

# Finding Common Ground

## Project Update

### Recommendation:

That the February 3, 2015, Sustainable Development report CR\_1871, be received for information.

### Report Summary

**This report presents initiatives Administration is engaged in to encourage positive outcomes for affordable housing providers and host communities regarding the development of affordable and supportive housing projects.**

### Report

#### The Project

The "Finding Common Ground" research project was initiated in January 2013 in response to the growing frustration of non-market housing provider agencies and existing community residents over the process of public engagement around proposed non-market housing developments.

The purpose of "Finding Common Ground" was to find ways to address the root causes for conflict in the development of these projects, working towards the larger goal of building community trust in decision-making regarding approvals for such developments. The project's intent was not to manage community opposition nor find ways to convince neighbours of the legitimacy of non-market housing in their areas, but rather to identify ways through constructive dialogue and information exchange to gain community recognition that the planning and engagement process for such proposals is fair, transparent, and credible, to create better outcomes for all concerned.

The following four principles were developed to guide the project:

1. Ensure it does not affect or undermine the established processes of existing regulatory bodies (e.g. Subdivision Development Appeal Board or the zoning decision-making role of the City).
2. Ensure it is efficient and will not result in prolonging the project review and approval process.
3. Be seen to be effective and useful to the parties involved; the process must be credible and unbiased.
4. The effects of new dialogue-enhancing processes should be pragmatic and measurable.

Please retain this report for future meetings

### Context

There are an estimated 38,500 households in core housing need in Edmonton and the City's continuing population growth is adding annually to that "backlog" non-market housing need. For this report, "non-market housing" means affordable or supportive housing projects which require direct government funding, occupancy by households with less than median incomes, and to some extent resident supports. Such projects include new construction as well as the purchase and retrofit of existing housing stock.

While existing City policy encourages sustainable neighbourhoods with housing choices to meet the needs of all demographic and income groups, there is potential for conflict when existing community residents become concerned about the type and scale of new developments changing the character of their neighbourhoods.

Funders of non-market housing projects have often required demonstration of community consultation regardless of whether rezoning is required; however, that consultation is not defined. Existing residents say that they are not adequately consulted and/or not in a timely fashion. Non-market housing providers say that there is no defined process and that consultation is time-consuming and costly. With no proactive dialogue prior to the land development approval stage, that stage can become adversarial and can be characterized by a lack of information and dialogue among interested parties, requiring resolution through costly regulatory appeals (Subdivision Development Appeal Board) or legal appeals.

### The Process

In early 2013, the project was conceived and consultants were retained. Consultants interviewed non-market housing developers in Edmonton and reviewed common practices for addressing community opposition to non-market housing across Canada and the United States. On August 7, 2013, the consultants, together with City and Homeless Commission staff, facilitated conversations with key stakeholders including the development industry, community league representatives, social housing providers, and Government of Alberta and City of Edmonton staff.

On December 10 and 11, 2013, the consultants presented the findings from the Edmonton case studies and from the jurisdictional reviews, which covered the experience in ten American and nine Canadian cities. The presentation provided an overview of the typology of approaches and strategies being used across this set of cities and provided specific illustrative examples. The project team facilitated five public consultation meetings with key stakeholders including the development industry, community league representatives, interested members of the public, social housing providers, and Government of Alberta and City of Edmonton staff. The stakeholders provided advice on options gathered by the consultants.

On April 15, 2014, two stakeholder workshops explored the feasibility of the recommended initiatives. Participants included the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness, the Homeless Commission, the Community Plan Committee, housing

providers, community league representatives, staff from the Government of Alberta, and a representation of City of Edmonton staff, including Community Services.

### Recommendations

The consultants final report (Attachment 1) was completed in December 2013, following several rounds of consultations with key non-market housing providers, funders and community stakeholders. The following four principle recommendations were identified:

1. Initiate, in collaboration with provider networks, the Homeless Commission and Homeward Trust, a public awareness and education campaign that includes an explicit policy framework on non-market housing plans and policies to include existing objectives such as locating non-market housing throughout the City;
2. Provide training and guidance to housing developers in undertaking an effective community engagement process;
3. Funders should update and publish a set of clear, objective evaluation and selection criteria for non-market housing funding proposals; and
4. Explore further with stakeholders how a review panel could be used to manage contested developments to act as a tribunal and arbitrator in the event that dialogue between proponents and community representatives/residents is stalled.

