Kitchen Table Conversation Report

Name of Group/Organization: The staff who work at Economic Development Lethbridge (EDL)

Conversation Topic: Efficient Land Use

Number of people in Conversation: 9

Date: August 31st, 2016

Describe your Conversation: Organized by their Director of Business Development & Operations, members of Economic Development Lethbridge gathered around a boardroom table at **tec**connect to participate in a conversation on Efficient Land Use and future growth in Lethbridge. The conversations were based on individual's perceptions/opinions and do not reflect the opinions of Economic Development Lethbridge (EDL) as an organization.

Conversations were focused on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the various neighbourhood types in our city and evolved into a broader discussion on the urban footprint and how future urban growth should/could take place in the future. Consensus was not always found and there were conversations based around points of agreement and disagreement.

All in all the conversation highlighted the diversity of neighbourhoods within the city of Lethbridge and that every neighbourhood type has its own particular strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Further, the conversation demonstrated that not all individuals have the same view of what constitutes a strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat within a neighbourhood or the larger city.

Conversation 1: *Using the neighbourhood classifications list identify what neighbourhood type does each individual currently live in?*

There was diverse representation in respect to where individuals lived in the city. There was at least one from each of the neighbourhood classifications and one from Lethbridge County which added an interesting perspective to the conversations. Point of Interest: Not everyone identifies where they live with a neighbourhood name – some were surprised to hear that their neighborhood had an official name.
- Central Area = 1 individual
- Mature Area = 2 individuals
- Established Area = 3 individuals
- Developing Area = 1 individual
- County/Other = 1 individual

Conversation 2: *What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of each Neighbourhood type?*

Central Areas

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Location, close to the activity	Sometimes hard to find high quality rentals	Supports to help homeowners keep up properties e.g. financial incentives	Mixed Use needs to be done carefully. When done right it is positive, but could be a threat if not.
General attractiveness	Sad to see high potential lands going to low potential uses – 1st Ave and two story buildings versus taller structures with mixed use commercial and residential. Need to balance community benefit.	More centrally located increases in density close to Downtown.	Aging/fixed income homeowners may not be able to keep up properties without incentives.
Mix of uses (commercial, residential, non-profits)		More housing for "professionals" in the downtown. This is a niche that has not been met yet.	Sometimes neighbourhood associations can block redevelopment due to NIMBY.
Community – connected, pride, vibrancy (neighbourhood associations)		Need the right mix of people and amenities downtown.	Some heritage properties that are becoming dilapidated and potentially hindering valuable redevelopment.
Transportation access – car ownership not necessary (walkability)			

Mature/Established Areas (For the purposes of discussion mature and established were grouped together)

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Mature trees and aesthetics	Isolating certain developments that should be more central (e.g. seniors living in neighbourhoods without close amenities – doesn't make sense).	Need to make sure all residents have a neighbourhood that meets their unique needs.	As redevelopment occurs there can be a lack of cohesiveness. There is a need to be sensitive.
Community feel		Increased density that is sensitive to context	Growing out not up
Great type of neighbourhood for families.		Mixed use developments on former sites of large scale commercial (Sobeys and Safeway)	
Good balance. People to parks ratio seems the best. Keep this as is.			

Many homes have been well maintained. Little pockets of history have been preserved because of this.			
Diversity of housing types creates a sense of neighbourhood			

Developing Areas

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Starting to get commercial and residential integration	University students and traffic. Need for wider roads. Sometimes feel isolated from commercial (south of whoop up)	Need to create more interesting built environments	Although limiting growth fronts could see neighbourhoods developed faster it could create a construction nightmare if all concentrated.
Commercial developments are becoming more aesthetically pleasing	Westside has seemed unbalanced in terms of commercial development for years	Create more community pockets of activity (e.g. West Side Farmers Market – how can it become year round)	
Incorporation of great connected open space, park and pathway networks	Not able to walk to any grocery stores due to large arterial roadways splitting up neighbourhoods		
	Infrastructure (e.g. roads) takes a long time to catch up due to slow growth rate		

Conversation 3: *Provide one reason why you chose to live where you live?*

- *Walkability, maturity (trees), neighbourhood feel, lot size (big yard), isolation (county), my house design, good price, proximity to destinations.*

Conversation 4: *How important is minimizing the City of Lethbridge's urban footprint?. When you think about it from an individual perspective or a community perspective does your view change?*

The group's consensus was that from a community perspective, thinking about Lethbridge's urban footprint is important. There was also consensus that the key is to find appropriate ways of minimizing the footprint for the benefit of each resident and the city as a whole. Some would be very willing to reduce their urban footprint if the right opportunity came up (e.g. trade in their large suburban home for an upscale downtown condo with patio). If the suggestions/solutions to minimizing the footprint don't negatively affect the individual then there will be less push back from public, however NIMBY will always be a factor. Some interesting conversation points included:

- Some in the group would rather have a small or no yard and use nicely design public open spaces then having their own large private yard. These public spaces use our land more efficiently and allow more community interaction. Others preferred privacy and option for large yards. Balance and opportunity for both is key.
- Question to city planners – how does Lethbridge compare to other cities in regards to population and urban footprint. Response was that is what the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan's Efficient Land Use Strategy will help portray and understand.
- Depending on the stage of your life you have different needs from a home and neighbourhood. It is therefore important to have a variety so we can support everyone in all stages of their lives.
- There is a need to have an awareness campaign around the "true costs of growth"
- Minimizing the footprint will occur over a long period of time – incentives could help speed this up.

Conversation 5: *What is the most important argument for minimizing our urban footprint? Economic, Environmental, Social, Not Important?*
- Social evolution – single detached homes used to be (is) a status symbol – how do we change this? Or does it naturally change?
- Answers from people at different life stages will differ e.g. millennials are driving less, baby boomers are aging.
- Economic (Costs) are important to consider. Costs will always be the most likely to change people's ways.

Conversation 6: *All in the room support density… what suggestions do you have to ensure it is done sensitively?*
- Let restaurants sprawl out on sidewalks and streets – create places where people want to be. No problem with more people if those people are involved in productive or positive activities.
- Encourage/Incentivize the downtown
- People need to know what is possible – visualization
- Create more local/community atmosphere
- Predictable long term investments/incentives for people to trust and willingness to be flexible.

Conversation 7: *Do you support the idea of a mix of housing types (single detached, suites, duplexes, townhouses, apartments, etc.) in Lethbridge?*
- Overall Yes!
- Parking can be a problem if not properly designed for
- Redevelopment is an opportunity to create more diversity
- Education – need better disclosure of where in a neighbourhood it can take place through neighbourhood plans – transparency is key.
- Can we change out development timing in new neighbourhoods to help people visualize the full build out? Start with development that might be controversial such as higher densities. This might also speed up commercial development so it's not that last thing added to a neighbourhood.
- Need to improve the aesthetics of multi-family
- Lots of social gains that come with increased diversity of housing
- There is the need for stronger alignment between transit and planning. Diversity of housing should be located where there is a more frequent transit route.