

Inner City Coalition

Of Calgary Society



www.icccalgary.ca

Calgarians will be going to the polls on October 15 to vote in our municipal election. To maximize the benefit from this important democratic process, the Inner City Coalition (ICC) has identified a list of the key issues of concern in Established Communities, as defined by the City of Calgary Planning Department.

UP FRONT, an on-line forum for all candidates is an ICC initiative that provides the general public access to the vision and views of City Council candidates on key issues that affect their quality of life. Responses of 250 words or less will be posted on www.icccalgary.ca

Objective

Our primary objective is to elevate the voter awareness of major issues to the broader spectrum of "Public Dialogue".

We believe that the inner core and established communities in any city are its heart, soul, and heritage. Therefore the health and vitality of the city as a whole are affected by issues that manifest in its inner city.

This list of issues will be forwarded to candidates. We hope to also raise these issues at "All Candidates" forums this fall. Public debate will increase the profile of and generate new interest in the election.

The ICC will assist interested communities in more effectively evaluating candidates by sending this summary of the critical issues to them. We want to encourage their members to become involved in meaningful municipal debate. We also hope to encourage communities to join the Inner City Coalition's, efforts both in our election endeavours and on a permanent basis.

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THE ISSUES

*Quality of Life in the
Face of Booming
Growth*



Perhaps the most important overall issue facing a new Council will be managing and paying for rapid growth while maintaining the quality of life that citizens have come to appreciate. The following issues generate from these concerns. The new Council's vision, how it deals with these issues, the tools it uses, and the consistency of decision making will determine the Calgary of the 21st century.

The success of Calgary as a growing physical and economic entity has a price. Increased traffic, greater isolation of individuals, inefficient characterless suburbs, homeless citizens, an apparent increase in crime, higher taxes, higher service fees, overcrowded schools, lower standards of health care, alienation from politicians - all factor into the cost of growth. The impact of these effects will be the greatest on established communities. Planning and building policies, decisions, and public spending priorities are key elements of the city's strategy for growth.

In 1999 Calgary City Council adopted the Calgary Transportation Plan (CTP) for the 21st century, then called the "Go Plan". It identified an interactive triangle of three elements for City growth. The CTP called for careful balancing of these components for a successful city future.

Today, Calgary appears to be imbalanced. Community and environmental standards are threatened, mobility and access to services is reduced, as is the affordability of housing and transportation systems. All of these bare a high cost to the quality of life for *all* Calgarians.

The 5 issues below capture and reflect the potential negative impacts of growth and concerns for the loss of the qualities, which Calgarians value (friendly, safe, affordable, healthy, and comfortable communities). Each issue is prefaced by back-ground information as viewed by the ICC membership; specific questions solicit ideas on possible solutions.

- 1. Affordable and Low Income Housing**
- 2. The Transportation Dilemma**
- 3. Tax Fairness** (*property taxes, user fees, and service charges*)
- 4. Environmental and Sustainability Concerns**
- 5. Democratic Process and Policies**

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1. AFFORDABLE, LOW INCOME HOUSING,

*We believe the City must
increase its options for
solutions to the housing
squeeze.*

Issue:

Amidst the booming city growth, large numbers of Calgarians are homeless or are unable to find adequate housing. Working poor and new immigrants cannot find adequate accommodation for themselves or for their families. Fixed income families are being squeezed out of long standing residences.

Background:

Huge rent increases and condo conversions are seriously decreasing the options for affordable housing for low income households. In Calgary there is a severe shortage of affordable housing as well as inadequate social services to address this problem. The cost of housing affects everyone, but the impact is greatest on the service and support industries. There is a visible increase in the number of working poor and low income families experiencing homelessness.

Other North American cities have established various agencies, authorities, and strategies to provide housing alternatives and social services for needy citizens. San Francisco for example employs a wide range of strategies such as:

- Construction subsidies, rent controls, rent subsidies, required non-market units in each new development, public housing, loan guarantees, conservation districts, tax concessions, etc.

Calgary seems to use very few tools to address affordability and social housing issues.

There is a critical need for housing and social service facilities in Calgary. These facilities need to be located close to existing amenities in order to ensure safe and secure environments for all. The City has dedicated considerable time effort and administrative power assessing, studying, and discussing the issue of affordable housing. Yet there is an increase in the numbers of homeless on the streets, in shelters, some of whom are involved in undesirable activities.

QUESTION

What policy changes, or practical action such as leveraging existing funding can you initiate for Council to address this issue in the long term and the short term?

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2. THE TRANSPORTATION DILEMMA

We believe the City must balance its plan for growth in all quadrants of the city. Additional employment centres and localised community services will help mobility systems become more efficient and effective.

Issue

Transportation is one of the critical issues facing all communities as the city continues to grow. Ways have to be found to sustain the quality of life in the inner city and established communities while ensuring access to and from employment and services for the larger community.

Background

Recent surges in massive City and Provincial expenditures have focussed on bringing more commuters into the City Core by road and transit, or on major highway by-passes around the City. Little has been done to resolve the impact of this traffic on the Inner City communities. Traffic calming techniques to moderate local impact in the inner city pit one community against another.

