



Neighbourhood Engagement

WHAT WE HEARD

January, 2015

Exploring
housing
options
in the inner city



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Realizing Housing Potential is a City initiative focused on exploring housing options in five neighbourhoods: Alberta Avenue, Central McDougall, Eastwood, McCauley and Queen Mary Park. This initiative fulfills the City of Edmonton commitment made in 2012 to complete neighbourhood-based housing assessments in the five neighbourhoods under the three year non-market housing investment pause.

Realizing Housing Potential provides an opportunity for residents, stakeholders and City staff to work together to identify housing policies, programs and pilot projects with strong potential to improve housing conditions in these neighbourhoods. These will be contained in Neighbourhood Housing Roadmaps for each area that will consider issues and options related to all types of housing across the housing continuum, including both market and non-market housing.

A critical objective in Realizing Housing Potential has been to engage local residents and stakeholders in the development of the Neighbourhood Housing Roadmaps. In particular emphasis has been placed on:

- Community:** Carry out a process that offers practical significance to the community
- Collaboration:** Community members' advice and innovation will be actively sought and incorporated into developing recommendations
- Action:** Process and results are accessible and useful to community members and lead to positive change

As part of this community engagement process, a series of neighbourhood workshops were held to hear from a diversity of voices to help clarify housing needs and opportunities within each of the neighbourhoods. In addition, several interviews were held with key community groups and stakeholders that live, work, and have knowledge of the five neighbourhoods.

The results of the workshops and stakeholder interviews will be used to develop each community's housing roadmap.

1.2 APPROACH

WORKSHOPS

Four neighbourhood workshops were held:

- **Queen Mary Park:** September 20, 2014, at the Queen Mary Park Community League Hall
- **McCauley:** September 22, 2014, at the Ital-Canadian Seniors Association
- **Central McDougall:** September 24, 2014, at the St. John's Cultural Centre
- **Alberta Avenue and Eastwood:** September 25, 2014, at the Alberta Avenue Community League Hall

Through these sessions, the City heard from approximately 150 residents.

The meetings were advertised through newspaper advertisements, Community League newsletters and websites, the project website, e-newsletter and neighbourhood-wide mail drop. The sessions included a series of information boards that participants were encouraged to view and discuss with the project team prior to the formal presentation and break-out groups. Information displayed on the boards included relevant City policy and housing initiatives, neighbourhood statistics (derived from the Neighbourhood Housing Profiles) and project information.



The formal portion of the session opened with an introduction and a summary of the intent of Realizing Housing Potential to provide participants with background and context. Following this introduction a brief presentation was made to highlight key results of the neighbourhood profiles.

Neighbourhood profiles have been prepared to help clarify the current state of housing in the five neighbourhoods. Examples of indicators highlighted within the profiles include population and household demographics, current housing stock and other socio-economic indicators (such as labour force). Each participant was provided a one-page "Housing Snapshot" with summary statistics taken from the Neighbourhood Profile.

Following the presentations, and for the majority of the session, participants engaged in a World Café style workshop where participants had their choice to sit at a table focusing on one of four key topics: Housing Data, Housing Choice, Housing Affordability, and Housing Ideas. Participants rotated tables in order to have an opportunity to provide feedback for each topic as desired. The World Café concluded with a report back from facilitators and residents on each of the four topics.

A full copy of the participant handout, including questions, is provided in Appendix A. Additional information and presentation material can be found on the City's website:

edmonton.ca/realizinghousing

INTERVIEWS

In addition to the neighbourhood workshops, a series of interviews were conducted in March, April and June of 2014. These conversations were comprised of a wide range of individuals and groups:

- REACH for Safe Communities
- Infill Development Edmonton (IDEA)
- Inner City Housing Corporation
- Homeward Trust,
- Community Leagues
- Community Revitalization Steering Committees
- BRZ Business Associations
- Edmonton Social Planning Council
- Bissell Centre
- Edmonton Multi-Cultural Health Brokers
- Builders and Developers (Urban Development Institute and Canadian Homebuilders Association-Edmonton)
- Community Leaders in McCauley and Alberta Avenue.

Key findings from the neighbourhood engagement activities are described in the following sections of this report.

2.0 WORKSHOP SUMMARY: KEY MESSAGES

Understanding the housing needs and opportunities within the five City neighbourhoods requires the perspective of the people who live and work in these areas. Through the neighbourhood workshops conducted in September 2014, the City heard from a number of residents and stakeholders. The insight, experience and knowledge of these individuals have been summarized and reflected in the following synopsis. This synopsis highlights key messages heard across all five neighbourhoods; a detailed summary of ‘what was heard’ at each session is described in Section 3.0.

STRONG COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN BUILDING NEIGHBOURHOODS

Each neighbourhood workshop highlighted a commitment by participants to be a part of building the neighbourhoods. The level of attendance demonstrated an interest in working with the City to build positive and successful neighbourhoods. More importantly, the dedication and enthusiasm of participants in the various discussions highlighted further the desire to see their neighbourhood be its ‘best’. Residents all acknowledge that their neighbourhoods are changing and evolving. While some participants are unsure of their role in the changes others identify change as an opportunity to benefit their community.

INTEREST IN HOUSING OPTIONS ACROSS THE CONTINUUM

Participants noted the importance of having housing options to meet the needs of a range of households including first-time homebuyers, families (couples, couples with children, and single-parents), seniors, students, and lower income households as well as moderate and higher income households. Several residents suggested creating more opportunities for secondary suites, co-housing or cooperative housing models, and a mix of ownership and rental housing options.

