



February 25, 2020

TO: Mayor and Council, City Clerk

RE: The Guidebook for Great Communities

SPC on Planning and Urban Development, March 4, 2020 meeting

Dear Mayor and Council:

We request that the consideration of the Guidebook be postponed until we have had time to review and discuss the, as yet unseen, February 28 revision.

Based on the September 2019 version we have seen, we offer the following.

The Guidebook, in general, achieves its purpose. However, it should be revised to properly address the concerns of many Calgarians, especially those with children, over the treatment of neighbourhoods characterized by contiguous areas of houses.

Summary

1. Opportunity and Choice

Over 840,000 Calgarians (65% of the population) have chosen to live in houses and mostly in contiguous areas of houses. They should be allowed to continue to have that choice.

2. Identity and Place

Most residential communities' identity, sense of place, and community pride is defined by its core of contiguous areas of houses. These areas should be respected and enhanced.

3. Contribution of Greenspace

Contiguous areas of houses significantly contribute to Calgary's greenspace. These areas should be protected to avoid the loss of greenspace.

4. The Calgary Advantage: *Economic Vitality*

The availability of affordable houses in contiguous areas of houses close to a vibrant downtown will be a key factor in attracting high-tech business and talented people. These areas should be protected and enhanced.

5. Cumulative Effects

The loss of choice, identity and sense of place, and greenspace is irreversible and cumulative. The destruction of areas of contiguous houses should be avoided to provide future generations the options that we currently have.

Recommendation: Revise the Guidebook to include a new Urban Form Category and new Scale Modifier that will protect the neighbourhood cores of contiguous areas of houses.

Note 1: Quotes from the Guidebook and other City documents are in italics.

1. Opportunity and Choice

The Guidebook includes "*Opportunity and Choice*" as one of the 6 Principles "*that are central to creating and maintaining great communities for everyone.*"

Opportunity and Choice

Everyone has access to places to shop, learn, work, eat and play, and there are diverse housing and mobility options for many different people and household types."

Over 840,000 Calgarians (65% of the population) have chosen to live in a "*Single Family Structure. A Structure originally designed and built to contain a single dwelling unit*". 2019 Calgary Civic Census.

We believe that these Calgarians that have chosen to live in houses most often live in contiguous areas of houses.

Over 500,000 Calgarians (40% of the population) are members of families with children. *City Guidebook 101* course handout.

We believe that most families with children, given the opportunity, want to live in a house in contiguous areas of houses.

The Guidebook seems to ignore these choice options.

The Guidebook should be revised to preserve this choice option that is important to the majority of Calgarians who have already chosen to live in contiguous areas of houses.

2. Identity and Place

The Guidebook includes "*Identity and Place*" as one of the 6 Principles.

Identity and Place

Well-developed neighbourhoods create a sense of place that fosters identity and creates pride in community"

Our community, and we believe most Calgarians, strongly support this key Principle and want to see it implemented.

We suggest that the Municipal Development Plan Policy 2.3.2 *Respecting and enhancing neighbourhood character* is a clearer and more detailed articulation of the Principle *Identity and Place* than the brief description in the Guidebook and should be added to the description of *Identity and Place*.

Low Density Residential Neighbourhoods, contiguous areas of houses

We believe the unique identity of Calgary's neighbourhoods is defined by the core of contiguous areas of houses, not by the higher density structures along the busier streets or around the local activity centres.

It is the core that creates a sense of place that fosters identity and that creates pride in community.

We believe that virtually all residential neighbourhoods follow the same general design; a core of contiguous areas of houses transitioning into higher density forms along busier streets and activity centres. Virtually all the new subdivisions are also designed along this same model.

Over the years some of the neighbourhoods closer to downtown or major transportation corridors have evolved to include higher density forms inside their cores. But the majority of the neighbourhoods, including ours, retain this same general model, a core of contiguous areas of houses.

It is the trees, yards, gardens and sunlight associated with the core of contiguous areas of houses that define the character and sense of place of a neighbourhood. The front yards, in conjunction with the trees and greenspace on the City boulevards, create linear parks that Calgarians can enjoy as they stroll by, walk their dogs, or ride their bikes down the streets.

The contiguous areas of houses create a child-friendly environment where Calgarians with children can let their kids (or grandkids) run around outside and play in their yards and their friends yards, or the parks and playgrounds and school yards, or the ice rinks and facilities at the neighbourhood community centres.

The guidebook should protect the unique and sought-after identity and sense of place created by neighbourhoods with a core of contiguous areas of houses.

3. Contribution of Greenspace

We believe, and most Calgarians would agree, that greenspace should be retained and enhanced. The Guidebook Policy *Landscape Design* does an excellent job articulating the benefits of greenspace:

“Landscaping has many community benefits, from improved stormwater management and quality to positive impact on mental and physical health. Landscaping should be used as more than a buffer between properties and should contribute to the built form outcomes directed by this Guidebook.”

The contiguous areas of houses contribute significantly to the overall greenspace in Calgary for the benefit of all Calgarians.

