Real Estate Intelligent

TENANT BEHAVIOUR REPORT

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CALGARY TENANT BEHAVIOUR REPORT

CALGARY, ALBERTA

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Executive Summary

Calgary's rental market is undergoing a shift as perspectives on renting change from a stopgap choice to an intentional part of changing lifestyles. MLA's tenant research report surfaces four major insights for developers.

1. **Tangible value is a dark horse.** Affordability remains the primary concern for tenants, but tangible or perceived quality commands "premium" pricing.

2. **A cultural movement is opening up new markets.** The "lifestyle" tenant is real and represents a growing segment.

3. **Predictability is the driving force of decision making** across tenants of all demographics and cultures. Quality property management being the lowest-hanging fruit to meet predictability.

4. **Location still matters.** Safety and access to everyday convenience remain defining aspects of neighborhood appeal, second to the address.

Behavioral Drivers

Economic: Affordability with a Value Ceiling

Primary Finding: Competitive rent is a key factor in initial tenant consideration (70%), but renters demonstrate a sophisticated value calculation. A willingness to pay meaningful premiums for quality upgrades, or at least the perception of one combined with guaranteed fixed costs.

The Numbers:

- ➔ 70% prioritize competitive monthly rent in their top-3 selection criteria
- ➔ Yet 70% choose modern units with parking over bare-bones lower-cost alternatives
- ➔ Average premium tolerance: $281/month (median $200) for modern appliances & parking
- ➔ 31% actively prioritize modern finishes and design as differentiators
- ➔ 24% prioritize pet-friendly policies, a clear quality-of-life signal
- ➔ 42% selected predictable rent increases as critical
- ➔ 37% selected free months rent/utilities as critical
- ➔ 31% Selected clear policies on additional costs.

The Insight: Calgary renters aren't bargain hunting, they're on the hunt for true value, which includes no surprises. Renters will pay for tangible lifestyle improvements, specifically: modern finishes, parking, and pet accommodations. It's important to lead with positioning around the things that make daily life materially better, including certainty in costs, which was noted as a non-starter for many.

Lifestyle: Renting By Choice, Not By Chance

Primary Finding: A renaissance is taking place; a "renter-by-choice" cohort is developing and reshaping product demand and perspectives on leasing. A significant segment (22% of homeowners) would consider renting by preference placing greater value on convenience, safety, and flexibility over ownership.

The Numbers:

- ➔ Top reasons for choosing rental living:
    - ◆ Affordability (50%)—but for many, this is about capital allocation, not scarcity
    - ◆ Convenience/no maintenance (46%)
    - ◆ Security while away (19%)—professional oversight valued
    - ◆ Lifestyle/freedom (18%)- New relationship constructs (non-traditional), and shifts in mindsets around “liabilities” (I.e. property taxes, maintenance, etc.)
- ➔ 53% prefer standard 12-month leases; 18% want month-to-month flexibility
- ➔ 19% prefer short-term leases—particularly younger renters and multi-person households

The Insight: Leasing is shedding stigma and for practical lifestyle reasons; freedom from maintenance, predictability in costs, valuing other investments, flexibility (as more relationships are less traditional), and professional management. There is an opportunity to appeal to people’s aspirations, and not their resignation. Position as rental living that is intentional, sophisticated, and convenient—not a stepping stone.

Social: Community Connection Through Convenience, Not Programming

Primary Finding: Renters seek out walkable, amenity-rich neighborhoods that allow for organic community, and not manufactured socialization. Only 12% prioritize building events; 71% want walkable access to daily needs.

The Numbers:

- ➔ 71% prioritize walkability and local amenities (top neighborhood factor)
- ➔ 55% prioritize perceived safety
- ➔ 48% value access to nature/parks
- ➔ 46% want "sense of community/friendly atmosphere"
- ➔ Only 12% value social or community events in building.

The Insight: Renters are choosing location first, with the real decision-making tied to what's in proximity. Renters want to walk to coffee, work, and parks. The things that matter most to their daily lifestyle. These are the tools they need to build their own social networks. Vibe matters, but it emerges from walkability and access to daily conveniences not forced building events or amenities.

Cultural: Practicality Over Identity-Based Marketing

Primary Finding: Despite Calgary's growing diversity (27% born outside Canada, 29% speak non-English languages at home), cultural similarity ranks dead last in decision making factors. Renters from all backgrounds continue to prioritize the same universal basics.