While participants expressed interest in various forms of housing, it was also emphasized that ‘new’ development or any revitalization, including infill, should be done in a way that maintains the neighbourhoods’ heritage, diversity and architecture. Overall, residents want a ‘balance’; where diversity and character are preserved while still providing choice and creating opportunities for existing and new residents. Examples include encouraging more ownership in areas with higher amounts of



rental housing, encouraging lower density and mixed housing forms in high density areas, and preserving character homes while providing opportunities for new development. Secondary suites are seen as one way to increase density without losing neighbourhood character.

"Need to attract quality owners and renters. To do that, we need quality housing and good enforcement of existing laws and bylaws."

PHYSICAL CONDITION OF HOUSING IS A CONCERN ACROSS ALL NEIGHBOURHOODS

Participants from across all neighbourhoods expressed concerns over vacant lots, unfinished developments and derelict housing. Participants placed a greater emphasis on the poor condition of rental housing compared to ownership housing. It was suggested that absentee landlords are a key challenge as well as the costs of

maintenance. Participants emphasized the important role of the City to enforce and encourage maintenance of properties. Accountability to current standards by landlords/homeowners as well as grants and City programs to encourage renovation of existing homes and enhancements to neighbourhoods would be helpful according to stakeholders.

Linked with ensuring adequate housing condition are safe neighbourhoods. Participants expressed the need and desire for their neighbourhoods to be safe.

NEED TO 'SHOWCASE' ASSETS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE OF NEIGHBOURHOODS

Residents from all neighbourhoods expressed pride in the history and culture of their neighbourhoods. This character of place is important and should be emphasized in the design and planning of each neighbourhood and shared throughout the City.

Some residents, however, shared sentiments of not 'knowing their neighbours and local community' and were interested in learning more. Marketing and neighbourhood engagement are important initiatives to achieve a greater sense of neighbourhood enjoyment and cohesion.

NO SHORTAGE OF LOCAL IDEAS

Each workshop highlighted many unique and thoughtful ideas from residents and stakeholders. While each neighbourhood needs its own solutions a number of common ideas emerged from all sessions. These include encouraging mixed development projects (whether mix of tenure, or mix of form and use), and facilitating different housing concepts such as co-operative housing models, rent-to-own, Habitat for Humanity, more secondary suites, and social enterprises. Other ideas included providing incentives for home renovation and neighbourhood revitalization, greater enforcement of existing standards, enhancements to neighbourhood safety (e.g. lighting), and providing assistance to seniors and



first-time home buyers. Several participants also acknowledged the need to continue and enhance existing City programs such as Curb Appeal, HOPE and Cornerstones II (secondary suite grant program).

KEEP THE CONVERSATIONS GOING

The neighbourhood workshops underlined the desire of residents to continue to be active in the evolution of their neighbourhood. In general, participants were happy to have input about the housing in their neighbourhood. Moreover, workshops provided an opportunity for residents to engage not only with staff and facilitators but also share experiences and stories amongst each other.

Overall, residents and stakeholders expressed their interest to continue to be involved in developing their Neighbourhood Housing Roadmaps.

3.0 WORKSHOP SUMMARY BY NEIGHBOURHOOD



3.1 QUEEN MARY PARK

OVERVIEW

This session was held September 20, 2014, at the Queen Mary Park Community League Hall. There were 27 attendees.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FEEDBACK BY TOPIC

Housing Indicators

Queen Mary Park participants found that the statistics that were most important to them were on dwelling types, sales activity and tenure breakdown. The housing type was important because it demonstrates to them that the neighbourhood should be protecting the remaining detached housing stock, that it is family friendly, and allows for aging-in-place due to the prevalence of bungalows compared to multi-storey houses. Sales activity also indicated that the neighbourhood is more affordable than others, although some participants thought the affordability stats indicated that the neighbourhood may need more affordable housing due to the high ownership and renter spending on housing costs, compared to other mature neighbourhoods. Some participants noted that many of these owners are seniors on fixed incomes who are still paying mortgages.

Participants did not find the tenure breakdown surprising, and noted there seemed to be a correlation between household sizes and tendency to rent. Some did express surprise by how few single-detached homes were left in the neighbourhood however, as well as that there were more long-term residents than expected and more children and families. Participants would have liked to have seen statistics on housing type broken down by tenure.

"An attraction of QMP is the amount of "space" that is available in comparison to new suburbs"

Housing Condition

Participants generally found the condition of the housing on their block to be varied – while the housing is unique, the cost of repairs can be high and ownership housing is generally in better shape than rental housing and there are some unique character homes. The problems with rental housing include parking issues, piling up of garbage, lack of yard maintenance and absentee landlords. Furthermore, some participants found housing condition to be below average and much housing to be in need of extensive repair. There are also a number of derelict properties and vacant lots that have not been taken care of, further lowering the overall condition of blocks in which they are located.

“[Housing condition is] mixed - some very nice, well-kept, some need a lot of work.”

Poor housing condition was attributed mainly to absentee landlords, the high cost of repairs (which low-income households and seniors struggle to afford), and some lack of exterior fixtures such as proper lighting.

Participants thought that housing condition could be improved through grants for exterior upgrades, an easier process for improving housing condition, the City fixing roads/sidewalks and potholes, and raising the minimum income cut off point for the HOPE program so it is more accessible. Modifying homes to allow seniors to age in place could make a difference as well, as could secondary and ‘granny’ suites. They also found the Yards in Bloom program to be contributing positively to housing condition. Infill should also be focused on vacant and dilapidated lots.

