

AFFORDABILITY AND CHOICE TODAY (A•C•T) STREAMLINED APPROVAL PROCESS PROJECT

**Calgary's Planning Education Program:
Balancing Community and Industry Needs**
The Planning and Building Department, City of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta

Prepared for:
Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Canadian Home Builders' Association
Canadian Housing and Renewal Association
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

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FOREWORD

The project documented in this case study received funding assistance under the Affordability and Choice Today (A•C•T) Program. A•C•T is a joint initiative, managed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Home Builders' Association, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, together with the funding agency Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The A•C•T Program is administered by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

A•C•T, which was launched in January 1990, was designed to foster changes to planning and building regulations and residential development approval procedures in order to improve housing affordability, choice and quality.

Through A•C•T, grants are awarded to municipalities, private and non-profit builders and developers, planners and architects to undertake innovative regulatory reform initiatives in municipalities across Canada. Three types of projects are awarded grants under the A•C•T Program: Demonstration Projects, Streamlined Approval Process Projects, and Case Studies (of existing initiatives).

- *Demonstration Projects* involve the construction of innovative housing that demonstrates how modifications to planning and construction regulations can improve affordability, choice and quality.
- *Streamlined Approval Process Projects* involve the development of a method or an approach that reduces the time and effort needed to obtain approvals for housing projects.
- *Case Study* grants are awarded for the documentation of existing regulatory reform initiatives.

Change and innovation require the participation of all the players in the housing sector. A•C•T provides a unique opportunity for groups at the local level to work together to identify housing concerns, reach consensus on potential solutions, and implement action. Consequently, a key component of A•C•T-sponsored projects is the participation and cooperation of various players in the housing sector in all phases of each project, from development to realization.

All projects awarded a grant under the A•C•T Program are documented as case studies in order to share information on the initiatives and the benefits of regulatory reform with other Canadian communities. Each case study discusses the regulatory reform initiative, its goals and the lessons learned. Where appropriate, the cost savings resulting from modifications in various planning, development, and construction regulations are calculated and reported.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In order to improve and expedite its planning process, the City of Calgary conceived an education program intended to benefit both sides of the planning process—community residents and the building industry.

In 1992, the City of Calgary received an A•C•T grant to help fund the development of the education program materials. Led by the City's Planning and Building Department, the project team included representatives from the Calgary Home Builders' Association, the Federation of Calgary Communities, the Urban Development Institute (Calgary Chapter) and the Alberta Association of Architects.

The program addresses the needs of the residents and the building industry alike by familiarizing the former with the planning process, and by encouraging the latter to seek out and consider public input at the proposal stage.

The main component of the education program is an 18-minute video, entitled "Planning Approvals in Calgary: A Cooperative Process", and its companion notes. The video is designed to be presented in a workshop format, to community associations, developers and municipal staff.

Complementary products include a booklet intended as a reference tool for the various participants, and an instruction manual designed to guide community associations through the approval process. Both documents present the planning process in detail, though the manual is much more technical in nature.

Completion of the video and its companion notes, in 1993, was immediately followed by workshop presentations at community meetings and at City staff training and orientation sessions. The video was shown widely across Canada and at various national and international conferences. In 1994 and 1995, the completed education package earned awards from the Canadian Institute of Planners, the Alberta Institute of Planners and the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators. The program was very successful, and far surpassed expectations.

Good, sound development is vital to the continued growth and prosperity of Calgary's communities. By encouraging public participation in the planning process, while teaching developers and builders to consider and anticipate community needs, Calgary's education program contributes toward better community–industry collaboration.

1.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1.1 Community–Industry Consultation

In 1992, consultation between community and building industry representatives was already an integral part of the planning process in Calgary. However, an audit report uncovered that the approval process was hampered by conflicts arising between developers and residents. These conflicts ultimately led to delays and additional costs and, sometimes, to the abandonment of sound, affordable housing projects. The report recommended that the City’s planning approval process could be significantly streamlined if members of the community and the building industry understood better their respective rights and responsibilities.

To follow up on this recommendation, the City of Calgary’s Planning and Building Department undertook the creation of a Planning Education Program. The education program would acquaint residents and community associations with the planning process fully, and encourage builders and developers to seek out and consider public input at the proposal stage.

