

**Riverbend Community Association**

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**May 3, 2015**

Councilor Gian-Carlo Carra  
Ward 9, City of Calgary  
700 Macleod Trail Southeast  
Calgary, AB  
T2G 2M3

**Dear Councilor Carra,**

Let me start by saying that as Community in the City of Calgary, we are in favor of the concept of Owner-Occupied Secondary Suites. In fact, based on the polling I have seen, most citizens of Calgary are also in favor of the concept.

If implemented well, it has the potential of providing a number of benefits.

However, we, the Board of Directors of the Riverbend Community Association and its residents are not in favor of the proposed zoning changes that are being proposed by City Council at this time, and ask that you vote against them at the May 2015 Council meeting.

Again – it is important to understand that we are in favor of Secondary Suites – just, not the way that the City of Calgary plans to implement them.

## Community of Riverbend

**Riverbend** is a [residential](#) neighborhood located in Ward 9 in the south-east quadrant of [Calgary, Alberta](#). It is bounded to the north by [Glenmore Trail](#), to the east by 24 Street E and to the west by [Deerfoot Trail](#). It is developed in the [Bow River](#) floodplain, on its escarpment and the upland plain.<sup>1</sup>

According to the last Government Census from 2014<sup>2</sup>, the following information is known:

| Description   | Riverbend | Ward 9 | City of Calgary |
|---|-----------|--------|-----------------|
| Population  | 9,696     | 76,481 | 1,195,194       |
| Occupied Dwellings  | 3,416     | 34,038 | 453,626         |
| Percent of Occupied Dwellings that were Single Family Dwellings | 94%       | 50%    | 58%             |
| Percent of Occupied Dwellings that were Occupied by the Owner   | 91%       | 58%    | 69%             |
| Percent of Residents who Live in Single-Family Dwellings        | 96%       | 55%    | 67%             |

## Discussions with the City

On April 21, 2015, I was invited to attend an information session with members of City Council, City Administration, and other communities at the Central Library.

I was very impressed by the questions that were being asked by concerned Community Groups represented at the meeting.

Having said that, I was somewhat disappointed by the answers that were provided by the City.

What was interesting to me is that if this was such a great idea – why were the Communities at this meeting jumping on it? Why were the Communities almost universal in their opposition to it?

During the meeting, it was suggested that Calgary was one of the last hold-outs for changes to our by-laws that would allow for these accommodations. The inference that was made is that it must be because as a community, we are behind the times, and need to get into line with the rest of Canada.

My response to this is that NOTHING could be further from the truth.

Yet, the City seems content to paint anyone or group who opposes the change as being ill informed, and backward, and that by opposing the changes, we are opposing progress.

However, my contention is that while we support Secondary Suites – we oppose bad legislation that is poorly conceived, and has not addressed all the fundamentals issues needed to make this work.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riverbend,\\_Calgary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riverbend,_Calgary)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gccarra.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/riverbend.pdf>

Another concern I have with how the City has undertaken to implement these changes. It is my understanding that on 32 or so prior occasions, motions have been presented to the City to implement in varying forms Secondary Suites, and all have failed.

So, after 32 times or so of trying, the City has undertaken a new strategy. That new strategy is to try and get approval for Secondary Suites in Wards where the Councilors are known to be strong advocates.

Though we do not know for sure why this was done, we have a couple of thoughts:

- It is believed that the City is taking a “divide and conquer” approach. The idea being that if City Administration cannot get approval for City wide changes to allow Secondary Suites – they should be able to get approval to go after a smaller portion of the City.

As part of this strategy, it is felt that by targeting those Wards where support is the highest, the remaining Wards who are not affected will simply go along with the plan, as ultimately it does not affect them.

- Secondly, it is believed that the City will make this an issue about whether someone does or does not support Secondary Suites, when in fact, we think that there are two issues:\
  - a) Do you support Secondary Suites
  - b) Do you support bad legislation to implement Secondary Suites?

Our position, as noted earlier is we support (a) above, but, do not support (b) above.

- According to the City of Demographics for the affected Wards, the City plans on introducing a motion at its May 2015 meeting that will affect Wards 7, 8, 9, and 11. According to the City’s own figures, this is how many people live in each of the affected Wards <sup>3</sup>:

| Ward Number  | Ward Population |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 7            | 81,989          |
| 8            | 85,609          |
| 9            | 76,481          |
| 11           | 82,041          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>326,120</b>  |

- According to information presented by the City at the April 21, 2015 meeting at the City of Calgary, they say that they held 4 major open houses. They further go on to state that they had a largest attendance of Calgarians at this open houses – over 700 people.

Based on the feedback of 700 people, the City feel they have enough of a mandate to go ahead with the plan.

What is not 100% clear is how many of the 700 people actually supported the idea.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Pages/Social-research-policy-and-resources/Ward-7.aspx>

What is also not clear is how the City feels that with 700 people providing their input – the City has enough of a sampling to move forward. Based on my own simplistic calculations, the City has fallen far short of getting the necessary sampling feedback to move forward at all. <sup>4</sup>

Yet the tactic seems to be “push forward regardless of whether a proper mandate has been obtained or not. Who cares if it is bad legislation or not – we will push it through regardless of what problems it will create – and worry about the problems later.” However, historically as we have seen with other issues, the problems never do not always get fixed, they just get worse.”

This is not to say that is true of all issues, and would be unfair to say so. What we can say though is when a solutions are put forward that have failed 32 times before to pass City Council – it probably is fair to say that City is now willing to do anything it needs – just to get it passed.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>

### What Have Other Council Members Said?

We have reviewed the feedback provided by other Council members, and have noted that others have provided some great feedback <sup>5</sup>

The following are some extracts that we wanted to include as being very relevant to this discussion.