Housing Choice

Overall, participants feel there is a range of housing choice in the neighbourhood, but there could be more larger single-family homes and quality rental housing options (such as three-bedroom units), and the neighbourhood should aim for more balance in the ratio of affordable and market housing. Participants noted concerns around the influx of infill housing leading to a decline in affordability and challenges in infrastructure and parking.

Additionally, they noted the need for more seniors housing options, including assisted living options.



“Some properties not as maintained as others – limits choice of safe / appealing homes”

Participants also felt there should be more co-op and row housing available as well for first-time homebuyers and young families, and less apartment housing. Overall, most participants were

against higher-density housing and want the neighbourhood to retain existing low density housing stock.

Participants emphasized that any new housing should be in keeping with the ‘fit of the neighbourhood’ and meet the needs of current residents. They noted that there has already been infill development, and the neighbourhood should focus on keeping the single detached housing as these can be affordable options but also help maintain a stable population. There should also be more support for secondary /garden /garage suites, as this increases density without increasing height, as some participants feel there is more than enough multi-storey housing.

Housing Ideas

The aspects of Queen Mary Park’s housing that participants generally like best are the character of the neighbourhood; that it is family friendly and low density (meaning less traffic), the smaller homes are easier to maintain, that it is close to amenities, and the large yards and trees in the area. Transportation costs are also lower as services are nearby, and the location is central and affordable.



To improve the housing in the neighbourhood, participants suggested:

- More amenities
- Encourage some infill housing to attract families
- Need to bring back the school to attract and retain families in the neighborhood
- Create some housing options for larger home sizes (two and three bedroom)
- Encourage aging in place and all types of seniors housing – life cycle housing
- Encouraging a sense of community and community engagement throughout the entire neighbourhood, not just in the single-detached areas (which is where most of the community engagement takes place right now)
- Funding for home maintenance for lower-income households
- Enforce quality standards and bylaw enforcement for rental housing in particular
- Better maintain the sidewalks

3.2 MCCAULEY

OVERVIEW

This session was held September 22, 2014, at the Ital-Canadian Seniors Association. There were 38 attendees.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FEEDBACK BY TOPIC

Housing Indicators

McCauley participants found that the statistics that

"I found all the stats very interesting. The emergency and transitional units and supported and permanent housing make up 1/3 of our population. This is not a healthy ratio."

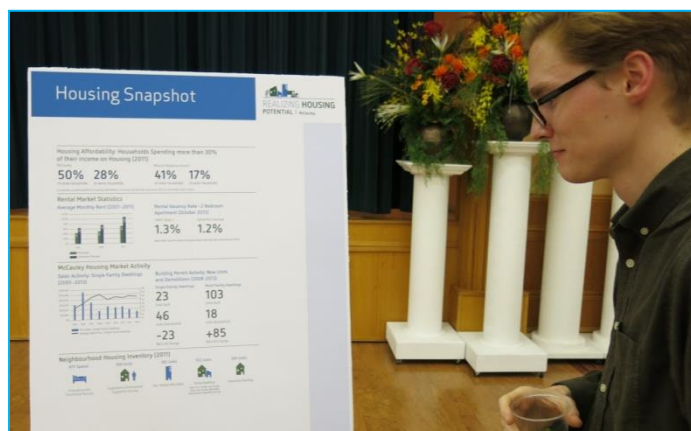
"I was surprised that the houses needing major renovations (16%) is quite close to that in other old neighbourhoods (10%). It seems higher when you just walk around."

were most important to them were McCauley's age distribution, income distribution, and housing type (e.g. the number and proportion of single person households), especially compared to similar neighbourhoods, as well as the statistics on emergency and transitional units and supported and permanent housing. Rental versus ownership tenure was also an important statistic, including the change in tenure over time. Some participants also noted the trends in building activity as being important.

Participants would have liked to have seen more statistics on emergency/shelter housing in the neighborhood, and a more detailed housing type breakdown by household type as well however (e.g. how many single households live in single-family homes). They were also interested in statistics on the demolition of single-family homes.

"All of the measurements were very enlightening, alarming, but enlightening."

In general, participants were surprised by the high proportion of single person households, and the similar proportion of homes needing major renovations in McCauley and other mature neighbourhoods, as looking around the neighbourhood it appears to be a higher proportion. Participants were also surprised by the low number of children (and therefore families) in the neighbourhood, as this indicates that families are not coming to or staying in McCauley. Some participants felt that the statistics on the number of families were not accurate, with some thinking the numbers should be higher than stated and others thinking they should be lower.



Participants were not surprised by the high proportion of non-market housing however, or the high number of rental households in the area, as this is a very visible characteristic of the neighbourhood.

Housing Condition

Participants varied on how they found the condition of the housing on their block. Some thought that the housing condition was good to very good as most homes were well taken care of, with nice yards/landscaping and architectural variety that contributed positively to the character of the neighbourhood. There were also many blocks with new houses. Others found that some of the houses/apartment buildings on their blocks needed upgrading (especially boarding homes and rental dwellings), or some houses were abandoned or neglected. Some areas also had vacant lots that often pile up with garbage. As well, participants noted that many streets could use some upgrading and maintenance to the sidewalks, drainage, etc. Another issue noted is that seniors seem to have trouble maintaining their homes.



Overall, participants agreed that the upkeep of the homes and landscaping greatly affected the perception of the block, and there are big differences in different parts of the neighbourhood (i.e. north versus south). Owner-occupied housing tends to be well-taken care of in the neighbourhood, but much of rental housing has not been maintained.