In 1992, the City of Calgary received an A•C•T grant to help fund the development of the education program materials.

There’s a great deal of conflict between developers and community residents—much of it unnecessary. And there’s a lot of time and money lost as a result. So there must be a way to make the process less confrontational.

—Philip Dack, MCIP

City of Calgary Planning and Building Department

1.2 Project Objectives

The principal objective of the education program was to improve and expedite the planning approval process by informing the community and the building industry of the various steps involved and their respective roles and responsibilities.

In designing the program, the City aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- Improve community–industry collaboration
- Inform the public of municipal housing policies
- Encourage developers and builders to consider and anticipate any objections communities might raise
- Reduce conflict between residents and planners
- Identify issues and increase public acceptance of innovative, affordable housing options
- Develop effective techniques to support the foregoing objectives

1.3 Developing the Program

Recognizing that input from industry and other key players in the planning and housing community was vital to the project's success, the City enlisted the participation of the following groups on the A•C•T. project team:

- Calgary Home Builders' Association
- Federation of Calgary Communities
- Urban Development Institute (Calgary Chapter)
- Alberta Association of Architects

The project team hoped to produce a tool which could be useful to other Canadian communities, and consulted the planning departments of the cities of Edmonton

Many community volunteers find the planning process cumbersome and feel that both the manual and the video are useful because they explain the process in simple terms.

*—Janis Dicks, Community Development Planner
Federation of Calgary Communities*

and Vancouver, who volunteered their participation and advice.

The project received widespread informal support and input from the provincial government, aldermen, developers, community representatives and planning staff. The end products were viewed as potentially very constructive and effective tools for improving the planning process.

2.0 THE PLANNING EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Planning Education Program was designed to be presented yearly, in a workshop format, to allow for turnover among community associations and municipal staff. The workshop includes three elements:

- A video presentation, accompanied by companion notes
- A booklet intended as a reference tool for the various audiences
- An instruction manual designed to help community associations participate in the approval process

2.1 Video and Companion Notes

The program's main component is an 18-minute video, entitled "Planning Approvals in Calgary: A Cooperative Process". Together with its companion notes, it forms the basis for guided instruction on community and industry involvement in the planning process.

The video fulfils the following main objectives: it educates community associations, other public interest groups and the general public; it familiarizes developers and builders with community concerns and perceptions; and it encourages a collaborative approach to development and conflict resolution. The video aims to create an effective, balanced and cooperative forum for discussion of the merits of individual developments.

The video presents an overview of the following topics:

- Landowners' rights
- Approval process

- Opportunities for public input
- Common issues and concerns related to proposed developments
- How to identify, explore and present concerns
- Resolving conflicts between developers, community and neighbours
- Roles of the planning staff and approving authorities

2.2 Booklet

The booklet, entitled "Public Participation in the Planning Process", describes in detail the formal opportunities for public participation in the approval of redesignation, subdivision and development permits, and in the preparation of policy plans.

The booklet is intended to be a benchmark document to be used as a reference tool for the general public, the development industry and other interested groups (heritage, environment), teaching institutions, and other communities interested in the planning process. It covers the various options available for participation, most notably negotiation, notification, written comments and appeals.

The booklet also describes the way public interest is weighed against industry interest by the various authorities, as well as presenting the legal framework for decision-making. Diagrams and charts are used to illustrate the various processes and opportunities for public participation.

2.3 Instruction Manual

“A Community Guide to the Planning Process”, is presented in a loose-leaf binder format, to allow for regular updating. Sections are colour-coded for easy reference.

As its title indicates, the manual is intended primarily for community associations. The manual is considerably more technical in nature than the video and the booklet. As such, it constitutes a veritable step-by-step “how-to” manual that is intended to help community association representatives evaluate proposed developments.

The manual covers in detail each of the following topics:

- Evaluating proposed development projects
- Reviewing redesignation, subdivision and development applications
- Understanding the legal framework within which planning operates
- Making presentations to Council and Development Appeal Board
- Obtaining permits (Building, Occupancy, etc.)
- Roles and responsibilities of the different players (applicants, aldermen, planning authorities, etc.)
- Community planning committee’s guidelines
- Reducing conflict and managing disputes

Appendices present technical information on various subjects, such as district by-laws, area redevelopment plans, and development permits. The figures on the following pages present excerpts from the manual.

