



DALHOUSIE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

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2018 October 3

Peter Schryvers
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The City of Calgary
PO Box 2100, Station M
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**RE: DP2018-1607
BIRCHWOOD DALHOUSIE DEVELOPMENT – Revised Plans**

Dear Peter,

The Dalhousie Community Association Planning & Development Committee appreciates the opportunity to comment on the revised plans for Birchwood's Dalhousie development. We have reviewed the plans and, on 2018 September 13, met with the Birchwood team, who provided a comprehensive overview of their revisions as well as engaged in a fulsome discussion on the project. We welcome Birchwood's efforts to incorporate some of the feedback and address some of the concerns expressed to you in our letter dated 2018 June 22, including revisions for:

- An enhanced Dalhousie Drive façade that incorporates a 2-storey retail/restaurant podium feature and a prominent front entry to the building;
- A revised interior plaza design to directly connect Dalton Drive through the site to the park and LRT with a separated walkway to reduce potential vehicle/pedestrian conflicts;
- Reduced surface parking in the plaza; replaced concrete with soft landscaping at Dalhousie Drive building's rear entrance;
- Enhanced plaza connections between buildings and incorporated a more prominent entrance to the south building;
- Reduced height of surface generator located in center of plaza.

We remain concerned that a number of our comments and concerns have not been addressed by the applicant, both in direct relation to the development and in relation to its potential impacts on the community.

COMMENTS

1. Specific

- Context & Scale:** While we acknowledge that the development is within the height envelope permitted in its approved Land Use, something Birchwood has communicated as being "non-negotiable", we feel that height distribution is insufficient to ensure the development blends into and is contextual with adjacent land use. Specifically, we question whether the development fulfills Calgary MDP direction stating that "... *the tallest buildings and highest densities be closest to transit stops and stations ... and stepping down heights and densities away from these sites*" or that "...*massing new development frame adjacent streets in a way that respects the existing scale of the street.*" We further draw attention to unresolved concerns about how Birchwood has addressed comments at Land Use and the Community's Key Principle that interfaces transition to existing residential.

- b. **Parking:** While we have acknowledged reduced motor vehicle dependence is an important objective of TOD, we desire a clear understanding of what measures the City and Birchwood will take to ensure that any potential for spill-over parking of resident or visitor vehicles, including any car share or Car2Go-type vehicles, is mitigated so that it does not adversely impact the established parking needs of the Community.
- c. **Interior Plaza:** We remain concerned with the impact of certain elements on the function and safety of the Interior Plaza, and specifically request that consideration be given to;
 - i. Removing the generator building, as non-functional space for the Plaza’s intended purpose and a visibility obstruction, from the Plaza altogether, in favor of space that can be used by people;
 - ii. Consolidating garbage and loading areas to further minimize impact of these services on people’s enjoyment of the Plaza, as well as to enhance safety and comfort;
 - iii. Modifying the east-west pedestrian corridor to provide a contiguous patio-restaurant area and eliminate potential conflicts with through traffic (pedestrian or cyclist);
 - iv. Articulating the “blank wall” on Plaza side of Dalton Drive with design elements that create interest in the Plaza, as opposed to being a flat window wall for its full span, as per our understanding;
 - v. Robustly accommodating bicycle movements within the Plaza, specifically between the interior street network, adjoining pathways and interior bicycle storage, including necessary curb ramps;
 - vi. Creating clear site lines through the Plaza to eliminate dark corners and/or walls that could invite undesirable behaviours;
 - vii. Providing enhanced lighting throughout the Plaza.
- a. **Loading/Unloading Areas:** Proliferation of service vehicle traffic, including taxis, delivery vehicles, Uber and car share, is a real concern in the vicinity of the buildings, particularly at main entrances. We request attention be given to how such vehicles will be accommodated by the development, so as to not compromise the safety or impact the mobility of any travel mode along Dalton Drive
- b. **Bus Lay-by on Dalton Drive:** Dalton Drive is a narrow two-way street that functions as a bus route and will serve as the development’s only vehicular access. We recommend considering a bus lay-by for the southbound bus stop along Dalton Drive so as to minimize potential traffic back-up into the intersection of Dalton Drive and Dalhousie Drive, mitigate occurrence of unsafe passing of stopped buses and improve overall egress sight lines from the Interior Plaza.
- c. **Transportation Network:**
 - i. Dalton Drive: Dalton Drive is a narrow 2-way, 1.3km loop road south of Dalhousie Drive that serves 1,200 dwellings, functions as a transit route (105 bus with frequent east- and west-bound service) and is included in Restricted Parking Zone TT. With Birchwood’s 3.45 acre development adding +900 dwellings, Coop’s redevelopment adding 440 and Canadian Tire, whom we understand is also exploring redevelopment opportunities, potentially adding more, we remain concerned with the capability of the street to safely handle resulting traffic volumes.
 - ii. Dalton Drive-Dalhousie Drive Intersection: This intersection is immediately adjacent to the development and will likely bear the brunt of traffic impact. While we have asked that this intersection be thoroughly evaluated for its ability to handle traffic demand for all travel modes, we remain unconvinced this has been accomplished, specifically as there is no evidence to suggest that necessary bicycle movements through the intersection, including cyclists transitioning between the regional pathway and Dalhousie Drive bicycle route, have been considered so as to achieve safety and clarity of operation for all travel modes.
 - iii. In addition, and specific to Active Travel (bicycle and pedestrian), we have not seen any evidence, either in the Transportation Impact Assessment or through Birchwood, to suggest that;
 - a) The level of service of the sidewalks along Dalhousie Drive, both adjacent to and opposite the development, has been evaluated against their function as multi-use pathways, nor that potential for bicycle-pedestrian conflict, due to increased pedestrian and bicycle trips generated by the development, will be mitigated;
 - b) The Dalhousie Drive designated bicycle route is substandard, for the given roadway context, in providing safe and comfortable space for a broad range of Calgarians to travel by bicycle, or that recommendations have been made to mitigate further reduced bicycle accessibility, stemming from additional motor vehicle traffic directly related to the development;