In order to improve the condition of housing in their neighbourhood, participants thought it would help to have access to more renovation/maintenance programs to help with upgrades, as many households cannot afford needed repairs/maintenance, as well as more bylaw enforcement on 'slum landlords' and upgrades for rental buildings. Other improvements include improving the lighting, increasing seniors home maintenance benefits and increasing the maximum income threshold required to access the program, and assistance with home ownership and maintenance.

Affordable home ownership and assistance to upgrade secondary and garage suites would be beneficial, as participants thought that more home ownership, as well as more market housing, would lead to improvements in housing condition.

"Would be nice to have more access to programs to help with upgrades (income levels set too low to access grants)"

Housing Choice

Overall, participants do not feel there is adequate housing choice for residents currently living in the neighbourhood or for those wanting to move to the neighbourhood. In particular,

“More nice (market priced) rental apartments to serve people working downtown or at the Royal Alex hospital etc. would benefit by bringing more younger people to live (and hopefully shop) in the area”

participants feel there is a lack of affordable single detached dwellings and good quality market rental/condominium housing for young professionals/persons working downtown or at the Royal Alexandra Hospital. A few participants also suggested the need for more co-housing options in the neighbourhood. Participants did, however, think there is enough affordable/non-market single household dwellings and emergency/transitional housing.

Participants thought that having more market rental/condominium housing in the neighbourhood would benefit the community by bringing in more younger people to live (and hopefully shop) in the area. It would also help increase the density of the neighbourhood which in turn would help increase liveliness, mixed use development, and the attractiveness of the downtown area, while preserving the diversity of the neighbourhood. Mixed-income neighbourhoods are also important to ensuring that there is not a concentration of ‘poverty’ in the neighbourhood, but that lower-income households still have options.

Participants also noted that having more single detached dwellings would help with neighbourhood safety, and more affordable ownership housing would improve neighbourhood quality.

Encouraging more secondary and garden suites and infill housing was also noted as housing forms that are important to the neighbourhood. Some participants noted that more co-housing and co-op options are needed as well as more student housing. Overall, there should be more diversity in the neighbourhood’s housing stock, but the housing should have character that is in keeping with the overall neighbourhood fabric.



Housing Ideas

The aspects of McCauley's housing that participants generally like best is the diversity of housing in age, type and character/architecture; the affordability and range of options; the landscaping, trees and gardens; and the higher density that allows people to interact with their neighbours. Participants also praised the walkability and amenities in the neighbourhood, as well as its close proximity to downtown and transportation options.

To improve the housing in the neighbourhood, participants suggested:

- More mixed-income developments (mix of market and below market housing) and higher density developments (i.e. row and town houses), as well as design control to ensure housing fits well with the existing neighbourhood character
- Ensure there is an adequate supply of ground-oriented housing
- Home maintenance/renovation programs for seniors and lower-income households
- Better Bylaw enforcement on rental housing
- Promote secondary suites as affordable housing
- Develop the vacant lots and remove condemned housing more quickly, and protect existing housing (prevent demolition of older character houses)
- Rent-to-own housing for both small and larger households
- Expedite planning and development approval processes for housing in mature neighbourhoods
- Social enterprises tied to inner city revitalization and live-work environments
- Build the community league and encourage more community engagement and interaction
- Amenities/programs to draw young families to the live in the neighbourhood
- Street maintenance, especially in the winter
- Co-housing/co-op options

What do you like about the housing in your neighbourhood? "Quirky, charming, character, variety of houses with lots of different kinds of people because of affordability."

3.3 CENTRAL MCDUGALL

OVERVIEW

This session was held September 24, 2014, at the St. John's Cultural Centre. There were 28 attendees.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FEEDBACK BY TOPIC

Housing Indicators

Central McDougall participants found that the statistics that were most important to them were the housing mix, tenure distribution (the high proportion of renters and apartments), income (the high number of low-income households and the low average and median incomes), age distribution (indicating a very small presence of children and families, and mostly single or two

“10% ownership almost guarantees a neighbourhood with significant issues and certainly makes it more likely that governmental intervention will be required.”

non-related person households) and the length of residence (indicating whether people like the neighbourhood enough to stay).

Overall, participants were not surprised by the statistics, but some did express surprise by the number of single family dwellings being demolished, that Central McDougall is the neighbourhood with the second lowest median household income after McCauley, the younger age profile as they thought it would be older, and that residents do not stay long in the neighbourhood. That 90% of households were

renters was also a surprise – participants knew the percentage was high, but not that high.

Participants would have liked to have seen a definition of a sustainable community, more on how the housing types available affect the demographics of the neighbourhood, and how development is controlled in communities.

Housing Condition

Participants varied on how they found the condition of the housing on their block; however, most agreed that the apartment buildings are in poor condition due to age and lack of upkeep and maintenance, and that many blocks are in bad shape. Many residents of these buildings and units do not report the poor standards or the landlords however, as they cannot afford housing anywhere else, and the neighbourhood has a low vacancy rate for this housing type. As well, residents commented that there is a notable homeless population in the area that causes issues, in addition to crime and safety concerns affecting the condition of buildings. Many lower density homes also require significant improvements as well, and some suggested the overall feel of the neighbourhood is of old and unappealing homes.

