



December 6, 2011

On September 24, 2011 The Federation of Calgary Communities hosted its Fall 2011 General Meeting. This was done in coordination with The Mayor's Office and Land Use Planning & Policy, The City of Calgary. The theme of the meeting was exploring how the City can best engage community associations in the implementation challenges of "Plan It Calgary" or the Municipal Development Plan and Calgary Transportation Plan (MDP/CTP).

The meeting was professionally facilitated by an external consultant, who was supported by five volunteer facilitators from the Engage Unit from The City of Calgary. In addition, City staff from the Mayor's Office, Land Use Planning & Policy and the Office of Sustainability acted as observers at the meeting. Approximately thirty community association representatives participated in the meeting discussions.

After the meeting took place, Federation staff transcribed the meeting notes and sent them to the facilitator to draft a report that highlighted the emerging themes and ideas discussed during the meeting. A draft report was submitted to The Federation, which then disseminated it to the meeting participants, the Mayor's Office and Land Use Planning & Policy staff who were present at the meeting. This was done to ensure that the report accurately reflected the sentiments that were collected from the meeting participants. As there were no suggestions or concerns with the draft report, no changes were subsequently made.

The attached report summarises the discussions that took place during the General Meeting, specifically those regarding community association roles in implementing Plan It Calgary, as well as ways in which to improve City and community processes. The transcribed flipchart notes are available upon request. This report is not intended to be a position paper; the intent of the report is to be a neutral representation of the discussions that took place at the Federation's Fall 2011 General Meeting.

### **What is The Federation of Calgary Communities Doing?**

The Federation is involved in efforts, both new and ongoing, to address issues related to MDP/CTP implementation and the planning process generally. Through our recent participation in the MDP/CTP Implementation and Sustainment Committees, and in other ways, we have been advocating for the translation of MDP/CTP policies to the local level, through education, collaborative review of local plans, policies, circumstances and opportunities, and the updating of/creation of Local Area Plans as required. We have also been encouraging communities to take it upon themselves to better understand and plan for their own future, such as through "visioning" projects that engage community members and are mindful of the changes envisioned in Plan It. The annual project we facilitate between the U of C Urban Studies program and community associations (chosen through an RFP process) is one such initiative, and we encourage other efforts and are looking for other opportunities.

On a day-to-day basis, MDP/CTP implementation happens through the land use amendment and DP process in which communities participate. There are concerns with aspects of these processes (some longstanding), and over the last few months the Federation and a group of community representatives have been working with Development and Building Approvals staff on a “Process Pilot” project to identify problems with the process and recommend improvements. What we heard at the General Meeting reinforces much of what we have been hearing in the pilot project (and elsewhere), and we expect to have more information about outcomes in the New Year. Compared to the broad discussion at the General Meeting, the Process Pilot project has a limited scope, but there are other converging initiatives at City Hall, including “cut red tape” initiatives, and the envisioned “re-engineering” of planning processes referenced by the Mayor, and included in the planning department’s recently approved budget and workplan. What we heard at the General Meeting and elsewhere will be fed into these processes, and will contribute to our positioning as they roll forward.

It was clear from the meeting that building trusting relationships between community associations and other stakeholders in the planning process, such as The City of Calgary and developers, is extremely important to facilitate good planning at the community scale (community, City and developer-applicants were described by some GM participants the “three legs of the stool”). The process pilot, and the very successful “Partners In Planning” series of workshops are important in this regard – we have more PIP courses than ever this year, and more participants). However, the Federation understands that more work needs to be done to improve these relationships and we have already embarked upon exercises to explore the issues between CAs and planning stakeholders (notably in the development industry) with the intention of developing materials and recommendations that will improve transparency, trust and process.

Finally, the Federation will explore opportunities for improved information sharing between community associations. We encourage neighbouring communities to get to know each other and collaborate on planning issues where appropriate. We are also developing some specific opportunities for communities to meet and share experiences and best practices. Watch for more information about this in the new year.

The Federation will continue to explore opportunities, as well as develop resources and tools to enhance community associations in the pursuit of developing and maintaining constructive influence in the planning process. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me (contact information below).