2.4 Communication Plan

The project team determined at the onset that its education program would be presented to community associations, industry associations, other public interest groups and the general public.

The various target audiences will be reached through workshop presentations to community associations, public interest groups, developers and the general public; through the media; and through the distribution of written materials. The project team also intended that the video be aired regularly on public television and be used in conjunction with various other orientation and education programs. Industry publications could be used to arouse interest in the program among specific groups interested in exploring the issue of community involvement.

The complete education package has been distributed to various community associations and public libraries. The video may be viewed at no cost in CMHC offices across Canada. The education package may be obtained from the City of Calgary Planning and Building Department.¹

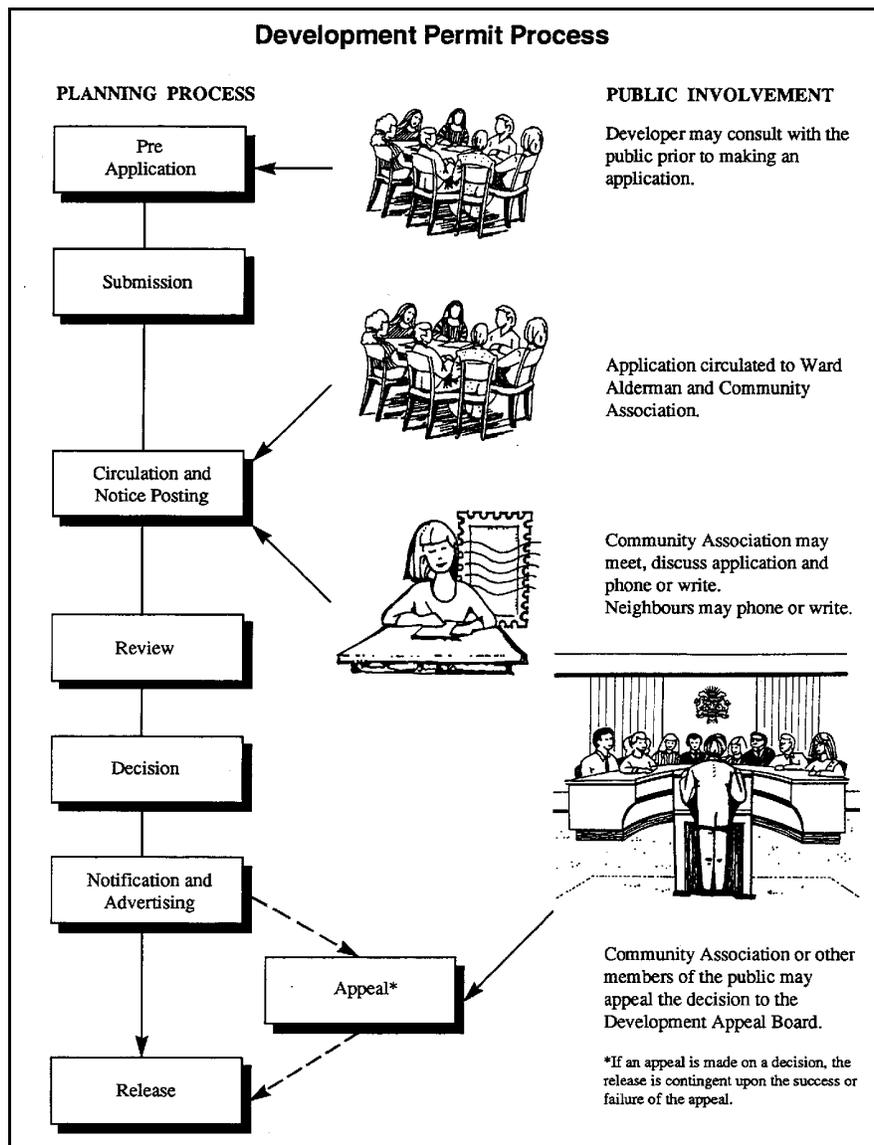
¹ For more information or to obtain the planning education package, contact the Planning and Building Department #8108, City of Calgary, P.O. Box 2100, Postal Station “M”, Calgary, Alberta, T2P 2M5, Tel: (403) 268-5308, Fax: (403) 268-5623. A charge for the package may be applied to cover expenses.