“People who lack choice won’t take care of apartments – need to educate owners and possibly tenants”

Participants emphasized that the extent of poverty in the neighbourhood needs to be addressed, as well as the safety. If these issues can be remedied, it increases the desirability of the neighbourhood. However, they also expressed concern over new developments causing a rise in rents and therefore a responding decline in affordability. They also emphasized they want the



housing moratorium to continue, and that the focus of future efforts should be on attracting families to the neighbourhood.

Programs to help with renovations were another possible solution to help with housing maintenance and condition, as well as enforcing landlords to maintain and improve their rental units. One such way could be to implement an owner-occupied requirement.

"Rising land values are leading to more demand leading to higher rental & purchase costs. This increased property values/rental costs leads to improved perception of the neighbourhood and perceived improvement in tenant 'mix'."

Housing Choice

Overall, participants do not feel there is adequate housing choice for residents in the neighbourhood. Participants emphasized the lack of family-oriented housing, such as starter homes (row/town houses) and single detached homes that families can grow into, as well as the lack of two and three bedroom housing in general. Participants want to see more of a balance in housing in the neighbourhood – more ownership and family housing that is well integrated into the neighbourhood character. There are too many one-bedroom units in the neighbourhood. Participants emphasized they want to attract and retain families in the neighbourhood, in particular families that want to live there and will stay in the neighbourhood. They also want to see more safe housing and less absentee landlords whose buildings are in poor condition.



"We already have some of, if not the lowest rent in the city. However our market housing reflects the lack of standards in some buildings, so placements from non-market agencies end up there with hard to house individuals, who are not well managed. Additionally, we have many absentee owners of apartments who sometimes do not employ good management, and rent to whoever walks in. This sheds a negative light on good managers."

Participants also noted the need for homes for new immigrants in particular – these households can eventually afford non-apartment housing, but there are no options for them in Central McDougall so they leave the neighbourhood when they need family housing. Infill housing was

one suggestion to address this issue. Affordable student housing was also noted as being in short supply. Another issue raised was the lack of seniors in the neighbourhood, even though the hospital is in close proximity.

"109 Street/109 Avenue a good place for row houses, duplex/semi-detached"

Some also suggested a need for mixed-use developments, with commercial on the bottom and residential above and quality housing for young professionals and students. Another option was a home ownership program, which would encourage people to live and invest in the neighbourhood. Other suggestions include an opportunity for Light Rail Transit development, co-ops, Habitat for Humanity ownership, and rent-to-own through community land trusts.

Housing Ideas

The aspects of Central McDougall's housing that participants generally like best include the neighbourhood's centrality and proximity to downtown, the single detached areas (especially those where people have front porches and 'eyes on the street'), the mix of housing types, the large lots and yards, the diversity of residents and community-wide events.

To improve the housing in the neighbourhood, reach a balanced community, and improve the image of Central McDougall, participants suggested:

- Continue the moratorium on non-market housing for 10 more years
- Encourage mixed-use (commercial-residential) and diverse development especially for families and young professionals
- Preserve the single detached housing, and build fewer smaller apartments (or convert to condominiums)
- Need some affordable larger units (e.g. two and three bedroom apartments) to attract families
- Implement a home ownership program to help reduce the high level of renters in the neighbourhood
- Expand the City's revitalization budget and program to ensure it is adequate enough to fund needed changes to create an attractive community – help beautify the neighbourhood and meet infrastructure needs (e.g. streetlights, sidewalks)
- Provide grants for renovations and maintenance, especially for rental buildings (e.g. the former RRAP program). Expand programs such as HOPE



- Retain existing amenities and provide access to more amenities/encourage more businesses (e.g. restaurants, shops, cafes, etc.)
- Try to help the homeless population in the neighbourhood through better services throughout the City, not just in Central McDougall
- Ensure zoning is not easily amended and is consistent with the rest of the neighbourhood
- Provide incentives for green, diverse, pedestrian friendly developments
- Reduce the building permit process length
- Bylaw enforcement on dwellings not up to code or site conditions – there needs to be better enforcement of housing standards, especially for apartment buildings
- Deal with the vacant lots and parking lots, for example through zoning and softening of floor area ratio restrictions
- Provide more student housing
- Implement more measures to address safety and crime in the neighbourhood, such as a neighbourhood patrol, street cleaning, better lighting
- Have a community hall
- Remove the Hudson's Bay restrictive covenant hold on certain lots
- Develop the North Edge consistent with the Area Redevelopment Plan

"Despite all the bad stuff that has happened to neighbourhood, 108 Avenue has remained strong (amazed that this has happened)"

"Revitalization budget is miniscule for what is really needed – hope that budget for this project is realistic and can influence change"

3.4 ALBERTA AVENUE

OVERVIEW

This session was held September 25, 2014, at the Alberta Avenue Community League Hall. There were 35 attendees. The Eastwood and Alberta Avenue sessions were held concurrently.



NEIGHBOURHOOD FEEDBACK BY TOPIC

Housing Indicators



Alberta Avenue participants found that the statistics that were most important to them were on the amount of housing needing major repairs, which was a concern; single-family dwelling sales and prices, which indicated high turnover and high prices, another concern; the population's age breakdown which indicates the diversity of the neighbourhood and the proportion of seniors; the high vacancy rate of rental units compared to the rest of the city; and the housing type and tenure breakdown which shows a high rental proportion, although some thought this proportion should be higher.

Participants would have liked to have seen statistics on the number of secondary suites, crime statistics, neighbourhood amenities/facilities, and the capacity of infrastructure. Participants were surprised by some of the more positive statistics, indicating that the image of the neighbourhood may be an issue. The low-rents were not a surprise, but the number of single family homes being demolished and being replaced with multi-family housing was.

