These years were crucial to Calgary’s spatial development. First, the attitudes towards outward growth were entrenched. In spite of the implications, the City, with developer support, endorsed the merits of gross physical expansion. Second, the City and developers established their formal relationship, one that was not to change for the next 20 years and beyond. This relationship was one of tightening expectations, and although it showed the City in its most dominant mode, there were missed opportunities. Policies respecting green space and low cost housing revealed a reluctance to broach new ground. Finally, the official attitude towards zoning demonstrates the City’s adherence to tradition and its unwillingness to exercise available options. This helped more than hurt the developers.

The period began on an auspicious note. In July 1954 the provincial government struck a Royal Commission to investigate the problems associated with metropolitan growth in Calgary and Edmonton. It was a long and exhausting experience for the five commissioners. Headed by Dr. George Frederick McNally, a retired Deputy Minister of Education, the Commission held 34 formal sittings over 112 days, involving 89 witnesses and 286 briefs. The 21-volume Report was released to the public in early 1956. For the City, the findings and recommendations of the McNally Commission were largely vindications of paths already chosen.
They also emerged through time to legitimize both private enterprise and gross physical expansion.

The McNally Commission

The City’s brief was presented to the McNally Commission in December 1954 after having been postponed from October in order to allow for additional preparation. It was a reasoned document based on “the orderly and progressive development of the City as an economic unit.” According to the brief, controlled planning strategies were necessary to achieve stable land values, equitable economic development, and the integration and provision of transportation, welfare, and health services. The brief also stressed the City’s inequitable financial burdens and called for remedial measures, either in the form of additional provincial monies or access to alternative revenue sources.  

Central to the City’s argument was a request for annexation. In asking for extensive additions, the City justified its arguments primarily in terms of utilities issues. According to the City, annexation was one way of dealing with what it called the “staggering cost of utilities facilities due to backlog of demand.” The City’s solution under annexation was a system of graded utilities services via differentiated taxation. It also called for the annexation of the fringe communities of Forest Lawn, Montgomery, and Bowness. The appeal for annexation was supported in briefs by the Calgary Real Estate Board and by developers anxious to develop subdivisions on the edges of the city.

The City’s interests were well served when the Commission released its recommendations in February 1956. Amalgamation with Forest Lawn, Montgomery, and Bowness was recommended, as were annexations to increase the city’s area from 40 to 104.77 square miles. In its recommendations, the Commission mirrored the City’s brief. Concluding that the city’s needs for the next 15 years would be met in the south and southeast, the Commission noted: “It is here that boundaries should be extended to accommodate a population of 300,000.” The commissioners evinced less enthusiasm over expansion to the north, west, and east, citing cost and topography as formidable barriers to growth.

Both the City and the developers were pleased with two other recommendations. The Commission liked the prepayment option for local improvements, and further urged an increase in the proportion borne by the property owner. The Report endorsed the growing trend towards shifting the financial burden for utilities installations to the private
developer, and agreed that the economics of development favoured larger-scale operations. The Commission further recommended that the Province pay half the costs incurred in amalgamating with the three fringe communities.

Through time, the McNally Commission was seen by City officials in groundbreaking terms, and was frequently referenced as a precedent. For example, City officials up to the present day have referred to the McNally Report as the genesis of the uni-city idea, and by implication the later policies of gross expansion. It was not. The uni-city concept predated the Commission. The McNally Commission simply reaffirmed it, and by so doing lent legitimacy to the policies that supported it.

Calgary's success in achieving a uni-city status stands in sharp contrast to other Canadian cities where a metropolitan profile is more evident. Part of the reason lies in geography. For years the area around the city was ranching country. Peripheral urban development did not occur at the same rate as say, Edmonton, where more intensive farming was prevalent. The main reason, however, was linked to historical precedent and the expansive euphoria associated with the pre–World War I expansion boom. The settlements of Bowness and Montgomery on the city's western limits were linked by street railway to the city, while the village of Forest Lawn also developed close commuter links. Following the collapse of the boom they attracted residents who commuted to their city jobs. An abhorrence of the parasitical fringe community was soon evident in civic thought. By the time the McNally Commission convened, and in the face of dramatic population increases in these three communities, the City was firmly convinced that the Bowness, Montgomery, and Forest Lawn experience should never reoccur.

In recommending substantial annexation, the McNally Commission wanted to avoid potential jurisdictional issues while providing for sufficient land to allow a comprehensive approach to long-range planning. It also wanted to do away with “piecemeal” annexations that created instability in surrounding municipalities. A City Planning Department Report released a few months later gave indication of how annexation could be integrated into long-range planning. In reference to sewer trunk placements, the document acknowledged the haphazard practices that had led to uneven development within the city. According to the report the result had been “a most undesirable position” in which over 38 percent of the city's area was undeveloped. The Report concluded that “the present area of Calgary is too great to be utilized by the existing population,” and recommended that land in any future annexations be loosely
zoned with respect to time of development. The 1958 Zoning Bylaw took the intent of these recommendations but widened them to allow maximum discretion. Outlying land was zoned agricultural, taxed as such, and restricted to a minimum of 20 acres. Provision was made for priority areas for residential subdivision. The result was mutually beneficial to both the City and the developers. The Zoning Bylaw, with its provision for Agriculture (Future Residential), ensured planning flexibility. The retention of large agricultural holdings and low attendant taxes enabled owners to stay on their land, and encouraged developers to secure options to purchase.

Annexations

Between 1956 and 1961 a series of annexations swelled Calgary's size from 40 to 151 square miles. All were consistent with the recommendations of the McNally Commission and all were strongly influenced by the interests of property. The 1956 and 1957 annexations clearly showed the City and the developers hand in glove. Though the developers' role in the 1961 annexation was not as direct, the interests of property were present.

Difficulties with annexation arose following the release of the McNally Report mainly because the Commission had no powers of implementation. In fact the Province was quick to step in, appointing an Interim Development Board "to monitor development that would in the opinion of the Board materially affect or prejudice the carrying out of the recommendations of the Commission." One early manifestation was the refusal by the Province to assume half the costs, estimated conservatively at $8.09 million, of amalgamating the City with Forest Lawn, Montgomery, and Bowness. The City declined to bear the entire expense, indicating debt repayments of over a million dollars a year for 20 years and an annual loss of $10,000 for the Transit Department. Amalgamation was thus allowed to lapse for another five years when property issues imposed a new imperative.

The City lobbied for annexation by appealing to urgency. In early 1956, Commissioner Ivor Strong wrote to McNally Commission member Ivan Robison. In referring to the half a dozen requests for land outside the city limits, Strong argued that in order to satisfy the needs of these developers, land to the south needed to be annexed by 1957. Strong went much further a month later. In a long letter to A.W. Morrison, Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs, Strong pushed hard for annexation by stressing two factors, both concerning utilities. The first was the cost
advantage in installing utilities outside the city as opposed to those undeveloped areas within the corporate limits. The second referred to the ongoing extension of utilities trunks to the areas of greatest demand in the south and west. In May it was noted that 900 building sites in Kingsland, Wildwood, Glendale, and Glamorgan were all approved contingent on annexation to the city. Then in August, the City asked the Chair of the Metropolitan Interim Development Board to grant a special order allowing Kelwood and Art Sullivan, already in possession of 200 mortgages, to go ahead with development in Glendale Meadows.

Faced with this pressure, the Province granted two annexations, both on application by the City in 1956 and 1957. Each was consistent with the McNally Commission recommendations. In 1956 a half-mile-wide strip to the west was added between 45th and 53rd Streets and from the Bow River to 26th Avenue South. In June 1957 the long-awaited south annexation was finally achieved. Comprising approximately 25 square miles and extending south to Anderson Road from the Glamorgan-Lakeview area to Willow Park, the addition increased the city’s area to...
74.4 square miles. A denial of a strip to the east was not pivotal to developer interests but did anticipate the pending battle with the Town of Forest Lawn. Following these annexations, development advanced southwards on three fronts. In the west it continued from Glendale to Richmond and Glamorgan. Another thrust progressed from Meadowlark Park to Bel Aire, Mayfair, Kingsland, Chinook Park, Haysboro and Southwood. Farther east, Kelwood negotiated the purchase of the Earl of Egmont Estate plus an option on 18 sections of land from Burns Ranch at $1,600 an acre, and soon began another southward thrust that would take development from Fairview to Acadia and Willow Park.

