

Kitchen Table Conversation Report

Name of Group/Organization: CHBA Board of Directors

Conversation Topic: Efficient Land Use

Number of people in Conversation: 12

Date: September 20th, 2016

Describe your Conversation: The Conversation was organized by the Canadian Home Builders Association (CHBA) Lethbridge Region's CEO (who sits on the Efficient Land Use Community Liaison Group). Members of the Board of Directors gathered around a boardroom table at their office to participate in a conversation on Efficient Land Use and future growth in Lethbridge, in particular the pros and cons of increasing density and providing a variety of housing types. The CHBA Board of Directors has representation from across the growth and development sector including Land Development, Building, and Trades industries. The conversations were based on individual's perceptions/opinions and do not reflect the opinions of CHBA as an organization or the individual companies represented.

Conversations were overall very positive. Consensus was not always found and there were conversations based around points of agreement and disagreement. All in all the conversation highlighted need for the city to continue in learning from the past and plan for the future. Although there are many good things happening in growth and development today, there is still some need to provide more options for everyone and to take a look in the mirror at the way things are done today in regards to process, red tape, and the roles in development and housing.

Conversation 1: *How important is minimizing the City of Lethbridge's urban footprint? When you think about from an individual perspective or a community perspective does your view change?*

Community Viewpoint

- If we are concerned about the environment then it's important (e.g. the connection between inefficient land use, longer commuting times, which has an environmental impact from emissions).
- Financial/tax impacts of "sprawl" as infrastructure is very expensive
- Feel as if we are spreading out fairly quickly and this has an impact on social connections. Need to think about how to create "social hubs" – as we get larger, these are more important (e.g. this is happening well with the Crossings Development).
- Are these hubs accessible to people? E.g. Is Crossings accessible to people living in the S or N? Does it need to be?
- Need to balance social hubs with sprawl
- Does sprawl help or hinder the building industry? Helps by providing a continual supply of housing that needs to be built. Hinders as the impact on offsite levies causes costs to increase. Suggestion that just because we choose not to develop in a sprawl paradigm does not mean that housing does not need to be built. Just built in a different way.
- The current number of growth fronts is worrying as we have a number of unfinished neighbourhoods. What is the impact on bringing on more e.g. Waterbridge.

Individual Viewpoint

- Not everyone has the same lifestyle. There needs to be variety and options for everyone. There are likely some options that are currently undersupplied or not supplied at all. This should be the focus.
- I am "NIMBY" – it is real and will always be real. "I don't want multifamily around me"
- Some people would like downtown living e.g. young professionals

- If increasing density is the solution to reducing our urban footprint it needs to be done properly. Which means good management, homeowners association/neighbourhood associations, and quality materials and design.
- The right to choose!

Conversation 2: *What ways can a city support the minimization of its urban footprint? Where are their opportunities to focus development/redevelopment of higher densities?*

- Redevelopment should be focused to natural collection areas. Where are people already going for work, entertainment, or recreation?
- Near the hospital in the form of (smaller apartments, row housing, mixed use)
- Downtown (old Lethbridge Hotel Site and other derelict buildings)
- Close to existing schools to ensure they have longer lifecycles without having to rely on busing.
- Near places that have existing servicing and amenities (e.g. big south collection area around the Mayor Magrath Drive Commercial area – very large parking lots and large building footprints. Would it not make sense for Walmart to be 2-3 storeys with people living above it?)
- Question posed on whether Lethbridge has big enough developers to tackle the scale needed for a larger redevelopment project? Possibility of outside developers coming in. Also the need to realize what is in the realm of possibility for Lethbridge... we are not Calgary so skyscrapers are not what we are looking for.
- Row Housing, laneway housing, smaller front setbacks are all real possibilities to density in a Lethbridge context.

Conversation 3: *What can be done in Lethbridge to help make increases in density a reality?*

- Remove barriers
- Need to speed up rezoning process
- Incentives
- Innovative taxation – discourage dereliction/encourage what you want to see
- Permitting Process – too much head-butting – need to work together
- Affordability – expensive to build things properly
- Current barrier around having to give up so much land to the city for parks, schools, etc. Building neighbourhoods to the expected standard is getting more and more expensive.
- Creativity is being restricted by the City.
- Limit the number of growth fronts based on a completion % of new neighbourhoods or market absorption data
- Use City of Lethbridge Real Estate and Development (RELD) in a different capacity. They could be used more efficiently with some sort of redevelopment capacity. Feeling that the City is over competing in already saturated areas (westside low density).
- Innovative parking and alternative transportation options including transit – stop providing transit for everyone and provide it in specific locations with hubs/terminals – people will locate here to use it.
- As the City approaches 100,000 people more cost effective ways of delivering services utilizing the private sector need to be addressed. Providing some services directly using City forces may have been required when we were a much smaller City because they may not have been available at that time in the private sector. That's not the case now for a City of our size. A couple of illustrative examples of services provided by the City's own forces that could be far more cost effectively provided by the private sector include top lift paving and tie-in of commercial services. These services are abundant and very cost effective and yet the City still hires staff and owns equipment to provide these services.

- Re-evaluating the City's role in residential land development was touched on previously but also falls into under this cost effectiveness discussion. The City should only provide services where they are not sufficiently or cost effectively being provided in the private sector. Commercial land development meets this criteria, and also serves "a greater good" in the fact that serviced land is often a determining factor in attracting new businesses to our City....so there's an argument for the City to remain in it. Residential land development is well served by the private sector in this City and so the City should vacate it. Downtown re-development is not well served and should become the "greater good" refocus of the City Land group.
- The debate around recycling services needs to be looked at from this perspective as well. The City has a very well utilized and recently upgraded recycle collection centers. If the City is considering curb side pick up or recycle process facilities, it should look to the private sector to own and operate them. Municipalities that entered this space and made a small profit from it when commodity prices were high are vacating this space now and looking to privatise it as they've found it be a very expensive, money losing venture for tax payers now (Vancouver was recently in the news to do just that). If the City insists on curb side recycle pick up, put it out for private tender..... and think about doing the same with garbage pick up.
- Providing the many services that a growing City expects is a challenge. Doing it cost effectively has to include a new mindset that makes better use of taxpayer money by providing more of these services using the private sector.

Conversation 4: *Do you support the idea of a mix of housing types in Lethbridge? Are we achieving this?*

- There is no one size fits all. Each neighbourhood has a different mix of housing and amenities.
- Need to achieve density and variety of housing types as a City – not all neighbourhoods need to accommodate in the same ways. Not a blanket approach. Some neighbourhood will be all large single detached homes, where others should have higher density options as long as there is an overall net increase in density across the city. Forced inclusionary zoning (MGA changes) will not work. “affordable housing options” will be achieved organically if we encourage growth in the natural collection areas.
- Do not create demographic ghettos (i.e areas just for students or just for seniors)
- Density and housing diversity brings greater affordability
- There are areas where we have done this mix nicely – Henderson Lake and Varsity Village
- Need to keep collaboration going with the city – ongoing work on RLF district is a great example.

Conversation 5: *What housing are we currently missing in Lethbridge?*

- Immigrant supportive housing – specific need due to the size of their families and multi-generational nature
- Accessible housing – for seniors, one floor ranch style.