Housing Condition

Participants generally found the condition of the housing on their block to be mixed. They noted that houses which are less well maintained tend to be older houses, apartment buildings, boarding homes, and homes inhabited by seniors. There are also a number of vacant lots, unfinished developments and derelict houses. They also expressed concern that while new housing is being built, it is sometimes at the cost of heritage homes and some of the new builds do not fit the character of the neighbourhood. Sometimes this new housing does not complete the landscaping, leaving the exterior looking incomplete.

"One of the reasons I moved here was to buy a historic home at an affordable price. They need work but are important."

Overall however, they agreed that most owner-occupied blocks are in decent condition, and recent community and City activity has contributed to many improvements in the condition of the area, although these improvements can be slow at times. Participants suggested that assistance with maintenance could help greatly with housing condition, as it can be costly for seniors and for those in the older homes.

"Maintenance is a key issue in the neighbourhood."

In order to improve the condition of housing in their neighbourhood, participants thought it would help to ensure heritage homes and older housing with distinct 'character' is maintained and kept. This type of housing forms a unique part of the housing stock in the neighbourhood, and the City overall, and adds significantly to the character of the neighbourhood. In general, the history of the neighbourhood should be highlighted.

Participants stated strongly that the City should encourage residents to obtain grants to improve curbsides/facades, and the HOPE and Curb Appeal grants should be expanded and the required minimum incomes increased (although restrictions should be in place to prevent the abuse of these grants for flipping houses). Secondary suites should also be encouraged, according to participants, and the Cornerstones program expanded so it is more accessible.

Participants noted that landlords should be made more accountable for the standards of their rental units, and new builds need to fit in with the neighbourhood character as well as meet health and safety standards before occupants move in. Some participants suggested educating the public on who to contact at the City regarding unsafe and derelict housing.



"I would like to see more enforcement on actual building code violations and development permit violations, especially in regards of rental housing secondary suites and illegal suites."

Participants felt strongly that community engagement and interaction would help lead to improvements in housing condition and more foot traffic and business support. Home-ownership should be encouraged and amenities to keep owners in the neighbourhood should be implemented (e.g.: parks, businesses, schools, etc.). The neighbourhood should also aim to increase its marketing to appeal to new residents.

Housing Choice

Overall, participants feel there is a range of housing choice for the variety of residents in the neighbourhood, and that the neighbourhood has a more diverse and unique stock than most other neighbourhoods in the City. However, participants expressed concerns around not knowing their neighbours and local community, and therefore not knowing the demographics of the neighbourhood or whether the housing options are right for the demographics.

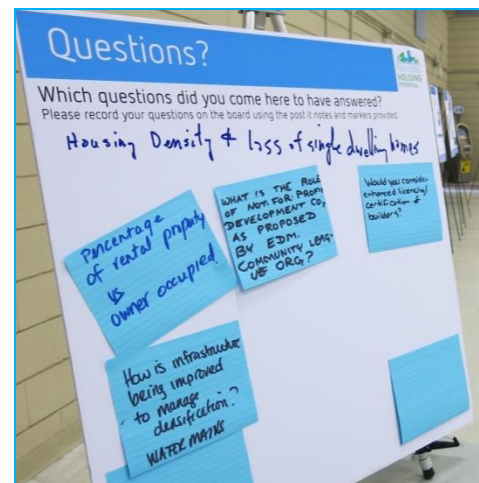
"Big range of choices—apartments, heritage homes, duplexes, basement suites, houses with suites, garden suites, # of seniors in their homes"

Participants felt there needs to be more families in the neighbourhood, and as such the area needs more family-friendly amenities (schools, etc.) and houses that create a sense of community (e.g. porches, open to the street, etc.). Participants did note that there are an adequate number of single detached homes in the neighbourhood. The historic houses also have character and are affordable to young families and first time home buyers. Many houses have secondary suites which act as a mortgage helper and are an unobtrusive form of higher density, and there is a range of higher density housing present.

"Great for young families + first time home buyers. Historic and affordable"

Participants emphasized that if any infill or higher density development took place, it should be in keeping with the character of the neighbourhood's diversity, heritage and architecture. There should be standards to enforce this as well as quality, and there should a push to preserve the heritage homes. There should be more options for seniors-friendly housing, such as condominiums for seniors to downsize to, and more mixed-use development (e.g. housing above businesses). Market-rate ownership housing would also help improve the economic stability of the neighbourhood.

"Need architectural guidelines to preserve the character, diversity, variety of kinds of styles like we have now."



Housing Ideas

The aspects of Alberta Avenue's housing that participants generally like best are that the historic homes are affordable, the range of housing options, the neighbourhood is friendly and central (close to downtown), young families are moving in, and there is a lack of front-of-house drive-in garages.

To improve the housing in the neighbourhood, participants suggested:

- Maintaining housing character
- Enforcement on derelict housing and improvement of deteriorated properties
- Considerations for parking for higher density developments
- Incentivizing the development of vacant lots
- Increased neighbourhood safety
- Improved street lighting

- Expansion of the HOPE and Curb Appeal programs and raising of minimum income so more households qualify
- Curb Appeal in more areas
- More mixed-use development for 118 Ave and maybe 111 Ave
- Infill development
- Introducing co-housing/co-op options

3.5 EASTWOOD

OVERVIEW

This session was held September 25, 2014, at the Alberta Avenue Community League Hall. There were 19 attendees. The Eastwood and Alberta Avenue sessions were held concurrently.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FEEDBACK BY TOPIC

Housing Indicators

Eastwood participants found that the statistics that were most important to them were on the housing mix, which confirmed there are a range of housing types and housing condition in the neighbourhood. They were also interested in crime statistics, as safety varies by area, as well as the age distribution throughout the neighbourhood.




