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From: Roberta Franchuk

Sent: Monday, April 26, 2004 10:54 PM

To: urban.sustainability@edmonton.ca

Subject: Urban forms

My comments on the upcoming urban sustainability session:

First, if Edmonton has such a common-sense set up guidelines and goals as listed in the Smart Choices report, why are abominations like South Edmonton Common allowed to be developed? Anyone with half a brain could have foreseen that whole scenario: big-box development, hideous traffic tie-ups, stratospheric costs for roadway changes. WHY DID THIS HAPPEN? WHO PAID OFF WHOM?

No matter how lovely and sensible your planning documents are, if this sort of thing isn't recognized as the cancer that it is, nothing will change. Change the political will at city hall if you want to change something. learn to say NO to developers!

That said, I am also disturbed that the Smart Choices document recognizes walkability and the related and complementary concept of cyclability only in terms of multi-use paths. We don't need huge amount of investment in multi-use paths designed to get cyclists and pedestrians out of the way of cars. We need:

1. a plowed sidewalk on both sides of every single damn roadway no matter how busy it is. I am certainly not the only person who has walked the berm on 170th Street north of WEM, or 51 Avenue near 89th Street, or Calgary Trail south of the Whitemud. People are using these areas now, because they have to get somewhere and they don't have a car. Right now we pedestrians have to climb snowdrifts, dodge mud, and trek across parking lots to get where we're going. It's a laugh to talk about a walkable city when every new shopping development is surrounded by hostile traffic with no sidewalks. Put the sidewalks in, charge the industrial/commercial owners for building and maintenance.
2. Some decent cycle routes through major quadrants of the city: across the Yellowhead at 124th Street, across the city to WEM, etc. i don't mean bike lanes or multiuse trails. What about simple bike connections between residential areas? Residential roads are far superior to the patchwork of sidewalks and paths that now exist. Many times a good cycle route via residential streets exists but a crucial connection is missing. In designing

new neighborhoods, this kind of cycle/pedestrian connection is easy to include.

3. Better traffic law enforcement and awareness for both cyclists and motorists. Cyclists should not be riding against traffic on one-way streets; motorists should not be yielding to cyclists who are waiting at a stop sign.

The "walkable communities" presentation on April 22 had some very sensible and well-understood ideas (except for the reliance on bike paths). No one needs to reinvent the wheel here. If we can't do it it's due to a lack of political motivation, nothing else.

And one last thing: tell Robert Noce the new bridge is a no-go.

Thanks for your consideration.

Roberta Franchuk

commuter/utility cyclist for 15 years

car-free since 1995

mother of 2 pre-school children - on the bike, on foot, on the bus.

From: josey.berg
Sent: Wednesday, April 28, 2004 9:51 AM
To: urban.sustainability@edmonton.ca
Subject: Urban form

April 28, 2004

City of Edmonton, Four Pillars of Urban Sustainability
Office of the City Clerk
3rd Floor, City Hall, 1 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 2R7

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my views concerning Edmonton's urban form. I believe this pillar of urban sustainability is the most crucial to the city's long-term development.

For almost three years, my wife and I have commuted from our townhouse in the Callingwood area to the northwest industrial district. On the way, we pass other uniform townhouse complexes, strip malls, big box warehouses and office buildings—mostly fronted by large parking lots—and expanses of brownfields. It is a depressing sight, to say nothing of the commuting itself. It was our hope to find work downtown and move to the nearby Riverdale neighbourhood, but the higher cost of houses there has held us back. We would happily move into a more affordable condominium close to downtown, but we could not bring ourselves to part with our very active shepherd dog. As a last resort, we have decided to move to another city where we can afford to buy a house in a diverse neighbourhood, within a few blocks of work and other amenities.

For a long time, I thought Edmonton's prevailing physical character was just part of how large cities were. Dealing with traffic and eyesores was an unavoidable part of big city living. I have since learned otherwise. Even in the automobile age, many cities—mostly in Europe, but a few in North America—have managed to avoid or overcome these pitfalls that have befallen other cities like Edmonton. They have done so by planning with people's needs and desires for walkable, pleasant public spaces in mind.

Edmonton has devoted a great deal of attention and money to solving its transportation problems. That our housing tracts are so intricately linked by thoroughfares and feeder roads with shopping malls, office complexes and other sites is testament to the skill and influence of our city's engineers. Our planners have made these roads necessary by physically separating land uses and by enforcing minimum setbacks and parking allotments and maximum densities beyond what are required. There is hardly anywhere in this city that people go to in the course of their daily lives without having to get into a car or bus. Even if they realistically could, they would rather not walk among the rushing vehicles and unattractive buildings. As a result, the social fabric of our city's streets has either decayed or never had a chance to grow.

