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Urban Shift

From Exception to Model: A Review of Calgary's CFB Redevelopment

June, 2009

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Prepared for:

The City of Calgary

Canada Lands Company CLC Limited

Version

V. 3.0 Draft, July 24, 2009

Tsix URBANISTS Inc.

Urban Shift | Version: June 24, 2009

(Official, Version 3)

CONTENTS

1. Introduction-----	1
2. Innovations Toward Urbanism -----	2
3. Findings & Immediate Recommendations -----	12
4. Long Term Recommendations -----	14

Background Material (Under Separate Cover)

A: Study Methodology

B. The CFB Redevelopment Story

C. A Distinction of Types

(Official, Version 3)

1. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The pursuit for urban sustainability and smart growth has gained great momentum throughout North America over the past several years. In spite of well intentioned broad policy aiming at innovation, implementing these ideals has proven difficult. Burdened by rules and process designed to create conventional development patterns, innovative developments in Calgary such as The Bridges, McKenzie Towne, and Garrison Woods/Garrison Green have all come about only by exceptional circumstances. It is this need for exceptional circumstances that marginalize innovation and impedes the direction of broad policy. But as these exceptional urban projects are beginning to look like model projects for incoming policy, it has become apparent that the current regulations, standards, and processes are not in alignment with the intended outcome of this policy, and in fact stand as formidable barriers.

1

OBJECTIVES

Originally commissioned under the title: *A Review of Innovations in Garrison Woods and Garrison Green* there are three primary, interrelated objectives of this study. The first is to conduct and report findings of a review of the approval process relating to sustainable design innovations applied in the new communities of Garrison Woods and Garrison Green. The second is to benchmark how smart growth and Council's Sustainability Principles are being implemented in Calgary communities, in this case Garrison Woods and Garrison Green. And the third is that this review should facilitate the approval and development of more innovative communities.

OVERVIEW

This study has drawn from both local and North America-wide experiences. The development of this study has involved a review of the City's approvals framework and related studies, an analysis of the approvals process as it has applied to both the CFB redevelopments as well as a variety of other built and ongoing projects, interviews with City elected officials and staff, local consultants, developers, and community leaders, and a survey of North America-wide experiences. The basic finding of this study concludes that recent and emerging policy for the City of Calgary that is based on addressing issues of sustainability through human-scaled urbanism, which are embodied by the CFB redevelopments, is fundamentally at odds with the City's approvals framework, and current standards based on automobile-focused suburbanism.

FORMAT

This study is structured as a concise, action-oriented report augmented by more lengthy discussions and resource materials in the attached *Background Materials*. The report responds to each of the three report missions, with an emphasis on widespread implementation of the City's emerging progressive policy illustrated by the experience of the Calgary CFB redevelopment projects.

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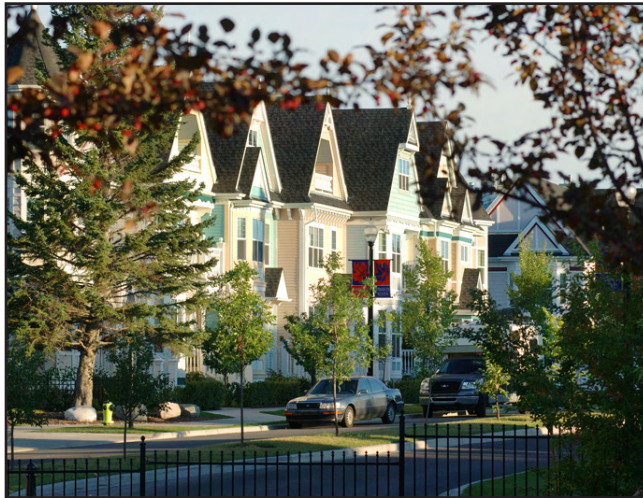
2. INNOVATIONS TOWARD URBANISM

OVERVIEW

Garrison Woods, Garrison Green, and the forthcoming Currie Barracks represent only a limited list of projects (along with The Bridges and early phases of McKenzie Towne) that have established new urban development patterns, therefore exemplifying current and emerging broad policy aimed at sustainable urbanism. It should be recognized, however, that the implied “innovation” inherent in these projects is not simply the collection of creative design details, but is rather the broader shift from automobile-focused suburbanism to human-scaled urbanism. This section explores a number of key “innovations” achieved within Garrison Woods and Garrison Green that collectively support and represent the broader shift toward urbanism.

2

GARRISON WOODS / GARRISON GREEN



- Residential densities achieved in Garrison Woods and Garrison Green range from 10 to 13.5 units per gross developable acre, creating compact communities.