Most were surprised by the low rental percentage, as well as the average rent for the neighbourhood being lower than the City's average rent overall. Some noted that this surprise is due to incorrect perceptions of Eastwood, and that the rental percentage could be low due to not counting secondary and garden suites. Some were also surprised by the low need for major repairs, and think this number is under reported due to the many old and deteriorating buildings. Many expressed concern over the number of single detached homes being demolished for multi-family housing.

Others were surprised by the high number of children in the neighbourhood, even though the schools have closed, as well as the high percentage of owners spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs, which suggests to them that

maintenance costs are an issue. Additionally, many noted surprise at the low number of seniors, as they thought the number would be higher. Stakeholders also expressed concern at the change in neighbourhood density. Participants were not surprised, however, by the count of duplexes.

Housing Condition

Participants generally found the condition of the housing on their block to be fair, although some houses and apartment buildings could use upgrading and maintenance. Apartment buildings and other rentals, such as duplexes, in particular tend to be the least maintained and in need of renovation. Participants expressed concern over the quality some of the new infill housing, such as fourplexes, although most new developments contributed positively to the overall housing condition of the block. However, some residents noted, many homes could use more character and landscaping to brighten up the block.




"Surprised by the percentage of owners spending more than 30% on housing costs. Maintenance costs can be challenging"

"Couple that could use some work. By and large it's not bad though."

Participants thought that housing condition could be improved through additional green space, such as community gardens and more landscaping for certain properties. They also believe that Cornerstones and other City grant programs should be expanded with fewer restrictions so that the program is more accessible, and that taxes should not be based on property values alone, as this is an obstacle to many households. More community events that bring the neighbourhood together would also help improve the neighbourhood condition, as these can build community pride and residents can work on beautification together.

Alternative housing options that are not usually built by for-profit developers were suggested, such as co-op housing. Many also felt that historic homes should be preserved when possible, as they are unique and add character, unlike much of the new development. Another suggestion was to simplify the process of enforcing bylaw infractions, so problems are taken care of more quickly.



"Cleanliness on properties is improving. One person fixes/cleans property, it motivates other neighbours to do the same. Fosters pride of owners."

Housing Choice

Overall, participants feel there is a range of housing choice in the neighbourhood, but there could be more (larger) single detached homes. Participants expressed concern that these single detached homes are being lost to infill (e.g. to the development of duplex and triplexes), and are concerned that the infrastructure may not be able to keep up with the increasing density. In addition, it was noted that some of these rental properties are not as well maintained.



Participants commented that a diversity of housing forms was important to their neighbourhood. In particular participants expressed the importance of housing options for households in the low-income range, and more development that fits the neighbourhood character. Participants suggested the neighbourhood needs more single detached homes, as well as a few more types of higher density housing, such as rowhouses. Participants seem to agree that there need to be housing options that would enable more affordable home ownership. Some also noted the need for student and seniors housing, as well as co-op housing. Another suggestion was more incentives for garden and secondary suites to encourage these housing forms, as well as more maintenance of the rental housing stock.

Housing Ideas

The aspects of Eastwood's housing that participants generally like best are the single detached homes, the green areas and trees, the character and history of the housing, the central location, the affordability of housing, the range of housing options, the diversity and culture of the neighbourhood, and transportation options.

To improve the housing in the neighbourhood, participants suggested:

- Maintain neighbourhood housing character by enforcing design guidelines
- Encourage single detached development and less apartment development
- Bring the school back in order to attract and retain families in the neighborhood
- Enforce quality standards and upkeep of rental housing
- Incentivize owner-occupied rental buildings
- Improve/maintain access to services
- Encourage bike lane usage
- Encourage co-op housing
- Encourage neighbourhood connections
- Ensure lower-income residents are not displaced through development
- More crime and safety enforcement

4.0 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW SUMMARY: KEY MESSAGES

In addition to the valuable experiences and insight shared by local residents through the neighbourhood workshops, several interviews/meetings were held with community leaders and organizations across the five neighbourhoods. The following summary highlights key messages heard from these stakeholder groups.

WHILE THERE IS INTEREST IN DEVELOPMENT, SEVERAL CHALLENGES EXIST

Builders, developers, realtors and business investors felt that there was opportunity to develop infill properties in the five communities. However, all cited red tape, lack of incentives and narrow margins as the challenges that prevented them from pursuing more infill opportunities in these neighbourhoods.

"I definitely think we need to do more to spur market housing investments in these neighborhoods ... Especially McCauley, which apart from the vacant areas has a fair number of houses that are empty ... Increasing market housing is a viable option especially if the City were to eliminate the conflicting red tape requirements."

"More flexibility among development officers, what is allowed in certain places is needed – this isn't the suburbs, we are making something different."

Stakeholders shared several key trends with regard to development in the five neighbourhoods:

Housing Needs Renewal: It was felt that a significant percentage of housing stock needs to be

"We definitely need single family and infill, not just multistory units. And we need a percentage of rental to own properties"

renewed. Some of the conditions suggest the best option may be to 'tear down.' Participants felt that many housing options simply need upgrades; incentives, grants, loans and other creative solutions to upgrading existing properties were felt to be worthy of consideration.

Lack of Housing Diversity: Closely related to the desire to improve single family dwellings was the need for increased diversity in housing options (i.e. more townhomes and rental options).

