

Habitat for Humanity pleads for support

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Habitat for Humanity president and CEO Andrew MacLachlan says it is time to turn some Airdrie residents' "Not in my Backyard" (NIMBY) mentality into a "Yes in my backyard" (YIMBY) attitude. "Isn't it time we turned NIMBY into YIMBY?" he asked.

"Too often, social agencies face a problem greater than the ability to raise funds. Often they are confronted by NIMBYism, which can quickly set back the milestones the organization has worked so hard to achieve."

MacLachlan is referring to the opposition faced by a proposed Habitat for Humanity Calgary (HFHC) effort to build an attainable housing development in Airdrie.

The location for the proposed 2.37-acre project is undeveloped, vacant land next to Monklands Soccer Park and Ralph McCall School.

HFHC proposed a mixed use residential community that may include craftsman-inspired townhomes and apartment-style condominiums.

The proposal was presented to Airdrie City council on Dec. 21 in a public hearing. Residents of the Sagewood area packed council chambers to object the proposal, stating increased traffic, children's safety and loss of green space as reasons to oppose the project.

"A small but vocal group attended the public hearing objecting to the development for several reasons; one of these was the impact the development would have on traffic and council suggested a further transportation study need to be conducted," said MacLachlan.

Another hearing is scheduled for Feb. 1, when the engineers will present a winter weather traffic study and detailed explanation.

"The City administration has been very supportive of this project and we believe the majority of Airdrie residents would not oppose the project," said MacLachlan. "Unfortunately, a well-organized vocal minority can garner a lot of bandwagon support and could sway council members who may have once supported the project." MacLachlan said the solution to changing NIMBY into YIMBY is education.

"Often people have misconceptions about Habitat families, such as they're unemployed or may increase crime in a particular neighbourhood. The opposite is true," he said.

He said Habitat for Humanity Calgary offers an innovative solution to the crisis of poverty housing by giving a hand up, not a hand out.

"We work to end poverty housing by creating opportunities for homeownership in partnership with low-income families, and by making safe, decent, affordable shelter a matter of community conscience and action."

Homebuyers repay their mortgage loans into a fund that makes more homes possible and, by doing so, they become involved in returning the generosity they receive back to others in need, he added.

"The simple fact is that so many of us are only a paycheck away from needing assistance from agencies like Habitat for Humanity," said MacLachlan.

"Habitat for Humanity Calgary is so close to achieving its goal of providing quality, environmentally-friendly homes to assist Airdrie and area residents in breaking the cycle of poverty."

A Facebook page has been set up for people to join to show support: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=254062834878>

The public hearing on the proposed development will continue on Feb. 1 at 7 p.m. in Airdrie City council chambers.