

Important Update Regarding Bylaw, Zoning, Planning and Related Advocacy Initiatives

(An opinion and information piece by Steven Lakey, MBA, CMC)

As our community grapples with the management of change and development and the City heads into an election on October 20, I greatly appreciate the opportunity provided by the West Jasper Sherwood Community League Board to bring some matters that I believe to be of great importance to the attention to residents. In what is the first attempt to address extremely complicated and controversial issues, it is my hope that what I have written, below, will begin to help you to be informed, to stimulate 'intelligent and productive' dialogue and to make decisions as to how you can help shape the future of our community **and** the role and position(s) that you would like the community league and board to play. This piece addresses advocacy; and the role that you and the board should/could play to represent the interests of residents.

As background, (www.efcl.org/about/history/) community leagues in Edmonton were formed in the early 1900s with one of the objectives being of providing a common voice on issues of concern. This worked well for many years and the West Jasper Sherwood league was very active in Civic affairs. Curiously, this seemed to change at about the time of the beginning of the overhaul of Edmonton's zoning Bylaws and the development of the new District and City Plans. All of a sudden, the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues and individual leagues were 'muzzled' and pressured by the City to 'not make waves'. Please reference the accompanying "*Tough questions for the EFCL*" for an informative analysis of certain factors and the consultative process, leading up to the new zoning Bylaw and District policies. An important advocacy function was lost for years.

In my view, the advocacy function needs to be reclaimed with support by the WJS board but the question is 'how' and 'what'. Below, I highlight two possible models.

Voices of West Jasper Sherwood ('Voices') and Its Future

As an advocacy group, 'Voices' was formed in the Summer of 2024 (without support) in an attempt to inform residents about, to collect perspectives and, as time went on and views clarified, to oppose a large six-storey apartment development on 153 St, which could have been the first of many in the core of WJS under the City's new zoning Bylaws and policies. The efforts of Voices, representing some 300 opposed residents, were met with mixed success. While the larger apartment was stopped, a very dense 38 resident row house development was approved on 153 St on April 7, 2025. Shortly after the 153 St approval, an even larger rezoning application has now been advanced on 155 St and may need the attention of residents at a future Public Hearing.

Sadly, the leadership of Voices is no longer able to carry the burden, especially without recognition and resourcing by the community league. The burden was increased substantially in that, while interest was strong in early days, involvement in planning meetings declined and speaking participation in the rezoning Public Hearing was minimal at best. Perhaps, people were 'burned out' from years of time consuming and energy sapping zoning battles over the past 15 years, and thought 'why bother' with a Council and Administration holding such rigid perspectives?

Voices filled a role that some would argue had been absent in WJS for a number of years; and others would argue that, with the changes that WJS faces with the new City zoning and planning policies and procedures the need for advocacy has never been greater. With what is at stake, **the future of Voices (or a similar body) has 'come to a head' and, in my view, needs to be addressed in the near future.** What do you want the community league to do? What are you prepared to do to advocate for your own interests, if you felt as though you had a chance?

The Launch of Edmonton Neighbourhoods United (ENU)

(www.edmontonneighbourhoodsunited.com)

If you are dissatisfied with the current situation, a new body to explore that might complement or fill the void of 'Voices' is Edmonton Neighbourhoods United (ENU).

ENU was formed in March of 2025 by citizens of a number of communities who were concerned about the new zoning Bylaws, the City's densification efforts and lack of accountability, limited consultation, lack of control and loss of community-based input. ENU is not against infill and densification – and recognizes the pressures faced by the City of Edmonton – but members believe that there are better and fairer ways for Edmonton to grow.

The goals of ENU can be divided into two phases:

- Phase 1 (Immediate Action) – rescind new district plans and policies and amend zoning Bylaw 20001 to reinstate key protections such as the Mature Neighbourhood Overlay, limit densification to four residences per lot, and reduce building height to reflect community scale.
- Phase 2 (next 2 to 3 years) – rethink zoning and land use through genuine neighbourhood engagement and independent urban planning expertise, redo District plans, and redo and, where appropriate, update the City Plan using targeted Area Redevelopment Plans based on 'reality'.

ENU could have some advantage over Voices in that being city-wide, it might have better 'fire power' to take on the City and Administration and related interest groups than one small and under-resourced group from one community league.

More about the organization and its goals and objectives, possibly including achieving a change in Council following the municipal election on October 20, sources of information and opportunities to share ideas may be found on the website. After you have had a chance for reflection, please share your thoughts about ENU with the WJS Community League Board of Directors and your friends and neighbours.

Finally, for now, please send a note to ENU.WJS@gmail.com for connecting on some other ways to help out and for your thoughts to be shared including:

- The **Priority Growth Area Public Hearing on May 20**. If you have not already done so, I would encourage you to study the refined plans for the 156 St and Stony Plain Road corridors which include **significant** additional densification (Speakers Required).
- The **one-year review of the rezoning Bylaws**, which will start on **June 3** (Speakers Required).
- Consider signing the petition that has been launched recently on the ENU website.
- Requesting a lawn sign (proofs and pricing - ~ \$10 - to be available shortly).
- Your interest in a community information meeting.
- Skills that you have or roles that you could play.

Conclusion

I have attempted to provide information, options and views on an important topic. I hope that the forum can be continued and that other individuals will step up with views ideas on others in the coming months.