Sincerely,



**Natasha Kuzmak**, MEdes  
Urban Planner + Engagement Facilitator  
Federation of Calgary Communities  
**T** (403) 244-4111, ext. 210  
**E** [engageinplanning@calgarycommunities.com](mailto:engageinplanning@calgarycommunities.com)



Bob van Wegen  
Urban Planner  
Federation of Calgary Communities  
**T** (403) 244-4111, ext. 203  
**E** [planning@calgarycommunities.com](mailto:planning@calgarycommunities.com)

# FEDERATION OF CALGARY COMMUNITIES

## FALL 2011 GENERAL MEETING

SEPTEMBER 24, 2011

### **Purpose**

The objective of the Federation of Calgary Communities (Federation) General Meeting was to obtain input from community association representatives on the topic: *How can The City of Calgary best engage community associations in implementing the Municipal Development Plan and Calgary Transportation Plan?* Invitations were extended to all community associations (CAs) where presidents, vice presidents, planners, environmental, transportation and heritage representatives, as well as members of the Federation's Urban Planning Committee, were specifically invited. Thirty representatives attended and took part in the discussion. In addition, five facilitators from the Engage Unit at the City of Calgary, as well as five City staff were present at the meeting.

To support informed input on the topic, a list of questions was provided to participants in advance of the meeting. This report provides a summary of the meeting, in particular the areas of general agreement and key issues raised by participants. Responses to the individual questions are also summarized. Readers of this report who participated in the workshop may not see their specific words in this report. In instances where participant comments were duplicated or of the same general sentiment, the comments have been summarized to reflect the general intent. Effort has been taken to accurately reflect the input received. In addition, table facilitators used flip charts to record as much detail as possible and these flip charts are available upon request.

The topic of how best to engage community associations in implementing Plan It Calgary was suggested initially by the office of Mayor Naheed Nenshi. The Federation September General Meeting was considered an idea forum to facilitate a dialogue with community associations on this important topic. The Federation gratefully acknowledges the support of the Mayor's office in providing resources to engage a facilitator for this event. In addition, the Federation thanks The City of Calgary Engagement Unit for providing volunteer facilitators, and Land Use Planning and Policy for their presentation on the Municipal Development Plan and Calgary Transportation Plan.

### **Overall Outcome of Meeting**

A key finding and point of strong agreement is that community associations have a key role to play in supporting the planning process in general and particularly the implementation of Plan It Calgary and both the regional and local levels. This can occur in a variety of ways: from CAs being a full partner in the planning process, to CAs encouraging and facilitating collaborative efforts between themselves, The City and the development community, by ensuring processes are in place to engage communities, and by educating and raising awareness of Plan It Calgary at the community level. At a minimum, it was suggested that The City needs to do better job of engaging CAs, and needs to be respectful and mindful of processes that already exist in communities.

A second finding is the need for open and transparent dialogue between The City, CAs and the development community. The notion of a 'three legged stool' was put forward as the model for properly implementing Plan It Calgary, with the individual legs of the stool being community associations, The City and the development community. In this respect it was strongly suggested that great collaboration, cooperation and transparency is needed between these three key players.

Another key issue suggested by several participants is the general sense of mistrust and apprehension that exists between CAs and The City. In some respect, this situation is created by a perceived lack of transparency on planning issues, confusing and sometimes mixed messages from The City and developers, and a belief by some participants that The City does not take seriously the view of residents. It is important to note that at the meeting there was strong support and willingness among all participants for improving this situation by shifting to a culture that is collaborative and transparent, and in this regard participants provided several suggestions for improvement, which are elaborated upon further in this report.

**Summary of Responses to Question 1: *What do you think the role of community associations should be in implementing Plan It Calgary at the community level?***

Community Associations (CAs) provide an important channel or conduit through which the views of residents can be represented to both the development community and to The City. CAs have a mandate/responsibility to provide advice and feedback to The City on broad planning issues as well as on specific development applications and design issues. Another important role is the facilitation of linkages between communities and The City by developing and maintaining strong relationships with City staff.

With regards to Plan It Calgary, CAs can play a role in 'scaling down' the broader plan and introducing local aspects to citizens. In this regard, CAs suggested a dual role for themselves in raising awareness and educating residents: through workshops and community meetings they can help residents understand the potential impacts as well as the benefits of Plan It Calgary to the community, and they can also engage residents to identify local concerns and priorities for planning. In turn, CAs play a vital role in educating City staff about the history and unique characteristics of individual communities and in reflecting the overall position of their residents on Plan It Calgary issues. In general, participants felt that Plan It Calgary is an opportunity for CAs to play a greater stewardship role in influencing how their communities develop and evolve into the future. In this regard there is a desire to build stronger relationships and foster an environment of greater collaboration and transparency between CAs, The City and developers.