Strategic Approach Required: Participants applauded the project (Realizing Housing Potential) and felt that the City needed to take a very thoughtful approach to the potential redevelopment of the five communities, given their historical and geographical significance.

“The land available in the neighborhoods is being snapped up in higher numbers, and they are putting in several story buildings. Is this what we want? What is the potential for infill? When the development conditions get profitable enough single family homes will get snapped up. What is good for the community? The City?”

Incentives Matter: Participants felt that while the City had made some progress towards incentivizing change in the communities, there was need for improvement.

“Something the city might be more flexible around is the secondary suite program; it needs to broaden criteria as right now it is only for single families and certain zones throughout the city. The lots in the five communities are small and the houses are small; why can we not have an additional secondary suite? Especially if you live in the inner city, you might not even need a parking pad.”

CONCERN RAISED OVER IMPACT OF MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COMMUNITIES

Concerns were raised by social service agencies and the development community that the Realizing Housing Potential Initiative need to take into account other major developments that would impact these five communities. The arena district, LRT and The Quarters were seen as having the potential to create unintended consequences in the five communities. Participants felt that these developments would not necessarily help the communities.

Participants noted that rising prices may force people out who would traditionally establish themselves in these communities, start small businesses and add to the diversity and vibrancy of the community. New development not only impacted housing costs—it was also seen to impact the rent of small businesses, driving them out of the neighbourhood.


“We need to incentivize through various methods and keep these small businesses and their owners in the community. Home ownership programs could be targeted at some of the ethnic groups in the area, so we can keep that diversity. That’s a really important economic generator - the [diversity] is what leads to some of the destination restaurants and shops in the area. Some alternative rental incentives for both business and home would be important as you don’t want to push your business population out – you want them to stay in the community and maintain stability.”

Some stakeholders felt development has resulted in the displacement of vulnerable populations that traditionally gather in developing areas. In addition, when properties are purchased for infill, renters are often forced to find other accommodations.

“None of this development, like the arena or the Galleria Project is designed to help the people who live/reside here. LRT is moving through the area, and downtown development pressure is providing displacement pressure to the neighborhood residents.”

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS A CONCERN

Several stakeholders identified a lack of affordable housing as a major barrier to a good quality of life in their communities.



"Housing problems are the root of everything."

In particular, newcomers and immigrant populations settle in the five neighbourhoods because of proximity to services, employment, transit, cultural shops and pre-existing community and cultural networks. They cite a three year waiting list to both Capital Region Housing Corporation (CHRC) and City of Edmonton housing options. This forces them to rent apartments that often pose significant sanitation and health risks: cockroaches, bed bugs, mold, lack of heating, and hot water.

"Not having affordable housing means stress, depression, family relationships break down and this leads to domestic disharmony and possibly even domestic abuse. Every year families get more fragile – we are looking for others to help us break this cycle. We are trapped and it's getting harder and harder each year."


MIXED RESPONSE ON NON-MARKET HOUSING INVESTMENT PAUSE

Stakeholders identified a distinction between affordable housing and supportive housing. Some felt that additional affordable housing units would be welcome in their communities if they were owned and managed by responsible agencies. Some believed it was more the 'supportive' housing options that were a burden to the community and prevented the community from achieving its potential. It became evident through the conversations that respondents were unable to distinguish between housing provided by programs and agencies, and low cost housing that was run by independent 'slum' landlords. Oftentimes the examples cited of poor housing conditions or problem behavior was from properties belonging to independent landlords and not affiliated with an agency or program.

Resistance to Non-Market Supportive Housing: Some participants felt that supportive housing led to trouble attracting new residents.



"In one of the older neighborhoods we are having trouble attracting families with children. I do agree we should be looking in other neighborhoods for non-market houses tailored to singles or permanent supportive houses. Central McDougall, Boyle Street, McCauley have disproportionately large shares and we also know that the bulk of the emergency shelter capacity and related services [are in these neighborhoods]. Unless it is a really creative project with mixed housing (like family housing with some non-market housing) ... I don't think it would be welcome. Unfortunately the moratorium (non-market housing investment pause) doesn't allow that kind of creative project currently."



"The well-being of individuals and the "building of the community" within our buildings are best served through being inclusive, and not labelling tenants, and by providing a Supportive Management Model"

Need for Supportive Housing: Some participants felt that supportive housing in these areas should be allowed to continue to be developed. They believe that people have a right to stable, affordable housing. Creative, well designed projects that are well managed have the potential to add capacity to the communities that they are in.

"To not allow these developments flies in the face of Canadian's Human Rights Charter. Is that how we want to be viewed—as violating human rights of our most vulnerable citizens?"

Amenities Required for Complete Communities

An emerging theme heard throughout several conversations, is the need for amenities in the five neighbourhoods. There is a lack of grocery stores, banks, medical clinics, and pharmacies in the five neighbourhoods.

Participants suggested that community economic development plans should be developed if any of the communities were to truly reach their potential.



"We need to look at making this a complete community with neighbourhood groceries selling healthy foods."

5.0 NEXT STEPS

Using the feedback and direction outlined in the above summary and input from stakeholder interviews (referring to the work we've done with developers, agencies and community organizations), the City of Edmonton will continue to work with residents and the consulting team to develop five Neighbourhood Housing Roadmaps.

Draft Roadmaps will be shared with residents at Neighbourhood Workshops in the spring 2015 where there will be additional opportunities for stakeholder input prior to finalizing the Housing Roadmaps.

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