Why, then, have so many people, including myself, chosen to live and do business in these settings? The short answer is that it is simply cheaper to do so. (The appeal of suburban living for some lasts a few short years before the areas are built up and the fringe of development pushed further out.) The lack of more attractive places like Riverdale has pushed up their prices relative to the suburbs. The cost of living generally, though, favours the suburbs. Roads, utilities, bus lines and other services are brought to these far-flung areas without directly costing users any more than they would elsewhere in the city. Their costs are spread among taxpayers, including residents and small business owners closer to the city center who do not access them. Municipal taxes are assessed on the value of each property, not the land itself. Hence the expansive lots, cheap commercial facades and empty fields we suburbanites have grown

accustomed to.

It is well-known what needs to be done to combat these developments. We need to stop trying to solve Edmonton's transportation problems in isolation, and start trying to better integrate where people live, work, shop and go for recreation and entertainment. We need to make streets more appealing to pedestrians by bringing facades and other visual cues that describe each street as an entity more in line and closer to the sidewalks. Parking should be placed next to the curbs or behind buildings. Where possible, blocks should be shortened to allow for more evenly distributed traffic flow. Narrower roads will also encourage motorists to slow down and pedestrians to feel more comfortable. Finally, we need to structure taxes and user fees to better reflect the true cost of providing municipal services to different areas of the city.

These solutions have been widely promoted, even by developers, and have started to enter mainstream planning discussion. All that prevents them from being implemented are restrictive zoning and building codes and a lack of will among planners and politicians to overhaul the old system. In their place, we need to adopt enforceable urban design guidelines based on the principles of New Urbanism, which I have only begun to articulate. I hope, for the sake of Edmontonians who remain in this city, you will do so.

Sincerely,

Jason Josey

From: Don Hussey:
Sent: Thursday, April 29, 2004 3:18 PM
To: urban.sustainability@edmonton.ca
Subject: Comments on Shaping Edmonton's Urban Form in the Future

Attached are comments provided to assist Council in their deliberations on Edmonton's Urban Form and the Smart Choices for Developing Edmonton.

Any questions can be directed to Don Hussey, Principal, Urban Revision via return email or by phone/ fax.

cheers, Don

Don Hussey, Principal
Urban Revision

Comments on Edmonton's Four Pillars of Urban Sustainability

Urban Form - May 20/21, 2004

Moving Forward with Smart Choices:

Edmonton's urban form will continue to evolve regardless of the amount or quality of civic involvement. As the decision maker on municipal development, it is extremely important that City Council take an active role in establishing objectives to guide the evolution of Edmonton's urban form so that there is a goal to work towards, the process and results can be continuously evaluated and options can be weighed.

The goals and objectives for Edmonton's urban form are contained in the Municipal Development Plan and in Statutory Plans (ASP's and NSP's) focussed on smaller areas such as the downtown. Smart Choices for developing Edmonton provides a means of achieving goals and objectives that make good sense. Smart Choices also focuses on a process that can be successfully applied to address urban issues of varying difficulty and generate the feedback necessary to adjust the targets and approach as required from time to time.

Priorities and Implementation Activities from Smart Choices:

While locally generated goals and objectives are key to creating a vision for Edmonton's urban form, the critical priority for implementing Smart Choices is the process.

It is possible for the planning process to provide an education to all participants by identifying issues and constraints and assisting the community in developing solutions to problems related to urban form within community defined guidelines. The process can foster dialogue without the pressure of a specific development application over the collective heads of a neighbourhood or City Council. The process can also generate opportunities for new investment in neighbourhoods, allowing new development to add vitality rather than divisions to the neighbourhood. Based on Edmonton's experience with neighbourhood planning over the past 25 years, I believe a neighbourhood planning process can achieve these things and more, including intensification as an acceptable

neighbourhood solution rather than a divisive and controversial departure from low density residential housing.

Intensification- How much and where?

The level and location of any intensification is subject to a number of constraints. They can include physical limits associated with existing service capacity and affordable increments. They can be limits to neighbourhood activity levels or facilities such as vehicular traffic levels, off street and on street parking, park space per residential unit and amenity requirements. Constraints to intensification can also include limitations on access for developments over a specific density or land use type and limits on architectural style or density where appropriate.

The level and location of any intensification can likewise be influenced by a number of incentives that relate to the need for revitalization in a neighbourhood and the difficulty associated with redevelopment of certain sites. The replacement of obsolete or undesirable uses can be encouraged with incentives such as higher density zoning (that meets community guidelines) to create a win/win solution for neighbourhoods facing difficult alternatives to address urban form related issues. For example, conversion of obsolete commercial or industrial land uses to family oriented residential may help support dropping school populations and other infrastructure critical to the continued existence of residential uses.