Private sector influence was a major factor in securing these annexations. First the influential Calgary House Builders Association, wanting to protect the interests of the small builders, argued that all development should occur only within the city limits. Kelwood pushed hard for both annexations particularly in the south. The Glendale experience had convinced the corporation of the danger of building beyond the city boundaries. It was just too risky to go ahead unilaterally with construction
and utilities installations and hope that annexation and eligible recompense from the City would follow. Also, while Kelwood was willing to install and bear the expense of utilities in its subdivisions, it needed the City's cooperation in providing the necessary sewer trunks and the main water lines. In other words, development had to occur not only within the city but in areas where utilities installations were feasible and cost-effective. Kelwood knew it had reached its limit in the west. It had ventured farther west into Glendale Meadows and Westgate, but aside from the Wildwood subdivision to the north, this was as far as utilities feasibility allowed. This left the south, and it was here that Kelwood chose to stake its future. In pressing for annexation in February 1957 Kelwood told the City that development should follow lines of economic efficiency, and argued that its subdivisions of Kingsland and Mayfair were superior to those located anywhere else. It is interesting that the Board of Public Utilities' tacit approval for annexation came only six days after Kelwood's strong letter.

The next major annexation occurred in 1961, when over 70 square miles were added to the city, virtually doubling its size. Unlike earlier annexations, this one did not go through without intense controversy. Opposition arose in the south and the east, marking for the first time a concerted effort to thwart the City's expansion ambitions. Developers played a lesser role in this annexation because their needs had been adequately met in 1957. However, though less clamorous than in the earlier annexations, they were still more than bystanders.

The pressure for further expansion came from several directions. One was related to population projections, an accepted basis for annexation applications. By the late 1950s, these projections were becoming more accurate. In a 1959 commissioned study, University of Alberta Geographer Peter Smith employed a wide variety of indicators to project a population of 516,962 by 1976 (470,043 actual). Civic administrators, always mindful of the impact of rapid growth, viewed these figures with some disquiet and as a rationale for physical expansion, especially in light of the fact that southward residential development was approaching the city boundary at Anderson Road.

A second reason was likely related to advice offered by the C.M.H.C. In early March, 1958, the City made inquiries to the Corporation respecting land values in various parts of the city. In a carefully worded reply, the C.M.H.C. offered several opinions, two of which were crucial not only for annexation but for subsequent development. In referring specifically to the subdivision of Belfast and surrounding areas in the northeast, the
C.M.H.C. noted that they were suitable for “residential construction of a certain type,” but that they did not offer amenities likely to attract the wealthier classes, who “depend to a large extent on social significance.” The Corporation went on to stress that “the North Eastern section of the City is naturally limited to low to medium cost developments,” and that the City would find it “equitable to fulfill the needs at these levels and for our part we could possibly reflect such end values in our mortgage appraisals.” The message was clear. Mortgage monies in the north and northeast were to be based on lower rental values than in the south and southwest, which the C.M.H.C. referred to as areas of “higher class or exclusive construction.” Thus, in a single correspondence, the C.M.H.C. laid out Calgary’s differentiated socio-economic residential patterns, a preference that had profound implications for subsequent development. The impact was not lost on the City. Annexation to the north assumed a new significance. By 1959 the City had begun assembling land in the Forest Lawn area. By the early 1960s development in the north was approximating that in the south, and by the summer of 1962 actually exceeded it.

Another pressure involved emotion and politics. Though it was related to the McNally recommendations on amalgamation, it specifically concerned the ambitious little town of Forest Lawn directly east of the city limits. As discussed earlier, Forest Lawn was a historic community of 4,000 with close commuter links to Calgary. However, it had also demonstrated its ambitions for independence through two successful annexation applications in 1950 and 1952 when it acquired parcels of land to the southwest close to Calgary’s eastern boundary. That the Town was prepared to fight for its survival was without question. Anticipating the McNally Commission recommendations, the town’s mayoralty election for 1956 was fought on the amalgamation issue, with the anti-annexation candidate receiving 81 percent of the popular vote. The Town had also successfully opposed the City’s annexation bid in 1957 with reference to a strip of land running north/south along the eastern boundary.

The central issue was not whether or not Calgary would annex the Town of Forest Lawn. The City had little if any interest in the town itself. In fact, it was estimated that amalgamation with Forest Lawn would add $2.39 million to the debenture debt and cost another $3.78 million in School Board and capital expenditures. Rather, it was the land between them. Traversed by railways and main highways, the land was highly prized by both parties for industrial purposes. The City made its move in early 1958 when it applied to the Public Utilities Board to annex the land in question. The Town countered by announcing a $1.93 million
development plan “for the continued sound and rapid development of the town as a vigorous independent community that may some day grow into Calgary's proud and valued twin sister.” Supported by several developer interests, the Town proceeded with an annexation bid of its own. On January 20, 1960 the City responded by indicating the support of the Municipal Districts of Foothills and Rocky View. Six months later, it made formal application for annexation of the contested eastern strip plus land south of Fish Creek, several sections to the north, and a block of land in the northwest corridor. Much later it added a bid for 270 acres in the municipality of Montgomery.

As the battle with Forest Lawn moved towards its climax in 1961, developer and land interests made their voices heard. The Forest Lawn bid was supported by three developer-based organizations that had either acquired land or had options to buy in the annexed areas. They were outnumbered, however, by those who saw more merit in the City's case. Anticipating higher prices, this group comprised the vast majority of landowners in an area covering 50 whole and partial sections. City developers also expressed interest in developing residential subdivisions to serve the potential industrial areas.

In marked contrast to the earlier annexation, developers were not crucial in the bid to extend the city farther south, although it was contended that several large landholders in the annexed area stood to reap heavy profits when their land was needed. Fish Creek just beyond the present boundary of Anderson Road was a natural barrier. The City gave two reasons for its bid for moving its boundaries south beyond the creek. One focused on Midnapore, a small community whose origins predated Calgary's. Planners were worried that it could develop into a fringe community. A second reason concerned the new sewage treatment plant at Fish Creek. It was outside the city limits and needed to be brought in. Also in order to offset the cost of its construction plus the $2 million necessary to build a four-mile trunk, a greater population density in the south was necessary. In part, the need for a taxation base to pay for high cost facilities always furnished a rationale for outward growth. In this case, possible alternatives did not seem to matter. According to Kent Lyle, a leading business figure in real estate, the costs of the Fish Creek plant could be met by encouraging higher densities north of Anderson Road. The only opposition to annexation to the south came from residents in the present Canyon Meadows area who feared potential tax increases. City officials easily deflected their concerns by pointing out that Midnapore residents were in favour of annexation.
The bid to secure several sections in the north and northwest was due to developer influence. According to a 1958 report, previously recommended capital expenditures were revised following a meeting with developers who offered to contribute to a reservoir that would enable water to be brought to areas above the 3,750-foot contour, including another 1,550 acres outside the city limits. The report further mentioned the distinct possibility of annexation. The subsequent annexation bid for land north of Thorncliffe Heights comprising most of Nose Hill and eastward was also a response to pressure from the North Hill Businessmen’s Association. The Association maintained that the north was being neglected and asked for development of seven sections to raise the area’s population by 54,000. A petition signed by 54 business proprietors and presented to the City in April 1959 called for the annexation of four sections presently beyond the corporate limits. The City obliged. The annexation bid included the aforementioned sections plus two and a half to the immediate east.

The City’s interest in annexing 270 acres of land in the municipality of the Town of Montgomery was ostensibly linked with a desire to expand the subdivision of University Heights and to make land available to the university. It had already bought 60 acres for $180,000 and wanted the other 210 to consolidate the annexation bid. This land in question was owned by Standard Gravel and Surfacing of Canada Ltd. with an option to purchase given to Moraine Investment Corporation Ltd. Predictably, both supported the annexation bid. The towns of Montgomery and Bowness opposed it.

The Board of Public Utilities heard the annexation application on September 8, 1961. In addition to the towns and municipalities involved, two development companies and a representative of landowners in the Forest Lawn area were present. The annexation of part of Montgomery was rejected. In recognizing the strenuous efforts the town had made to improve conditions, the Board sided with the principles of local autonomy. The Town of Forest Lawn was not so fortunate. The Board recognized the essence of the issue: “The essential question … is not as to whether or not Calgary should be allowed to annex Forest Lawn but rather which municipality should be allowed to annex and develop the territory common to both applications.” Observing that Calgary was better suited to this end, the Board recommended annexation of the disputed land, and added the town of Forest Lawn as well on the grounds that it had no future otherwise. The other annexations to the north, south and northwest were accepted without opposition.
The City ultimately annexed the Town of Montgomery in August 1963. In approving the application initiated by the Town through resolution and petition, and supported by the City, the Local Authorities Board described the community of 5,200 as a logical extension of Calgary’s residential area. In the years following the McNally Commission the Town had installed its own utilities that had been connected to the City before the annexation was processed. The City had done well. In October 1963, The Town of Bowness voted 1003 to 397 for annexation to the City. Though not overly happy with the financial implications, the City did not oppose the bid. The application was approved in July 1964 and became effective the following month. With the annexation of Bowness and its population of 10,000, the City had expanded its area to 154 square miles.

The way was now cleared for a sustained period of suburban growth within a large urban area. As the developers would later argue, the land supply was sufficient to promote healthy competition, and all benefited. It is misleading to suggest that the developers had achieved a mighty victory. The City had gotten what it wanted as well.