**Summary of Responses to Question 2: *How can formal mechanisms for implementing Plan It Calgary, such as Area Redevelopment Plans and other Local Area Plans be improved?***

Stronger and more consistent processes are needed for CA involvement in the Area Redevelopment Plan and Local Area Plan processes. Suggestions varied from CAs being a full partner in the ARP (Area Redevelopment Plan) and LAP (Local Area Plan) processes to The City leading the process but with CAs playing a role in redefining how the current process should be improved.

A suggestion put forward by some participants and which appeared to have strong support was that The City should consider the ERCB (Energy and Resource Conservation Board) application process, in particular it's pre-consultation and project planning requirements, as a model for how communities could be better engaged on planning issues. Aspects of the ERCB model (an on-line application process and compliance tracking system) could allow communities to track the progress of individual applications and, in turn, free up valuable time that CAs could use to focus on the broader Municipal Development Plan (MDP) vision. Another aspect of the ERCB model is a requirement for developers to carry out early pre-consultation on their broader project plans. This type of requirement, if adopted by The City, would allow communities to focus on 'pre-application' planning issues and to have a more proactive as opposed to a reactive role in addressing planning issues. Pre-consultation would also give developers an early heads-up and opportunity to learn about and respond proactively to community concerns.

A consistent concern voiced by participants is the low level of trust between CAs and The City. This lack of trust is caused in part because of the perception that individual applications are treated differently depending on the person handling the file, and in part because The City does not appear to take seriously what is said by residents during consultations on Area and Local development plan issues. As a result, CAs feel they have no option but to play a 'watch dog' role which, in turn, forces them to be reactive on planning issues. To improve this situation, participants suggested that a more consistent and transparent process is needed both with respect to how The City handles individual permits and with respect to the process for developing area redevelopment plans and local areas plans. A more consistent application of the planning by-laws and consistent approach to LAPs would enable CAs to know what to anticipate and to have a clear picture of the process for going forward. It would also free up valuable volunteer time to focus less on individual permits and to be more proactive with regard to putting forward a vision for their communities and the broader MDP process.

There is a strong desire for streamlined communications. CAs feel there are too many silos within The City which in turn creates multiple and inconsistent messages back to communities. This results in a lot of work for community members, and streamlined communications would help to create better understanding of planning issues and increase efficiencies.

City planning staff need to be more familiar with communities, especially their history and unique characteristics. Some participants stated that The City is often unaware of, or ignores, planning processes that are already in place in individual communities. One way to achieve greater familiarity and understanding of communities would be to assign planners to specific communities. A related suggestion is that The City should establish multi-disciplinary cross-department work groups (involving staff from Community Recreation, City planners and others) as a way of creating a culture of collaboration and breaking down silos between groups. These multi-disciplinary/cross-department groups would also serve to provide consistent messaging and stable points of contact between The City and CAs.

Other suggestions in response to this question were:

- As a matter of priority The City develop a plan and schedule for updating ARPs in priority areas
- Develop an engagement "tool box" and make it available to CAs to use to improve community and stakeholder engagement. The tool box would include 'best practices' in engagement and possibly a

roster of trained facilitators who would help ensure The City ‘hears what is said’ and that views of communities are not otherwise filtered or distorted.

- Encourage CA representatives and other interested residents to take the Partners in Planning courses.
- There needs to be more openness and willingness on the part of CAs to get all stakeholders involved.
- The City use more on-line tools (such as a dedicated page or link on Calgary.ca) to open up the compliance review process and where citizens could have access to compliance reports.

**Question 3: *What resources do community associations need to implement Plan It Calgary?***

Participants provided several suggestions for resources that would help them strengthen and improve their role in implementing Plan It Calgary. These include:

- Establishment of city wide committees such as the current ‘Presidents Council’ or area wide committees where CAs could work on common issues and potentially develop unified or regional strategies and responses to these issues. These broader processes could foster collaboration across communities, lead to greater understanding of planning impacts and opportunities, and also provide a forum where communities could share experiences and learn from each other on what worked or doesn’t work and where communities could showcase successes.
- The City or Federation developing and circulating to CAs a list of resources already available (such as the community liaison office, CNS, legal, other). It was felt that many resources are already available but CAs are either not aware of them or may not know how to tap into them.
- Communications tools to help CAs communicate with and educate their residents on how Plan It Calgary translates from big picture planning to implementation at the community level. It is felt that within communities there are different meanings and levels of understanding and tools are needed to help improve understanding and awareness. There is particular interest among participants in having resources and training to set up and use social media and other on-line tools such as:
  - Survey monkey or similar survey tools
  - Face Book and Twitter, with the proviso that social media tools may not be appropriate for all audiences. Some residents continue to prefer conventional methods such as newsletters and flyers and may not be technically savvy.
  - Establishing a dedicated page or link on Calgary.ca to educate, raise awareness and provide updates of Plan It Calgary issues.
- Financial resources, or a funding model, should be put in place to help CAs engage professional expertise such as legal or planning specialists, or to hire engagement facilitators. By improving the ability of CAs to tap into professional resources it is felt that CAs can provide more informed and earlier responses on planning issues. In this respect, it was suggested that The City address this need by developing a short-term and long-term plan for how these resources could be provided to communities.

**Question 4: *What mechanisms might a community association use to effectively engage residents and other parties (BRZs, schools, businesses, etc) on Plan It Calgary implementation?***

Community associations find it a continuous challenge to engage a broad and diverse range of citizens and other stakeholders on planning issues. In general residents tend to respond or get involved when they perceive that they are directly affected. A related consideration is the need to weigh quantity, as in the number of residents or stakeholders who come out to community meetings, and quality, or the degree to which those who participate are informed, engaged and motivated to volunteer over the longer term.

In considering mechanisms for effectively engaging a broad range of stakeholders, participants said two things: (1) don't fix what is already working/build on what we already are doing well, and (2) pay attention to the level of effort versus the potential impact with priority being given to processes that provide a big impact with a minimum of effort. A related and important issue is whether CAs, The City or developers should be responsible for initiating and funding engagement strategies, with some participants suggesting that no matter who 'owns' the process, CAs need to be fully engaged.

Community engagement processes need to be strengthened and put in place for when Plan It Calgary is rolled out at the community or area level, or for times when developers bring forward proposed plans. Participants suggested the following mechanisms as a means to better engage residents and other stakeholders.

- Increased use of community councils and inviting a broader range of stakeholders to participate. The South Shaganappi Council was pointed to as a model that could be emulated to address regional or common issues. In the South Shaganappi process 5 communities, the University of Calgary, Market Mall, Alberta Health, aldermen and others met regularly to develop a strategy to respond to regional planning concerns.
- The use of roundtables for specific issues, for instance a roundtable on heritage issues or environmental issues or on urban design issues.
- Communication tools identified under Question 3 (social media, websites etc) were further discussed. To reach a broader range of stakeholders and residents communications need to be audience specific (fit for purpose) and to engage different demographic groups such as youth and seniors. It was suggested by some that the Federation could play a role in developing or hosting communications tools (such as webmail) or in providing information or training on tools already available and on best practices. An annual report could be published in which accomplishments or best practices are described.
- It was noted that formal engagement mechanisms require lots of resources, both financial and in terms of volunteer hours, to set up and maintain and there may be times when smaller ad hoc processes are more appropriate.
- Develop an engagement strategy with a focus on how to engage people who don't otherwise participate. People in general need an issue to entice them to participate, but nevertheless, tools could be developed and put in place for times when these issues arise.

- In terms of a funding model or financial sources to develop engagement tools, some options that should be considered are the use of a percentage of casino profits or asking The City to provide resources for developing generic tools, which communities could adapt for their own use.

## **PARKING LOT**

During the course of the meeting, some items arose which were not central to the workshop topic, and these items were placed on a parking lot for further consideration if time permitted. These items were:

- A suggestion that there is a potential inherent conflict in the Plan It Calgary goals. For instance, a green compact city versus increased growth.
- Clarification of the role of City planners in reporting to communities and the role of Community Recreation Coordinators (CRCs) in planning processes, and whether there is regular communication between City planners and CRC.
- A suggestion that there is a role for the Federation in forming or bringing together community associations on shared issues.
- A suggestion that the integrity of Plan It Calgary is in doubt when it appears decisions are being made before the process is complete.
- The role of CAs in advocating for development initiatives that The City may consider are 'not appropriate'.

## **CLOSING SUMMARY**

Federation representatives thanked participants for their active participation and willingness to provide constructive input. The workshop report will be drafted and provided to participants for their review. In this regard, participants were cautioned that individual works may not find their way into the report, but that the report will in general capture the sentiment and intent of the responses and input provided. Workshop participants were invited to provide feedback on the draft report. The final completed report will be provided to The City and to Community Associations.