



DALHOUSIE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

5432 DALHART ROAD NW
CALGARY, ALBERTA T3A 1V6
403.286.2555

2018 June 22

Peter Schryvers
Senior Planner, North Area
Community Planning
The City of Calgary
PO Box 2100, Station M
Calgary, AB, T2P 2M5

**RE: DP2018-1607
BIRCHWOOD DALHOUSIE DEVELOPMENT**

Dear Peter,

The Dalhousie Community Association Planning & Development Committee appreciates the opportunity to provide comment to this development. We have reviewed the plans as well as hosted a Community Open House on 2018 June 12 where the Birchwood team showcased their proposed plans.

Through the process specific to this development, and the growing community awareness of development and land use proposals in the community, the DCA team has had a chance to hear significant feedback from our community. Feedback has been available to us as a team via online input, community meetings, neighbourhood conversations, and open houses. We have heard and are summarizing our community's concerns and interests as they relate to this development. Feedback always contains a degree of diversity; however, the majority of feedback has been consistent and intersects on the parameters and issues articulated in this letter.

The feedback we heard from the conceptual designs presented in December 2017 focussed on excessive heights, most specifically but not limited to the Dalhousie Drive tower and that this building did not provide a sensitive transition to the existing residential north of Dalhousie Drive, excessive density and insufficient resident parking. Regarding the transportation network and access, some residents directly impacted were concerned with additional vehicle congestion and delays to nearby streets, most specifically Dalford and Dalgleish Roads, and Dalton Drive. Positive feedback included the rooftop patio amenity, the ground level townhouse interface with existing condos along Dalton Drive, and a well-designed and connected interior central courtyard/open space that encouraged outdoor interaction. The café amenity was seen a welcome addition as a commercial pedestrian-oriented use. Generally, the design and finishing materials received comments such as too trendy, too boxy, too much glass, lacking enduring architectural elements and style complementary to the existing community. The DCA notes that little if any change to reflect any of that feedback is incorporated in the current iteration.

These concerns (and others) arose again at the June 12th open house and they are addressed below.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

While the proposed development achieves much of the City's TOD density, massing, parking and pedestrian requirements, there are several significant shortcomings that the DCA hopes the applicant will resolve through design and use changes. Those changes will better integrate the development through more sensitive interfaces with the existing community and provide pedestrian-oriented uses that will provide necessary street-level vitality at the heart of our community – most especially on Dalhousie Drive.

A. Dalhousie Visioning Key Principles

The 2017 Dalhousie Visioning exercise was undertaken to address the back-to-back redevelopment applications in the community (Birchwood, Co-op and Intercare proposals), and the outcome generated a set of community agreed-upon and Council-endorsed principles by which land use and development permit applications should be reviewed (summarized):

1. Provision of higher quality gathering spaces for a range of age groups;
2. Improve connectivity with safe, comfortable and convenient walking and cycling connections;
3. Building heights and massing focussed near LRT, Crowchild Trail and Shaganappi Trail, and transition to lower scales and intensities closer to existing scales in the community with consideration of wind/sun/shadow impacts;
4. Off and on-street parking should be appropriately managed to minimize impact on limited supply of on-street parking;
5. Maintain the fabric and scale of existing ground-oriented residential areas north of Dalhousie Drive;
6. Efficient and cost-effective parking for LRT passengers while providing enhanced community space; and
7. Redevelopment to provide active, comfortable frontages along open spaces and streets to create safe, interesting and comfortable environment for pedestrians.

B. TOD Guidelines

The following are highlighted and in the DCAs view, most relevant to this application:

1. Ensure transit-supported land uses by providing a mixed-use activity node for the local community and city-wide transportation network benefits, providing the community with increased services, employment and housing options for the community;
2. Increase density around transit stations and provide a base for a variety of housing, employment, local services and amenities that support a vibrant station area community.
 - *create transition between higher and lower intensity development by stepping down building heights and densities from the LRT station building;*
 - *create proper edge treatments such as compatible building scale, parking location, and landscaping between new development and existing community to minimize impacts and ensure integration.*
3. Create a pedestrian-oriented design with convenient, comfortable, direct and safe pedestrian linkages that support a walkable station and promote the use of transit.
 - *the ground floor should contain uses that are appealing to pedestrians, such as retail, personal service, restaurants, outdoor cafes and residences; provide visual interest to the pedestrian;*
 - *buildings higher than 4 to 5 storeys should step back from higher floors in order to maintain the more human scale along the sidewalk and reduce shadow impacts.*
4. Make each station area a “place” by creating a unique environment, transforming a utilitarian transit node into a community gateway and vibrant mixed-use hub of activity.
 - *public open space.*
5. Manage transit bus and private automobile circulation and parking needs, while creating a comfortable pedestrian environment.
6. TOD should benefit the community and provide a wide range of supporting benefits for local communities, including increased uses and services, a variety of housing, increased transportation options and a more walkable environment and community amenities.
 - *public and private open space should be developed to complement LRT stations;*
 - *elements should include local gathering places, shopping, services and transit connections;*
 - *vertically or horizontally integrated, a mix of residential, employment and supporting retail and service uses.*

