



Jennifer Wyness, Ward 2 Councillor

Housing and Affordability Taskforce Recommendations

On June 6 (Item 9.3.1), Council was presented with an omnibus request containing at least 33 separate recommendations. Many are excellent and have my full support. However, I oppose a few: some are large budget asks, some are not within municipal government's purview or authority to approve, and a couple are just bad ideas.

The report skipped committee stage and was presented directly to Council, asking for immediate approval for some of the 33 recommendations. This is unusual. Typically, reports presented directly to Council are for information only and do not request immediate approval.

One of the good recommendations was to rezone Calgary's existing residential areas to R-CG. This would provide equitable zoning across the city by allowing single family homes as well as duplexes, rowhouses, and townhouses to be built without having to go to Council for a zoning change. New communities across Calgary, like Glacier Ridge and Ambleton in Ward 2, already have this kind of zoning.

This zoning change would have minimal impact on existing communities, especially in older ones where land values are so high that market forces just don't support anything but single-family homes. This would, however, give inner-city landowners the opportunity to build to the same density as their counterparts in new communities where it makes sense. The resulting increase in land value could in-turn benefit younger Canadians, who increasingly rely on intergenerational wealth transfers to afford a home. This zoning change would also allow existing properties to remain as they are today, if the owner chooses. Any development would still require The City's permission to acquire a development permit. Over the long-term, more homes would be built in inner-city communities. This would help spread out the residential property tax burden, which currently falls disproportionately on newer, higher-density communities like Sage Hill and Evanston.

A bad recommendation was removing minimum parking stall requirements for new homes. When we're adding density in both inner city and new communities, this would have chaotic results. If we remove parking minimums without improving transit amenities in newer communities, we are doing a huge disservice to workers commuting in and out of downtown. People will always have cars. Where will they park? On the street, where there is not enough room. As such, there is a high likelihood that new, "zero parking" units will become short term rentals. Even the federal government knows cars are here to stay for a while longer; they are pumping billions into supporting the auto industry. We will still need places to park, and city streets should not be the default.

Additionally, the recommendations included an extra \$50 million for downtown revitalization. Over the past few years, the previous and current Council have approved over \$2.5 billion dollars towards downtown revitalization and the river's district. Those expenditures included \$500 million for the BMO Centre; \$500 million for Arts Commons, Olympic Plaza, and the Glenbow; a proposed \$1.25 billion for the new arena and surrounding Rivers District; \$150 million for commercial to residential conversions; and \$100 million for other projects. Maybe the extra \$50 million is warranted, but we only had 8 minutes per Councillor to ask questions on this entire omnibus proposal. I can't consider this kind of spending when I've been given so little information.

This brings me to a high-level, macroeconomic concern. As a local government, our job is to allocate capital dollars in a level and consistent manner. We are making huge infrastructure investments right now, especially when considering the Greenline and above projects. All this spending puts upward pressure on inflation at a time when many Calgarians are having a hard time paying for rent and groceries. Meanwhile, the Bank of Canada is trying to control inflation by increasing interest rates. This is important to recognize, as construction costs and mortgage interest rates have the biggest impact on housing affordability.

Calgary continues to be one of the most affordable cities in Canada. This is attracting significant investment, as people are cashing out of expensive cities like Vancouver and Toronto and reinvesting into Calgary. House prices have remained fairly flat, and have seen only a 3% price growth over the past year. We need to continue to build more homes, and to bring much-needed stability to the housing market. It's a complicated matter, and many of the recommendations deserved thorough and thoughtful consideration on their own, and not as part of an omnibus package.

Later in the meeting, Council revisited its decision on the taskforce recommendations.

Council ultimately decided to send the recommendations to committee for more review, public input, and to be packaged more appropriately. I voted yes to this new motion, because it will allow us to have the robust conversations as a Council, and with the public, that we should have had right from the start.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J Wyness".

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