2.5 Project Costs

The total cost for the production of the planning education program (video and companion notes, booklet and instruction

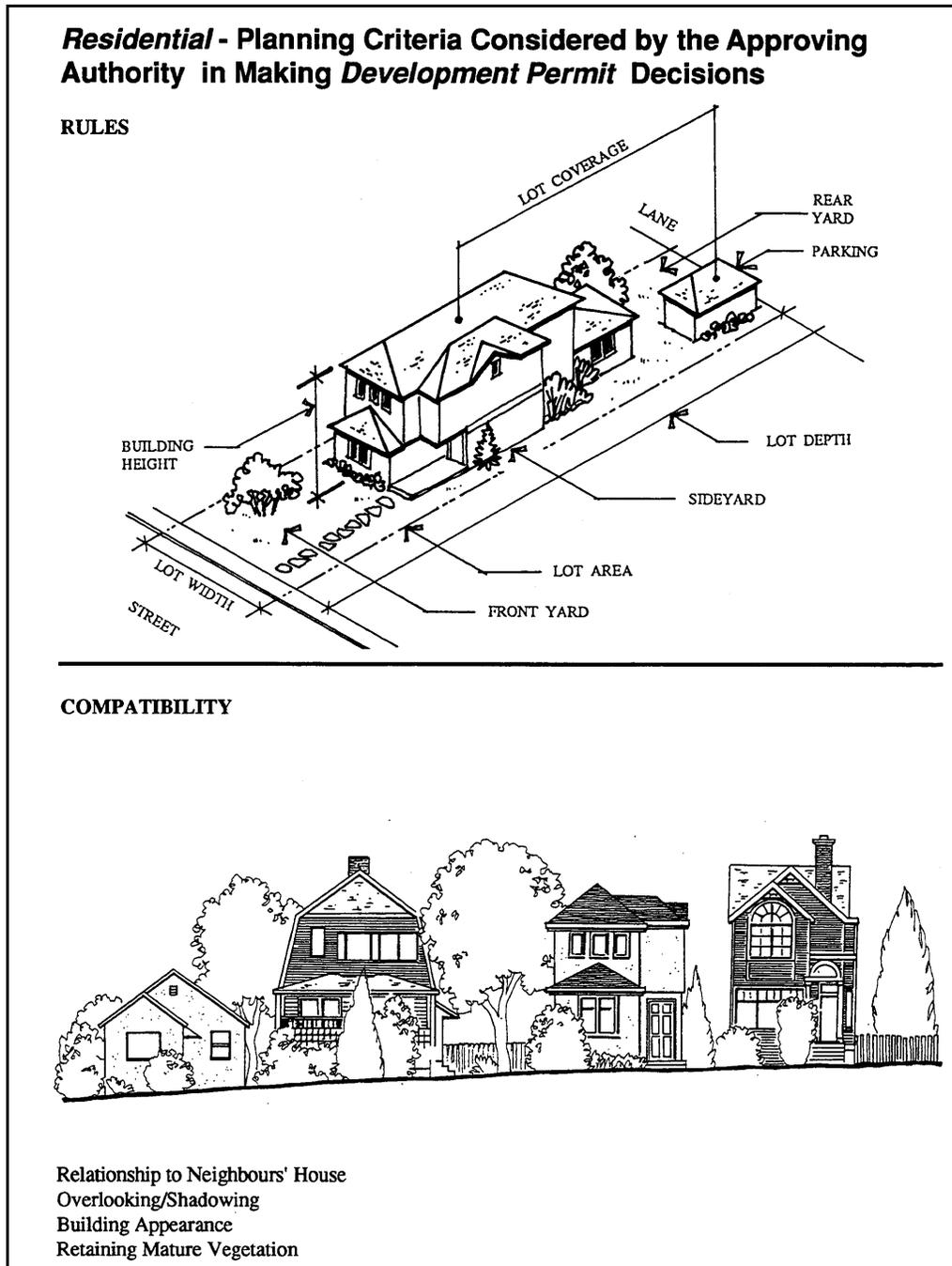
manual) was \$40,000. The cost of producing the video was \$26,000; the remaining \$14,000 was used to prepare the written materials.