C. Relevant Comments from Calgary Planning Commission Review (at Land Use)

1. Development permit to be particularly sensitive to its site and situation and should not automatically expect to see maximums achieved in height and density. The Approving Authority will need to exercise its discretion very carefully. (Wright)
2. The community's concerns regarding the consultation process, design and lack of an integrated larger station plan to be valid. (Leighton)
3. Little benefit to the community and the City. As a result of this application: It appears to be a case of densification for densification's sake. (Leighton)
4. It does not meet the planning provisions and criteria of the MDP (sections 2.2.1 (b)(i), (ii), (iv), (v) and (vi). Note the provisions of the TOD guidelines. (Leighton)

D. Relevant Comments from Council Public Hearing (at Land Use)

The following comments were made at the Public Hearing from Members of Council and Administration that deferred decisions and further discussion to the Development Permit phase:

1. Dalhousie Visioning Key Principles to be applied at Development Permit stage of application
2. Ensure pedestrian connectivity of site to public realm (pathways) and required improvements
3. Ensure no "blank walls"
4. Ensure proposed plan enhances community
5. Evaluate public/private interfaces
6. Publicly accessible courtyard

E. Community Feedback

1. **Dalhousie Drive Tower:** Too many storeys, should be stepped-back or reduced to **at least** half the height; an isolated glass box that has no context in the community; uninteresting exterior that is exclusively urban in a traditional neighborhood, too much glass, insufficient community amenities to draw people in from the street, no prominent front door, too plain compared to other buildings in the development, concerns regarding shadows cast from height of building, density too high for location.
2. **Dalton Drive Towers:** Rooftop amenity welcome, too high, too many units, townhouse units integrate nicely with adjacent residential, concerns regarding shadows on adjacent residential;
3. **Interior Courtyard:** Nice landscaping, good pathway desire-line connections within, concerns regarding vehicle and service vehicle vs pedestrian conflicts, connectivity to park and further to LRT station could be more direct, better.
4. **Traffic Concerns:** Contributes congestion on Dalton Drive with buses, additional traffic and parking currently at capacity; will add to current traffic access problems at Dalgleish Road with school buses, Dalford Road right-in, right-out from Dalhousie Drive already a problem with turn movement restrictions.
5. **Underground Parking:** Insufficient at approximately 0.50 stalls per unit, given the existing density of the area and the resulting lack of on-street parking. The ratio should be increased to 0.85 at minimum, also insufficient visitor stalls.
6. **Overall:** Appearance of a low quality development, too many units, units too small, will not encourage a mix of demographics including families, loss of affordable-level housing that The Dells offered.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

We have aimed to relate our comments to Council approved policies and principles, but grounded in a manner that is sensitive to the existing community context and areas the community has identified for improvement or modifications.

The community views the Birchwood development as transformational due to its size, density and location, as well as its aspirational shift to more pedestrian-focussed and transit-oriented development within Dalhousie. As the first step to a larger, comprehensive high-density development, we see this phase as **pivotal** in setting the direction for subsequent phases and, likely and future development along this corridor. As such, we believe it should **aim to achieve the highest standard possible, going beyond approved City policies and guidelines**, to ensure it energizes and creates the positive and enhanced benefits new residents will be looking for and the community-at-large desires. With this in mind, our focus in this review are on those outstanding elements that require further attention and revision.

1. Full Land Parcel Context (current Phase 1 and future Phase 2)

Heights and massing across the full land parcel do mitigate negative impacts as they step down from the LRT station to Dalton Drive (west to east) with an effective transition utilizing low-rise townhouse units at the east interface. However, the step down scale from Crowchild Trail to Dalhousie Drive addresses negative impacts **only internally within the full land parcel** but completely fails to provide an acceptable and sensitive interface with adjacent existing residential to the north.

