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Calgary, Alberta T3A 0A1

15 April 2024

City of Calgary Clerk's Office  
700 Macleod Trail SE  
P.O. Box 2100  
Postal Station M 8007  
Calgary, Alberta, T2P 2M5

## **Regarding The City of Calgary proposed R-CG Blanket Upzoning Council Meeting 22.Apr.2024**

Dear Sirs/Madams:

This letter is a copy of the comments I submitted online to the City of Calgary Clerk's Office on the above-indicated date at a time before 12:00 noon.

The City of Calgary proposed blanket upzoning is both "Bad Government" and "Bad Planning".

### **Bad Government**

This proposed blanket upzoning is being forced on Calgary residents with what seems to be only a slim majority of support on Council and without sufficient consultation of the public is terrible. It is an affront to any sort of natural justice.

The City of Calgary cannot in good conscience make such a major shift in long-standing policy without further consultation of those impacted so severely. It is undemocratic. But they continue to rebuff efforts to ask for careful thought and consultation with those who are Calgary. The citizens of Calgary did not elect a council and mayor to run The City of Calgary like a dictatorship based on a few council votes. The Province of Alberta needs to step in and restrain The City of Calgary!

### **Bad Planning**

This proposed blanket upzoning is just chasing the latest community planning fad: It is assumed that higher densities are better because they reduce consumption and sprawl even if lower densities still have many advantages and are preferred by many citizens. Based on this assumption, regulations are to be relaxed to allow a mix of densities wherever developers see opportunity to make density greater overall.

The City of Calgary is grasping at something:

1: It is a big dramatic action. It might even be considered a form of virtue signaling: "See how we have taken this grand action to upend low density communities across the City – in spite of all the concerns raised". Or it is just following other apparent trend-setting cities.

2: It is intended to solve the housing crisis by speeding up the addition of dwelling units generally and low-cost dwelling units in particular. But it is wrong to think that blanket upzoning will on its own result in more units faster. The residential building capacity – the rate at which the full developer community can complete projects – is the key factor. The City of Calgary should be working to help focus high density development in locations with higher capacity and less expensive infrastructure, to help get the most out of the residential building capacity in Calgary. Releasing a huge swath all at once that includes so much more than can be used by developers acts to dilute the potential effectiveness of focused efforts. The opportunity to coordinate higher-quality public transit with zones of greater density to gain further synergies is also lost.

3: It is intended to increase profits for developers. The idea is to incentivize developers to build higher densities. It presumes that what is lacking is locations for these developers. What motivates developers is profit, and this action is at its heart an attempt to steer developers by increasing their profits. Of course, higher profits for developers is not something to object to on its own, but to the extent it does not help lower housing prices, for low income households in particular, it does have equity implications – which may be a concern for some proponents of this proposed blanket upzoning as discussed below.

4: It is based on the forceful assumption that higher densities are better overall. The City of Calgary is buying into the argument that higher densities use resources more efficiently and bring people closer to their destinations, resulting in a reduced urban footprint. Unfortunately, things are nowhere near that simple. Density on its own is shown empirically to have little effect. Focused density well-served by transit does more than a thin spread of duplexes or row houses in otherwise low density areas. Higher densities also have negative effects on residential space, from shading to less human scale to privacy – and the loss of a lifestyle associated with a private garden and a more protected family setting. These are all negatives that must be set against the potential benefits. It seems too much to not save more of the existing low density neighbourhoods that many residents enjoy along with pursuing higher densities in selected places to realize those benefits.


5: It sometimes seems to be an attempt at social engineering or encouraging a class conflict. I have heard it said – sometimes as whispers – that: higher income families in their low density neighbourhoods need to accept some low income families in high density housing as their neighbours – low density dwellers do not deserve their protected privilege and higher home values – there needs to be some “levelling up”. People have laughed at me and indicated some satisfaction when I expressed my concern that this proposed blanket upzoning will not only spoil the character of my neighbourhood but also reduce the value of my house. I was asked why I thought I deserved to live in a “protected” low density neighbourhood. I said because the neighbourhood has been designed low density by zoning and because I purchased and I pay municipal taxes based on the value of my house, including the component of value related to a “protected” low density. It just seems to be like The City of Calgary is acting in bad faith to suddenly change the rules – so dramatically – with such negative consequences for certain groups – and to do so with a thin majority of Council and while avoiding more complete public input.

6: It is an abdication of planning responsibility by the City of Calgary. If the point is to provide a greater range of housing types and more low income housing in particular, and to not bring about the wholesale devaluation of low density neighbourhoods in Calgary, then compatible areas should

be designated for these and the efforts focused. Simply throwing open a vast area to potential development will merely give up any focus or coordination. The greater infrastructure capacities associated with greater development densities will be required everywhere and not only in focused areas – which will add to housing costs that will make low income housing more difficult.

7: It is not the most effective way to generate more housing stock generally and low income housing in particular. The proposal seeks to increase the number and lower the costs of residential construction opportunities for developers – in effect to subsidize development activity for developers. Research has shown that it is far more effective to subsidize rents than it is to lower construction costs when seeking to benefit low income households. Developers respond to both higher rents and to lower construction costs, but families get their more direct say when they choose where to pay the rents. Developers get the market prices, but the subsidized renters do not face the full market prices. When developer construction is subsidized, it is too easy for developers to still charge the market prices to the renters and keep the subsidies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Douglas Hunt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent.

John Douglas Hunt, PhD(cantab), PEng  
Retired Professor of Civil Engineering  
University of Calgary

cc:	Honourable Ric McIver, Minister of Municipal Affairs	Calgary.Hays@assembly.ab.ca
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