

Walter, Penny

From: City Council
Subject: FW: Email - Request to Speak - Peggy Schmeiser - Housing Accelerator Fund Proposed Zoning Amendments - CK 750-1
Attachments: Letter to Council June 18.docx

From: Web NoReply <web-noreply@saskatoon.ca>
Sent: Tuesday, June 18, 2024 11:36 AM
To: City Council <City.Council@saskatoon.ca>
Subject: Email - Request to Speak - Peggy Schmeiser - Housing Accelerator Fund Proposed Zoning Amendments - CK 750-1

--- Replies to this email will go to [REDACTED] ---

Submitted on Tuesday, June 18, 2024 - 11:26

Submitted by user: [REDACTED]

Submitted values are:

I have read and understand the above statements.: Yes

I do not want my comments placed on a public agenda. They will be shared with members of Council through their online repository.: No

I only want my comments shared with the Mayor or my Ward Councillor.: No

Date: Tuesday, June 18, 2024

To: His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

Pronouns: She/her/hers

First Name: Peggy

Last Name: Schmeiser

Phone Number : [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

I live outside of Saskatoon: No

Saskatoon Address and Ward:

Address: [REDACTED] Kirk Crescent

Ward: Ward 8

What do you wish to do ?: Request to Speak

If speaking will you be attending in person or remotely: In person

What meeting do you wish to speak/submit comments ? (if known):: June 27 City Council Public Hearing

What agenda item do you wish to comment on ?: All agenda items pertaining to proposed amendment items including those pertaining to OCP amendments, 4-dwelling units per lot, 4-storey residential buildings, and zoning regulations for residential care homes

Comments:

I wish to speak with City Council at the June 27th Public Hearing regarding the four amendment proposals relating to the zoning bylaw and other amendments pertaining to the HAF application.

Will you be submitting a video to be vetted prior to council meeting?: No

11 Kirk Crescent
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7H 3B1

June 17, 2024

Saskatoon City Council
222 3rd Ave North
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7K 0J5

Dear Mayor Clark and Councillors,

Over the last few weeks, increasing numbers of Saskatoon residents have expressed strong concerns and opposition to City Council and municipal administrators about the proposed zoning amendments in the context of the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF). I am writing to also express my strong opposition to the proposed changes and to urge City Council to reject the four amendments to the Official Community Plan and Zoning Bylaw being proposed to meet the conditions of the HAF funding at its public hearing scheduled on June 27th.

While remaining steadfastly committed to the goals of finding urgent and effective solutions to challenges relating to housing and transit, citizens have outlined innumerable problems associated with the city's current plans to accept funding under the federal HAF program for affordable housing initiatives that also include imposed requirements for wide-sweeping and far-reaching land-use and zoning changes that are ultimately ill-suited and detrimental to our municipality. With more considered thought and compromise, many of us believe that the city's priority to ensure affordable and accessible housing for more residents could be accomplished in ways that would not undermine and destroy the very character and planning that up until now, have defined our strengths as a city and made us a desirable home to current and future residents.

Until recently, residents have largely been unaware of the proposed amendments and I suspect the majority still are. As public knowledge grows however, so too, it appears, does the opposition. According to its own 2023 "What We Heard Report," City administration admittedly developed its HAF application in consultation with homebuilders and others that stood to financially gain from the agreement without a community association nor resident per se being included. A City card was distributed to households in early 2024 inviting them to consult a website without details of the implications for homeowners who bought into an existing zoning area that could be gone, we've now been told, based on a negotiation between our mayor's office and a federal minister. Compare this with the level of communication and details residents received directly from the City over the last year around the black-bin swap, proposed stormwater ponds, garbage pick-up and construction disruptions and many of us are wondering why the biggest proposed changes to personal property and neighbourhoods were not better communicated to help residents inform themselves and be a part of decision-making process. Zoning information presented in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* on June 8, 2024 that included colour-coded maps with indistinguishable and inconsistent shades of purple throughout various parts of the city only exacerbated the confusion many residents are feeling with respect to the proposed changes. Approximately 80-90% of residents on two culturally significant streets, Kirk Crescent and Weir Crescent in Greystone Heights, where four storey buildings would be permitted beside single two-storey dwellings and bungalows, have signed a petition opposing the zoning amendments. Moreover, at a city information session in June,

many attendees approached a nearby table organized by a community association to voice their vehement opposition to the plans.

The challenges posed by the current plan are numerous and include the following:

- Blanket zoning changes that would grant right-to-build provisions for developers to construct four dwellings per lot throughout the city, along with four-story buildings in so-called “corridor residential” areas that encompass some of Saskatoon’s most well-established neighbourhoods and historic and culturally significant streets violate the desires and expectations of property owners who purchased homes in zoning areas not foreseen nor designed for that sort of densification. A range of concerns have been raised about the impacts of the intrusion of such large-scale development in well-established residential neighbourhoods and on adjacent properties including with respect to traffic, parking, already strained city services and infrastructure, safety for children and seniors, stormwater drainage, adjacent foundations, local biodiversity and energy-saving initiatives.
- Associated plans to remove required onsite parking in development projects raise innumerable questions about the extensive space that would be needed on streets to accommodate the inevitable increase in vehicles and disposal bins. Little consideration appears to have been given to the need for plug-in access for electric and hybrid vehicles, along with the location and risks of all the extension cords residents would need to run over sidewalks out to the street to plug in block heaters.
- “Right-to-build” provisions remove any recourse for a municipality and its residents to intervene on construction projects that could threaten the existing fabric of communities and culturally or historically significant streets. Granting unilateral and unequivocal authority to the building sector to determine - without challenge nor parameters other than the National Building Code - the nature and number of buildings and dwelling units that will exist according to various designated land use areas in our city is more than concerning. Not even our public sector has enjoyed such authority, with independent bodies and appeal mechanisms legislated up until now to safeguard the interests of local residents and the general public.
- The city has suggested that ‘massing mitigation’ step-backs and guidelines will help address concerns about the cultural and visual integrity of well-established neighbourhoods, while proposing no design requirements and no infill regulations within the Corridor Growth Area. Meanwhile, Saskatoon’s recent report on neighbourhood character protection disappointingly suggests that little can be done with regards to character integrity, concluding that while “the City has planning tools that can be used to impact some elements of neighbourhood character...they can be costly and onerous to develop and implement. In the context of HAF they contradict the intent of removing barriers to the development of more housing.”
- With the new housing levy just announced by the City to cover land costs for needed high schools and the new leisure centre, it is worrying that no information is available to explain how the city, and ultimately taxpayers, will also cover the potentially enormous costs of needed infrastructure upgrades for housing development, along with the Bus Rapid Transit system and additionally needed schools and leisure facilities. Those costs would fall on resident taxpayers while developers benefit from incentives.

- The amendments are discriminatory in creating property divisions around development and value among owners in the same neighbourhood and on adjacent properties. They also incentivize the destruction of existing houses by developers in rezoned areas where they would not have to assume infrastructure costs as they would in new housing development areas.

Saskatoon is facing an urgent housing crisis, as are other Canadian cities. But evidently, the current Housing Accelerator Fund is raising concerns about its requirements and appropriateness for addressing municipal affordable housing challenges. Other cities, like London and Halifax, have reached potentially more favourable terms or agreements that do not necessarily require rezoning and the Federal Minister has publicly acknowledged and welcomed a “made in Halifax plan” that does not permit four storeys as-of-right. Oakville recently voted down four-dwelling units, with the Mayor there saying that he didn’t want to risk their neighbourhood livability for the small amount of the grant. Windsor’s Mayor equally refused to “compromise [its] neighbourhoods and to do away with fair public consultation with...residents in exchange for uncertain funding that will be tied to sacrificing the makeup of [its] communities.” The Municipality of Leamington opted not to submit a HAF application due to infrastructure concerns indicating that that “permitting [four units] as of right across the board would be irresponsible and in some circumstances negligent.” Mississauga Council voted down a four-dwelling proposal that was controversially overturned by then Mayor and now Ontario Liberal leader. In Calgary, nearly three hundred people have just gone to court to have the sweeping rezoning decision by their city council under the HAF reviewed.

Amidst this controversy, Saskatoon must carefully weigh the opportunities and immense toll of its own proposed HAF agreement and rezoning changes. There are numerous alternative actions that can respond to urgent needs for housing while also respecting our city’s character and size, including,

- Renegotiating the federal agreement and its problematic provisions including around four storey five dwelling plus buildings on residential streets in established neighbourhoods;
- Reconsidering right-to-build rezoning that ignores the interests of existing residents who bought into specific zones;
- Focusing on financial incentives for property owners (not just builders) to develop the three dwelling units per lot that have already been approved;
- Provide protections for well-established neighbourhoods so as to avoid the negative impacts of right-to-build provisions;
- Focus on strategies to improve the transit service along existing commercial routes to reduce reliance on parking lots and with a view to converting current large parking lots to higher density mixed use and residential;
- Concentrate large multi storey construction in existing and underutilized high density zoned areas or corridors;
- Establishing design requirements that match existing neighbourhood scale and character;

- Prioritizing infill and construction on vacant lots, unused city-owned lots and already existing or new greenfield sites where transit is planned and infrastructure costs would be assumed by developers;
- Working with post-secondary institutions and residents on housing for students and families.

The promise of the city's original pre-HAF planning processes lay in the creation of affordable housing and better transportation options that could together support municipal growth and vibrancy. But any strategy that overlooks the social, economic, cultural, and health risks to residents for approximately \$10-13M/year in limited 3-4 year short-term funding at the demonstrable long-term expense of our city, is not a strong foundation on which to build. Saskatoon residents deserve a better deal to address urgent housing and transportation needs. Together we can build a plan that benefits from wider support across our city and better suits existing and future home owners. We can address our pressing housing and transportation needs alongside, and not in opposition to, caring deeply about our neighbourhoods and the well-being of our residents.

Ensuring a made-in-Saskatoon, not made-in Ottawa, solution does not negate nor undermine efforts to respond urgently to pressing housing needs. I urge City Council to oppose the current amendments and support housing where it is most needed while pursuing solutions that build on and enhance, not diminish, the quality and strengths of our city and neighbourhoods.

Sincerely,
Peggy Schmeiser, PhD