

Calgary must control life on the edge

Boundaries have effect on people

BEV SANDALACK AND JIM DEWALD
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

In a recent article, we talked about the idea of legibility in city form — that is, the ease with which we can “read” the city.

We mentioned the late American urbanist Kevin Lynch, author of the book, *Image of the City*, which talks about how users perceive and organize spatial information as they navigate through cities.

He demonstrated that people tend to create a mental map of a place, neighbourhood, or city in order to make sense of an environment and to develop a picture of its structure and identity.

This is important in wayfinding, and also in developing a sense of belonging to a place.

When we have trouble constructing that mental map — when we can't quite figure out an environment — we become frustrated and more likely to form a negative opinion about the place.

Lynch believed that the city image/mental map was composed of five elements — paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks.

When these elements work together, they give citizens a greater likelihood of being able to form that positive mental map.

One of our previous articles was about paths; this one will talk about edges.

Edges can be:

- the boundaries between places (the Bow River is the north edge of the downtown, separating it from the Sunnyside residential area);

- breaks in a pattern (where the early street grid changes to the post-Second World War street pattern of drives, crescents and cul-de-sacs);

- articulation points, where something gives way to something else (the railway is what most people think of as the south edge of the downtown).

- Sometimes they are barriers (most freeways);
- Sometimes, they are seams or sutures along which two regions are joined together (4th Street, which joins Mission and Cliff Bungalow together).

Edges happen at various scales. They can delineate where we enter or leave the city — where we are inside the urban area or the countryside.

They can let us know where we are entering into a certain neighbourhood, or even a certain street.

Entry features, changes in signage, and gateways are tools that can emphasize this edge.

Fences can also be ways to mark an edge, and they seem to work best when they reinforce what the layout or design was already doing, and are most intrusive if they are all that is used to keep people

out or in. A chain link fence is usually a clumsy way to mark an edge.

How edges are penetrated is a key element of urban design. Are connections across edges welcoming, or do they cause viewers to turn-away?

Do connections evoke a sense of inclusiveness or exclusiveness?

Are the aesthetic and emotional attributes of connections consistent with other urban design elements of the surrounding districts?

In Calgary, the Bow River divides the downtown from the Sunnyside district, and the Louise Bridge provides a decidedly inviting link between the two distinct districts.

On the other hand, the Centre Street Bridge is less pedestrian-friendly on the north side — more suitable for goat trails and Olympic level cross-country runners than the touristy pedestrian.

Think of the northbound walk on a cold, dark, winter evening. The Louise Bridge crossing provides hints of warm refuge, while the Centre Street Bridge seems more ominous and colder than the north wind.

In some situations, exclusiveness is the intended message.

For instance, castles and walled cities had moats to protect their inhabitants from known enemies.

Curiously, in today's free society, there are some who feel a similar need to keep out the “undesirables” from exclusive districts.

For instance, walled communities continue to sprout up in parts of the United States as a response to fears of terrorism and crime.

Scientifically, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) is a burgeoning field of research that considers two polarized approaches — crime prevention through hard edges that separate classes of citizens, or through permeable edges that compliment a compassionate normative means of crime prevention.

The distinctions are hot and cold, but all too often we find lukewarm designs that send confusing messages to people.

It would seem in our open and free society, the shift should be to more inclusive approaches of connecting

edges. One of the characteristics of new communities developed in the 1980s and 1990s was to use faux gates in order to establish an exclusive enclave, falsely creating edges where only the privileged may cross over to a better life.

This was a marketing strategy, but the confusing social undertones become a lasting legacy.

Fortunately, community entries have more recently become focused on a softer approach that sends a message of inclusion over



Bev Sandalack



Jim Dewald

“Think about this when you walk down any street: is it clear where the space is public?”



Photos courtesy, Jim Dewald and Bev Sandalack

People tend to create mental maps of a place, such as Mount Royal Village in Calgary, above.



Do suburban streets, such as this one, promote a feeling of inclusiveness, or exclusiveness?

exclusion, diversity over segregation, and positive over negative.

Edges can also be the linings of streets, showing where the public space ends and the private space begins.

This is an important part of urban legibility.

Think about this when you walk down any street: is it clear where space is public — that is, where all citizens can be, and where space is more private and controlled?

Does it make sense? Can you see clearly by the design of the area where you should go, and where you should only be if you are a resident or employee?

Edges can also be created by buildings.

There is a sense of enclosure that can be formed by a continuous edge of buildings close enough to the sidewalk to create what is sometimes

called a “street wall.”

This can be seen on Calgary's favorite pedestrian streets, such as Kensington Avenue, 10th Street N.W., 17th Avenue S.W., 9th Avenue in Inglewood, and 11th Street S.W.

But it can only be observed in parts of them because there are plenty of things that can go wrong.

On the best streets, buildings form a permeable edge: there are stores, businesses and offices where people, coffee, drinks and other goods go in and out, enlivening the streetscape.

Where the edge isn't permeable — for example where there is a blank wall or a big box-like structure with only one entry — the quality is quite different, and people tend to stay away.

Edges are a key consideration in effective urban design, and it is incumbent on design professionals and developers to consider the legibility of edge treatments when adding their projects to the inclusive fabric of Calgary's urban landscape.

JIM DEWALD, PHD, IS ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, STRATEGY AND GLOBAL MANAGEMENT AT THE HASKAYNE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY, AND A PARTNER WITH PETERS-DEWALD LAND CO. BEV SANDALACK, PHD, IS CO-ORDINATOR OF THE URBAN DESIGN PROGRAM IN THE FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY, MEMBER OF THE CALGARY URBAN DESIGN REVIEW PANEL, AND CO-AUTHOR OF THE CALGARY PROJECT, A BOOK ABOUT CALGARY'S URBAN DEVELOPMENT.



This water feature is an example of how boundaries can help shape a community.

moving tributes™
memoriams
obituaries
photographs
guest books
stories

remembering.ca

Stories, pictures and tributes to life.

FOR SALE
6.5 ACRE MULTI SITE
Flexible Terms

Hampton Hills Estates
OF HIGH RIVER

R3 –
118 Unit Townhouse Site
Only 25 minutes from South Calgary.
Serviced to property line and ready for construction.

Call for more info: 403-254-6440 ext 239

jobs
careers
advice

working.com

Interview in your pyjamas.
Search anytime.

WESTMERE
GARDENS
at Chestermere Lake

QUICK POSSESSIONS AVAILABLE

- from 1669 - 2154 sq. ft.
- 3 Bedroom, 2-storey, semi-attached homes
- Island kitchens w/ walk in pantry
- Master Bdrms w/ ensuite and walk-in closet
- Rear sundecks w/ vinyl decking
- Mountain views and walk-outs available
- Yard Maintenance Service

For details contact Melinda at 235-0660 or visit our Show Home at 100 Springmere Grove

Starting at \$409,900 (incl. home, lot & gst)

REID BUILT HOMES
MASTER BUILDER

reidbuilthomes.com