Developer Dialogue

The main feature of this period was the formalization of the City-Developer Agreements which defined and specified subdivision development. The rules and procedures that were established during this period provided a template that remained largely unchanged in substance. Within this context, the pragmatics of “give and take” ensured a balance that ultimately favoured neither. However, issues associated with green space and low cost housing revealed some limitations in “the politics of pragmatics.”

The Developer Agreements

The terms of the 1955 contract with developers obliged them to supply sanitary, sewer, and water services to all properties within the subdivision. Sidewalks, curbs, and gutter were built on frontages at developer expense as well as roads 32 feet in width and gravelled to a depth of 12 inches. The maintenance period was set at twelve months. The City remained responsible for storm sewers and for laying the water mains, valves, hydrants, and fittings, including leads to the boundary of the development. The City further contracted itself to pay for oversize, and to assume a 50 percent share of utilities installations on boundaries or where only one side of the street served the subdivision.
The development agreements were subject to an eight-step process beginning with a Statement of Intent submitted to the Technical Planning Board and continuing through the submission, circulation, modification, and final approval of Tentative Plans. The signing of the agreement was followed by its registration with the provincial government and the ultimate go-ahead by the City. The tentative plans contained information related to lot, road, and school placements together with details on utilities rights of way and easements if necessary. They focussed on specific subdivisions and were not integrated with future developments over a wide area.

Over the next five years, the contracts became more binding on the developers. The maintenance period in some instances was increased to two years. Road construction obligations were widened. The time frame and procedures for plan submission and approval were specified. A $300 per lot performance bond was necessary, as was a payment of $80 per lot for inspection purposes. However, contractual obligations in three other areas showed more graphically the City's intention to distance itself further from the costs of residential development.

The first concerned flankage costs. Local improvement levies had previously been on frontages only. Curb and gutter and sidewalk construction on side streets between blocks were the responsibility of the City. The City was loath to put these flankage costs under local improvement, believing it would add substantially to the cost of a lot and present difficulties in determining exactly who would be levied. By 1955, the City was feeling the financial strain. Side streets in many older areas of the city were without curb and gutter and sidewalks. By early 1956, the City had only constructed 35 percent of flankage requirements in Thorncliffe Heights at a cost of over $42,000. The move to have developers assume flankage costs was probably inspired by Kelwood's precedent when it expended $22,000 in Glendale even though the City had no money to repay the company. By 1957 the matter was settled in the City's favour. The developers' contract in that year stated that the developer was responsible for constructing “sidewalks, curbs and gutters on all streets and roads.”

The second significant change occurred in the fall of 1957 and involved financing the installation and extensions of storm sewers and water mains. Hitherto they had been the City's responsibility, chargeable to general revenues. They also involved heavy expense. For example, rather than install storm sewers at a cost of $292,000, the City paid Art Sullivan $135,200 for his 52 acres of undeveloped land in the Glendale Meadows.
subdivision. On October 28, 1957, Commissioner Dudley Batchelor recommended to Council that developers assume these costs, which had amounted to $1.5 million in 1956. Batchelor admitted that the price of a lot would increase by $150 and thus affect mortgage payments, but added that the C.M.H.C.'s lending policies would be accommodating. The C.M.H.C., he later argued, was prepared to advance 70 percent of the extra cost, a figure that would translate into a modest increase of $3 per month in mortgage payments. On Batchelor's recommendation Council adopted the new policy but applied it to undeveloped areas only.

The new policy had significant implications. First, the large developers had no problem with absorbing the total costs of utilities. In fact, in order to speed up development, some developers like Kelwood had been installing storm sewers on a voluntary basis and simply charging the cost to homeowners anyway. A greater level of control meant that bigger developments could be planned to a higher level of efficiency with respect to cost and time. The same was not true for the smaller developers. In a special meeting between the developers and the City Commissioners on November 28, 1957, the Calgary House Builders Association argued that the extra up-front costs would force the smaller developer out of business. Echoing the feelings of several present, John McLeod of Spyhill pointed out that the average homeowner would be greatly prejudiced. To McLeod, anyone earning Calgary's average income of $3,815 per annum was "practically eliminated from the picture." The Commissioners, however, paid little heed to this opposition. In giving their reasons for supporting the new policy, they neatly encapsulated a philosophy that would reign supreme for the next 20 years. To them, the present policy was unacceptable since it restricted growth to the extent of the City's ability to provide services. On the other hand, the new policy, by allowing developers free rein, allowed large-scale development to "go ahead unhindered."

The final change effected by the City related to acreage assessments. Essentially they were one-time levies against the civic costs of constructing such water and sewer facilities as filtrations systems, pumping stations, and waste treatment plants as well as trunks and water mains. For storm and sanitary sewers, the fringe areas of the city were divided into drainage zones, and for water into pressure zones. Using current market values, the cost of developing and servicing the entire area contained by these various zones was established. The total acreage was divided into this figure to arrive at a per acre assessment which was then applied to the area until it was fully developed. Acreage assessment for sanitary sewers presented more inequity than for storm sewers since it included
Part One: 1945–1962

History of Annexation to 1961

- 1884-1900
- 1901-1910
- 1911-1920
- 1921-1960
- 1961
- Annexed 1910, Withdrawn 1923, Re-annexed 1954

Source: City of Calgary Archives, Cartographer: Robin Poitras
major trunks that serviced both developed and undeveloped areas plus the cost of individual facilities like treatment plans which served a particular region of the city. Thus acreage assessments varied from area to area and over time from year to year.53

The idea of acreage assessments was first mooted in late 1957 to developers in the south part of the city and was associated with the costs of the pending Fish Creek Waste Treatment Plant, and the main sewer trunk serving it.54 Doubtless realizing the inevitable, the developers were not indisposed to the suggestion. At a meeting held in July 1958, the details were hammered out and an acreage assessment of $175 per acre was established.55 In 1959 a further acreage assessment was applied towards the $1.5 million cost of upgrading the Glenmore Reservoir filtration system. In 1960 an acreage assessment was applied to the north. While the acreage assessment principle had become civic policy in 1958, it did not become part of the development agreement until 1961.

The Urban Development Institute (U.D.I.) strongly resisted acreage assessments and in 1959 and 1960 fought for their removal. First, it questioned the City's legal power to levy the assessment. The Institute also maintained that the developers who had originally accepted the levy were not under the Institute's auspices; that the 1958 agreement was not supposed to set a precedent, and that subsequent dialogue with the City in 1959 had been unsatisfactory. In an oft-repeated argument, the U.D.I. contended that acreage assessments were a form of double tax on homeowners in new areas. It claimed that the installations they affected were a benefit to the entire city and not just the area being developed. Arguing that the City's policy of "either pay now or wait until we are ready to install" was tantamount to "blackmail," the U.D.I. urged resistance.56 Carma announced in the fall of 1960 that it not going to pay any acreage assessment.57 Then in December 1960, U.D.I. Secretary C.J. Combe informed the City that the members of the Institute had unani mously agreed not to sign any agreement in which acreage assessments were required.58

The issue was likely settled in February 1961 when the City Solicitor notified the U.D.I. of the City's legal right to levy acreage assessments.59 His confidence was puzzling since existing legislation was not definitive on the City's right to impose off-site levies.60 Even when a new Planning Act was passed in 1963 it made no provision for acreage assessments, nor did the wording of any section appear to give Council the enabling power. Yet the U.D.I., which had always questioned the levy's legality, chose not to challenge it. Its reasons are conjectural. It may have had something
to do with the dreaded delays occasioned by legal action, or the implications of any ensuing strained relations with the City. Also the fact that levies were differentiated and affected some developers far more than others probably precluded U.D.I. unanimity on the wisdom of a court challenge. In any case, the U.D.I. took the pragmatic route, backed down and sought a compromise solution. An arrangement was reached between the City and the Institute in April whereby acreage assessments were to be included in the 1961 Developer Agreement. There were eight in all, two each for waterworks and sanitary sewers north and south of the Bow River, and four for storm sewers, three in the north and one in the south. In return for U.D.I. co-operation, the City agreed to a $750 per acre maximum and to make no changes in levies for five years. It also promised to negotiate consistently with developers on an individual basis.\textsuperscript{61}

In a short period of time, the City of Calgary and the developers had achieved an enduring formal relationship. Any subsequent changes were in form rather than substance. Though the official recognition of the new arrangements was embodied in the 1959 standard Developer Agreement...
Agreement, all the components were in place by 1958. In July of that year, the Chief Commissioner informed City Council “that new subdivisions are being developed as a result of the overall assignment going to the developer and the City of Calgary is playing no part in the picture.”

