

CBC radio talk show interview posted May 29, 2014 with Mayor Naheed Nenshi

Host:

“This week, hundreds of Calgarians were told they’re going to have to move. In 3 years the city will shut down Midfield Mobile Home Park on 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue N.E. Now, Rudy Prediger has lived there for decades. Yesterday on the show he told us that the mayor had made promises to Midfield residents that he didn’t keep. You may have heard him on the show”.

Rudy: (previously recorded) “When he was running for mayor, he came in here and sat right in our front room and told us that the city’s not treating us right and he’s going to put a stop to all that. And they’re going to start communicating with you people and 3 weeks after he was in power he sent us a letter stating that we’re moving”.

Host:

“That’s Rudy Prediger the president of the Midfield Mobile Home Co-operative. Mayor Nenshi joins me on the line now. ‘Morning Mayor. What do you make of what you just heard?’”

Mayor Nenshi:

“Well, it’s not quite right. Well, at all. But that’s irrelevant. I mean the folks who live there obviously got some very tough news this week and it’s a tough, tough decision for council as well and the real issue here is to try and treat everyone as fairly as possible. It’s probably worth a little bit of background. Rudy is correct in that I’ve spent lots of time there and in people’s living rooms talking about what the right and fair solution for everyone is ... I don’t know what letter he is talking about ‘3 weeks after I was elected’ ‘cause that just didn’t happen. But, we finally made the decision to *extend* the life of the park - remember the previous council had suggested the park should be closed as early as 2012. And we were pushing as far as we possibly could, but the challenge is that the infrastructure is really failing, and the way the people who built that park before the city ended up with it, built it was such that the pipes are directly under the mobile homes. And over the last 3 years we’ve seen significant pipe failures both sewage and water, and we had to replace them with over ground pipes. But in order to replace them we have to jack-up the mobile homes and so to fix the infrastructure throughout the park actually means destroying the park. Because you simply cannot move all those homes around in order to get at the pipes. And that’s really the challenge we face is that soon we won’t be able to offer folks who live there safe water and sanitation so we pushed it out as far as we possibly can”.

Host:

“How is that materially different from any other aging neighbourhood in Calgary that needs a system overhaul?”

Mayor Nenshi:

“The difference is that in most older neighbourhoods, in fact in every other older neighbourhood that I’m aware of, you don’t actually have to get in *under* the people’s

houses, you know, you can actually go through the utilities rights of way, but when the private developer built that park they built it in a very odd way. So there are really no utility rights of way to get at. The homes are very close together, there's no room in between, you have to go in underneath people's homes and because they're mobile homes, it's very difficult to do so. They lack a foundation".

Host:

"There's an underlying allegation here that we may as well just throw right up to the surface – that the city has been sitting on this decision for a long time waiting for property values to increase and now they've decided, 'this is the time to cash in'. How do you address that?"

Mayor Nenshi:

"Well, if that were true, when the city first made the decision at the height of the boom in 2007, they would have sold the land then and of course that's not true at all. In fact, one thing that I have been very, very clear on is that there are *no* plans about the future of that land, nor will there be any plans any time soon. We had to make the decision on what to do and how to be fair to those residents completely independent of any decision on the future use of the land, and I've been - council and I - have been very clear on that point, that this cannot be clouded by any decision about what happens. Will the land be developed some day? Yeah. Will that happen anytime soon? No".

Host:

"Let's talk about what's fair. The city as I understand it, is offering up to \$20,000 to help residents relocate. But the residents there say they don't have anywhere to go. All the trailer parks in Calgary are full. What options are there for them?"

Mayor Nenshi:

"This is a really important point. And the city prior to my becoming mayor had made a lot of noises about building its' own trailer park – I shouldn't say 'trailer park' – mobile home community. And the numbers *never* made sense, the city was going to take a giant financial loss on it and over the last couple of years we've been told by many private sector operators that they really want to build more mobile home parks in Calgary, but were not willing to do so because the city was 'hotfooting' in that area. So in fact when we made the announcement the other day, we already had one reputable mobile home operator say, 'Great. I'm going to build a new mobile home in the next three years and there'll be room for virtually all of the Midfield residents there'. So there's going to be two options going for it and that's why it's 3 years, it's such a long period, right? No private landlord would ever give you 3 years notice, I don't think. And so the idea is there that those who prefer a mobile home community, will be able to find space in a mobile home community and we'll help them move their house to that place if they so desire, and those who prefer to stay in the same neighbourhood - there's a whole bunch of development at every price level that will come on line in that neighbourhood on the 16<sup>th</sup> avenue corridor over the next three years. So people have a choice to move to a mobile home community in a different neighbourhood, or stay in the neighbourhood they love, but not in a mobile home community, and I think that's fair".

Host:

“I hear what you’re saying, but Mayor, many of the people who are living there, as you know, are seniors who have been there for a long time. I want to put you back in one of the living rooms of those doublewides for a moment. If you’re sitting down with one of those seniors, who’s *very* worried about what they are going to do, don’t know if they can move their trailer and are kind of stuck right now, what would you tell them?”

Mayor Nenshi:

“Well, you know, take a deep breath. The reason we took 3 years, and over the course of those 3 years we’ll be able to find options for people. In addition to that \$20,000, we’re offering every person who lives there an individualized consultant to help them develop their best housing situation, people who are experts in this area, and it is *three* years after all. So obviously this is a very traumatic experience for a lot of people, but we’ll be able to find the right option. The other thing I should mention, is that while a lot of people who live there are seniors, there’s about 173 homes there at the moment, and a large proportion - I don’t think it’s as high as Rudy had suggested, but a large proportion - are seniors, but only about 22 of those homes are what we would classify as low income homes. Only 22 are subsidized homes and of course we are going to spend special time with those low income people, helping them think through their options”.

Host:

“You may have another problem on your hands. Sure, temperatures are running high right now. But Rudy Prediger told us yesterday, he’s not moving. You want him to move, you’re going to have to come in and take him out. What are you going to do if residents don’t leave?”

Mayor Nenshi:

“I don’t think we really have to worry about that. You know, emotions are obviously running high, but you know, in a place where you can’t guarantee water and sewer, in a place that, you know you don’t actually own, I don’t think we’re going to have any problem with that. I think people will be reasonable in the end. And the other thing I should mention too is that there is a *wide* variety of opinions among the residents on what is right and what we should do. You know, Rudy himself, yesterday, was suggesting that we have to build this other park, except that Rudy and his group were saying they had no desire whatsoever for the new park. So, you know, there’s a whole bunch of different opinions. But things will sort out. Again 3 years is a *long* time and we’ll have the opportunity to fix all this stuff over that period”.

Host:

“Well, we’ll see where it goes from here. Thank you for taking the time to join us this morning”.

Mayor Nenshi:

“Thank you, David. I appreciate the opportunity”.