### Work To Date

The following three principle recommendations have been actioned:

#### 1. Non-Market Housing Public Education and Awareness

This initiative is considered necessary to stimulate a conversation prior to land development applications for specific Non-Market Housing proposals, in regards to the City's housing needs and to clarify what the City is aiming for relative to Non-Market Housing. The initiative includes the communities' role in accommodating a balance of all types of housing, including Non-Market Housing. The Capital Region Board's Housing Plan and the ELEVATE report recommend a public education campaign as a key to addressing Non-Market Housing shortage. This Education and Awareness initiative will require a commitment of resources by Administration to ensure this endeavor is successful. A survey was conducted using the Insight Community to assess a baseline to plan the education and awareness initiative. This initiative supports the Councillors Initiative on Public Engagement. As a first step to implementation of this initiative, the attached Consultant's final report and report appendices will be posted on the City website.

#### 2. Public Engagement Training for Non-Market Housing Provider Agencies

This initiative involves the City making public engagement training available to Non-Market Housing providers and community groups. Participants would learn when public engagement is required, when it is advisable, why it is valuable, how to effectively engage and what resources are available to facilitate effective engagement (i.e. Good Neighbour Agreements). This initiative is envisioned as an annual or semiannual event offered by the City either through a venue like the

Planning Academy or as a stand-alone workshop. The focus is aimed at various segments of the public, including: agencies, business owners, community representatives, and citizens. To date, Administration sponsored four housing agencies to take the prestigious International Association of Public Participation training on September 17-19, 2014, and October 8-9, 2014. The participants are sharing their learning through their organizations. Furthermore, the Real Estate, Housing and Economic Sustainability Branch is incorporating the learning from this initiative into the public engagement process on surplus school sites.

### 3. Non-Market Housing Project Proposal Evaluation and Selection Criteria

This initiative is aimed at demonstrating the due diligence that goes into the planning of Non-Market Housing. The funders were identified as the appropriate body to determine what proposals were worth funding while the City is most appropriate to determine what locations, community context, and scale is consistent with good planning practice. Funders have been asked to update and make publicly accessible their funding selection criteria.

Administration is not pursuing the following initiative at this time:

### 4. Non-Market Housing Dispute Resolution Panel

This initiative is supported by some housing providers and community advocates, but has generated some apprehension from funders and may be no longer necessary if the previous three initiatives are implemented. The initiative includes facilitator who aids communities and developers in an early dialogue about Non-Market Housing, in particular supportive housing. Once operational issues are discussed and alternative locations are identified, the project would be reviewed by funders (applying the City's planning and location criteria). If the dialogue was not progressing, a panel of independent experts could review the community's outstanding concerns and make a recommendation to funders and or Council in the event of a required rezoning. A panel could allow earlier consultation and greater weight to either a funding or development decision when the panel's findings were considered. If such a process was piloted, Administration could document and assess the effectiveness of such a panel in achieving both early dialogue and new development of supportive housing.

## Policy

### *The Way We Grow:*

- Goal 4.4.1 Ensure neighbourhoods have a range of housing choice to meet the needs of all demographic and income groups and create more socially sustainable communities.
- Policy 4.4.1.1 Provide a broad and varied housing choice, incorporating various demographics and income groups in all neighbourhoods.
- Policy 4.4.1.3 Develop a strategy to address the distribution of housing types within neighbourhoods.

### *The Way We Live:*

- Goal One: Edmonton is vibrant, connected, engaged and welcoming city. Policy 1.4.3 and 1.4.4
- Goal Three: Edmonton is a caring, inclusive and affordable city. Policy 3.2.3
- Goal Six: Edmonton is a sustainable city. Policy 6.1.8

### **Attachments**

1. Finding Common Ground - Consultants Report
2. What We Heard - Stakeholder Workshop Summaries

### **Others Reviewing this Report**

- L. Cochrane, General Manager, Community Services