Since the development of utilities averaged over $2,000 an acre, the City had reason to be satisfied with the immediate cost savings. In 1958, Kelwood paid $1.2 million for storm and sanitary sewers and water mains in Haysboro and another $700,000 in Fairview. An added form of revenue had been discovered in the acreage assessment. In referring to the projected $7.6 million expenditure on nine sewer trunks Chief Planner, A.G. Martin expected that acreage assessments would ease the financial burden. Finally, the City felt that the new arrangement had not weakened its control over the developers. As Assistant City Engineer, C.D. Howarth pointed out in 1959, “The system of private subdivision development … has reached a point where the City has excellent control over both design and materials and the execution of the work.” By 1961 there were fourteen developers under contract with the City for subdivision development.

Yet, as significant as these developments were, they were replicating a pattern being followed in other Canadian cities. Indeed, before beginning the negotiations that led to the developers taking over storm sewers and water mains, the City had contacted several other Canadian cities respecting their policies. Knowing that municipalities like Hamilton, Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke had all largely withdrawn from residential development, the City doubtless felt more confident in its own deliberations. However, the speed at which these dramatic changes had taken place is noteworthy, especially given Calgary’s modest size. Certainly Edmonton had not gone as far.

While the template for developer agreements was standard, the agreements themselves differed from developer to developer and contained special agreements and modifications with respect to division of responsibility, cost sharing and maintenance conditions. Most were minor and usually predicated on special circumstances and difficulties. Sometimes they led to inconsistencies. One bizarre example concerned two developers in Glamorgan. Both were paving the same road but contractual obligations had committed one to a width of 36 feet and the other to 18 feet.

The establishment of the agreements with the developers was not an immediate signal for the City to withdraw from residential subdivision development. In 1956 the City still controlled 45 percent of residential
development. For several years, the City continued to develop subdivisions in Britannia, Cambrian Heights, Spruce Cliff, University Heights, Belfast, Capitol Hill, Mountview, Lynwood, Stanley Park, and Rosemount. The problems with City subdivisions had little to do with quality. However, limited by policy constraints and other factors, the City simply could not meet demand and thus lost interest and desire. For example, much to the chagrin of the Chief Engineer, the City was reluctant to install any utilities in its subdivisions until the lots were sold. For a while it was at a disadvantage with the developers because of a failure to secure the requisite C.M.H.C. approval with respect to paving requirements. Difficult terrain and land assembly problems, resident complaints, and resistance to local improvements were other factors influencing the City to withdraw from subdivision development. The Rosscarrock Community Association berated the City in 1956 over sanitary conditions, stating that “absolutely no attempt has been made to improve the district since annexation in 1955.” In 1957, a contractor complained that land he had purchased from the City in Cambrian Heights and on which he prepaid utilities costs had not been serviced. He added that private developers in the same subdivision were installing everything on time and were thus inducing contractors to buy from them and not the City. In 1958, the City sold 549 lots. In 1950, the figure had been 4,722. By 1960, there were about 4,700 lots under development. The City’s share was less than 20 percent. However, it was the option not to go ahead with the subdivision of University Heights in 1962 that effectively ended the City’s role as a major developer. Following a recommendation that servicing costs of $1.2 million were too excessive, and that too much pressure was being placed on the Planning and Engineering Departments, the City sold 182 acres to private interests, and in so doing signalled the end of an era. Finally, the City’s problems in developing one subdivision led to the arrival of what was to become Calgary’s largest developer. In 1958 the City of Calgary sold the subdivision of Rosemount to the recently formed Carma Developments Ltd. for $309,868.

The brainchild of veteran builder Albert Bennett, and his younger colleagues, Roy Wilson and Howard Ross, Carma Developers was incorporated in February 1958. The new syndicate comprised 43 members of the Calgary House Builders Association who contributed $250,000 to launch the company, and was partly a response to the monopoly wielded by Kelwood. In referring to Kelwood, Carma president Albert Bennett told the Land Department that “this monopoly … is becoming more complete with every passing month.” Carma was a unique organization...
based on the co-operative principle. Its sole aim was to acquire tracts of land and distribute the lots to its members on a proportionate shareholder basis. Another unique feature was the fact that other prominent builder-developers in the city were shareholders, including Quality Construction and the major shareholder, Nu-West Homes. Financed by debentures bought by members, Carma employed bold but simple strategies. First it followed its developments in Rosemount by concentrating on City-owned properties in the north and northwest. Second, Carma used its co-operative membership as a lever to secure preferential treatment from the City, a strategy which was reflected in its standard offer of $2,500 an acre for prime building land. Third, it dealt with the City more forcibly than its competitors. Long-time General Manager Joe Combe was widely recognized for his ability to make his presence felt. The reputation, apparently, of “Old Stone Face” at City Hall was legend. Finally, Carma’s success in Rosemount helped consolidate its reputation with the City. In spite of the topographic difficulties, Carma successfully built over 300 homes in Rosemount at a total cost of over $5 million. Indeed, some builder-shareholders, including Ralph Scurfield of Nu-West, lived there.

The City and Developer Relations

The City’s relations with the developers were characterized by a general commitment to co-operation on the grounds that it was necessary for the achievement of common goals. Differences existed, however, and it was here that one sees the “give and take” consistent with longstanding relations.

The City was not loath to exert its authority over the developers. Suburban Developments Ltd. argued unsuccessfully in 1961 for a change of rules with respect to its share of road costs on 14th Street. Subdivision approval was not automatic. When Carma revised the City plan in Rosemount north to accommodate more lots at a savings of $29,000, it was rejected on the grounds that “It would be a pity to accept an inferior plan merely for the sake of a little extra cost.” A plan for Thorncliffe Heights was also rejected in 1960. A developer’s contract in Glamorgan was terminated in 1966 because of lack of progress. Another in Greenview lost an oversize dispute. The Technical Planning Board wanted work in a Southwood subdivision halted until the developer had settled outstanding payments on an earlier development. In many cases modifications were necessary with respect to set backs, lot depths, road widths, minimum
distances between houses, etc. It was rare for a plan to be totally accepted following its circulation to the various departments. Many mirrored a 1959 Brentwood plan that required extensive revisions. A variety of other pleas were rejected. Some were daring in their presuppositions. One developer who had over-bought in Glendale Meadows wanted the City to buy portions of the land from him and then sell it back at the same price when it was needed. Another who had bought land from the City in Collingwood at $3,000 an acre wanted $1,000 remitted for every acre that was not developable. In 1961 Norman S. Trouth, the current Chair of the Urban Development Institute and Manager of Kelwood, wanted to save money by using open ditches for storm water runoff rather than underground pipes.

An excellent example of entrepreneurial initiative occurred in 1956 and involved Art Sullivan, a builder-developer recognized for his aggressiveness. In August 1955, Burns Ranches granted an option to Sullivan to buy 540 acres at $2,000 an acre in the present Fairview area on condition that the land was rezoned for residential and commercial purposes in time for the 1956 construction season. Sullivan envisaged a $35 million project containing 2,000 homes, 60 acres of park and recreational space, bounded to the east and west by industrial and commercial zones. Noting that “gainfull [sic] employment is a necessity for continued prosperity,” Sullivan projected employment for 1,000 men, including 350 unemployed during the winter months. Sullivan further argued that this subdivision (Meadowbrook) was superior to Kingsland farther west. Sullivan “sweetened the pot” by giving the City the option to buy him out or otherwise let him go ahead on his own. It was a marvellous pitch and one to which the City gave serious attention, more so because utilities were not a pivotal issue. Yet, as Public School Board and Transportation officials pointed out, Meadowbrook’s isolation from existing development made it a much more expensive proposition than Kingsland. Faced with these financial considerations, the City declined to take up either of Sullivan’s options and decided to press ahead as planned with Kingsland.

On the other hand, co-operation was also evident. In return for increasing its performance bond, Kelwood was allowed to borrow $20,000 worth of pipe from the City for water in Glendale. Even though the subdivision was outside the city limits, Kelwood was also allowed to take water from the City system in off-peak hours. It was stored in tanks capable of holding 250,000 gallons, and used as a temporary water supply for 2,100 residents. The City also secured agreements with developers respecting land it wanted to buy. In order to consolidate its holdings in
1957, the City arranged for a developer to release his option to acquire 13 acres in University Heights. In return the company was given the right to buy 50 lots in another subdivision at an equivalent price. In 1959, the City took advantage of a Department of National Revenue concession that exempted municipalities from the sales tax on sewage and drainage materials. Following purchase at the discounted levels, the City sold pipes, fittings, etc. to the developers at full price. The savings difference was placed in a special fund to be accessed by developers for subdivision enhancement. The construction of several community centres, including those in Glenmore Park and Brentwood, was partly financed under this arrangement.

An excellent example of dialogue between the developer and the City concerned the subdivision of Highwood south of Thorncliffe. One of those areas that had been provided with utilities in the pre-1914 boom, Highwood had reverted to the City in lieu of unpaid taxes. Wanting to realize some gain from a long dormant investment, City engineers approached Kelwood and offered to sell the land for residential development. Kelwood was interested but resisted the City’s asking price by citing cost factors occasioned by large sandstone formations near the surface in several areas. According to Kelwood, development costs were between $4,000 and 5,000 an acre. The City subsequently accepted Kelwood’s counter-offer for 220 acres, and the suburb of Highwood took shape after 1955. There can be no doubt that Highwood was a difficult subdivision to develop, as witness the lack of any previous interest by either the City or builders especially given the presence of utilities installation. Yet the price paid by Kelwood elicited one of the earliest comments about undue developer influence. In 1957, an alderman censured the City for acceding to “ridiculously low prices.”

