



April 15, 2024

Members of Council
The City of Calgary
Office of the Mayor and Office of the Councillors
P.O. Box 2100, Station "M"
Calgary, AB T2P 2M5

Dear Mayor Gondek and Members of Council,

RE: City Wide Rezoning

Calgary is a large urban centre known for its small-town-friendly feel. This warm atmosphere owes much to its geographic communities, nurtured by community associations and non-profits, fueled by over 20,000 volunteers. This strong sense of place is evident when you ask a Calgarian where they live—they proudly name their neighbourhood. Each Calgary community boasts its unique character, influenced by its location, demographics, green spaces, amenities and housing forms. For residents, transitioning from one neighbourhood to another is unmistakable. These neighbourhoods are unique, reflecting our diverse community fabric and cherished community character.

The Federation supports 156 Community Associations and approximately 80 other community-based non-profits. Our primary role is to educate and assist our members in enhancing their organizations and to support them to become a respected voice for issues affecting their community. This letter reflects feedback we have received, identifies trust breakdowns, and offers recommendations for consideration.

Rezoning as a stand-alone issue is a contentious one. Linking this controversial "growth and change" issue with the affordable housing crisis has added confusion; for some, it has implied rezoning is the only solution for housing affordability. Residents have strong ties to their neighbourhoods, investing financially and emotionally in meaningful relationships there. The possibility of rezoning can create the feeling of uncertainty; rezoning everything is, for some, overwhelming. Furthermore, the confusion between sound planning principles concerning "growth and change" and the housing affordability crisis has caused division within communities, leading to conflicts among members of community association boards and tensions between neighbours.

Change is a process that demands patience, evidence, and good examples. Regrettably, the research on rezoning provided by The City hasn't resonated with residents. Many express frustrations over the absence of substantial evidence supporting the proposed rezoning and unsatisfactory responses from City Staff to their inquiries. The information provided has raised more concerns. Answers, or the lack of answers, to questions regarding concerns around tree canopies, snow removal, garbage, or privacy have failed to reassure residents. Moreover, inconsistencies in responses across planning project silos have deepened the lack of trust. Many residents are puzzled by The City's departure from the Municipal Development Plan (MDP), which emphasizes the intensification of main streets and corridors, particularly considering it was recently revised in 2021.



As the Federation, we refrain from taking positions on any planning issues due to our limited resources to represent the diverse communities we serve. We can, however, “reflect” a community voice by conveying what we've heard from members and residents citywide. Many individuals we've heard from are expressing anger, worry, and a sense of being misled by The City. Community association leaders from all corners of the City, including developing areas, have shared their perspectives. The spectrum of voices is broad from long-time homeowners to renters, from young professionals embarking on their careers to new Canadians aspiring to provide homes for their multi-generational families. We heard a profound sense of humanity and deep struggles through our interactions.

We must acknowledge that a few citizens have chosen to express themselves inappropriately, primarily observed online and on X, formerly Twitter, and through verbal badgering and heckling of City Staff. The Federation has taken, and will continue to take, a strong and firm leadership stance against hate speech and will not tolerate such behaviour in any context.

Why is Trust Such a Problem?

Since 2012, the Federation has been critical of the engagement process. Behind the scenes, we have directly engaged with Administration and council members to address our concerns about the diminishing value of community voice. Specifically, this decline has been evident in initiatives such as Transforming Planning, the Community Representation Framework, the Guidebook for Greater Communities, and the Re-zoning process, reflecting a decade-long trend of diminishing respect for community input.

Here are some examples:

- Throughout various planning reforms, there has been a noticeable shift away from treating communities as partners and recognizing residents as "experts on where they live." Instead, they are often relegated to passive roles of "listening and learning." This appears to be a leadership issue and is not shared by all The City planning staff. In fact, there are hardworking and receptive staff members who are actively supporting a stronger community voice, for which we are grateful to work with. However, the prevailing reality remains one of "listen and learn."
 - This stance has been overtly reinforced by some council members and manager-level administration, who assert that Administration's role is to educate residents about their work but not alter their professional planning opinion based on feedback. Instead, they are tasked with presenting a "What We Heard Report" to Council, leaving Council Members to sift through reports, letters and public hearings to make decisions. Unfortunately, this approach often leads to unintended consequences stemming from motions made during Council sessions, which may or may not align with good planning outcomes.
 - Another instance of community devaluation occurred during an online rezoning session we hosted. Residents were restricted to posing questions solely through chat or the Q&A feature. Despite several good suggestions in writing, The City staff directed participants to the Engage Portal, stating, "Those are good ideas. Please go to the Engage Portal and type them in so we can capture your

comments." Shouldn't staff be obligated to capture those ideas directly from the sessions and include them in the "What We Heard Report" to Council? Or, more importantly, shouldn't they incorporate those ideas into their recommendations? Finally, we understand that when trust is at an all-time low, having one-way conversations may seem like the safest approach. However, it does nothing to foster productive discourse that could potentially lead to better outcomes.