The bottom line on intensification is that it must be a locally defined solution, the subject of discussions among the many stakeholders that live, work and play within and support a neighbourhood. While City Council has specific responsibilities of approval under the Municipal Government Act, a successful intensification program has to reflect the goals, objectives and tradeoffs deemed reasonable by the neighbourhood. Again, process is key to arriving at a set of goals and objectives that fulfill the various needs of the community.

What urban elements support new urban forms?

Smart Choices provides a wide range of development related solutions to support new and existing directions in urban form such as transit oriented development and pedestrian friendly commercial areas. From a physical development perspective, many workable solutions have been outlined and refinement of these options will continue as Edmonton grows and intensifies. However, physical changes to Edmonton's urban form will not effectively deal with many of the urban form issues City Council faces. As Council is well aware, many issues have their roots in social and other urban policy.

Successful support for future urban forms in Edmonton requires that all stakeholders including neighbourhood residents, social agencies, environmental groups and the development industry be involved in bringing forward and implementing solutions to urban form issues. Changing the physical form of a neighbourhood without developing area commitment to a solution can end up wasting valuable time and resources because

the issues and problems often run much deeper than the relationship between the physical city and an individual. Neighbourhood plans need to be comprehensive to deal with all the issues and the stakeholders need not only a full toolkit of techniques and solutions, but the correct resources including money and the planners, architects and engineers to implement agreed to solutions.

Appropriate Infrastructure and Programs for New Urban Forms

As part of the neighbourhood planning process, the administration should undertake an assessment of existing service capacities in subject neighbourhoods and evaluate the options for accommodating growth without significant infrastructure changes and understanding what levels of redevelopment will lead to significant infrastructure costs. This can apply equally to underground or shallow utility services and parks facilities, library services or social services. Understanding where redevelopment can occur, how much can be accommodated with little or no additional infrastructure costs and what might be necessary to support additional investment is critical to the question of what intensification is worth supporting.

Programming to support the redevelopment planning, implementation and the neighbourhood in its redeveloped form will depend on the issues addressed in the plan. While some of the solutions may be typical like streetscape improvements, others may be less 'physical' and more program oriented. With an open and inclusive neighbourhood planning process, there is an opportunity to bring a variety of solutions to bear on urban form related issues and problems.

As with many urban issues, City Council often finds itself alone on the front lines. The City has an opportunity with Smart Choices to do what needs to be done without having to mould solutions to the requirements of another government's urban funding programs. With the renewed interest in setting up more general funding sources for Cities, there may be better opportunities to secure funding to implement these plans in the foreseeable future.

Risks of Not Setting New Directions?

The sooner we can identify the problems to be dealt with, work out appropriate solutions and establish the resources required so that they can then be applied, the sooner we can work to resolve these issues. There are several reasons for proceeding quickly on intensification and urban form changes. First, the market is favourable to redevelopment and the outlook remains strong over the short to medium time frame. Second, these types of problems affect the daily lives of Edmontonians and even partial solutions reap significant results in terms of improving quality of life. Finally, there appears to be a continual need for reinvestment in and renewal of existing housing stock

There is a good chance that private investment within these neighbourhoods will follow if the opportunities and costs associated with redevelopment are better known to the development industry and potential investors. Being able to invest in a property for

redevelopment that is deemed suitable for intensification by the neighbourhood with a clear indication of infrastructure related costs removes a significant amount of development risk associated with rezoning and approvals. This would also affect the time it takes to redevelop a property in an existing developed area which reduces development risk. Intensification needs greater certainty as to results if it is to be embraced by more than just City Council. This is a good way of providing it without also paying for significant incentives to induce investment.

Why does Edmonton Need New Directions for Urban Form?

Intensification within older areas of Edmonton addresses a number of urban and regional issues that provide significant returns to the City and its residents. These returns include increased tax base with low marginal costs, more efficient service provision and support, more vibrant neighbourhoods, reduced need for suburban lands, less reliance on commuting and a more sustainable future for Edmonton as it grows and develops.

Edmonton will continue to grow. City Council, residents, members of the development industry and other stakeholders all have a responsibility to ensure that this growth proceeds in an economically, socially and environmentally responsible manner for current and future residents. Setting a vision for Edmonton's future urban form will establish what the community wants. Smart Choices provides the options to achieve those ends.

Respectfully Submitted: Don Hussey, Principal
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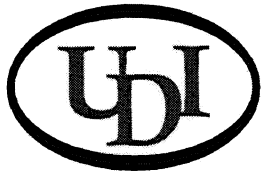
-----Original Message-----

From: Rose Yewchuk
Sent: Thursday, April 29, 2004 5:11 PM
To: urban.sustainability@edmonton.ca
Subject: Input on urban form

I would like to provide my comments for consideration at the Urban Form discussion on May 20 and 21.