The developers profited in other areas. First it was argued that the City sold its land too cheaply. Of all developers, Carma pushed hardest for the best deals by referring to its central place in the Calgary construction industry. For example, in a request to buy City land in Charleswood, the company mentioned its 45 builder-shareholders and argued that it deserved special consideration since it was offering gainful employment to over 3,000 Calgary citizens. Since it tended to bid low, Carma was essentially asking the City to do away with its tendering system for land purchases and sell at a cheaper price. A year later, Carma admitted that its bid for 170 acres in north Cambrian Heights was not the lowest. Then, after alluding to the low bidder’s capabilities, grandly informed the City that there was no other choice but “to accept Carma’s offer.” It was
successful, apparently. Two months later, Carma thanked Commissioner Dudley Batchelor “for the consideration we received when we presented our proposals.”

Advantages were secured in other areas. Many involved street extensions. For example, Kelwood succeeded in having a cul de sac in Fairview extended to 82nd Avenue. The original policy on storm sewers obliged the developer to construct them with the capacity to drain both his subdivision and any adjacent raw land, after which the City would pay for oversize. After an intense debate with the Urban Development Institute, the obligation to drain adjacent raw land was removed. The City backed off a recommendation by the Subdivision Co-ordinator to charge half a percent a month interest on outstanding accounts. In 1957, Art Sullivan won his argument that he should be governed by his 1956 contract and not held responsible for storm sewers and water mains. In 1960 the City lost the argument over the construction of some major roads through subdivisions. In arguing that these roads offered limited access and were a result of City transportation policies, the developers succeeded in having the City bear the costs.

In this early period, the developers encountered the sorts of criticisms that later tainted them with accusations of rapacious behaviour and indifference to the public. In a letter to the Herald, a City alderman ranted somewhat misleadingly that “We allow the contractor to buy cheap land outside the city. We ask for annexation then pay the cost of parks, storm sewers, water and lighting.” In Glendale, Kelwood was heavily censured by concerned citizens for its indifference and misleading sales pitches. As early as 1961, a member of the Planning Advisory Commission commented on the indifference of developers to the merits of variety in their subdivisions. In criticizing the unimaginative house designs, the critic noted: “The dreary and unimaginative approach to much of the present day building design and construction in the city left little doubt that the average private developer neither cared nor was concerned with providing first class development that would enhance the appearance of the city.”

Green Space

Neither the City nor the developers exhibited vision with respect to the potential of green space within subdivisions. Lacking an overall plan, the City merely responded to developer initiative by relying on provincial legislation and an occasional touch of common sense. The developers exacerbated this by pressing their interests as much as possible.
Chapter 3: Establishing the Pattern, 1955–1962

The provision for reserves during this period was laid out in the Subdivision Regulations of 1953 and the Subdivision and Transfer Regulations of 1960, which specified the setting aside of no less than 10 percent of the gross area of registered subdivision plans for reserve purposes.116 Both allowed discretion. In the 1953 Regulations, the location or topographic nature of reserves was not specified, though the intent was clearly to provide for schools and adjacent public spaces. The 1960 Regulations were more specific. Land unsuitable for building purposes within a subdivision could be designated as park or reserve but had to be additional to the 10 percent requirement. However, the Regulations also specified that if the total area of streets, lanes, and reserves exceeded 40 percent of the entire subdivision then the reserve requirement might be reduced. Both sets of regulations revealed the narrow concept of public green spaces in that they were seen in terms of developable land. In 1953, reserves were associated primarily with public facilities like schools and adjacent recreational areas. In 1960, true “green space” was equated to undevelopable land. Both the City and the developers bore the onus of blame for a lack of interest in incorporating more green space within subdivisions. For example, as early as 1956 the Technical Planning Board faced pressure to reduce the 10 percent if the needs of arterial roads demanded it.117

Reserves were essentially pawns in the give and take between the City and the Developers. In later years the developers saw them as a way to increase density and raise land prices. In this early period, they used them in two ways. First, reserve allocations were differentiated over large tracts to maximize lot numbers in more exclusive subdivisions. Second, the definition of reserves was widened to defeat the intent of the Regulations. In both cases the City offered little leadership.

The most obvious way developers used the reserve issue was as an incentive for subdivision approval. Art Sullivan provided for 4½ acres more than necessary in Glendale Meadows.118 Kelwood over-dedicated 26 acres in Wildwood.119 The concessions, however, were deceiving. Sometimes the over-dedication consisted of land that could not be developed. In other instances, the excess was retrieved by under-dedication of reserves in subsequent adjacent subdivisions. The policy of incremental subdivision development by the same developer over time prejudiced reserve allocations. For example, Kelwood developed both Mayfair and Kingsland. When the Corporation submitted its plan for Mayfair, it reduced the requisite reserve acreage and made more high-priced lots available. In referring to lot areas of 12,000 square feet, Kelwood argued
that public land “was not necessary in high class residential areas,” and that it should be allowed to transfer the reserve requirements to Kingsland. In allowing the request, the Technical Planning Board warned that it “should not be regarded as a precedent for future cases.” Kelwood was later censured by the Technical Planning Board for trying to reduce the size of its Mayfair lots. The same thing happened in 1959 in the exclusive subdivision of Eagle Ridge, where almost all the community reserve was transferred from the Chinook Park subdivision to an area later used by the City as a tree farm. Reserve allocations also suffered when individual developers operated in small subdivisions. When Kingsland was being completed in 1962, the developer could not provide his 10 percent and was forced to compensate by remitting $5,430 to the City. The City received money. Residents lost entitlement.

The use of buffer zones provides a good insight as to how green space was perceived by both the City and the developers. As the term implies, buffers served to separate specific zoning areas. They could be green strips or transitional-zone buildings like apartments. For example, the
agreement that allowed the Stampede to expand north into Victoria Park in the late 1960s specified a grass buffer on the south side of 14th Avenue. The question as to whether buffers could or should be included in the 10 percent reserve allocation resulted in inconsistency. Developers argued that if the buffers represented potentially developable land then they should be included in the 10 percent. In Haysboro, Kelwood included buffer zones and future road requirements in reserve quotas. On the other hand, the City claimed that by serving as a buffer the land in question was essentially undevelopable. Yet the City did not push the issue. For example, developers were allowed to pay cash in lieu of reserves in industrial areas when the original intent of the regulations was to deploy the 10 percent reserve requirements in green space buffers between industrial and adjacent residential zones. Moreover, the City sometimes permitted buffers to be included in reserves on a two to one basis. Under this arrangement, two acres of buffer or marginal land could be credited as one acre of reserve. Reserve allocations in Brentwood were modified under the two to one policy. In industrial Fairview, Kelwood wanted part of its 10 percent residential reserve to be a buffer protecting it from the industrial area to the north. The City allowed this on a two to one basis. One implication was the under-dedication of green space in Fairview, a situation exacerbated by the fact that six additional acres of reserve were removed for road interchange purposes. Carma was allowed a 100-foot storm sewer right of way in Greenview as reserve. Kelwood requested the same concession in Acadia with respect to a 500-foot buffer zone for storm sewers. In 1960 a developer in Thorncliffe wanted a drainage ditch included as community reserve.

Developers tried to convince the City to accept undevelopable land as reserves. Carma, for instance, said it was only logical to place its reserve in north Cambrian Heights on the "worst rock formations." Sam Hashman included cliffs and riverbanks in his reserve allocation in Bel Aire. When Spyhill Development and Holding Company agreed to 15 percent in public reserve including some hillside and coulee, the Technical Planning Board reduced its developable allocation. The City allowed a developer in Wildwood to include 20 acres of hillside to compensate for his 4-acre reserve deficiency on the condition that 4 acres was added to another subdivision. The fact that reserve requirements were subject to negotiation and even manipulation shows that City and the developers were interested in honouring the letter of the regulations more than the intent.

Calgary's topography, with its rivers, creeks, moraines, bluffs, hills, and coulees, was an important factor in determining the city's physical
development. While these features presented problems with respect to utilities installations and residential development, they were prime candidates for natural open space dedication. In fact, many fine recreational areas in the City have more to do with topographic unsuitability for development than with civic policy. The bluffs and draws in Edgemont stand as a prime example. However, these locations also had high scenic potential and were therefore tempting to developers who pursued a simple but risky strategy. They bought sizable chunks of scenic land and then prepared plans to develop the gentler slopes. In presenting these plans to City officials, they offered to help financially with capital expenditures, and to contribute the steep slopes to reserves in addition to the requisite 10 percent. The first area in Calgary to receive such attention was Nose Hill in the city’s north.