2. Dalhousie Drive Tower

- a. This tower lines and defines our main street, Dalhousie Drive, and has the greatest impact and highest visibility in the existing community – including adjacent residential, pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, transit riders. Most community feedback focussed on this tower and was generally consistent.
- b. **Excessive height for the most prominent community interface structure.** 15 storeys rising starkly from the ground is not considered a sensitive transition to existing residential to the north, nor do the design materials complement the existing local character of the community. Our request in this regard is two-fold:
 - i. Incorporating additional traditional design elements and finishes that provide interest and variety in the façade (consider incorporating stucco-type finishing as done on Dalton Drive building), and
 - ii. Substantially reducing the building height by either reducing the number of storeys by one-half, or by stepping down height to achieve a better integrated transition and reduce shadow impacts to the north. Creating a human active frontage along Dalhousie Drive provides visual interest to pedestrians and passers-by at ground level and provides “eyes on the street” and opportunities to interact. The addition of ground-oriented townhouse units or supporting retail and services uses is viewed favorably as a significant revision request. (Refer to Dalhousie Co-op redevelopment where the entire Dalhousie Drive frontage is flanked with townhouse units with low scale residential units above as an example of a superior main street design.) The addition of a prominent front building entrance along Dalhousie Drive provides human interaction at street level.

3. Interior Courtyard/Plaza

- a. **Dalhousie Drive Tower**
 - i. Paved area at the rear of this building is stark and uninviting to residents. We request that a soft landscaped area be considered together with a well-defined safe pedestrian walkway connecting Dalton Drive to the LRT with a necessary safe separation from underground parking access, ground level parking and service vehicle movements.
 - ii. Consideration should be given to relocating or redesigning underground parking access to the rear of south tower to create a safe, inviting, people-focussed interior courtyard.
- b. **Dalton Drive Tower (15 & 12 Storey)**
 - i. Consider repositioning the proposed 12 storey (with rooftop patio) along Dalton Road and the 15 storey tower as the perpendicular rear connected tower to provide an increased step-back from adjacent residential to the west. If considered, the rooftop patio should provide adequate west-side screening to prevent over-looking of existing residential properties.

ii. Consider reducing the height of this tower to provide increased step-back from adjacent Dalton Drive residential and reduce shadowing.

c. **All Towers**

- i. Ground level space on all buildings is primarily glass with no prominent access point or amenities and is static in nature – likened to clear “blank walls.” All that is visible from the exterior are interior corridors.
- ii. The courtyard is well designed with interior pedestrian connections and is generally viewed favorably as a community gathering place. However, **there are no active uses to draw** pedestrians to utilize and support this space to its fullest potential. The generator location is inappropriate for this space.
- iii. Prime ground-level real-estate opportunities that provide a range of pedestrian-oriented local retail and service uses and increase employment are required to create human interactions and provide vitality within this public courtyard. Alternatively, including low rise ground-oriented residential units could be incorporated to provide a human element within the courtyard space. (Note that as part of Dalhousie’s visioning exercise, it was noted that the community lacks cultural, artistic stops encouraging residents to enjoy the local community.) Further, with the infusion of between 500 to upwards of 800 new residents in phase 1 development, the demand for pedestrian-oriented local retail and services uses will intensify and support a necessary vibrant “hub” of activity and community gateway.
- iv. The DCA is interested in the results and recommendations of a CPTED review as we view a courtyard space with no interactive or gathering function as a potential draw for crime.
- v. Relocating a portion **of interior bicycle storage from prime ground-level space in favor of true mixed and much needed community uses is strongly encouraged.** Additionally, a full glass frontage for a large indoor bicycle storage is seen as a potential draw for break-ins and criminal opportunities, most especially as a consequence of no-people uses.

4. Parking

The objectives of creating a transit-oriented development aimed at reducing the necessity of driving and improving mobility opportunities for all ages of citizens should be applauded. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that as we transition from established development patterns automobile use will remain a necessity and with that, so will parking. This is stated respecting that this demand may diminish over the medium to long term.

Given the large number (approximately 1200) dwellings in this multi-family area, On-street parking on Dalton Drive south of Dalhousie Drive is at capacity. Most of this area is included in Residential Parking Zone TT along with most of the residential streets on the north side of Dalhousie Drive. Many of the residential streets in close proximity to the Dalhousie LRT Station have implemented restricted parking as was required. Given the large number (approximately 1200) dwellings in this multi-family area, the DCA anticipates additional petitions from residents within the Zone TT to follow during the Birchwood construction and with the occupancy of this phase. Additional underground resident and visitor parking is strongly encouraged to mitigate on-going non-resident parking concerns. Over the years, the DCA has insisted that new development must provide adequate parking for any increased use it generates. Despite its orientation as TOD, the Birchwood development should be no exception.

In addition to automobile parking around the site, there is public bicycle parking on the site. It is encouraged that the placement of bicycle parking be such that it is well distributed in relation to desired amenity access points, easily accessible year-round and secure, so as to minimize occurrence of bicycles being locked to street signs, trees or other objects.

5. Connectivity Through Site and With Public Realm

As a transit-oriented development aiming to provide “pedestrian-oriented design with convenient, comfortable, direct and safe pedestrian linkages” robust connectivity through the site and between the site and the public realm is essential with significant consideration given to convenient, efficient and safe travel for all travel modes.

