

OPINION

# NIMBY battle thickens



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The housing industry is facing opposition to densification projects.

This is the second in a series of opinion pieces dealing with the Plan It initiative put forward by the City of Calgary's planning department.

**JIM DEWALD AND BEV SANDALACK**  
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

In our first article, we noted that the development and building industry have recently expressed their displeasure in two areas — NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) resistance to densification projects, and municipal

## City set to learn lessons developers already know

development charges. But attacks on local politicians are unlikely to solve either of these problems.

In particular, NIMBY resistance involves more than just two sides. It involves politicians and developers, but also residents, and each party has its own concerns.

Here are some different thoughts on how we all might

move forward in addressing both areas of concern.

By and large, the city's administration and politicians sit on the sidelines while developers battle the strong and sometimes irrational emotions of NIMBY resistance.

However, through the Plan It initiative, city administration and council are going to directly engage this resistance.

Focused efforts to intensify land uses near C-Train stations are causing quite a stir in many Calgary neighbourhoods.

In short, while Calgarians are generally supportive of increased densities and a smaller footprint for our city, their views change when it involves their own neighbourhood, and resistance mounts.

This phenomenon is not just limited to the areas around transit stations.

In virtually all of the second ring of suburbs that were initiated in the '70s, '80s and early '90s (the first ring consists of the suburbs developed just after the Second World War during the '50s and '60s), there are serious concerns about how the city is changing, including the recent trends of redevelopment, infill and increasing density.

These neighbourhoods are the homes of most of the baby boomers — people who are now in their 40s and 50s — and for many, this will be their home well into retirement.

They don't want to move and they don't want their neighbourhood to change.

This group could be the bastion of resistance for the next 30 years and the city's administration knows that if it can't shift this mindset, Plan It, as well as any other plans for intensification and sustainability, is destined to remain no more than an idea.



Bev Sandalack



Jim Dewald

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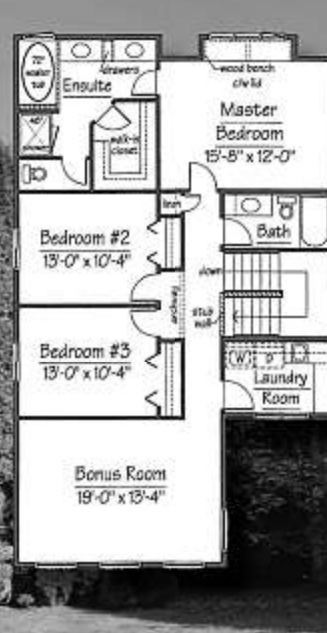
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FROM I12

# CHANGE: Sustainability

Although change is difficult for most of us to accept, there are some fundamental changes that have to take place in order for Calgary to grow sustainably, and to support better public transit and a greater range of services and amenities.

The existing density for most of Calgary is just too low to support this vision; change is a given.

But how that change takes place is the real issue.

Rather than automatically resisting when redevelopment is proposed, residents of a neighbourhood would be much better off to work with the city's administration and developers towards the kind of change that would help to improve the overall quality of life, rather than just continue to protect their old, outdated ways.

An example of how high density cities can support an incredible range of businesses and services is Barcelona in Spain.

On a recent trip, one of us whiled away a morning counting all the businesses and residences in a 100 meter by 100 meter block.

Barcelona is one of the most livable cities in the world, and, coincidentally, it has some of the highest densities.

This is what 465 apartments (600 to 800 residents) can find within 100 metres of their door: seven food stores, one wine store, nine bars and restaurants, six opticians, dentists or medical offices, two pharmacies, two banks, several clothing stores and two hairdressers (plus a pet grooming service).

In the area, residents can also organize renovations, pick up minor hardware items, rent or sell their apartment, and find a multitude of other services.

This is all contained in one city block.

There is also a large neighbourhood market nearby, and a metro stop is only a couple of blocks away.

The key to this situation is enough people living within walking distance to make it all viable.

A Calgary version of higher den-

sity should embrace the potential of what can be included in a neighbourhood if more people lived within walking distance.

We don't need Barcelona densities, but we need far more than the standard six to eight units per acre (with one hectare roughly equal to four acres).

Some may say "we're not Europe," but there are valuable lessons to be learned from such cities.

The most important of these is that density by itself is not enough. Good design of the public realm of streets, sidewalks and public spaces needs to be included within any redevelopment.

Urban design needs to be the methodology for city-making and re-making.

The responsible role of residents is to recognize and embrace the inevitable change in any city and neighbourhood, and to consider what kinds of changes would produce the best kind of places.

NIMBY responses to change are not beneficial to planning the best possible future for our city — but properly harnessed, the concern people have for their neighbourhood could be directed to managing change.

For developers, patience will eventually allow events to take their course.

City administrators are now moving into the front lines, tasting the sting of NIMBYism from residents protesting change in their neighbourhood.

Both administration and council are gaining a different perspective, and some understanding, of what developers are enduring.

However, understanding is not enough.

We hope for much more, including the structural or systemic changes that will provide reliable early indications of city hall support, or rejection, of proposed projects.

The development approval process is currently mired in uncertainty that causes developers to either abandon great project ideas or spend ridiculous sums of time, money and effort — only to find



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The developmental approval process is currently mired in uncertainty, affecting the housing industry.

that bureaucrats or politicians are not willing to stand-up against myopic self-interested NIMBY positions.

There is no lesson as profound as being in the trenches — developers, take comfort in knowing that city administrators and politicians will learn first-hand what you face by being in the trenches during this year.

With respect to development charges, what is the surprise?

There is simply no escaping the reality that new development patterns grounded in freeway networks will always cost more than compact, higher density, mixed use, and ultimately more livable places.

The basis of the freeway city (the current Calgary model) is pavement and concrete, whereas the

other model — that emphasizes good urban design — is focused on people and the human scale.

Just look at the concrete and land designated for freeways.

The costs are enormous and there is no escaping the economic unsustainability of a freeway-networked plan for the future.

Only by rededicating our city to the public realm can we achieve greatness, and along the way save a ton of money.

The Plan It initiative is intended to make this message clear to taxpayers who are currently being asked to bear the burden of the unsustainable growth patterns of the past several decades.

Today, the debate is based on "who" should pay.

The real question is "why" pay for something that is unsustainable

and that only decreases the quality of all of our lives?

By adopting urban design as a core methodology for city planning, we can save money, resolve many of the barriers raised by NIMBYism, and create a better city.

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