Nose Hill, with its strong historic links to aboriginal usage, its ecological sensitivity, and its varied grassland environment, comprises well over 4,000 acres and rises over 3,700 feet above sea level. It offers panoramic views of Calgary and the Rocky Mountains. It is also a natural “treasure.” Despite steep slopes, the summit is fairly flat and therefore an irresistible lure to developers. Evidence suggests that the City would have allowed development on Nose Hill before 1960, long before the later bitter controversy of the early 1970s. The fact that it was forestalled had little to do with any civic policy regarding green space preservation. External forces prevailed.

In 1954 Spyhill Development and Holding Company bought about 190 acres on the upper east slope of Nose Hill. In December 1956, with the support of a financial backer, the Company approached the City respecting a residential development. The City offered no objection but requested more information. Doubtless encouraged, Spyhill came back a month later with a more formal application that promised 1,000–1,200 homes over a four year period below the 3,700-foot contour. The developer further offered to construct the necessary reservoir or assist with its construction if it was to serve a greater area. The Technical Planning Board, in noting that it constituted orderly development, approved the development pending the construction of the reservoir.

There was little doubt that the development would have gone ahead but for two factors. The first was the fact that the upper 70 acres obstructed the clear flight path from the municipal airport to the immediate east. In a series of meetings with the City, airport officials and members of the federal Aviation Commission stressed the potential hazards posed by any development on upper Nose Hill. They also emphasized the distinct
possibility that potential jet plane traffic would be discouraged from coming to the city. Faced with these sobering prospects, the City agreed with airport officials that the flight path should be widened from 1,500 to 2,000 feet and that it be extended farther west into Nose Hill. Spyhill was not dissuaded, and in July 1957 responded with another application. Admitting that the plan still intruded into the widened flight path, the company suggested that the encroachment be used as reserve. The strategy did not work. While it had no trouble with the southern portion of the development, the Technical Planning Board sought safe refuge and passed the matter on to the City Commissioners, who found a better solution. Spyhill was persuaded to accept a land swap on a 3.5 to 1 basis. In November, 1957 the company gave up its 190 acres valued at $1,000 an acre in Nose Hill for 53 acres valued at $3,500 an acre in the emerging subdivision of Collingwood to the south. The City sweetened the deal by agreeing to construct the necessary utilities in Collingwood. Three subsequent applications from different parties to develop the top of Nose Hill were turned down, and for a while at least, Nose Hill was allowed to remain in its natural state.

One thing is certain in the Nose Hill issue. Its temporary reprieve had nothing to do with any emerging concept of the area as a prime asset in its natural state. Since the legality of the airport’s discretion over the entire area covered by the proposed development was tenuous, it is useful to consider a second point of influence. In addition to those dictated by utilities issues, and School Board and Transportation Department concerns, the City was profoundly influenced by the pending ring road to the immediate north. Any decision to allow a subdivision to go ahead would prejudice the City’s chances of securing a free right of way from the Province. Clearly it was a risk not worth taking.

This period also marked two City efforts to improve marginal lands and preserve green space through golf course construction. Both were in the north and both were associated with the green belt envisaged in the North Hill Plan of 1953. The low-lying areas in Highwood were considered for golf course purposes in 1958 as a way of extending the green belt. Similarly, the area north of Capitol Hill had been set aside for a golf course for the same reason. The initiative stalled when a golf expert informed the City that the terrain was unsuitable. For a short time the area was considered for sanitary fill purposes, until reason prevailed. A plan to develop the area for residential purposes was turned down in 1960, thus clearing the way for the subsequent development of Confederation Park Golf Course. The potential for golf courses in raising land values
in residential subdivisions was not lost on either Kelwood or Carma, both of whom were to enter the field in the ensuing decade.

By any account the provision of green spaces in Calgary subdivisions during this period was not successful. The interpretation of the word “reserve” translated into man-made structures in the form of schools, playgrounds, and recreational facilities. Even the haphazard placement of tot lots in every subdivision reflected the need to reach the 10 percent more than it did a concerted attempt to integrate meaningful green space into new communities. In this context the intent of the “neighbourhood plan” was not reflected in the uneven dispersal of reserves. Finally, there is the matter of the 10 percent. Provincial regulations specified it as a minimum. That it emerged as an absolute maximum speaks volumes about official thinking and the place of the “public green” within residential areas.

**Land Use**

The foundations for urban sprawl were laid during this period. Trends led to patterns which repeated themselves over two subsequent decades in ever-widening concentric circles to produce a low density residential environment. While the extensive annexations might have foreordained this process, it was enabled by specific policies. Certainly it could be argued that these policies simply reflected general attitudes that made the end result inevitable. However, options did exist for both the City and the developers. They were not exercised for a variety of reasons. By the early 1960s, on the eve of the release of Calgary’s first General Plan, the blueprint for growth had already been established and there would be no turning back.

Urgency imposed its own agenda. There can be little doubt that rapid population growth in this period placed an inordinate strain on City resources. While financial burdens were lessened, the delegation of responsibility to developers for subdivision construction imposed new pressures. City administrators, beset with dozens of development applications in several areas, found their role increasingly difficult. The feasibility of utilities was not the only problem. Approval of a new subdivision usually meant an elementary school. The placement of junior and senior high schools was a compounding issue. Roads had to be extended to provide for new bus routes, and to integrate the subdivisions into the city’s transportation network. Provision for commercial areas also had to be factored
The problems of coping with these insistent issues tended to blur their long-range implications. A reliance on present and past practice was safer and easier than “tinkering with the mechanism.”

Despite sporadic attempts that dated to 1913, Calgary had done little in the way of formal planning up to 1950. The most significant advancement was a Zoning Bylaw in 1934. The passage of the Town and Rural Planning Act in 1950 brought about significant changes. It allowed the appointment of a Technical Planning Board to oversee the preparation of a General Plan. Comprised of senior administrators and generally chaired by the Chief Engineer, the Technical Planning Board was given the added power in 1953 to approve subdivisions under the Subdivision Regulations. The planning process was further refined by the creation of a separate Planning Department under A.G. Martin and the establishment of an appeals process in the form of a Planning Advisory Commission comprised of three aldermen and six citizens.

The motion providing for a General Plan “for the whole area lying within the limits of the city” was passed by Council on September 4, 1951. The General Plan was to provide for “a rational and harmonious relationship between land use and transportation, an economic extension of utilities and a proper provision of public amenities.” It was supposed to be a blueprint for future growth. It was not. At no point was the General Plan seen as an instrument for change. While transportation and engineering studies formed part of the process, the General Plan, if City officials are to be believed, was based on two early documents. The first was the “Outline Report on Land Requirements for Housing the Metropolitan Population, Calgary 1953–1980.” The second was a brief to the McNally Commission in 1954. Neither was specific on future visions for the City and both saw Planning in terms of reasonable responses. When the General Plan was adopted in 1963, it affirmed current trends, and used them as a basis for future planning.

During this period the City failed to exercise its option to influence residential building patterns. In 1952 the more flexible system of Development Control replaced the existing Zoning Bylaw. Development Control operated through the issuance of permits which, unlike zoning, were applied to development on an individual basis. Ostensibly guided by the General Plan, Development Control allowed planners to specify the subdivision patterns before permanent zoning was applied. Yet traditional practices endured, and developers were not compelled to modify their outline plans in the interests of design or higher densities. These
cautious attitudes, entrenched during this period, were to later manifest themselves in a disinclination to use Development Control to redevelop built-up areas.

Zoning practices reinforced low density principles. Under the 1934 Zoning Bylaw, virtually all of north and northwest Calgary was zoned for R2, or two family residences. Even as late as 1953, the North Hill Plan envisaged R2 zoning west from Centre Street to Brentwood and Charleswood. The major problem with this R2 designation, however, was that it also allowed for R1, or single family dwellings. The failure of the Technical Planning Board to narrow the definition of R2 to either exclude or modify the presence of single family dwellings or to encourage duplexes had predictable results. In fact the Board noted the redundancy of R2 zoning in 1957 but declined to redefine it to encourage medium densities.

