

WESTGATE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION
4943 – 8 AVENUE SW
CALGARY

May 6, 2015

Member of City Council

RE: Secondary & Backyard Suites

Westgate Community is predominately R-C1 with spot R2 zoning. Most residences are single family homes, with many homes remodelled and/or re-built. In addition, Westgate includes the following housing types:

- West Heritage Manor Housing Co-Op (45 Street SW) that offers RGI, a second stage shelter for women and children fleeing domestic violence again with RGI.
- Two condominium developments one on Westwood Drive SW with another on 8 Avenue SW.
- Three story rental apartment building on Waverley Drive SW.
- Duplexes throughout the community on R2 sites

Westgate Community Association (WCA) has the following comments in regards to the proposed Land Use Bylaw Amendment to allow suites in four city wards – Wards 8, 9, 10 and 11. In summary, we are asking the City to undertake the following actions *prior to* proceeding with the proposed Amendment:

- Include all Wards
- Conduct a City-wide plebiscite
- Deal with illegal suites
- Address existing infrastructure issues
- Engage communities
- Deliver a Plan

1. INCLUDE ALL WARDS

Before proceeding with this Amendment, all city wards should be included. The proposal, as it stands, disproportionately impacts communities in four wards, many of which are already dealing with recent growth beyond the limits of what their infrastructure can accommodate.

2. CONDUCT A CITY-WIDE PLEBISCITE

We are asking that a City-wide plebiscite be conducted to offer all property owners the opportunity to vote and decide on the future face of their neighbourhood.

3. DEAL WITH ILLEGAL SUITES

Before Council moves to provide blanket approval to secondary suites in 4 wards, action needs to be taken to inspect all illegal suites and have them confirm to code or be shut down. Allowing these suite owners free access to apply for development permits costs all property owners on their property taxes.

To promote secondary suites as affordable housing is a fallacy; for a resident to spend upwards of \$20,000 to create a suite that meets code it will not be affordable. Illegal suites will continue to be an issue with or without the proposed Amendment unless they are specifically addressed by this Council.

4. ADDRESS EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES

In April 2013 residents of Westgate participated in the “Inspiring Communities” walk-thru with Bill Bruce and the elected officials of the day. A number of issues were identified. To date, very few of these issues have been resolved through action by the City.

As a neighbourhood we have approximately 50-year old infrastructure, limited access to the community, transit and traffic concerns, parking challenges, and, since the c-train, increased crime, including: car prowlings, car thefts, and assaults.

Transit in and out of downtown is unreliable and trains are already severely overcrowded during peak commuting periods.

Traffic problems on 8th Ave SW, 45th St SW, Bow Trail and 17th Ave SW have persisted for years, unattended and unresolved, despite the massive development of the City to the west. Much of the traffic is to community schools. Twelve busses bring students to Westgate Elementary school, and there are about as many bringing students to Vincent Massey Jr. High and St. Michael’s K-9 school.

Crime in our community has unfortunately increased significantly since the completion of the West LRT project. The potential for increased social disorder is an important density consideration.

5. CONSULT COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURS

Westgate Community wants to be involved and participate in a discussion of secondary suites and rezoning.

If changes are made, it is important for neighbours and communities to retain their option to comment on future development applications for secondary suites, above garage and backyard suites, and have their concerns considered prior to approval or rejection of applications. Perhaps have a Bond for property owners that states in plain language expectations for the rental property, this would give adjoining neighbours some added comfort.

6. DELIVER A PLAN

The City committed to deliver a Plan. Westgate Community believes that a Plan is a necessary precursor to any decision on the proposed Amendment. Council and Calgarians need to fully understand the costs

and the social impacts to communities of the proposed Amendment. Affected residents will want to ensure that they will not be subjected to lower levels of service, which is often the result of poorly managed density increases.

In the absence of a Plan, there remain many unanswered questions:

- How will the City address existing infrastructure concerns?
- How will service levels be assured for affected residents? (e.g., waste/recycling, transit, policing/enforcement, etc.)
- Will homeowners who develop a secondary suite for rentals be taxed as a commercial property?
- Will Calgarians have a say in development of projects that directly affect their privacy and property values?
- As lane ways become the entry point for garage suite residents, how will the City maintain laneways and what measures will be taken to provide for residents' safety?
- How will the City deal with absentee landlords and landlords who maintain illegal suites?

CONCLUSION

The socio-economic and infrastructure impacts of increased density in small communities are tremendous. In a single motion, this Council could change the social fabric and the lives of thousands of hard working Calgarians.

This proposed Amendment is about much, much more than finding extra places to put people; it's about urban re-design on a massive scale. It's about trees and greenspaces, parking, traffic, transit, schools, crime, enforcement and public safety. The Westgate Community believes that change of this magnitude requires consultation and it requires a plan.

As a community, Westgate has supported and worked with all parties to achieve a positive outcomes. We ask the City to extend the same consideration to potentially affected communities and we urge the City to reconsider the scope, plan and impacts on affected residents BEFORE proceeding to approve the proposed Amendment.

Sincerely,

Pat Guillemaud

Pat Guillemaud
President, Westgate Community Association