

Varsity Community Association Background & Statistics - 2024

General Comments

Varsity was developed from the 1960's up to the 2000's. Here is a summary of the development history with help from Wikipedia: Varsity Acres is the oldest part of Varsity and was developed in the 1960s with a street pattern of folded grids, rear lanes, and the occasional cul-de-sac. Varsity Village was developed in the late 60s and early 70s. Unique in Calgary, the planning of Varsity Village was based on the Radburn Plan which adapted the ideas of the English Garden City to an increasingly motorized context, developing a street hierarchy that segregated through traffic from local traffic and automotive traffic from pedestrian traffic. The developers of Varsity Village used as many cul-de-sacs as possible, and eliminated rear lanes in favour of pedestrian pathways that connected to parks behind the houses (and not adjacent to streets). The developers' intent was to create a park-like setting for users of the rear walkways, and in most parts of Varsity where tall private fences have not been built, this intent has been maintained. The pathways are heavily used by pedestrians throughout the community.

Market Mall, one of Calgary's major regional malls, is located in Varsity Village, along with most of the neighbourhood's multi-family dwellings. Varsity Estates was developed in the 70s, 80s, and 90s and is an upscale area made up of single-detached dwellings and townhouses without rear lanes, and much of it lies adjacent to Bowmont Natural Park or the Silver Springs Golf and Country Club (a private club which was established in 1971). Varsity Ridge Terrace was developed in the 2000's. The Brentwood LRT Station opened in 1990 and the Dalhousie LRT Station opened in 2003. The Groves of Varsity which consists of 5 apartment buildings close to the Dalhousie LRT Station was completed in 2015. In 2017 the neighbouring mall, Crowchild Square, was rezoned for a 12 storey mixed use building, however, construction has not yet commenced.

Varsity is a vibrant, unique, and beautiful community with a wide diversity of land uses including low, medium, and high density residential, regional and neighbourhood commercial, light industrial, research, office, 3 seniors' apartments (2 of which are subsidized for low income individuals), a fire hall, affordable and attainable housing projects, 6 schools, two LRT stations, Vecova, and the University Innovation Quarter (formerly known as the University Research Park). UIQ is located in the east part of Varsity by the Brentwood LRT station and the U of C Properties Group is currently working on an application to revitalize and redevelop the 76 acre site to high density mixed use development. The University of Calgary, the Alberta Children's Hospital, University District, and the community of Montgomery are located to the south of Varsity. To the southwest is Bowmont Natural Environment Park and Dale Hodges Park. Varsity residents place a high value on open, green spaces and the extensive mature urban tree canopy.

Varsity has a diverse population of over 12,000 as shown by the statistics from the 2021 Census published on the City's website:

Housing tenure:

Owner Households – 62% (Varsity), 69% (City Average)
Renter Households – 38% (Varsity), 31% (City Average)

Subsidized rental housing:

Varsity – 10%, City Average – 9 %

Median household income of private households:

Varsity Average – \$90,000, City Average – \$98,000

Dwellings by Structure Type

Dwellings by Structure Type	Varsity	Calgary
Single Detached House	45%	55%
Semi-Detached House	2%	6%
Row House	12%	10%
Apartment in Flat or Duplex	2%	4%
Apartment in Buildings less than 5 storeys	28%	16%
Apartment in Buildings 5+ storeys	11%	8%

Mode of Transportation for Employed labour force 15 years & over in private households

Mode of Transportation to Work	Varsity	Calgary
Driver – car, truck, or van	69%	77%
Passenger – car, truck, or van	6%	6%
Public Transit	9%	9%
Walked	8%	4%
Bicycle	4%	1%
Other Methods	4%	3%

These statistics demonstrate that Varsity has a very diverse population of all income levels as well as a higher percentage of rental accommodation and subsidized housing than the City average. We have significantly fewer single family homes and more medium and high density housing than the City average. The pattern of development respects the Municipal Development Plan which calls for density around activity nodes and corridors. In addition to University District, Varsity is very close to other medium and high density projects, some of which are still under construction, such as Northland Mall, south Dalhousie multi-family area, University City in Brentwood, and Stadium Shopping Centre in University Heights.

The City has not provided a clear target for desired density in each community in the Local Area Plan and we believe Varsity should receive credit for the greater than average density that already exists in the community. We believe in increasing density

where appropriate at activity nodes and corridors but do not support a patchwork of medium and high density development throughout the community that would overwhelm and disrupt the low density areas and the continuity of our pedestrian connections. It is important to have a sensitive transition from low density to high density and to preserve the special character of this community.

There are some areas that would be appropriate for multi-family housing but at a maximum height of 3 storeys to be compatible with neighbouring buildings. A good example of this is the existing 3 storey Attainable Housing building on Varsity Drive west of Shaganappi Trail. The LAP (Local Area Plan) only identifies areas of medium density as being a minimum of 4 storeys which reduces the flexibility for different types of medium density housing. We would recommend medium density be identified as 3+ storeys instead of 4+ storeys in the LAP. Overshadowing and massing by multiple storey buildings can have a significant and harmful impact to quality of life for residents. Including the reduced amount of light, overshadowing can block solar panels, increase heating loads, and reduce cooling loads of affected properties. Overshadowing by buildings has a very different and less desirable impact than overshadowing caused by trees. In fact, deciduous trees provide the best of all worlds – shade in the warmer months and no shade in the colder months. Even where overshadowing does not occur, height and massing can have a negative visual impact on neighbours and destroy sightlines. Multi-storey buildings can also cause privacy issues for nearby homes. The interrelationship between a building and its surroundings is critical and it is important that multiple storey buildings not overwhelm buildings in close proximity.

Since fewer than half of our residential units are low density (45% - mostly single family homes), it is crucial to protect these highly valued areas and the wide diversity of housing we currently enjoy. These homes are very desirable for those individuals or families who enjoy gardening and want to have yards for their children and pets. Varsity is experiencing an increase in families with small children as long-time homeowners move to other types of housing (much of which is available in our own community). Our schools are flourishing and our parks, pathways, and playgrounds are well utilized. There are areas in the community where increased density is suitable but we do not want to lose any open areas, parks, or low density homes. We also want to protect the valuable urban tree canopy that is an integral part of the community.

Even with increased use of alternative modes of transportation, some areas of the community would have great difficulty handling increased traffic generation from multi-storey buildings especially with the cumulative impact of increased density due to the proposed amendments to the Land Use Bylaw such as blanket upzoning to include R-CG as part of the base residential land use district. The proposal to eliminate minimum parking requirements for all residential development is also a concern in areas where there is limited on-street parking. The LAP does not address the impact of increased development on roads and other city infrastructure which is a concern.