- a. **Through-site Connectivity.** Establish a wide obstruction-free and well-illuminated pedestrian corridor through the site to provide through-travel and access to on-site amenities for residents and the public.
- b. **Pedestrian Space.** Ensure pedestrian space is well-defined and comfortable with the objective of inviting residents and visitors to gather and connect as well as travel within the site.
- c. **Public Realm Connectivity.** Create robust pedestrian connections to adjacent sidewalks and particularly to the nearby transit stop on Dalton Drive. Provide robust multimodal (pedestrian and bicycle) connectivity between the site and the regional pathway network and Dalhousie Station through well-designed and well-illuminated pathways.
- d. **All-season Active Travel.** Recognize that designs and policies within and adjacent to the site must consider the need for safe year-round 24-hour a day active travel (pedestrian and bicycle) and transit access.

In addition to the preceding, the following community impacts and opportunities should be recognized in the context of the development.

- a. **Regional pathway and mid-block crossing.** The regional pathway adjacent to the site to the west creates a popular mid-block desire line. Build-out of a high-density pedestrian-focused development may further drive demand for this desire line. This demand should be recognized and the possibility of re-establishing a formal mid-block crossing considered.
- b. **Bicycle Connectivity and Pedestrian-bicycle interaction.** Sidewalks along Dalhousie Drive, adjacent to the site (south side Dalhousie Drive) and opposite the site (north side Dalhousie Drive) connect the regional pathway to the crossing at Dalton Drive. Sidewalk widths are inadequate for mixed-use and will become more so with increased use. In the absence of a mid-block crossing, sidewalks should be upgraded to pathway specification, including repositioning any signage, signals or other utilities that might otherwise obstruct the pathway. This type of adaptation offers an opportunity to simultaneously improve the automobile traffic flow, while improving the safety for the current and increased active mode transportation users.
- c. **Access to/from Adjacent Neighborhood Streets.** With the exception of Dalton Drive at the east end of Dalhousie, all intersections are understood to be residential streets intersecting the local arterial street (Dalhousie Drive). With potential for increased traffic, related to the development, vehicle movements at non-signalized intersections may become difficult, which could in turn lead to increased congestion and, in the absence of mitigating actions, compromised street safety for all users. With this in mind, we encourage the City to revisit the anticipated function of potentially affected intersections.
- d. **Dalhousie Drive Bicycle Route.** Dalhousie Drive is a designated bicycle route however, City research confirms that few Calgarians are comfortable riding on this type of roadway (Cycling Strategy, Fig. 3.3). With the potential for increased traffic due to the development, accessibility to Dalhousie Drive could be further lessened. Consideration how to mitigate any deteriorated bicycle accessibility along Dalhousie Drive related to the development, including recommendations for improved guidance for cyclists transitioning between the regional pathway and Dalhousie Drive at Dalton Drive.

6. Construction Staging

Construction of such a large-scale development will have significant impacts on the community in terms of noise, traffic and potentially air quality in and around the site. Public safety may also be a concern if the site and associated materials are not properly secured or, during periods of construction, when large vehicles are moving in and around the site. We request the following:

- a. **Planning for Minimal Disruption.** The applicant present a plan to the DCA, prior to undertaking any demolition or construction on the site, detailing:

- i. Anticipated timing and hours of work
 - ii. Plans to ensure all access adjacent to the site (including all sidewalks, pathways and transit/school bus stops) remain open, safe and unimpeded by work on the site.
 - iii. If impact beyond the site is anticipated, plans for detours and maintenance of those detours to ensure all travel modes are adequately accommodated.
- b. **Ongoing Dialogue and Resolution of Concerns.** The City work with the DCA and the applicant to determine a functional update schedule whereby the DCA has the opportunity to express and have rectified by the City in a timely manner, any concerns with impacts on the community pertaining to development of the site.

SUMMARY

Although Birchwood has engaged the community, it remains the community's opinion that we've not been heard. The DCA hopes that by highlighting the community's most critical concerns that the development be respectful of the existing context and energize our community with needed services and amenities that benefit both newcomers and current residents.

We hope to achieve a mutually acceptable development that surpasses the standards of an ordinary on-trend development and will withstand the test of time. We have seen recent examples of rushed on-trend TOD developments in the Northwest that have been acknowledged as substandard and below community and city expectations. We know that the city expects better as does the community of Dalhousie. Our previous Councillor concluded her debate at the Public Hearing supporting Birchwood's Land Use with the statement, "**Dalhousie will be the first excellent TOD in the city.**" The DCA is committed to ensuring excellence through continued dialogue with the applicant and the planning team.

Sincerely,



Neil Pozak, Chair
Planning & Development Committee
Dalhousie Community Association

c: Councillor Sean Chu