Encouraged by developers who showed a marked preference for R1 zoning, single family residences became the norm. The advantage of the R1 over the R2 designation had to do with a better location within the subdivision and a higher level of exclusivity. Keith Construction, for example, catered almost entirely to single family homes. Whole areas in Haysboro and Glenbrook were rezoned R1 from R2. So popular were R1 lots that it was generally assumed that all buyers wanted them. In Westgate several buyers bought lots and only learned of their R1 designation when they tried to build duplexes. When Spyhill developed Thorncliffe Heights it secured a caveat that the entire area would be zoned R1 for 15 years. An application for an apartment in an R2 area in Parkdale was turned down since it was “out of keeping with the single family residences there.” By the early 1960s the bias towards single family residences had made its mark. In the working-class suburb of Ogden, which had been zoned almost entirely R2, over 80 percent of the homes were single family. In Highwood and Capitol Hill, both zoned entirely R2, the percentage of single family homes was over 90 and 80 percent respectively. Other suburbs showed a similar profile. Only 15 percent of the R2 lots in Westgate, South Richmond, and Kingsland were used for two family dwellings. By the time newer areas like Meadowlark Park, Haysboro, Lakeview, Fairview, and Acadia were developed, zoning for R2 lots had shown significant decline. By 1960, a trend had been set, supported, approved, and acknowledged. In February 1961, the City Planner prefaced a discussion on the forthcoming General Plan and the City’s future land needs by noting that “the predominance of the single family home would continue … for some time to come.”
The Technical Planning Board’s reasons for supporting this trend were not entirely linked to an aversion to change for its own sake. Zoning adhered to rigid covenants and personal rights. According to one contemporary source, “private landownership is so sacrosanct in public opinion and law, that it can question the propriety of planning proposals and defeat legitimate community objectives.” This traditional viewpoint of zoning as a legal tool for the protection of property values continued to hold major sway in civic thinking. Thus any amendment had to be based on its impact on surrounding property values (and angry residents), and not on merit or long-range implications. For instance, residents in Highwood had to be convinced through lengthy negotiations to give their conditional approval for apartments on land unsuitable for houses. When a new Zoning Bylaw was adopted in 1958 following a successful legal challenge to Interim Control, not only did the existing R2 classification remain unchanged, but a new and more exclusive category was introduced. Restricted Single Family or RR1 zoning allowed for greater lot size and therefore an even lower density ratio. Moreover, the introduction of the Conditional Use category was used in a restrictive capacity more than as a tool for flexibility.

The Neighbourhood Plan concept adopted by Council in 1953 as a base design for new subdivisions reinforced traditional attitudes towards zoning. The Neighbourhood Unit Model which was first utilized by Charles Perry in New York in 1929 attempted to consolidate community identity by separating neighbourhoods by arterial thoroughfares or natural features. A dendritic design of curvilinear streets, cul de sacs, and walkways in place of the old grid system emphasized the private realm. Access was limited to a few collector roads. Schools and recreational facilities were centrally located while commercial facilities were provided on the edges either on or adjacent to the main intersections.

The Neighbourhood Plan gave the City a specific rationale for its zoning priorities. A typical neighbourhood was subject to layered zoning which became more restricted with distance from the periphery. Single family residences were predominant. R2 zoning occurred sometimes along main roads and but always in the vicinity of commercial facilities. Apartment placement was on a buffer basis, usually between R2 zoning and commercial areas. Since the R2 designation was also used increasingly as a buffer and primarily for single family residences, there was little place for multi-family dwellings. Rezoning proposals for apartments were routinely refused. For example, in resisting an attempt to rezone parts of the inner city suburb of Bankview to higher densities, the Technical Planning Board...
Boards referred to the presence of single and two family dwellings “of good standard.” When the City accepted the row housing principle in 1960, it stipulated that no project could face R1 housing. A limited dividend row housing project in Acadia in 1960 was turned down on these grounds. The definition of an ideal neighbourhood was implied in the reasons given by the Technical Planning Board for refusing applications for rezoning. Phrases like “property devaluation,” “breaches of faith” and “regressive district character” were clear indicators of the type of dwelling that was not needed in suburban neighbourhoods.

In their haste to meet demand, the developers further undermined the planned neighbourhood concept. Large subdivisions negated the idea of neighbourhood. They were developed incrementally and were thus intersected by major thoroughfares. Several developers sometimes operated in the same subdivision over long periods of time. Southwood and Acadia are two cases in point. The latter, for example, was begun during this period but not completed until the late 1960s. Given the tight zoning designations of the single neighbourhood, zoning conflicts occurred on boundary roads where commercial areas faced across the street from single family zoning. This problem in coordinating streets that became thoroughfares with zoning patterns was most visible in the adjacent subdivisions like Brentwood, Collingwood, and Charleswood, or in Fairview, Acadia, and Willow Park. The Technical Planning Board thought that one of Kelwood’s plans for Acadia in 1959 resulted in the undesirable proximity of commercial areas to low density residences. The breakdown of the neighbourhood concept was closely related to incremental subdivision development in the same area.

If walk-up apartments were frowned on in new neighbourhoods, low cost housing was held in lower repute. Hitherto, the City had not embraced low cost housing, as evidenced by the opposition from residents who protested veterans’ housing in their communities in the late 1940s. The Chamber of Commerce went on record in 1950 as opposing any subsidized housing. Calgary’s first low cost housing projects were built in 1951 and 1954, when the City backed out of the C.M.H.C.’s assisted program and opted instead for limited dividend projects built by private enterprise on cheap land provided by the City. Like the veterans’ projects, they were not overly popular in the two communities that housed them. Rather than become involved, the City opted to promote co-operative efforts. In 1950 the Mayor tried unsuccessfully to float an informal house building scheme whereby potential homeowners got together and built homes for each other on a co-operative basis. Another fruitless
Chapter 3: Establishing the Pattern, 1955–1962

A proposal called for individual contributions of $1,000 to build 400 homes co-operatively.\(^\text{168}\)

The subject of low cost housing emerged again in the late 1950s amid a brief slowdown in Calgary's economy. The City was not prepared to enter the field unilaterally, since under the current 75–25 percent sharing arrangement for low cost housing between the federal government and the provinces, Alberta had simply passed its 25 percent responsibility onto the municipalities. It was the developers who broached the matter. They were willing to build low cost housing but wanted concessions from the City in the form of cheap or even free land, and some relaxation with respect to lot sizes as well as in construction and servicing standards. The City's reaction was mixed. While it was willing to secure provincial government approval for relaxation to subdivision regulations, any application was to be confined to “appropriate” areas. As for supplying cheap land, the City was less sanguine. If possible, and on an individual basis as with earlier projects, some arrangement might be made. However, an official policy administered through a municipal land banking program, though occasionally discussed, was never a real priority. Lacking any overall housing policy, the City's approach to low cost housing thus tended to be spontaneous, and very much dependent on outside governmental financing and developer initiative.

Though this pattern had already been established, it was more in evidence in the period between 1957 and 1961. First, since no direct financing was available from higher levels of government, the initiative for low cost housing had to come from the private sector. In 1958 the Technical Planning Board and the Commissioners met with developers and discussed the subject of substandard houses in new subdivisions. The developers argued that by reducing lot widths from 60 to 50 feet or less, lengthening blocks, providing narrower or no sidewalks, and relaxing standards for utilities, the price of a lot could be cut by $342.\(^\text{169}\) The City agreed but stressed the need to severely limit the extent to which these relaxations were applied. Quality Construction, for instance, was allowed to reduce costs in Belfast through deep faced sidewalks and curbs on the grounds that there “was no understanding that it would become a general city specification.”\(^\text{170}\) Design innovations were not welcomed. Row housing units, for example, were discouraged, and efforts by both Kelwood and Quality Construction to put them in Acadia were abandoned due to zoning issues and resident opposition.\(^\text{171}\) Not surprisingly, the city's first row housing project in Greenview in 1961 was enabled solely because of its proximity to industrial zoning.\(^\text{172}\) Following sustained
negotiations, Kelwood was allowed to build 27 low cost houses on lots with smaller frontages in Haysboro. The City’s rationale for acceptance was the fact that the lots were close enough to the railway tracks to classify them as warranting the concession.173

The City also reaffirmed its position on concessions on City-owned land. In one case, it did make land available for a low cost housing project, but only because the developer had already spent $160,000 in assembling property in a suitable area in Vista Heights adjacent to industrial zoning. In 1960 Buena Vista Developments paid the not-so-low price of $2,000 an acre for 42 acres of City-owned land in order to complete its requirements for a 198-unit $2 million limited dividend project.174 Yet when the Calgary House Builders Association proposed a homegrown workable solution to the affordable housing problem, the City was less than enthusiastic. In late 1958 the Association notified the City that it intended to design and build a no-frills house “to prove to the City and the public that a home could be built at a price the working man … could afford.”175 By 1960 the house was constructed in Belfast at a cost of $7,436, which included the builder’s 6 percent profit. However, land and utilities added over $2,000 to the cost.176 Given the high buyer interest in the home and the fact that it was inexpensive enough to secure a mortgage on an annual income of $3,600, the House Builders Association urged the City to follow the example in Saskatoon, where developers obtained City-owned land for low cost housing at $10 a frontage foot and then built single family residences for $8,000.177 In requesting that the City to set aside cheap land for that purpose, the Association noted that affordable housing for low income families was otherwise impossible.”178 The City’s response, however, was desultory. After some preliminary thought as to where suitable land might be available, the idea was allowed to lapse. Unlike the case with land acquisition for industrial purposes, no residential land assembly program was entertained, even one as modest as that suggested by the Calgary House Builders Association.

