

Tuesday April 1, 2008

Office of the Mayor
Office of the Councillors
2nd Floor, City Hall
1 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, AB T5J 2R7

To Whom It May Concern::

On behalf of the Old Strathcona Foundation and our Board of Directors, we would like to express our concerns over the proposed South Downtown Approaches Strategic Planning Study. While we acknowledge that the Walterdale Bridge requires replacement, we feel that the impact of several of the components leading up to the bridge from the south would cause a great detriment to the community of Old Strathcona.

The concerns that we would like to see addressed are:

- Widening Gateway Boulevard to four lanes north of Whyte Avenue would have significant impact to an area that has recently been designated a Provincial Historic Site. The intersection at Gateway Boulevard and Whyte Avenue represents valuable history in terms of its relationship to the train station and the pedestrians that it served over 100 years ago and continues to serve today. The railway station is one of the most valuable heritage assets in this area and is located within the Provincial Historic Site boundaries. Any impact to this asset needs to be considered.
- Our pedestrian access concerns continue as we move north along Gateway. There are two key access points for the 10 000 people that come to the Old Strathcona Farmers' Market every Saturday using 83rd Avenue and the crosswalk just north of that at 84th Avenue. The Old Strathcona Foundation was a founder of this market and it is an institution that will be celebrating its 25th year of bringing quality products to the citizens of Edmonton. This market has been recognized as one of the finest in Western Canada and every Saturday it serves as a pedestrian mall in the core of Old Strathcona. Adjacent to the market is another heritage asset and pedestrian destination found in McIntyre Park. Any impediment to access to both of these locations is a concern.
- This area is also the scene of the Edmonton International Fringe Festival. This is the second largest Fringe Festival in the world with a large portion of the venues being housed on the east side of Gateway Boulevard. This area becomes an outdoor pedestrian venue for two weeks every summer with extremely high volumes of public attendance. The atmosphere that contributes to this festival (that was also founded in part by the Old Strathcona Foundation) includes walking the site and the impact to pedestrians attending this world class event would be insurmountable.
- As we move north on Gateway Boulevard, we note that there are two other major pedestrian routes with heavy usage at 86th Avenue and Saskatchewan Drive. There are many residents that live east of Gateway and east of 99th Street who walk or ride bikes to the core area of Old Strathcona. A major freeway could effectively bisect this well connected neighbourhood. Both the Armoury and the park located north of 85th Avenue are areas of potential for commercial and cultural growth. We desire a plan that considers increasing future pedestrian links and allows for the promotion of heritage growth.

- Saskatchewan Drive is currently a major pedestrian and bicycle link. We are concerned that the current plan would result in something similar to Fort Hill Road which is no longer a pedestrian friendly route. There are many area residents who live in apartments and condominiums along Saskatchewan Drive who use this as their pedestrian connection between home and Old Strathcona and further west to the University and the LRT. There are also many other residents south and west of this area who use this as their connection to the river valley for jogging, bicycling, picnics, etc. They do not drive to this destination; they walk, run, and take their bikes. Any deterrent to this access would have a negative impact.
- This is an area that encourages and promotes active living and is a destination that is often arrived at on foot. We are concerned that barriers to pedestrian access or any changes to impede current usage of these key pedestrian access points would be detrimental to promoting healthy lifestyles.
- Whyte Avenue is a major conduit to the University of Alberta, the LRT system, the U of A Hospital, and the Jubilee Auditorium for anyone traveling from the east and southeast of the city. We are concerned about the impact of a major freeway to this connection.
- There are approximately 600 businesses in Old Strathcona, many of them small and independently owned. The financial contributions to the City of Edmonton are significant and their concerns and feedback should also be taken into consideration.
- Noise and emissions would increase and cause further environmental damage to an area that recognizes the growing importance of reducing our footprint on the environment.
- Our final and key point is to reiterate that this proposed plan is adjacent to the newly designated Provincial Historic Site. The impact of this plan could effectively cut this significant historic area off from the rest of the community of Old Strathcona. The significance of our heritage was recognized by the Province and the core area of Old Strathcona was designated an official Provincial Historic Site – one of only two in Alberta. The Old Strathcona Foundation has begun working with the City of Edmonton on two key projects, the Heritage Inventory of East Whyte and the Strathcona Junction Study. Our goal is to ensure that the periphery of Old Strathcona supports its heritage and to cut through the middle of this would negate our efforts.

The Old Strathcona Foundation cannot support the current proposal. We require a plan that not only preserves but enhances the pedestrian access to this area as well as one that recognizes the heritage and integrity of this community.

The mandate of the Old Strathcona Foundation has always been the preservation and restoration of the historical assets of the area, complimented by programs to revive cultural amenities to make Old Strathcona a place where people would want to live and where businesses would prosper. This community is Edmonton's second downtown. Sacrificing one will not necessarily provide an equivalent benefit to the other. The potential effects of this proposal as it stands are far reaching and will not only affect Old Strathcona and our surrounding communities but everyone who chooses this as a destination.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to call our office at 433-5866.

Sincerely,

Henry Maisonneuve
President, Board of Directors

Karen Tabor
Executive Director