Kitchen Table Conversation Report

Name of Group/Organization: Alberta Health Services

Conversation Topic: Efficient Land Use

Number of people in Conversation: 10

Date: September 12th, 2016

Describe your Conversation: During the morning of September 12, Lethbridge-based Alberta Health Services public and environmental health staff members joined City of Lethbridge Community Planners to talk about neighbourhood design and the responsibilities of individuals and the community in reducing the urban footprint of City. The conversation was facilitated by Perry Stein and Andrew Malcolm, from the City of Lethbridge and Sean Robinson, from Alberta Health Services.

There was general consensus among the group that there are number of benefits for reducing our urban footprint from

a variety of perspectives including economic, environmental, and social (including community and individual health). The biggest agreement was related to reducing urban sprawl or inefficient land use for the purposes of creating more connected, walkable, and healthy communities. There was also strong encouragement for the City to continue building its relationship and collaboration with Alberta Health Services for the benefit of all community members.

It became very clear through the conversation that AHS staff have experience with many of topics discussed, from a healthy community's standpoint. This perspective was shared with the City of Lethbridge staff, who similarly offered their thoughts from a Community Planning lens.

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 heavy representation from the Town of Coaldale which added an interesting perspective to the conversations. These individuals all work and make use of city infrastructure, amenities, and services every day but have decided not to call Lethbridge home. **Point of Interest:** Reasoning behind living in Coaldale was largely based around the ability to have a larger lot, the price of the lots, and the ability to decide who you want to build with.

- Central Area = 1 individual
- Mature Area = 1 individual
- Established Area = 1 individual
- Developing Area = 3 individuals
- County/Other = 4 individuals

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

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Aesthetics including mature trees, yard sizes, diversity in design	Parking challenges (may be perception)	More small grocery stores	One-way streets
Established traffic patterns that have more access points to the neighbourhood due to grid pattern	Derelict homes/areas	Redevelopment of derelict homes	Greater parking challenges with increase in density
Central to many services/amenities	Increasing crime/drug-use/safety issues. Often these are prevalent everywhere but their severity seems to be greater in central areas	More higher end condos	"You can drive anywhere in 15min" mentality might make redevelopment unrealistic
Often more local businesses not big box or large corporations	Narrow streets in some areas	Ability to establish some certainty including architectural controls through Redevelopment Plans	Aging infrastructure
Walkability – ability to walk to fulfill daily needs	Food deserts with few shopping options		Absentee or bad landlords/landowners sitting on property for long time looking for redevelopment

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

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Mature trees (very beneficial for mental health)	Concerns around water shortages and high water intensity landscaping.	High potential for redevelopment but needs to be done properly	Parking
Not one big maze of cul-de-sacs. For the most part are a good combination of curvilinear and grid	Access for the neighbourhoods like Paradise Canyon	Ability to establish some certainty including architectural controls through Redevelopment Plans	Losing neighbourhood aesthetics with poor housing design
Good access to Downtown as well as more suburban amenities (shopping centres)	Asbestos era of development	Large lots = increase in density	Aging infrastructure
Established parks and schools	Illegal suites. Easiest homes to convert but when illegal there are safety issues		
More of an ecosystem as houses are on larger lots more spread out with mature vegetation			

Developing Areas

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Well-designed stormwater management	New areas have very narrow streets that get congested with parking and snow removal	Providing service and amenities in a more balanced (earlier) way	Neighbourhood longevity because of a lack of character and minimum design/building codes – "the neighbourhoods are as good as they will ever be"
Affordability (generally)	Housing is very tight together and cookie cutter homes – no diversity	Diversify housing choices	Limited potential for redevelopment in 40+ years' time
Lots of "family" streets	Feel trapped sometimes due to curvilinear streets and the location of neighbourhoods on the edge		
Amenities and services are now arriving	Noise and lack of privacy largely associated with materials and build style		
"Can now stay on the westside and get everything I need"			

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 agreed that when you think about the city's urban footprint from an individual and community perspective you get a different feeling – a conflicting dilemma. At a community level it is very important, but many acknowledged they feel some sort of guilt that their individual lifestyle is not sustainable and is contributing to sprawl or inefficient land use but that they don't necessarily want to change their ways. Many see the value of living in a higher density mixed-use environment but the current options are not appealing. The point that most Southern Albertan's have never lived in a Downtown/Urban Environment and that any sort of strategy will require a shift in mindset.
- Higher density areas have more potential to be crowded and noisy.
- Design is extremely important for high density – any opportunity where higher density is built but not in good design we set ourselves back.
- Perception that social/negative issues tend to follow density
- Some individuals are willing to give up privacy (e.g. a large backyard) for higher density and greater public park space.
- Many know that efficient land use is the right thing to do as a community.
- Balance between density and design. Need to provide choice to people. Balance density and small lot sizes with parks and pathways.