

Inner City Coalition

Of Calgary Society

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UP FRONT 2010 On Line Forum

Calgarians will be going to the polls on October 18 to vote in our municipal election and will be making important decisions on who they wish to represent them on City Council for the next three years. To maximize the benefit from this important democratic process, the Inner City Coalition (ICC) has identified a list of the key issues of concern to Established Communities in Calgary.

UP FRONT 2010, an online forum for all candidates running for City Council is an ICC initiative that provides the general public access to the vision and views of the candidates on key issues that affect quality of life. Responses of 250 words or less per issue will be posted at www.icccalgary.ca

Objective

Our primary objective is to heighten the awareness of inner city issues through a "Public Dialogue".

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

This list of issues is being provided to City Council candidates. We believe that public awareness and debate of important civic issues will help increase the profile of and generate informed interest in the election.

THE ISSUES:

Quality of Life during the current moderate growth period

Perhaps the most important overall issue facing the new Council will be the managing the delivery of city services during the current uncertain economic times while maintaining the quality of life that citizens have come to appreciate. Quality of life is what sets great cities apart from other cities. The new Council's vision, how it deals with these issue, the tools it uses, and the consistency of decision making will determine how Calgary will be perceived for many years to come.

There are many challenges including increased traffic, greater isolation of individuals, many inefficient characterless suburbs, under-housed citizens, increased perceptions of crime, higher taxes, higher service fees and even public alienation of politicians. 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 of what Calgary will become.

From an inner city / established community perspective, the 1999 Transportation Plan triangle (shown to the right) identifies important elements that must be kept in mind as Council makes its decisions. Too much emphasis on one or two of these elements will imbalance the triangle at the cost of quality of life in Calgary.



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

- 1. Perceptions of Influence**
- 2. Council's Leadership Role**
- 3. Number of Aldermen / Wards**
- 4. City Charter**
- 5. Environment and Sustainability**
- 6. Housing**
- 7. Transportation**

1. Perceptions of Influence

a/ Issue Statement:

Democratic representation is a key tenet of government in Canada. In Calgary, this means our mayor and aldermen should represent the interests and beliefs of their constituents, even when this may be contrary to their own personal opinions. Unfortunately, other influences, such as professional lobbying, can overwhelm this representation.

Currently, donations to municipal election campaigns are only partially regulated and there are no limits placed on total expenditures. This increases the perception that elections can be bought and those candidates who spend the most are perceived in turn more likely to be influenced by those who help finance those campaigns.

We believe that civic election campaign total expenditures should be limited to reduce the potential for abuse.

b/ Background:

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.

While community volunteers represent their issues with very limited financial resources, there are individuals and organizations that have the resources to make sure council members 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 elected officials, due to the need to take time off work, the impact on personal costs, and the lack of technical or professional credentials.

c/ Questions for the Candidate:

Do you support limiting the total civic election expenditures by individual candidates? If so, what limits would you suggest?

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

Do you believe there should be new rules in regard to people and organizations lobbying Council members?

2. Council's Leadership Role

a/ Issue Statement:

Aldermen and the mayor are elected to direct the operation of municipal services for the benefit of the citizens of Calgary and to plan for the needs of the city and its citizens. Municipal governments are a child of the Provincial government, under the Canadian Charter and constitutional agreement, so these tasks are defined and authorized currently by the Alberta Municipal Government Act. As elected municipal officials you must establish policy for the civic administration, set standards, determine financing options, and respond to citizen concerns. To this end you must direct civic administration in their tasks, their goals, their financial needs, and balance the priorities between various departments against the funding available. This management of the administration appears to be lacking in coordination, in setting priorities, and in assuring efficient and effective operations.