- A fine grain mix of land uses including residential; retail; institutional; office; recreational; and open space, integrated both vertically and horizontally, to create more complete communities.

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- A range of housing types and affordability levels are interspersed throughout the communities.



- A range of high quality public spaces exhibit significant investment in the public realm



- Shallow building setbacks and vertical massing allows the shaping of streets and other public spaces and reduces land consumptive front yards. With vehicle storage and service functions in the rear lane, porches and stoops demonstrate a human-scale facing streets and public spaces.

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- Rear lanes define car-focused backs that allow human-focused fronts on development lots. Only rarely are lanes treated as landscaped public spaces.



- Prescriptive architectural codes ensure a sensitive, fine-grained integration of land uses and building types.



- Interconnected: Streets, sidewalks, public spaces, pathways, and mid-block passages form a block structure that supports walking, cycling, and transit use.

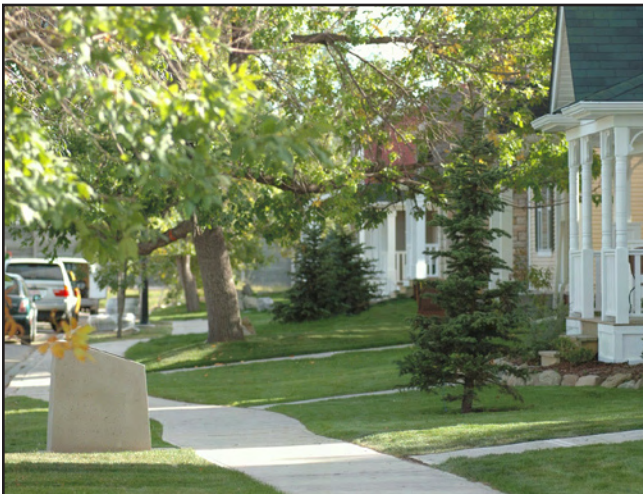
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- Walkable: streets and public spaces are designed for pedestrians. Walkability is increased by narrow lanes, on-street parking, and street trees throughout the communities.



- Traffic calmed streets, including curb extensions and bollards; traffic circles; and raised crosswalks help reduce vehicular speed and increase pedestrian safety.



- As a brownfield site, in an inner-city location, these projects demonstrate the efficient use and the environmental remediation of underutilized land.

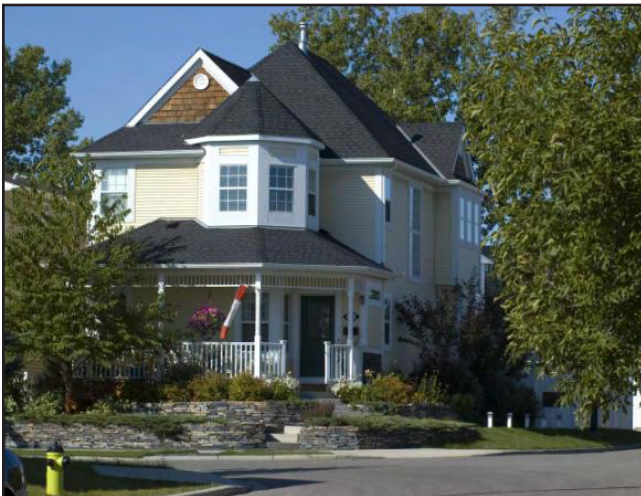
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- Recycling of materials is used in these communities to reduce waste.



- Existing former military housing and existing community facilities have been retained, upgraded, and adaptively reused.



- Existing trees have been retained, together with new vegetation.

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- The military history of these sites is commemorated through the use of street names and signs, interpretative cairns, and commemoratives.



- Pedestrian character and comfort is provided through the use of upgraded street furniture and paving, special lighting, and bollards.

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- Wider and continuous sidewalks promote pedestrian movement and connectivity.



- Affordable housing is promoted through special programs and housing variety.

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CURRIE BARRACKS

Currie Barracks will improve upon the innovations in Garrison Woods and Garrison Green by incorporating the following:



- Low Impact Design (LID) for stormwater through the use of techniques such as permeable pavement, rain gardens, infiltration systems, and on-site storage areas.



- Green Lanes, which support LID for stormwater and provide an improved aesthetic.