- ***Councilor Jim Stevenson (Ward 3)***

“Presently, it is possible for any homeowner to apply for a secondary suite, even in areas that are not specifically zoned for that particular use. All properties in new communities and many in established communities already have secondary suites as permitted or discretionary uses. **The problem with a blanket redesignation of all areas is changing the land use for homeowners without any consultation.** It is entirely possible that many communities will agree with redesignation, but we must involve homeowners in the process of changing their land use.”

- ***Councilor Andre Chabot (Ward 10)***

“Since 2010, there has been an increased push by Council to approve secondary suites throughout the city. I have been vocally opposed to any proposal which would allow for a blanket land-use approval of legal secondary suites. A blanket approval would mean these suites would be allowed in all residential land use areas.

...I’ve heard from many Ward 10 residents who do not support secondary suites in RC-1 neighbourhoods. For that, I continue to oppose blanket land-use approval of secondary suites in these neighbourhoods.”

- ***Councilor Peter Demong (Ward 14)***

“My position is of public record on this issue.

So many long standing residents of Ward 14 are opposed to secondary suites that as their elected official, I must present their views. However, these suites are necessary in our city. With this conflict in mind, I brought forth a notice of motion which is a reasonable compromise for both sides of the fence so to speak.

I moved that secondary suites should not be allowed in established communities where people chose to live as they made their choice on the then policy that such suites were not allowed. My motion also, was to allow suites in new developing communities where homeowners would know from day one that their community would include legal secondary suites.

Having said that, two years ago council rezoned approximately 150 000 homes throughout the city to allow the building of secondary suites. This blanket rezoning has had little material change to the

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<sup>5</sup> <http://secondariesuitescalgary.com/2013/10/22/detailed-summary-of-winning-candidates-position-on-secondary-suites/>

inventory of unsafe suites (about 200 annually). The fact is blanket zoning is not the issue, rather, the prohibitive cost of building safe suites that conform to the Alberta Building Code.”

### **Why Is The Proposed Solution by the City of Calgary a Poor Solution?**

- The amendments are self-serving from the perspective of the Planning Department as they avoid having to deal with zoning violations for the proportion of the nearly 15,000 existing and illegal secondary suites already located in Wards 7, 8, 9 and 11.
- The amendments are self-serving from the perspective of the City Council as they avoid having to deal with future re-zoning applications for legal secondary suites located in Wards 7, 8, 9 and 11.
- The amendments are discriminatory to citizens of Wards 7, 8, 9 and 11 as they circumvent a portion of the protection provided by Part 17 of the Municipal Government Act relative to land use in other Wards.
- The amendments make it more difficult to enforce violations for both new and existing or illegal secondary suites located in Wards 7, 8, 9 and 11 as they remove any remedies afforded by Land Use Bylaw 1P2007.
- The amendments do nothing to help the Building and Approvals Department to identify and rectify existing sub-standard suites nor do they avoid construction of new sub-standard suites.
- The amendments do nothing to help the Assessors Department to identify and properly assess existing unreported suites nor do they aid in the proper assessment of new suites.
- The amendments do nothing to help the Canada Revenue Agency to both identify and rectify taxable revenues generated from existing unreported suites nor avoid construction of new unreported suites.
- The removal of lot size and suite size provisions proposed by the amendments gives rise to ghetto-like conditions with respect to both outdoor and indoor space and without any form of occupancy limitations.
- The potential benefits to affordable housing resulting from the proposed amendments are questionable when weighed against the quality of housing provided and the avoidance of landlord taxes partially subsidizing them.
- The amendment fails to address a number of infrastructure changes needed to support changes to these communities. One example is the Community Standards By-Law. As was noted in the meeting of April 21, 2015 – it was recognized that the current by-law does not have enough teeth to deal with problems that may arise, and as such, are working on making changes to it. There are two problems with this thinking. First, it is not known what those changes are and if they will be enough. Second, the changes are being looked at AFTER the proposed changes to allow Secondary Suites. To us, it appears a little like putting the cart before the horse. As such, our desire is to see the proposed changes to the Community Standards by-Law done FIRST and then, look at any Secondary Suite changes.

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- We do not feel that City Administration has done enough to educate the public on the ramifications of the proposed changes so that they can make an informed decision. Not only that, but the City's own website is lacking in good information.
  - If the notion of Secondary Suites is a great idea, and we are not denying that they are not – then, we ask that the City Administration put this to a vote by all Calgarians in the form of a plebiscite. The idea being that if City Council cannot agree, perhaps the residents of the City of Calgary can assist in this process, provided that they are given all the relevant information.
  - We do not feel that that the City has met their burden of responsibility as far as obtaining enough feedback from people to warrant them moving forward with any kind of a mandate. And when asked for additional data during the April 21, 2015 meeting to support the City's desire to so – none was provided.
  - We feel that the City Administration is trying to use somewhat unfair techniques in trying to get this legislation approved, by appealing to Wards where it is known that there Councilors are strong supporters of Secondary Suites, without asking the question – are they also in favor of bad legislation to approve the changes?

Put another way – it seems that the City is intertwining the two so well that it becomes hard for a Councilor who is in favor of Secondary Suites, as is Riverbend, to oppose the legislation to implement the changes even if it not well thought out.

Our feeling is the Councilor can oppose the proposed changes as being not well thought out and still remain true to their core beliefs, whether they support Secondary Suites or not.

- **This issue should be referred back to Administration for a multi-departmental, comprehensive, city-wide solution.**

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at (403) 236-7270, by e-mail at [president@riverbendcommunity.ca](mailto:president@riverbendcommunity.ca).

Respectively,

*Original signed by Douglas Ratke*

**Douglas Ratke**

President

Riverbend Community Association

On Behalf of the Board of Directors of the Riverbend Community Association and its Residents

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