- c) Any evaluation of pedestrian and cyclist travel demand on the currently closed mid-block crossing of Dalhousie Drive has been carried out, or that recommendations have been considered on how to safely facilitate direct and efficient active mode travel along this City-created desire line; and
 - d) The pathway crossing of Dalton Drive along the recently established regional east-west pathway south of the development, has been evaluated for adequate guidance (signage and markings) to safely and clearly facilitate necessary bicycle through or turn movements onto or off of Dalton Drive.
- d. **Phase 2 Future Development:** The DCA is particularly concerned about future access to Birchwood’s approved Phase 2. That development will incorporate a similar number of residential units as the current phase, together with related residential, commercial and service vehicle volumes on what is an already congested Dalton Drive. Construction staging for Phase 2 is also a concern. The DCA would have preferred to see a proposed shadow plan to comprehensively assess impacts of both phases to appropriately consider pedestrian, cyclist and vehicular movements and access from Dalton Drive.

2. General

The DCA wishes to reiterate that our goal is to ensure that this development surpasses the standards of an ordinary, on-trend development that will withstand the test of time in our community. Recall our former Councillor Farrell’s comments at Land Use approval: “This will be **the first excellent TOD in the city.**”

That said, we remain frustrated in what is a **paper and pencil design** exercise where the major elements have been determined with no ability to relocate them on paper – long before they are transformed to physical structures, ie, buildings and access points. We’ve essentially been asked to create a comfortable, safe and inviting pedestrian-oriented and bicycle-friendly Plaza environment around rigid infrastructure that doesn’t exist (except for road access). We suggested early in the process that all vehicle access be relocated from the Plaza to the rear of the development to fully mitigate pedestrian-/cyclist-vehicle conflicts but have been advised that we are beyond the point of extensive changes and to focus on providing comments to improve what is in place. Any changes to the towers relative to siting, footprint and height are set, as is access to the parkade, loading and service areas within the plaza. These limitations preclude any meaningful improvements that could create a high quality, safe, and relaxing social gathering place without competing with vehicle movements.

The Birchwood site is new construction that should be seen as a blank canvas to create a high quality, pedestrian-friendly ground-level environment; it is **not a retrofit project** with existing physical structures that create real limitations and challenges on the site. City policies and Dalhousie’s Key Principles (which were developed specifically to evaluate this and two other large scale projects in Dalhousie and endorsed unanimously by Council) direct that development be contextual and that heights step down from adjacent LRT to existing residential (consistent with the MDP) and yet, the proposed massing is not respectful of the community’s collective vision nor City policies regarding interfaces. The two buildings adjacent to existing low-density residential are the tallest in this phase (15 storeys), with a small-scale 2-storey ground-level podium feature intended to satisfy the required stepped-back massing interface. Exceptionally designed ground-level spaces in our opinion should be achievable without painful, mediocre compromises when limitations are only drawings; pedestrian and cycling movements should not take a back seat and compete with vehicle access, loading/unloading and site servicing.

The DCA remains aligned with the following statements that we noted in our previous comment letter:

Calgary Planning Commissioner Wright’s comment at Land Use: *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;*

Calgary Planning Commissioner Leighton’s comments at Land Use: *It does not meet the planning provisions and criteria of the MDP (sections 2.2.1 Policies (b)(i), (ii), (iv) and (iv)). We would also add (iii)). And further: It appears to be a case of densification for densification’s sake.*

Council comments at Land Use Approval: *Dalhousie Visioning Key Principles to be applied at Development Permit stage of application; ensure no “blank walls,” and evaluate public/private interfaces.*

As a final note, the last major development in Dalhousie was Dalhousie Station Shopping Center and the Phoenician where the developer collaborated with City departments and the DCA to contribute full traffic signals at the intersection of Dalhousie Drive/Dalham Crescent (east end), the park spaces immediately west of the Birchwood site, complete with landscaping, tennis courts, basketball court and playground equipment, and contributed \$350,000, placed in trust with City Transportation to address transportation issues in the Dalhousie community arising as a result of the development. An additional \$350,000 was contributed to address traffic issues arising in the Varsity community. We encourage Birchwood to similarly engage with the DCA to explore how they can contribute to the broader community as most developers of significant projects do throughout the city. Providing amenities adjoining and outside their own footprint creates a better, enriched community experience for the hundreds of new residents that their development will bring to Dalhousie.

As always, the DCA is open to ongoing meaningful dialogue with Birchwood to ensure a project designed with excellence as a priority.

Sincerely,



Neil Pozak, Chair
Planning & Development Committee
Dalhousie Community Association

c: Councillor Sean Chu