We believe that Council should be setting the priorities and provide clearer direction to civic administration and related civic authorities and organizations.

b/ Background:

There have been many instances where administrative sections appear to be making decisions that conflict with or are counter to Council directions. Budget and policy issues on policing, transit funding, Calgary Parking Authority, Calgary Housing, Calgary Properties, Enmax, Calgary International Airport, Convention Centre, Stampede Board, and even Parks seem to arise continually with various managers proceeding with apparently independent actions. For example the Airport Authority appears to be telling Council how it will arrange airport access for its citizens rather than Council providing leadership. Or Parking Authority setting their own rates, system options, and uses of parking in-lieu grants. Or Enmax profits staying with corporate structures rather than active programs on energy options and costs reductions for citizens. Or Police Department indicating what they won't do if their funding isn't to their liking. Or a new Land Use Bylaw that is tremendously complex, convoluted, inefficient and unintelligible to all but the most experienced and expensive of consultants (over a thousand pages when in 1960 36 pages did the job for its citizens then). Yes many of these Boards and Committees are independent or semi-autonomous and have provincial charters or authorizations, but they often have tax breaks, council membership, funding independence, and other benefits not available to normal businesses or citizens.

c/ Questions for the Candidate:

How would you, as an elected alderman or mayor of Calgary manage to direct these various entities to the benefit of all the citizens and the future of Calgary?

How would you assure the citizens that they are being treated fairly, efficiently, and honestly by these various organizations and their processes?

3. Number of Aldermen / Wards

a/ Issue Statement:

While the mayor is elected by the city as a whole, aldermen are elected to represent a specific ward. Issues and perceptions of Calgary residents can vary significantly, depending on where they live. Aldermen need to be in a position of representing those issues and perceptions, hopefully for the ward as a whole. The larger the ward, the more difficult it is to represent the various points of view within a ward.

Currently, there are 14 wards for a population that has grown to over a million people. As the city has grown, boundaries of wards have been adjusted. This has become an increasingly more difficult task and one that is more open to political tinkering.

As the number people represented per ward has increased, access to our elected representatives has decreased due to very heavy time demands on them. Being an alderman has become a huge job time wise. The ability of aldermen to have sufficient time to consult with their constituents and research the issues in their ward is ever decreasing.

We believe that the number of aldermen in Calgary should increase.

b/ Background:

In 1950, there were 12 aldermen to represent 120,000 Calgarians. In 1976, the number of aldermen increased to 14 when the population had reached 470,000. There have been no changes in the number of aldermen since.

In 1976, each alderman represented around 34,000 people on average. This had increased to around 76,000 in 2009, more than double the 1976 number. By comparison, there were 23 MLA's representing an average of 46,000 Calgarians in 2009. This means that aldermen represented on average 80% more people than an MLA in Calgary. There have been many reviews and adjustments on the number of MLA's over the years. The latest proposed change would add 2 MLA's to Calgary.

c/ Questions for the Candidate:

Do you support increasing the number of aldermen in The City of Calgary?

What number of aldermen do you think there should there be in Calgary to adequately govern and represent ward residents and on what basis do you base your position?

4. City Charter

a/ Issue Statement:

Calgary has a population of over 1 million people, close to 30% of Alberta's total population. Being the largest city in Alberta creates new and complex challenges. Alberta municipalities of all sizes are governed by the Municipal Government Act (MGA). Other large cities in Canada that are in the same league as Calgary have their own city charter. These charters provide specific powers to help those large cities deal more effectively and more independently with their unique large city challenges.

We believe that The City of Calgary should approach the Province of Alberta to explore creating a city charter for Calgary.

b/ Background:

St John's Newfoundland, Saint John, New Brunswick, Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver all have city charters. Some of these charters responded to rapid growth, not unlike what Calgary has experienced and will experience in the future.

The most recent charter enacted was for the City of Toronto. Part of the rationale for this charter was to give Toronto powers and responsibilities that match that City's stature as the largest city in Canada and it being a significant economic centre. Certainly Calgary's growth and it becoming a significant economic centre in recent years promotes Calgary to be in the same league as Toronto in many respects.

City charters also help make the cities that have these charters more of an equal partner with their provincial government when it comes to matters impacting those cities.

c/ Questions for the Candidate:

Do you support exploring the concept of a city charter for Calgary?

Would you please expand on the rationale for you answer to the above question?

Do you believe that Calgary would be better served by having increased jurisdiction on matters facing a large city?

5. Environment and Sustainability

a/ Issue Statement

Environmental concerns continue to be an issue to Calgarians. While there has been a lot of progress on number of fronts, the ecological footprint of individual Calgarians continues to increase and there are still additional steps that need to be taken to control this growth.