Impact of Redevelopment



This is a picture of a new six-plex building in the central area of Altadore in southwest Calgary near Marda Loop. Altadore and Marda Loop are rapidly evolving neighbourhoods near the Crowchild Trail and 14th street transportation corridors. They are being redeveloped to provide a multitude of housing choices such as this one. This building is entirely appropriate in those neighbourhoods and contributes to the *Identity and sense of place* that is evolving there.

However:

The backyard is paved and covered; there is no greenspace. The other side of the building you cannot see abuts the paved lane, there is no greenspace. The only greenspace is the strip of grass in the front and one side, which is mostly City boulevard.

There is no question that the City will lose greenspace when a yard and trees are demolished to make way for a new building of this Form.

The Guidebook should protect the existing greenspace provided by contiguous areas of houses.

4. The Calgary Advantage: *Economic Vitality*

Calgary wants to attract new high-tech businesses, and skilled and talented people to enhance the economic vitality of the city. The availability of attractive, affordable housing is a major consideration when relocating to Calgary or anywhere.

We believe that many of these newcomers, especially those with children, will want to live in a house in a stable neighbourhood with contiguous areas of houses and near to schools. We believe many of them will also want to walk or bike to work if they could.

There are very few cities in North America that can offer skilled and talented newcomers this complete choice of housing. To our knowledge there are no neighbourhoods in Vancouver, Toronto, San Francisco or Seattle that can offer the complete package they want: a house in a quiet neighbourhood with schools that is close to downtown and affordable.

Calgary does offer this choice. Calgary is one of the few cities that still has neighbourhoods with a core of contiguous areas of houses that are close to a vibrant city centre and that have strong unique identities, a sense of place, community pride and lots of greenspace.

We believe that this gives Calgary a significant advantage attracting new business and people.

The Guidebook should ensure we don't lose this advantage.

5. Cumulative Effects and Phasing of Redevelopment

For any new redevelopment, an existing house and associated greenspace must be demolished. If the new structure is larger than the existing one, there will be loss of greenspace. If the structure does not respect the context of the neighbourhood, the Identity and sense of place is lost. This is irreversible and cumulative.

With time the unique identity of the neighbourhoods will be eroded.

Calgary's future is uncertain over the next few years, due to the recession in the energy industry. We may not need as much new housing as the long-term forecast suggests.

We understand that the Westbrook Community Association February 24th letter to Council calculates that there is more than enough land already designated for new higher density Forms to meet the forecast demand for many years.

There is no need to reduce greenspace until it is obvious that new land is required to meet continuing demand.

The City should preserve its greenspace for as long as possible.

Revision to the Guidebook

The Elboya Heights Britannia Community Association generally supports the Guidebook but recommends the following revisions:

Revise the Guidebook to include a new Urban Form Category and a new Scale Modifier that:

- Will be applied to the neighbourhood cores of contiguous areas of houses.
- Includes elements of *contextually sensitive redevelopment*.
- Preserves greenspace by restricting allowable Urban Forms to those Forms that preserve the existing Greenspace.
- Ensure that the type and placement of Urban Forms, other than houses, is defined in the Local Area Plan and any changes to the Local Area Plan must go through the Public Hearing Process.
- Ensures that the development of Urban Forms, other than houses, will be delayed until it can be demonstrated that there is not enough land to meet the actual demand.

Recommended revisions are attached.

We believe that these revisions will make the Guidebook a much better tool to address the concerns of all Calgarians.

Respectfully,

Elboya Heights Britannia Community Association

Page 49, 50

Neighbourhood Housing Limited Residential

Neighbourhood Housing Limited Residential areas serve the people who live there. These areas will have the strongest delineation between private and public space and landscaped areas such as soft landscaped yards and patios. These areas will be residential intended to accommodate existing residential forms and contextually sensitive redevelopment.

2.7 Neighbourhood Housing Limited Residential Policies

a. In a local area plan, Neighbourhood Housing Limited Residential should identify areas of a community that will have the following characteristics, relative to other Neighbourhood Housing areas of the community:

- i. lowest volumes of pedestrian activity,
- ii. primarily local visitation and use; and,
- iii. pedestrian routes that support a lower volume of movement.

b. Development in Neighbourhood Housing Limited Residential areas should:

- i. have building setbacks with soft landscaping that is located to support pedestrian comfort and provide the strongest delineation between public realm to private.

Page 80

Limited Scale Residential

Buildings in the Limited Scale Residential modifier are three storeys or less in height with smaller building footprints than typical of other scale modifiers. This category includes single-detached or semi-detached dwellings. Housing-focused areas at this scale should have more amenity space at grade, such as yards or patios.

2.25 Limited Scale Residential Policies

a. Buildings:

- i. should be a maximum of three storeys in height to a maximum of 10m above grade,
- ii. should be contextually sensitive to existing dwellings; and,

b. Limited Scale Residential housing-focused development should,

- i. have a well-articulated primary façade with distinct unit entrances;
- ii. provide at-grade amenity space; and,
- iii. have a reduced building mass above the second storey.