

Business in Calgary (Calgary, AB)				Order/Commande
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Date 31.05.2009	Circ. 33500	Page 8	1 / 3	



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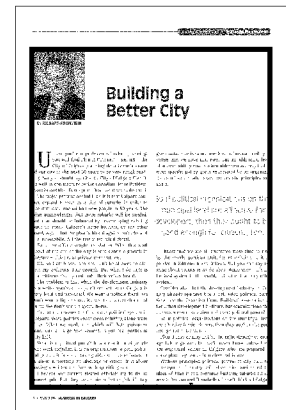
Building a Better City

Unless you're a professor of urban planning, you will find Plan It ("Planet" – get it!) – the City of Calgary planning department's vision of our city in the next 50 years to be very tough reading. But you should try. (Google City of Calgary Plan It, as well as commentary by the [Canadian Home Builders' Association/Urban Development Institute](#) at [www.crba.com](#).)

The major premise behind Plan It is that Calgary cannot expand forever as a city of suburbs in order to accommodate one million new people in 50 years. The plan acknowledges that more suburbs will be needed, but that should be balanced by redeveloping existing built-up areas. Calgary's home builders, on the other hand, argue that the plan is biased against suburbs and the automobile. All the rest is technical detail.

So let me offer a simple translation: What this is all about at the end of the day is who controls growth in Calgary – citizens or private corporations.

OK, so I am biased and shouldn't be allowed to dictate my esthetics. Fair enough. But what I do urge is that citizens rise up and make their voices heard.



The problem is that while the development industry is a well-organized lobby, citizen action in Calgary is very local and parochial. We want a pothole fixed. We don't want a liquor store. We want our street cleared of snow. We don't want a group home.

One of the reasons for this is our political system in Calgary. Ward politics encourages thinking along ward lines. What we need, and which will help galvanize more city-at-large involvement, is political parties at city hall.

What is a political party? It is a coalition of people who work together. It is an organization to gain political power. It is about taking sides on public issues. It is about expressing an ideology or vision. It is about having a written platform with specific goals.

I believe our current elected officials try to do an honest job. But they could do a better job if they were guided by a collective vision that flows from the grassroots. Elections are one level of accountability to voters and we have that now. But an additional level of accountability comes when aldermen are required to meet specific policy goals enunciated by an organized group of voters who agree on certain principles and goals.

So if political organizations on the municipal level are effective for developers, then they ought to be good enough for citizens, too.

I know that we are all frustrated from time to time by the overly partisan attitudes of existing political parties in Edmonton and Ottawa. But you can say the same about parties as we do about democracy – it's not the best system in the world, but better than any other system.

Consider also that the development industry in Calgary already operates like a well-oiled political party. What are the Canadian Home Builders' Association or the Urban Development Institute, but organizations that express a common vision and exert political power?

So if political organizations on the municipal level are effective for developers, then they ought to be good enough for citizens, too.

Plan It may or may not be the right strategy to manage future growth. But we'll never know unless there are organized voices in Calgary who are prepared to make planning issues into electoral issues.

Without principled political parties at city hall, the development industry will slice, dice and shred the ideas of Plan It and continue building suburbs all the way to Vulcan and Drumheller. I don't think all Calgarians want that. 