- During a Rezoning Open House, a man approached an Engage Staff. I heard him say, with a heavy accent indicating that English was not his first language, "This is my ninth time at these events. I need someone to hear what I have to say. Will you listen to me?" The Engage Staff responded, "You have come to the right place. You and I can look at these pictures and you can write your feedback on this form." I watched as the man left looking exasperated. Nobody had heard his voice.
- Trust continues to erode as engagement and planning efforts remain siloed. Planning teams repeatedly respond to questions in isolation from other city planning projects, leading to confusion among participants and potential misinformation. This ongoing trend only exacerbates the erosion of trust.
 - During a session, it was suggested by City Staff that RC-G would remain "discretionary" rather than "permitted." However, upon exploring the Engage Portal, a spreadsheet was discovered indicating that all neighbourhood-level development was recommended as "permitted." If "permitted" is passed during the City Building Work, it would effectively remove the voice of neighbours or affected parties from the redevelopment process. This is very concerning for residents.
 - In a similar forum, concerns about rezoning parks (cul-de-sacs, green boulevards, etc.) from RC-1 to RC-G were raised. Participants expressed worry as green space and parks are prioritized in the MDP and are recommended as a strategic goal in City Building Work, yet they are slated to be rezoned to RC-G. Some residents have seen green spaces being sold off and expressed concern, in our session, that this might happen if rezoned to RC-G. The City Staff responded, "they've been zoned like that for decades and it's just carried on through. Because they are zoned as RC-1 they will be moving to R-CG but Parks is a permitted use in R-CG, so it will stay as a park. It's not being proposed actually to have housing developed on it." While the City's Staff's intention was to provide reassurance from their perspective, the trust was already so fractured and the fact that community people had seen park space sold off and the word "it is not being proposed", it came across as lacking transparency and integrity.
 - Yet another example involved a question about how rezoning will affect the already passed Local Area Plans, which involved thousands of hours of community conversations and City staff input. The answer, "... if Council does end up approving the Citywide rezoning there are some local area plans where maybe policies don't necessarily align with it. Our team would be coming back with a separate proposal to Council to have those fixed to align with the rezoning." To defend the City Staff, they did try to explain that some of the integrity of the LAP would be kept, but the transcript is not clear how and with certainty.
 - Between 2015 and 2019, The Federation and our members repeatedly questioned if the goal of all the "City Building" initiatives was to rezone. Administration consistently responded with variations of "No," "We don't know," or "Not to our knowledge." Despite being told that City Staff are "building



the plane while flying it" and reassured of their expertise in planning, residents find it difficult not to question why the revelation of complete city rezoning as a planning best practice has emerged only as we confront a housing crisis. This discrepancy raises significant concerns about trust, honesty, and transparency within the planning process.

- **The Engage Portal** - The Federation strongly encourages all our members and residents who subscribe to our newsletters to visit the Engage Portal to participate in the online engagement processes. However, this site is not inviting; you must be an excellent reader with the stamina to navigate while digging for relevant content. There's a perception that this portal is the only way for comments to be included in a "What We Heard" report. Ironically, this portal eliminates Calgarians participating due to time, language barriers and technological skills.

Finally, City planning work is siloed into various expertise, processes, and departments. Residents experience planning holistically, not in specific and distinct pieces like The City. For most residents, it is all one big process that is connected, not distinct. So, when residents talk about "rezoning," they think about trees, parking, garbage, shadowing, HVAC noise and noise. To The City, none of these things matter to the Rezoning team as those are all under the control of different departments (i.e. Community Standards), or the details will be part of some other policies (i.e. Land Use Bylaw). When residents bring concerns, it is about where they live. They discuss things that affect their community's social cohesion and quality of life.

Recommendations:

Given that this public hearing represents the sole opportunity for citizens to influence policy, The Federation, based on feedback from our members and residents, respectfully requests that you consider making motions on the floor regarding:

- 1) **Preserve all green spaces.** Instead of rezoning them to RC-G, designate them as special-purpose districts for recreational purposes. As communities intensify, these spaces will become critical for people to connect. Preserve green space and rezone it separately as a sign of good faith.
- 2) **Honour the Municipal Development Plan (MDP)** by incentivizing builders to develop corridors and main streets. Implement RC-G rezoning gradually after evaluating the implementation of the principles outlined in the Municipal Development Plan (MDP).
- 3) **Direct the Administration to Have a Holistic Approach to Planning to** avoid unintended consequences. Work collaboratively with other departments to mitigate the following concerns:
 - a. **Tree Canopy:** Protecting the tree canopy is crucial for community aesthetics and environmental preservation. While new trees and shrubs will be planted in the limited green space remaining, evaluating the impact of the loss of mature trees on the environment is essential. Of note is the reduction in songbird habitat and the goal of reducing CO2 emissions as per The City's Climate Change Strategy.
 - b. **Snow Removal:** In mid-block H-GO or RC-G zones, there's a concern about where snow can be shovelled. Moving it against the neighbouring fence may cause rot, structural and run-off issues; moving it to the street may cause mobility and access issues. With limited space, approximately 4 to 6 feet around the lot perimeter, it's unclear where large amounts of snow can be moved.