We believe that the City needs to continue to strive to improve its ecological record and implement additional measures and steps towards this goal.

b/ Background

The many sustainability successes achieved by Calgarians, Corporate employers and The City of Calgary are a credit to the progressive spirit amongst all people that call Calgary their home. Despite these successes, some businesses in our city still prefer to act like we live in 1970. Some still waste water, are not fully supportive of recycling, employ poor material storage and are situated in locations that are difficult to reach except by car. The City can play a role in changing this situation though leading by example, encouraging these businesses to make changes and looking at land use and location of where these businesses can locate. The City can also encourage alternative means of transportation for the workers of all businesses.

In addition, the Blue Cart Recycling program has missed a significant portion of Calgary's population, those who live in multi-family developments. This needs to be addressed sooner than later. By comparison, Vancouver is far ahead of Calgary in multi-family recycling, which has existed there for many years.

The City could also lead by example by encouraging transit use by its employees and perhaps should subsidize transit use by its employees and encouraging employers do the same, possibly though incentive bulk purchases of bus passes.

c/ Questions for the Candidate:

Do you support expanding recycling to multi-family developments?

Would you support encouraging use of transit by City employees?

Would you be willing to work with the private sector towards increasing use of transit by their employees?

What other measures would you support towards reducing our ecological footprint?

6. Housing

a/ Issue Statement

In spite of being a relatively wealthy city, Calgary still has many citizens struggling to find adequate housing. Working poor, fixed income people and new immigrants are amongst those facing this challenge. While local and provincial housing plans have been formulated, much still needs to be done.

We believe that The City needs to be proactive in the implementation of these housing plans and explore additional means to address the provision of adequate housing.

b/ Background

In Calgary, there continues to be shortage of affordable housing. While much work has been done in regards to homeless people, there is the continuum of need including working poor, fixed income people and new immigrants. Immigration is key to providing people for future growth and economic sustainment.

There has been much discussion of secondary suites during the last three years and there is a wide spectrum of points of view on this matter. Nevertheless, this is one housing option that needs a concerted effort to resolve how it is approached and encouraged where appropriate. Some of the discussion has been coloured by the “illegal” suites that exist all over the City. Secondary suites are the legal alternative to illegal suites. By clarifying and, if possible, simplifying the approval processes and confirm the locations where secondary suites can be built, it would help depoliticize this issue. There needs to be proactive consultation with communities on this matter to first get the correct information to them and secondly explore under what conditions they would be acceptable to communities.

c/ Questions for the Candidate

What do you believe The City could do to increase the supply of more affordable housing in Calgary?

What is your position on secondary suites?

7. Transportation

a/ Issue Statement:

Transportation is a top of mind issue with voters. It is the second largest personal expense, a big personal time consumer, and a significant tax expense with major impacts on both the environment and quality of urban living.

We believe that land use is critical for achieving Calgary's transportation objectives.

b/ Background

Technologies such as cars, bikes, trucks, busses, LRT, BRT, roads and bridges etc. are only the last step in solving transportation problems. This hardware is where the money and resources are spent, and where impacts on the environment and quality of urban life show up, but what actually determines the success of the transportation solution and the scale of those impacts, is the definition of the problem and the objectives.

We believe the problem is to provide people and goods with timely access to the places they need to be, at minimal cost and environmental impact. We believe the objective must include providing the less well off, the elderly, the young and a full spectrum of handicapped people with service. This is not only fair and responsible but reduces their dependence on others to the benefit of all. We believe that balancing the public / private transportation split is a significant way to reduce costs for individuals and to reduce the demand on public infrastructure.

In light of these objectives, we believe that the most potent tool in achieving timely and inexpensive access is through land use planning. Concepts such as balancing residential, retail, employment, educational and recreational land uses at the neighbourhood, community and city scale are a way to reduce transportation demand at the source. Concepts like transit oriented development, distributed employment centres, rational distribution of densities, neighbourhood schools and mixed-use developments will increase overall convenience and viability of public transportation. We also believe that hierarchical labyrinth like road layouts tend toward congestion and limited access when compared with variety of user choices available in network or grid like road layouts. Most of these concepts received strong support through the imagineCALGARY process.

c/ Question for the Candidate:

Do you agree that land use planning is an essential tool for achieving Calgary's transportation objectives?

Will you take a leadership role in implementing Plan It?

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 conduct the affairs of the ICC and to provide a forum for discussion between member communities.
- * Placing items on the agenda by the members as matters 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.