottery system.

As discussed, we need assurance that community residents will have an active and respected role in development decisions that impact our communities. We strongly object to the current state where community input is disregarded by the development industry and by city administration: most development applications are rubberstamped despite community concerns about overlooking, shadowing, a lack of compatibility, loss of soft landscaping and trees, and many other negative impacts.

Under blanket rezoning, the public hearing process is removed, critically eliminating a fundamental part of the democratic process. It prevents citizens from speaking to their elected representatives about the impact that R-CG and H-GO development has on their unique homes, streetscape, and community. R-CG development works well on some streets-but does not fit everywhere. The public hearing process allows relevant evidence to be presented directly to Council instead of to City staff.

We believe that despite their short-comings, local area plans are a more appropriate way to identify where density should be encouraged. Hundreds of volunteer hours have been and are being dedicated to local area plans and we believe blanket upzoning contradicts the intent of local area plans.

We object in the strongest terms possible with handing control of the evolution of our neighbourhoods to developers. Decision-making should not be given to business entities (developers or investors) who are driven by profit motive and self-interest. Developers are not focused on community input, community context or the well-being of existing residents so they should not be making decisions about what and how redevelopment occurs.

As an example, the South Shaganappi Area Strategic Planning group has been meeting monthly for 21 years (please see accompanying attachments). This group demonstrates a proven success record of collaboration between developers, communities, stakeholders, and the City. This approach should be adopted in other areas of the city for major projects. For all development applications, we would like a process that involves community residents at the start of a development application rather than at the end when it's too late to have meaningful impact.

Real Estate and Development Service (REDS) should have community oversight.

Anger is swelling in the city because people do not feel heard. Public hearings are an important vehicle for citizens to express their opinions. A profoundly troubling difference between the current process and blanket upzoning is the elimination of the public hearing at Council.

In conclusion, Community Associations would like to see planning policy decisions that are transparent, evidence-based and made in collaboration with communities. We want to be part of the process to build stronger, healthier communities. In that regard, we appreciate the commitment from the mayor to meet once a year with Community Associations so there is more direct dialogue and so that we are heard.

We appreciate your consideration of our serious concerns and respectfully request that you vote against blanket rezoning. We request a reassessment of the impacts of creating one base land-use district. We need some metrics and follow-up to see if the goals of affordability are being addressed. We do not believe the current proposal can be improved sufficiently with amendments to satisfy these concerns.

Sincerely,

Lisa Poole
President, Elbow Park Residents Association
On behalf of the signatories of the multi-community letter