Since higher land prices were associated with commercial activity, the “Neighbourhood” concept provided developers with opportunities they could not resist. In short, they over-provided for commercial activity. Service stations were especially popular. In reference to six of them within a few hundred yards on Northmount Drive, the Technical Planning Board stressed that that had not been the intention when providing commercial zoning in the area.179 At the end of 1956, there were nine appeals pending to the Provincial Planning Board regarding service stations.180 While service stations were usually turned down on “spot zoning” principles,
they were insinuated into Neighbourhood units on the grounds that they belonged with the commercial strip. An interesting case concerned Kelwood in 1956 when it applied for a service station and adjacent commercial facilities in the Highwood area on lots zoned originally as residential. Kelwood argued that it had always been its intention to use the lots for this purpose and that the proposed facilities constituted “a necessary local service.” The application was refused following strenuous objections from residents. Kelwood appealed the decision to the Planning Advisory Commission, furnishing evidence that the original advertisement for the subdivision advised potential homeowners that shopping facilities would be provided. The weak argument was enough to convince the Planning Commission, which allowed the commercial facilities only.

During this period, commercial zoning was reduced in Thorncliffe, Greenview, Brentwood, and Glendale. Carma tried unsuccessfully to put three commercial locations in the small subdivision of Rosemount. Residents in Westgate fought to rezone several lots which they argued had been zoned commercial for speculative purposes. Mayfair residents thought that the commercial area south of 66th Avenue would continue to gobble up adjacent land and thus lower the value of residential property values. The Technical Planning Board agreed and refused to rezone. The result was the present suburb of Kelvin Grove. Affected residents lost the battle regarding the location of the North Hill Shopping Centre on the grounds that it was not a community issue. In 1957, Kelwood considered a major commercial development in Haysboro. The layout envisaged 2,000 homes, several small shopping venues, and a 42-acre regional shopping centre anchored by a Woodward’s department store. Though the project secured City approval, Kelwood declined to go ahead in light of a commissioned study which doubted the capacity of the projected area population to support a regional shopping centre. Instead, Calgary’s first regional shopping centre in the south opened farther north in Chinook. Ironically, it was just across MacLeod Trail from where Art Sullivan had tried to float his own similar dream a couple of years earlier. In reference to zoning practices in this period, planners in 1963 admitted that too much commercial zoning had produced an undesirable mix of residential and commercial land usage.

Two other trends, both of which had implications for urban sprawl, were observable during this period. The need for providing for parking was becoming a factor in the approval of high density dwellings. Apartment construction, for example, was restricted because of the strict interpretation of the zoning bylaw respecting off-street parking requirements.
Commercial facilities faced similar zoning strictures which required one off-street parking space for every 500 square feet of commercial area. Construction of a mosque on Centre Street North was turned down ostensibly because, unlike the case with a church which required seating, off-street parking criteria could not be applied. The second point refers to citizen involvement. The Zoning Bylaw specified that potential lot buyers had to be apprised of the zoning pattern in the area where the lots were being purchased. The apartment complex in the exclusive suburb of Eagle Ridge only survived because it had been posted as such at the time of lot sales. Any subsequent deviations from that pattern required resident permission and were subject to appeal. This happened several times from Bel Aire to Rosemount. Residents did not win every time. A gravel operation in the Riverbend area was approved over objections from the Ogden Community Association.

Discussion

In a few short years, the foundations were laid and attitudes entrenched that defined the relations between the City of Calgary and the land developers. The subsequent 20 years were in many ways an amplification of policies and practices forged in the 1950s.

The developer-agreement process was formalized during this period to the satisfaction of the City. While admitting to protracted negotiations on occasion, City officials on the whole were pleased with the evolution of “a formidable document” that specified the details and processes for developers to follow. The developers accepted the City’s demands, though grudgingly at times. Though the Urban Development Institute objected to acreage assessments on principle, most developers accepted it as part of the cost of doing business. Two other issues in evidence by 1960 concerned them far more. The first had to do with the time it took to approve subdivisions. Citing the number of reviews and examinations, developers argued that their subdivision plans were being unnecessarily delayed on subjective rather than on deficiency grounds. This led to added expense without materially improving the subdivisions. They also blamed the City for adding to the cost of housing by insisting on overly high specifications. They questioned the wisdom of increased concrete strengths and higher paving standards, wider roads, and underground utilities designed to “peak load” specifications. They pointed out that alternatives did exist but were not being considered. For example, it was suggested that provision for house storage tanks could allow for peak
use such as fire protection and lawn watering and thus reduce the high costs of mains. To the developers' chagrin, the time-consuming subdivision approval process and the “blue chip” specifications were to continue. The validity of their arguments and the fact that they were never addressed allowed developers their own refuge from which to counter rising costs in their industry.

The solution to growth problems through annexation was accepted in this period. The developers influenced but did not ordain this process. While developer demand was a factor, a belief that expansion enabled effective planning and an inordinate fear of fringe communities were equally pivotal. The annexations promised a larger supply of competitively priced land and resulted in a profligate density pattern of 12 persons per acre. The developers facilitated this process through lower lot prices on the city's periphery, and by stressing buyer choice in terms of location, house design, and cost. It appeared a workable formula, one that was compatible with the market. It seemed simple, too: The farther one went out, the cheaper the house. A precept well learned in this period was to become a blueprint for the future. When in doubt, annex.

By surrendering initiative to the developers, the City placed itself in a reactive and arguably inferior position. City officials believed that the combination of developer dialogue and constraints were effective growth controls. For example, developers bought their land only in areas generally approved for expansion, and had to plan their subdivisions within the City's annual development program. However, the City's policy of demanding compliance before subdivision approval obscures the fact that the specific initiative belonged to the developers. Whether under interim control or a zoning bylaw, undeveloped areas were zoned agricultural until ready to be subdivided for development. The specifics of rezoning fell to the developers, not the City. It was their subdivision design and size, their zoning proposals, their notions about interior road design, green spaces, school placement, and commercial locations against which this compliance was gauged. The experience with green spaces stands as an example of interpretive licence. So while the City had the power to demand compliance, it was balanced by other factors. Given the number of subdivision applications faced by a harried and understaffed administration, it is more than probable that compliance often submitted to initiative, in this or any subsequent period, for that matter.

Practices followed in this period also failed to anticipate future trends. The reluctance of the City to capitalize on the Calgary House Builders Association’s no-frills proposal in the late 1950s stands as an excellent
case in point. A creative use of the R2 zoning designation to initiate new low density built forms had to wait over a decade. Zoning priorities accorded multi-family densities a marginal place in new subdivisions. This militated strongly against both apartments and row housing, which had to compete for restricted space or settle for lesser-status concessions. Developers focused considerable attention on small commercial nodes in new subdivisions. The argument that they overbuilt is probably valid, and was later manifest in the inability of the strip malls to prosper in the coming age of the regional shopping centre. Despite Calgary’s first regional shopping centre on the north hill, or the failed initiative of Kelwood in Haysboro, the potential of the regional shopping centre for developer interests had to wait until the next decade.

The developers’ strong interest in maximizing commercial zoning gives an indication that profit margins in residential development might not have been as great as expected. Nu-West President Ralph Scurfield attested to the wide difference between profit margins in commercial as opposed to residential development. The Spyhill Development and Holding Company barely scraped up the money to buy the land for the Thorncliffe subdivision, and later had to pay its subcontractors on an incremental basis. John McLeod told this author that he netted a paltry $2,900 in his first year of operation. According to Ivan Robinson, a private appraiser and member of the McNally Commission, Kelwood expected to make “little or no money” by selling residential land in Fairview at $500 per lot but expected to more than compensate on its

| TABLE 4 Residential Land Absorption in Acres 1950–1960 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1951-1951       | 350 acres       |
| 1951-1952       | 550             |
| 1952-1953       | 550             |
| 1953-1954       | 405             |
| 1954-1955       | 740             |
| 1955-1956       | 622             |
| 1956-1957       | 610             |
| 1957-1958       | 1,010           |
| 1958-1959       | 1,000           |
| 1959-1960       | 600             |
| **Total**       | **6,442**       |

Source: City of Calgary Plan, 1961
adjacent industrial and commercial properties. Most early builders were prepared to accept a profit margin of between 6 and 10 percent. The subject of profit margins for residential development in these early years is one that warrants further scholarly attention.

By any standards, Calgary's growth statistics for the 1950s were impressive. Population had increased by over 100 percent. The value of building permits was up by 166 percent and City assessments by 312 percent. As the decade ended, residential construction was firmly in the hands of two major and a dozen or more other private developers. In terms of the future, three statistics are informative. While the city's gross area had grown from 40 to 150 square miles, only 10 square miles had actually been used for residential growth. Third, and equally revealing, was how this expanded area was being used. Of the estimated 43,000 dwelling units completed between 1945 and 1961, 36,596 were single family houses. In subsequent years, this disturbing trend became the accepted pattern for residential urban growth.