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Airdrie approves zoning for affordable housing

By CBC News

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The non-profit organization Habitat for Humanity wants to build townhouses and a condominium complex on an empty lot next to Monklands Soccer Park.

At a meeting Monday night, council approved the zoning change by a vote of three to two. Two aldermen didn't vote, arguing that they weren't a part of a public hearing on the issue in December. The meeting was so lively that at one point the mayor and council walked out to give the crowd a chance to cool down.

Habitat for Humanity Calgary president Andrew MacLachlan said he was relieved by the vote and promises to work with the community:

"My goal at the end of the day is that every person that was here tonight actually comes out and helps to build on site, and works side-by-side with the families," he said.

Opponents disappointed

Opponents, who had collected more than 600 signatures on a petition, say they may picket the site and are planning to consult with lawyers.

Ryan Cameron, who organized the fight against the development, said he is disappointed in the decision. His community has been unfairly smeared by allegations of being anti-poor, he said.

"Habitat has launched an amazing campaign since Christmas to discredit us. The NIMBY word came from their mouths, no one else's, and it stuck. Unfortunately the hard working, taxpaying citizens of this community are made out to look like the bad guys."

Mayor Linda Bruce, who supported the project, said she would welcome more Habitat for Humanity developments.

"Absolutely, yeah. But, again, each one is something they will have to bring forward and vet through us and make sure it is appropriate for our community."

Habitat for Humanity's goal is to provide homeownership for people who might not otherwise afford a place of their own. The one-hectare, city-owned lot planned for the project has been empty for 19 years.

Airdrie is about 30 kilometres north of Calgary.

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