

VARSITY CIVIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT

July 2025

Rowhouse Applications in Varsity

Applications for rowhouses in Varsity include 4607 Valiant Drive (12 dwelling units), 4804 Voyageur Drive (8 units), and 4816 Voyageur Drive (8 units). An application to rezone to H-GO (rowhouse with more units and height) has been made for 132 Varsity Estates Place NW. We will be opposing this rezoning due to its inappropriate location. If you wish to view the plans for these sites, go to <https://developmentmap.calgary.ca/>.

Civic Election

The civic election will be held on Monday, October 20, 2025. We have scheduled a Ward 1 Councillor Election Forum for October 6, 2025 at the Varsity Community Centre.

Restrictive Covenants

Restrictive Covenants are an agreement between neighbours that limit the type of development that can be built on their properties. More information can be obtained at www.varsityrestrictivecovenant.com.

Playgrounds

This has been on hold due to other pressing issues but I'm hoping to get the committee activated within the next few months.

For information regarding the Civic Affairs Committee, please contact JoAnne Atkins, Director of Civic Affairs, at joanneatkins@shaw.ca. There may be delays in responding to email inquiries. If you do not hear back from me within a few days, please email again.

Urban Tree Canopy

Here is an article written by Mary Anne Schleinich, a Varsity resident on The Great Value of Calgary's Urban Canopy.

Have you thought about how trees and greenery contribute to neighbourhoods? I notice the workmen across the street have no space around the new home that's going in, and at lunch they sit on the median under a tree where it's pleasant and cool. On your walks, you might have noticed some gaping holes where trees and every blade of green have been removed to fill in with newer homes. Did you know that only a quarter of Calgary trees are on city land? That means 75% of Calgary trees are under the protection of residents. Last year, award winning local,

Associated Engineering, partnered with City of Calgary to value those trees. They determined replacement value to be \$6.9 billion, with an annual service value of \$2.5 billion.

Why do urban trees need protection? They do increase property value, but more importantly, they reduce the need for air conditioning, protect from hail and wind, remove pollutants, store water and carbon, and put less stress on the electric grid. Calgary has a tough time keeping its trees because of chinooks, high elevation and few native species. In 1913, William Reader, a visionary teacher and environmentalist, became a city parks superintendent and within 30 yrs he transformed bare prairie into lush areas. The area around his home is now Reader Park and he lined many streets with trees. The lushly treed areas of Bowness Park, Memorial Dr, Sunnyside, and Mount Royal are all due to intentional efforts of such visionaries. Although Calgary's current goal is to double its tree canopy in three decades, our efforts haven't kept up with big events such as floods, erosion and summer snowstorms.

Will the city's upzoning also be an event harmful to trees? Is it time to rethink the build first, plant second approach? What if we built around trees of enormous value and preserved greenery, both below and above? What if we designed treed sidewalks and cycling paths to be community connections among homes and services?

We don't realize it, but the effect of green is much more than visual beauty and property values. A tree is a plumbing aquifer from roots to crown. It's a sieve that removes benzenes and emissions and fills the air with oxygen and uncountable medicinal properties that improve mental health and give protection from city heat with its symptoms of cardiac, kidney and cognitive dysfunction. Healthy trees and soil store water underground, which then transpires into cooler air. Healthy trees and soil are also much less flammable. To fireproof a neighbourhood, Didi Pershouse advises we harden the houses and soften the land.

Soil health is possibly even more underappreciated than Calgary trees and not less important. Its substrate is sand, clay and silt. Growing up on the edge of the Sahara Desert and then moving to Calgary, it's all I knew. Only recently have I come to appreciate that poor soil is like flour while healthy soil is like bread. Which would you rather eat? Which holds water and nutrition? I make a wonderful no-knead bread with three ingredients: flour, water and yeast. Alone, flour and water is a gluey mess. Adding yeast, it turns into something wonderful. Similarly, when soil contains living plants (best being native and diverse), it becomes healthy and holds more air and water, preventing erosion. Healthy soil stabilizes the entire ecological system for trees, plants, and wildlife. Significantly, it insulates and regulates local temperatures! No wonder the workers want to sit on the median for lunch.

You might be astonished to know that healthy soils and plants are a major source of cooling for the planet. They are especially important in cities that are mostly made of impenetrable surfaces that reflect heat into the environment on hot days. Ground heat can vary by as much as 20° C to 80° C degrees when comparing spot temperatures of bare ground to small green patches. The local atmosphere registers these significant differences. Parks, street trees and rain gardens are 3.8°C, 4.5° C and 4.8° C cooler respectively!

Cities resilient to climate change protect from fire, conserve water, and protect residents from heat. Canada does not tally heat deaths, but we know 600 died in Vancouver during a heat dome. Consider that a tree's cooling effect is likened to two air conditioners running full time. There is much we can do to improve our resilience.

Calgarians are enthusiastic and the city's tree planting program was fully subscribed. The Calgary Climate Hub has a forest planting program where they plant and grow tiny forests many times faster than a single tree grows. We can all take notice of the beauty of natural grasses on uncut boulevards. Homeowners can let lawns grow twice as high to double their cooling and boost soil health. We can pay more attention to ground cover, the beauty and diversity of native plants. We can join a compost club and create healthy soil. The City of Calgary is helping to establish a rain garden where I saw the workers lunch – it will be an area that holds water instead of filling the gutter during rainstorms.

Each of us can look for ways to protect trees, especially the old growth, which provide heights and widths of shade, water management, and air improvements. We can learn more about Varsity's civic affairs work and local area plans. Civic elections are prime time to raise these issues with candidates. Thoughtful bylaws could bring protection to the old growth that has been entrusted to us by past visionaries and caring residents. We can look for champion leaders, support them, and work to keep our urban treasure.