In 1995 City Council passed the Calgary Transportation Plan (GoPlan) following a comprehensive public consultation process, called the Go Plan. An essential element of GoPlan was land use strategy. This included higher suburban densities, the specific designation of "Employment Centres" to distribute traffic more evenly and away from downtown, and a commitment to transit nodes in new subdivisions.

What we have seen is massive investment in roads, some extensions of LRT lines, but lack of actual capacity increase, huge increase in core office centralization, and city-wide transportation delays.

QUESTION

Are you willing to take a leadership role and implement the Calgary Transportation Plan (GoPlan) and its principles of balance growth strategy?

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3. TAX FAIRNESS

*Property taxes, user fees,
and service charges*

*We believe the current system
is unfair to a wide range of
Calgarians and has negative
planning implications for the
City as a whole.*

Issue

The property tax system is fundamental to supporting municipal services and planning strategy. It has to be fairly administrated and it must treat all citizens in an equitable manner. Current market based assessment policies are raising taxes in Established Communities at a faster rate than city-wide averages. Fixed income seniors and low income families are being driven out of their homes and neighbourhoods.

Background:

The diversity of established communities is being compromised. ICC and others are concerned regarding the fairness and impact of the current tax system, called Market Value Assessments (MVA). Taxes in established communities have increased at a much greater rate than those in equivalent suburban areas. There is no relationship between taxes paid and services received. Since a majority of low income and fixed income citizens live in the inner city, they have been hit the hardest.

This tax system also penalises renovation and maintenance but rewards deterioration and demolition. Heritage structures and valued streetscapes are being lost. Communities are homogenized in character and affordability is reduced.

While the Market Value Assessment falls under Provincial jurisdiction, Council can request changes as well as develop taxation policy that:

- Mitigates the imbalances,
- Create alternatives to protect low and fixed income residents,
- Reflects the cost of services, and is based on measurable criteria,
- Provides future certainty for homeowners, and
- Ensures diversity in communities.

QUESTION

*What policy initiatives would
you implement to mitigate the
imbalances of Market Value
Assessment and ensure
taxation fairness?*

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4. ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

We believe that better planning tools such as land use and building regulations, and new engineering standards are required for an ecologically sustainable future.

Issue

Environmental concerns continue to be an issue to Calgarians, and Council appears to support various initiatives. However, the real ecological footprint of individual Calgarians is increasing, not decreasing. Planning standards, even in the proposed Land Use By-Law, do not encourage innovative green solutions.

Background:

Many initiatives designed to protect or enhance our environment have been a priority in recent years. Reducing the amount of garbage being sent to our land-fill sites and increasing the amount of materials for recycling have been successful programs. The City has taken the "LEED" on many of its own buildings. New and more aggressive initiatives have been discussed, but real action appears to be in holding.

Municipal leadership is needed on this issue. Incentive based initiatives would encourage waste (garbage) reduction, air quality management, people friendly pest and weed control, urban forestation, and water conservation.

Real environmental sustainability of our communities depends on the City's land use and related transportation strategies. Current and proposed planning rules do not encourage truly sustainable communities. Issues like walking distance to local shopping, pathways and sidewalks linking services, mixed use suburbs (live work opportunities), seem to have been lost as planning principles. These principles were adopted by Council in 1999 with the Calgary Transportation Plan but have yet to be implemented.

QUESTION

As a Municipal Leader , what types of policy have you or would you initiate to reduce our environmental impact and maintain our quality of life?

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5. DEMOCRATIC PROCESS & POLICIES

We believe that the financing of election campaigns at the municipal level should be subject to the same financial scrutiny of federal and provincial elections.

Issue

Democratic representation is based on aldermen representing the interests and beliefs of their constituents, even when this may be contrary to their own personal opinions. Other influences, such as industry lobbying, can overwhelm this representation. At the same time, donations to municipal election campaigns is unregulated and open to influence by opaque financial election support. The current election financing system is rife with potential for abuse and discourages balanced representation of its citizens.

Background:

Aldermen represent population bases much larger than their Provincial equivalents, yet there are few rules and disclosure requirements for election financing.

The perception that the will of constituents or communities is not always represented by elected representatives is intensified by unbridled financial support by certain industries and lobbyists.

In addition community volunteers represent their issues without adequate financial resources. There are individuals and organizations that have the resources to make sure aldermen understand their point of view. Average citizens and community volunteers, unlike industry professionals, experience greater difficulty in getting their message, issues, and concerns across to the elected officials, due to the need to take time off work, the impact on personal costs, and the lack of technical or professional credentials.

QUESTION

What election financing policies would you champion to provide limits, checks and balances against actual or perceived preferential treatment?

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INNER CITY COALITION HISTORY

The Inner City Coalition was established in 1991 as a forum to:

- Identify, address and communicate planning, social and other issues that directly or indirectly affect the well being of the established communities and to provide an inner city perspective.
- Establish a unified response.
- Be a positive force in directing the conservation and development of the inner city.
- Promote the understanding of inner city concerns.

We operate by:

- Meeting regularly to provide a forum for discussion between member communities.
- Placing items on the agenda by the members as matter of concern arise.
- Where possible a unified response is determined and a course of action chosen.
- When requested and if appropriate, members act in support of other communities and will share in lobbying, letter writing, etc.

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