- c. **Parking** – Transit options are limited in most neighbourhoods. It is unreasonable to think that there won't be at least four cars with eight units. It is critical to consider public transport and parking in decision-making at least until we invest in world-class transit. Until then they will remain car dependent.
 - d. **Drainage:** Given the limited permeable surface on an RC-G lot, there's concern about how melting snow and rainwater will be absorbed. This raises the risk of potential impacts on neighbouring units' basements and the new development itself. Further, there are concerns about added pressure on stormwater systems. Ensure bylaw relaxation on soft scaping are not allowed. Prioritize over other pieces? Ie. To protect the tree canopy
 - e. **Garbage and Recycling:** With the potential for up to eight units (4 main and 4 secondary) on a single lot, it's essential to consider where up to 24 bins (minimum of 12) will be stored and where they will be placed for pick-up on the street. Will this impede essential service access like ambulance or fire services?
 - f. **Privacy and Quality of Life of Neighbours:** Factors such as 13 windows facing a single backyard or eight air conditioners near an older home's backyard significantly impact the quality of life for neighbours. Thoughtful building standards should prioritize neighbour-friendly placement of windows and relocation of HVAC systems to the front side of the units to minimize the impact on existing neighbours. The functionality of the trades aspects are considered at the DP stage to accommodate neighbour friendly – better amalgamations between dp and alberta building code.
- 4) **Revitalize and Prioritize the Role of the Community in Planning:** Direct Administration and the ENGAGE unit to collaborate with The Federation, its members, and residents to revitalize the community's active role in planning. Planners, developers, and residents should work together to bring the best planning policies to Council for consideration.
- a. **Residents Want to be Engaged:** Communities, like developers, are eager to be part of the conversation from the outset. They are deeply invested in their neighbourhoods and have dedicated substantial time to understanding the planning process. Through initiatives led by The Federation, many community associations have refined their planning committees, becoming more intentional and reflective of their residents. Calgary's unique asset lies in its community associations. Let's work together to elevate their reach. This could come in the hiring planning liaisons or additional resources to support The Federation's efforts.
 - b. **Listening must occur before matters reach Council.** Unintended consequences can happen by making motions at the end of public hearings. Further, this doesn't always result in better planning outcomes. Waiting until the public hearing to try to incorporate citizens' ideas is disingenuous to residents and City Staff. Consequences of decisions in the built environment can last over 100 years, partnerships and collaboration are required to achieve sustainability goals while maintaining a high quality of life for all citizens.
 - c. **Bolster the role of CA** – For the past decade, the role of the community association has been devalued and demonized. There are 20,000 Calgarians who volunteer with the 156 community associations. They are an asset – something we should invest in and collectively celebrate. In fact, as a Civic Partner, you invest in us to support ways to help introduce newcomers to



community associations. Change has been happening; however, Community Associations are still painted with the same brush.

- d. **Develop Transparent Engagement Models:** Millions of dollars are expended on "engagement." Constituents deserve clarity regarding how and when they are engaged. Engagement processes should be led by individuals trained in best practices, such as those outlined by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). For contentious issues, external firms without conflicts of interest, specifically those not involved with developers in the Calgary area, should be engaged to solicit genuine input from all parties regarding the Administration's recommendations.

Conclusion:

Throughout this process and others before it, The Federation has provided The City with a community perspective, edited City materials, designed our own communications, shared ideas on how to engage our members and provide ideas that could foster understanding on both sides. We have hosted city-led engagements. Throughout this, we continue to offer education on good planning practices through the Partners in Planning program and other educational offerings. We have developed resources for our members to engage residents in city planning matters and have emphasized to our members the importance of establishing more robust planning committees and improving community engagement methods to reflect their community's demographics. While many have responded to our support, their question remains: to what end?

The Federation is a civic partner that has taken on the roles of educator, convener, and advocate for a meaningful community voice in City matters. We have attempted to balance our role with membership and The City, often using non-public approaches to address the serious and ongoing degradation of public engagement processes. We provide this feedback in good faith and as our written testimony, hoping to work together with Council, City Staff and our communities to rebuild trust.

Amid an affordability housing crisis where decisive action and cooperation are essential, it is unfortunate that you are confronted with a significant and blatant breakdown in community trust. This unfortunate reality adds a layer of complexity, making your decisions even more challenging.

Thank you for making it through our letter and for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Leslie Evans
Executive Director