Figure 1. Development Permit Process



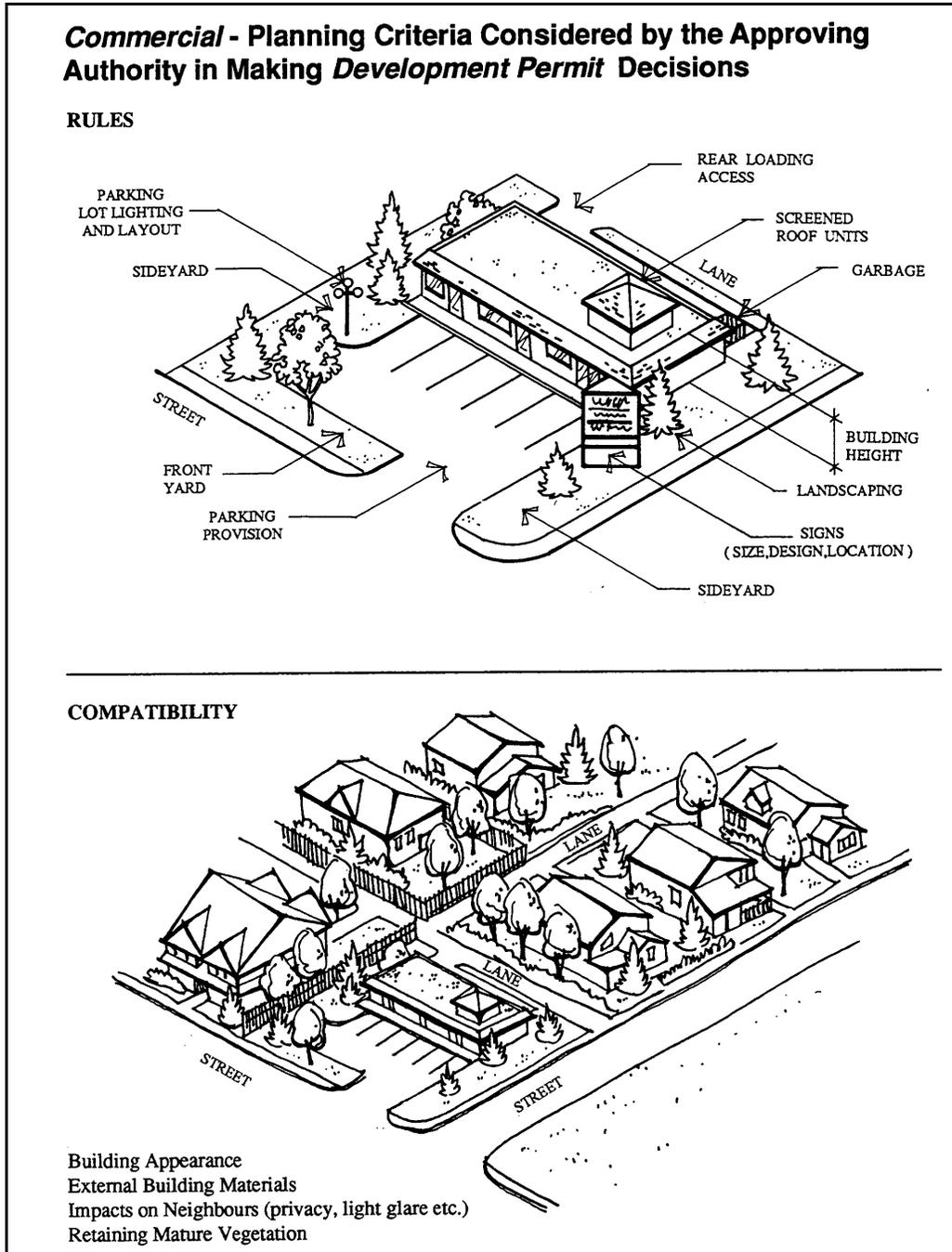
Source: City of Calgary

Figure 2. Development Permit—Residential Planning Criteria



Source: City of Calgary

Figure 3. Development Permit—Commercial Planning Criteria



Source: City of Calgary

Figure 4. Development Permit Evaluation

How You Evaluate a DEVELOPMENT PERMIT Circulation

So....you have the application in front of you. What do you need to do?