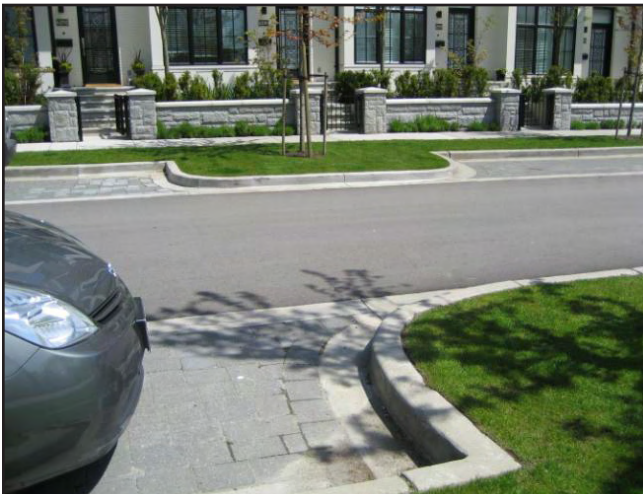
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- Higher density, with up to 16 units per gross developable acre is anticipated.



- Rich mix of land uses will provide for housing, retail to meet the day-to-day needs of residents, and office to provide for employment opportunities.



- More extensive traffic calming will achieve a reduced speed limit of 40 kph, creating a safer and more comfortable pedestrian environment.

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- Introduction of a landscape code to complement the LID for stormwater and improve landscape diversity and sustainability.



- Provision of a connected street network to facilitate walking and promote good transit access.

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3. FINDINGS & IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERVIEW

The primary investigations of this report were conducted through extensive interviews with the development industry, elected officials, City staff, and representatives of citizen organizations. These one-on-one interviews varied in focus, content, and outcome but were all undertaken with the premise that although the Calgary CFB projects are clearly aligned with Council priorities and City policy, approvals have become increasingly difficult to obtain, and that it would be difficult if not impossible to implement a project of similar scope and caliber elsewhere in the city. To this premise, interviewees were asked what they understood innovation to mean, what they saw as barriers to innovation, and what they would recommend as solutions. Through the disparate insights, observations, and discussions that emerged from the interviews, a number of barriers emerged. But all shared one common theme.

12

One of the primary findings of this study reveal a fundamental disconnect between the human-scaled urbanism increasingly demanded by policy and exhibited by Calgary's CFB redevelopment, and the automobile-focused suburbanism that our current regulatory environment is born out of. Appendix "E: A Distinction of Types" presents an essay that discusses the fundamental differences between these two types, and how they relate to the broader context of innovation.

A SYNOPSIS OF CURRENT IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

Through the interview process, and other investigations, the following barriers were revealed:

■ Regulatory Incompatibility

The current regulatory environment is born out of car-focused, segregated land-use development practices that in spite of direction from broad policy and upper management, is systematically incompatible with human-scaled urbanism at the level of implementation. When design criteria must be customized exceptions to accepted standards, the barriers to implementation are self evident. This is the primary barrier for which the following are symptomatic.

■ Conflict in the System

In the description of their frustrations, all interviewees identified that the system is based on conflict rather than collaboration. Although it is expected that some amount of conflict will exist in any bureaucracy and can be an important "check and balance," the integrative nature of urbanism cannot be achieved without the Approving Authority playing more of an *Enabling Authority* role.

■ Accountability to Policy

It is evident through a review of the Currie Barracks approvals process that Council directives and approved policy plans are not being fully respected. This may be due to a number of reasons such as a lack of education and/or experi-

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ence on the part of implementation staff, communication issues, and intractable positions. While all of these likely play a role, they are symptomatic of the underlying system incompatibility.

■ Incremental vs. Systematic Innovation

The interview process revealed two opposing viewpoints toward the concept of innovation. Some believe that the City is inevitably innovating toward sustainable urbanism and that the course set by policy will eventually get us there. The second believes that the barriers can only be removed through sweeping change. This study has concluded that systematic change will be necessary as there is no direct path of innovation between car-focused suburbanism and human-scaled urbanism as evidenced by North American experience.

13

■ Individual Departments:

Through the investigations and interviews, the departments involved with CPAG (Planning, Transportation, Urban Development, and Parks) in addition to the Fire department were discussed at length. While each department had individual issues, some of which are discussed in the long-term recommendations in the next section, it was revealed once again that there is a general disconnect between current standards and the standards necessary to implement human-scaled urbanism.

■ CPAG

All interviewees with working knowledge of the City's approvals process had much to say regarding CPAG. Most agreed that in theory, CPAG is a great idea. Unfortunately this process is not *people proof*. Specific issues include:

- The lack of a unified understanding of urbanism
- There is a lack of consistent File Manager assignment
- Comments on Detailed Team Reviews often reappear after they have already been addressed, often due to changing team members.
- Pre-Application meetings are a missed opportunity for idea exchanges, consensus building, and preliminary direction.

IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATION: A PARALLEL APPROVALS TEAM

While it will be necessary in time to align standards and processes to human-scaled urbanism, a necessary first step will be to create a parallel approvals process. This special CPAG-Urban team would be charged with obtaining all implementation approvals for projects that qualify. Characteristics would include:

- A collaborative ideas-based pre-application/qualification period
- Assignment of a single, consistent file manager
- Education among members as to the approvals issues inherent to urbanism
- A succession plan for each member so that new additions are fully informed
- A test-case that could be replicated as needed as new developments fall in line with emerging urban-focused policy.

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4. LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERVIEW

Moving beyond “innovations,” it is recognized that the individual innovations achieved in the Calgary CFB redevelopment have been a means to achieving the broader goals and vision of current and emerging City policy. It must be stressed that this vision is not in itself the central recommendation of this report- the vision for urbanism and sustainability is owned by the City, which therefore has a responsibility for implementing their own policy. The overarching barrier to achieving this, and the underlying conclusion of this report, is that there is a fundamental disconnect between the City’s vision and the rules and regulations in place to implement them- an incompatibility that cannot be fixed by incremental change and small innovations, but rather a fundamental shift from one pattern to the other.

14

The preceding “Immediate Recommendation” for a special approvals team establishes a crucial first-step that is achievable in the near term. This section summarizes a number of more difficult recommendations that may only be achievable in the mid to long term. These recommendations proceed directly from the interviews and investigations conducted for these studies, drawing on North American best practices and experience to define a comprehensive action-list to enable the City’s own policies, particularly those emerging from the current draft MDP and CTP. The Background Materials that accompany this study propose how these recommendations can tie into the draft MDP and CTP.

THE SOLUTION OF A PARALLEL SYSTEM

The long-term recommendations of this report proposes an urban-focused regulatory system that runs parallel to the current system. As Garrison Woods has proven, it takes more than mere on-the-ground success to enable urban development in Calgary. The Parallel System would provide an opportunity for a comprehensive set of regulatory devices to implement progressive current and emergent policy. City officials would gain the means to pursue progressive urban development initiatives within a controlled scope, the development industry would expand their options for development, and citizens will gain more lifestyle choices and new civic amenities. The system would be defined by the following objectives:

■ Assemble a Special Approvals Team for Urbanism

As discussed in the previous section, a special approvals team focused on urbanism is a critical first step, and can be realized in the short term.

■ Undertake an Integrated Parallel Code and Establish Project Criteria

The system should integrate land use, public works, transportation, and the approvals process, all tied together under common policy. Project eligibility would be through review of candidate applications checked against adherence to the common urban policy. Projects would include redevelopment sites as well as greenfield sites, and should be incentivised in a fair manner.

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■ **Regulate Urban Land Use By Intensity: Adopt a Form-Based Code**

International experience over the past two decades has determined that zoning and segregated–land use approaches are not compatible with urbanism. When the very reason for zoning is to fundamentally separate uses, new mixed-use zoning categories that “put the uses back together” are immediately at odds with the very DNA of suburbanism and have accordingly proven ineffective. Based on suburbanism, Calgary’s new Land Use Bylaw does not adequately address urbanism. To deal with this common issue, “Form-Based Codes” have emerged as a current best practice for implementing urbanism by-right throughout North America. At the heart of the proposed Code would be the adoption of a form-based code applicable throughout the City. The Background Materials, attached under separate cover, provide more in-depth information on form-based codes.

15

■ **Adopt Enforceable Design Criteria**

Comprehensive design criteria and standards must be established for urban neighbourhood design. The approved *Customized Design Criteria* developed for Currie Barracks provide an excellent starting point for this effort. The first action should be the long-awaited approval of an urban street palette. However, adopting urban street standards and mixed-use land use districts only establishes the ingredients for urbanism, it does not describe how those ingredients are assembled into the more complex recipe for urbanism. Urban subdivision standards regulate design at the scale of the neighbourhood, focusing on the form and dispersion of civic and natural space (urban parks standards), network connectivity, the establishment of a range of lifestyle choices (as opposed to housing choices), the overall form of the neighbourhood, and its internal and external connective structure of corridors. Urban Public Works standards for infrastructure and Storm Water Management may also be necessary.

■ **Develop Urban Parks Management Policy**

In addition to the design standards indicated in the previous recommendation, it will be necessary to re-conceptualize the manner in which Parks are managed and maintained. There are several possible approaches, but it is crucial that the funding not be based on equal per acre distribution of resources. Design and maintenance funding should instead take into account the population densities that are served by individual parks and the more intense use of smaller public spaces as a result.

■ **Employ Integrated Public Engagement**

It is recommended that redevelopment/existing neighbourhood plans be pursued at the increment of the Neighbourhood Unit (80-200 acres) and employ a transparent, public, and design-based process.