The Numbers:

- ➔ 27% born outside Canada; 29% speak languages other than English at home
- ➔ 29% moved to Alberta from another province (migration-driven growth)
- ➔ Only 11% prioritize "community of my culture/language" in building selection
- ➔ Supplementary analysis: No significant difference in priorities across South Asian, East Asian, or other cultural groups—"people are after practical first"

The Insight: Calgary's renter base is multicultural, but practicality is universal. Don't overthink cultural segmentation. Affordability, quality, location, and responsive management resonate across all groups. Focus on inclusive communication and professional service delivery, not identity-based amenities or products. Respect diversity; serve universal needs.

"So what?" Implications & Risk

Implication 1: Differentiation Through a Tailored Approach

Context: Calgary's rental supply is expanding significantly. In a competitive market, basic units and amenities commoditize quickly. A growing and broader renter market for the first time (geographical, age, lifestyle) suggests a need for more niche product offerings and tailored positioning.

Developer Impact:

- ➔ Upside: Renters demonstrate clear willingness to pay $200-300/month premiums for quality of life upgrades; new non-traditional lifestyles are fuelling diverse lease terms product type. (I.e. suburbia townhome for the multi-gen family)
- ➔ Risk: Competing on price and product alone in a high-supply market erodes margins without building affinity. Basic units face commoditization and slower absorption rates.

Action: Invest in mid-tier differentiation (modern finishes, parking, pet policies, intentional retail) rather than “luxury” amenities or bare-bones economy. Empower niche market segments through strategic lifestyle marketing. The "value-for-money premium" segment is large and under-served.

Implication 2: Property Management is Your Sales and Retention Lever

Context: Renters cite responsiveness, cleanliness, and transparency (basic operational excellence) as top priorities. Qualitative feedback revealed widespread property management dissatisfaction coupled with frustrations surrounding trust and reliability connected to both operations and pricing.

Developer Impact:

➔ Upside: The bar is low. Reliable execution on the basics: clean common areas, clear billing, responsive management, transparent pricing and marketing create competitive moats.

➔ Risk: Property Management skillset doesn’t translate into sales. Poor ongoing property management and hidden costs erode any product advantage. Renters tolerate subpar units if management is good; they flee great units if management is bad or if there is hidden cost.

Action: Property management is not a cost center—it's your retention and referral engine. Engage sales centric leasing agents, who understand how to convert leads. Educate your leasing team how to communicate with your target tenant, lean into a sales first approach. Then, invest in responsive, digital-first property management or partner with best-in-class operators. Track maintenance response times, NPS, and renewal rates as KPIs. Market pricing guarantees and/or bundles.

Implication 3: Location Trumps Product (within Reason)

Context: Walkability/amenities (71%) and safety (56%) dominate neighborhood selection—far above unit-level factors like building amenities (10%).

Developer Impact:

- ➔ Upside: Well-located, safe neighborhoods command pricing power and attract quality tenants. Location decisions are stickier than unit preferences.
- ➔ Risk: No amount of interior upgrades compensate for poor location. Renters will downgrade unit quality for better neighborhoods.

Action: Prioritize site selection in walkable, amenity-rich, safe areas. If you're developing in secondary locations, you need significant unit-level or pricing advantages to compete. Avoid vehicle-dependent, isolated sites unless targeting a niche (e.g., suburban families prioritizing space). Know your target tenant well to inform residential and retail amenities that increase the value of the community, not just the building. I.e. placing a ground-floor grocer in your building if there isn't one in the community.

Methodology

Purpose & Population

This study measures current and prospective renter attitudes and behaviours in the Calgary area. The target population was Calgarians aged 18+ who are either currently renting or intend to rent in the future.

Sample & Fieldwork

- **Sample size:** n = 405
- **Field dates:** October 16–21, 2025
- **Sampling approach:** Online survey drawn from a managed consumer research panel with quotas to achieve a balanced sample of Calgarians 18+ across key demographics.
- **Eligibility:** Screened in if currently renting or planning to rent.

Data Collection

- **Mode:** Self-administered online questionnaire (7–10 minutes).
- **Device compatibility:** Mobile and desktop optimized.
- **Question types:** Mix of single/multiple-response, and open-ended items.

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