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March 15, 2024

Urban Planning Committee
City of Edmonton
1 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, AB T5J 4R7

Re: March 19, 2024, Urban Planning Committee - Item 7.2 – “Options to Address Surface Parking Lots in Centre City and The Quarters - Recommended Regulatory Options”

UDI – Edmonton Metro is a non-profit organization that represents more than 180+ companies in the real estate development industry. Our members build in all parts of the city, inclusive of the downtown, and collectively contribute millions of dollars to the City of Edmonton through their residential, commercial, and industrial developments.

In 2022, our industry association identified downtown vibrancy as one of its top strategic priorities. We share Council and Administration’s vision set out in The City Plan – that calls for a more compact and efficient land use within the City Centre. In the past year alone, we have advocated for a range of strategies and opportunities to support the core – from addressing taxation policy, to housing growth, to actions that can improve the pedestrian experience.

As Administration details, while the Capital City Downtown Plan prohibited the development of new surface parking lots in 2010, its policies did not satisfactorily address lots that were already in existence. Over time, this may have led to unintended consequences like preventing parking lot owners from obtaining a development permit to operate their land legally for that specified use, or to encourage beautification and safety in their designs.

We are encouraged by Administration’s report and recommendation for a two-phased implementation process to ensure non-compliant parking lots are aligned with The City Plan’s vision for Centre City and the Capital City Downtown Plan, and the acknowledgment that this process should be transparent, equitable, and reasonable in its application for all landowners operating in this space.

For example, the costs associated with obtaining a development permit and requiring increased site enhancements for temporary parking should be thoughtfully staged so as to not serve as an impediment to future redevelopment or adversely impact businesses and their viability.

Underinvestment in site improvements coupled with the inability to obtain Development Permits to legally operate parking facilities may not realize positive impacts for downtown attractiveness for the period of time where the lots exist prior to redevelopment. On the other hand, overly strenuous requirements that increase investment requirements up front for an ultimately temporary use could have the unintended consequence of prolonging the development process unnecessarily as upgrade costs are recuperated. A fine balance must be struck, and our industry is ready and willing to work on this collaboratively.

We wish to thank Administration for the level of engagement offered in the development of this report and its recommendations and request that continued consultation is a priority moving forward.

Revitalizing the downtown is a challenge that invites all types of stakeholders to think creatively yet practically. Our industry and members remain committed to supporting Council and Administration in these endeavors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kalen Anderson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kalen Anderson, RPP/MCIP
Chief Executive Officer, UDI-EM

Copy: Office of the City Clerk
Andre Corbould, City Manager, City of Edmonton
Kim Petrin, Deputy City Manager, Urban Planning and Economy
Travis Pawlyk, a/ Branch Manager, Development Services
Jenn Brown, Chair of UDI-EM Nodes and Corridors Committee