1. **Familiarize** yourself with the site.
2. **Understand** the development proposal.
 - Take your time reading and understanding the plans.
3. If you have any questions or trouble understanding what the plans mean or what the proposal will look like contact the Planning & Building staff member or the applicant.
4. Check to see if the proposal helps achieve the intent and expectations of the approved policy (e.g., ARP). If your community does not have an approved policy but has previously defined community goals, **consider how the proposal will contribute to achieving your goals.**
5. List how the proposal could **impact** (pros and cons) the neighbours and the community regarding such things as :
 - **compatibility** with the neighbourhood (i.e., how well would it “fit” into its surroundings) - generally this refers to height, bulk, architectural style, etc.
 - the **relationship** to the surrounding buildings and the streetscape
 - impact on the **privacy** of the neighbours (i.e., overlooking)
 - **driveway** (access) locations
 - **parking**
 - **vehicle and pedestrian safety**
 - **landscaping** and possible retention of mature vegetation
 - **height, massing, yard setbacks, etc.**
 - **building materials**

There are some matters which cannot be considered:

- the characteristics of people who may use the proposed development (e.g., tenant vs. owner occupied); comments must address the land uses, not the land users.
- the economic benefits or losses (e.g., increasing tax revenue to the city or the proposed development creating too much competition resulting in the loss of revenue to an existing business, etc.).

- 6. Depending on the impact of the proposed project, you may want to set up a meeting for the immediate neighbours, the surrounding block, or the entire community.

Source: City of Calgary

7. It would be wise to **invite the applicant**, to any meeting where you discuss the proposal, to explain the details.
8. If you cannot comment by the date requested and you need an extension (to meet with the neighbours or the applicant, for example) discuss the matter with the planning staff member. It is important to meet the deadlines. An extension could be given only in exception cases.
9. In your written comments:
- Mention the pros and cons of the proposal and any important elements you feel should be protected in future negotiations. It does not help the staff if you just oppose or support a project without giving reasons.
 - Where appropriate, **make suggestions** which could improve the proposed project and reduce any impacts it may have.
 - Express your opinions using planning concepts (e.g., height, mass, parking) not personal preferences.
 - Do not include a “community decision” in your comments. The development staff cannot (and do not) consider whether a community has voted to “accept,” “support” or “reject” an application. The planners are interested in the problems the application may raise and how they could be addressed.
 - There may be disagreement between the neighbours of a proposed development and the general community membership. Include comments and concerns from all positions in your response to the City and note when a specific concern is limited to a particular group.
10. Development Permit decisions are made by the Development Officer or the Calgary Planning Commission (CPC). Unlike redesignations the **aldermen are not directly involved**, except for the aldermen that sit on the CPC and the DAB. The aldermen on DAB, however, are restrained by legislation from discussing applications heard at DAB prior to the DAB hearing. Since it is not known in advance which items may be appealed, they generally do not become involved in the Development Permit Process.
11. Development permit approvals are **advertised in Thursday’s newspapers**. Affected members of the public and the applicant may appeal development permit decisions through the Development Appeal Board.

Source: City of Calgary

3.0 REGULATORY REFORM INITIATIVES AND IMPACT ON HOUSING COST, CHOICE AND QUALITY

Presentation of the education program began as soon as its various elements were completed. The video was shown widely across Canada and at various national and international conferences. The workshop was presented at community meetings and during City staff training and orientation sessions.

In March 1994, Calgary's cable television aired an hour-long show which included the video presentation, a panel discussion hosted by the City's Planning and Building Department and a phone-in question-and-answer session.

The program has been used widely by the Calgary Home Builders' Association, the Urban Development Institute, Calgary City Council, the Calgary Planning Commission, the Development Appeal Board, Calgary's mayor and a number of aldermen, and numerous community associations, as well as the planning departments of Edmonton, Vancouver, New Westminster and Victoria.

We were especially excited and proud of the PEP video. This effort will serve as a very positive vehicle to assist community associations, planners and industry.

*—John R. Klassen, Executive Director
Calgary Home Builders' Association*

Response to the package surpassed the project team's expectations. In addition to receiving formal support from City Council, the program has merited the Canadian Institute of Planners 1994 National Award for Communications, the Alberta Institute of Planners 1994 Award of Distinction for Planning Excellence and the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators 1995 Education Award.

Following the project, Calgary continued its efforts in planning education with the development of an interactive information kiosk, a review of community planning review procedures, and a program to explain general strategic planning goals, such as intensification, to the public.