I live in West Edmonton and I strongly feel that the city's expanding boundaries are becoming unsustainable. Much of the new development south and west of the city is low-density, car-dependent suburban sprawl.

This type of development destroys farmland and forested land while doing little to alleviate Edmonton's need for affordable housing. It is extremely expensive for the city to be continually running new services out to these sprawling subdivisions. Further, the style of most new neighbourhoods alienates people from their neighbours and makes them dependent on their cars for transportation.



Urban Development Institute (UDI) Greater Edmonton Chapter

Submission to the Four Pillars of Urban Sustainability – Urban Form Session, May 20 & 21, 2004

Partnerships

UDI values the close working relationship it shares with the City Administration and Council. As “Partners in Growth” we have a long-standing history of working together on the challenges facing our growing and prosperous city.

In addition to UDI and the City’s successful initiatives, such as the Sanitary Servicing Strategy and the Arterial Roadway Assessment, UDI is closely aligned with the City’s Planning & Development Department, collaborating on many areas, such as, their groundbreaking work on mature neighbourhood intensification, entitled Smart Choices.

Choice

Affordability, range and competitiveness of choice, locational attributes and lifestyle choices are considerations made when selecting where to live. We believe a city must provide choice to its residents, both in an inner city and suburban setting. We must also provide the broad spectrum of housing choices from multi-family product, small lot starter homes to estate properties. In addition to master-planned suburban communities, UDI members are also responding to infill opportunities like Railtown and Riverdale, providing master-planned developments in our inner city. Unfortunately, opportunities like Railtown and Riverdale are limited and can offer only a small percentage of total new growth.

Benefits of Growth

Homeowners are responding to this choice of locations. A recent city report entitled “Urban Sprawl” reported that “housing developed between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2002 represents just 6% of the total single family housing stock yet paid nearly 30% of residential property taxes.”

Edmonton’s Socio Economic Outlook reports that housing starts in 2003 reached 8,956 in the City of Edmonton. In fact, total building permits issued in 2003 were valued at a record setting \$1.075 billion leaving the city in an enviable position of having a total property tax projection for 2004 of \$15.98 million from new growth. Tax revenue that is needed to support the demands of a growing city.

Other positive results from growth include the expansion of the University and other post secondary educational facilities like Norquest College and Grant MacEwan; increased opportunities for employment for young people; and more and better facilities like the Anthony Henday Drive.

Competitiveness in the Region

Edmonton City Council is to be applauded for their willingness to review and right size small lot product for starter homes and duplexes. Only 8 short years ago the City of Edmonton’s share of single family housing starts in the Edmonton Capital Region had

dipped below 50% to an all time low of 48%. This was down from the heady days of 1984 when it sat at a high of 78% of the region. Today, Edmonton has regained a large share of that market at 61% in 2003 primarily because, unlike some of its neighbours, it allowed the development of starter product that enabled young individuals and families to more affordably own than rent a home. Interest rates are still at a historic low, continuing the trend to first home ownership.

Housing starts are expected to fall to 8,000 in 2004 and average 6,000 through 2006-2009. While lower than 2004, still robust numbers for the future. These new residents will be looking for homes and jobs within the competitive Edmonton Capital Region.

Housing choices, affordability and lifestyle will still be the determining factors in where to locate. Edmonton, with its wide choice of product in every quadrant of the city and at every price point is well poised to take advantage of the lion's share of this growth.

Smart Choices for Growth & Development

Proper planning is the single largest element in creating a successful, long-term sustainable community. It cannot occur without the collaboration of the development industry, municipalities, residents and businesses.

Innovative strategies that are being deployed in the region and have proven successful include: developing pedestrian access to shopping; smaller scale town centres in different communities translating to increased accessibility; and integrating business and residential, providing more options for citizens to work and live within their immediate community. The introduction of jobs within a community contributes to its sustainability and quality of life, while reducing commuting time, traffic levels and impacts on the environment.

Smart Choices builds upon these concepts. Many new communities already allow for public transit corridors (LRT or bus). Transit oriented development and pedestrian linkages enhanced by the Multi-Use Trail Corridor are some of the practices already incorporated into developing new communities and translate well into inner city redevelopment. The use of specific plans for inner city areas identified for intensification will provide the certainty needed by the community to garner community buy-in and for the developer wishing to make an investment. This will ensure that opportunities for redevelopment can be achieved.

UDI members are creating new communities throughout the Edmonton Capital Region that are more compact and community focussed and where residents are within walking distance to services, green spaces and public transportation. The City of Edmonton is the major centre in the region and it is important that they continue to support the policies that provide for growth in all areas of the city – whether the downtown, inner city, mature or new suburban neighbourhoods. We welcome the opportunity to work with you and your administration to ensure that Edmontonians continue to have the ability to choose where and how they live and Edmonton remains a sustainable and affordable city in which to live.