



City of Edmonton

Seniors' Housing Open House: Wedgewood Heights

What We Heard Report – February 2015

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------|--|
| <u>Page 3</u> | Introduction |
| <u>Page 5</u> | Key Themes |
| <u>Page 6</u> | Table Discussion |
| <u>Page 7</u> | Seniors’ Housing Program |
| <u>Page 8</u> | Approved and Alternate Building Location |
| <u>Page 11</u> | Approved Building Location Map |
| <u>Page 12</u> | Alternate Building Location Map |
| <u>Page 13</u> | Parks and Open Space |
| <u>Page 14</u> | Transportation |
| <u>Page 15</u> | Emergency Access |
| <u>Page 16</u> | Property Values |
| <u>Page 17</u> | Conclusion |



Introduction

In October 2012, City Council approved new seniors' housing on the vacant school building site in Wedgewood Heights.

The timeline for this process was as follows:

- June 2012: The City informed community league representatives of planned public meetings and the Council hearing.
- September 2012: City staff presented their recommendation to build new seniors' housing on eight vacant sites, including Wedgewood Heights, to the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues.
- September 2012: Two public meetings were held to inform the public of the proposed changes.
- October 2012: A public meeting was held to specifically discuss the Wedgewood Heights building site.
- October 2012: Council public hearings occurred. Council received 15 hours of presentations from people speaking to the proposed change in zoning. Following questions and discussion with City staff, Council approved the changes in support of new seniors' housing.

Following City Council's directions to investigate approved and alternative building sites for seniors' housing, and extensive consultation with the community league and homeowners' association about community issues and meeting format, a public open house for Wedgewood Heights took place on December 3, 2014, between 6:30 and 8:30 p.m. Wedgewood Heights residents were invited to attend the meeting through:

- a mail drop that was sent out via Canada Post two weeks in advance to 2,234 homes, including apartments and condos;
- a temporary sign put up in the community between 184 Street and Wedgewood Boulevard;
- information on the City of Edmonton's website; and
- information on the Wedgewood Heights Community League's website.

The City acknowledges that despite best efforts, some residents did not receive their mailer well enough ahead of the open house. The City regrets this and is working to ensure that in the future, mailers are received on time. Additionally, there was confusion between the City and the homeowners' association about the placement of the City's temporary sign at 184 Street and Wedgewood Boulevard.

The meeting began with a welcome from Councillor Michael Oshry. Councillor Oshry thanked residents for the passion they demonstrated for their community in coming out to the meeting and becoming better informed about the seniors' housing planned for Wedgewood Heights. Councillor Oshry outlined the surplus school site process, and City Council's approval in 2012 to use eight surplus school sites across the city for seniors' housing. Recognizing that many residents at the open house



also attended the public hearing on the land use change in the lead-up to Council's approval, Councillor Oshry acknowledged that many residents remain unhappy about the change taking place in their community. He pointed out, however, that seniors' housing is a priority for the City in order to meet growing demand and allow more seniors to "age in place". Information was also provided about City Council's vision to create a more compact, transit oriented and sustainable city. That's why Council has directed City Administration to use existing infrastructure and services (such as those intended to support school construction) and to encourage at least 25% of citywide housing unit growth to take place downtown and in mature neighbourhoods. Following his comments, Councillor Oshry took questions and comments from the audience.

Residents were then invited to visit themed tables organized by frequently asked questions and input provided by the community league.

The theme tables were:

- the seniors' housing program
- approved and alternate building locations
- transportation
- property values
- parkland and open space
- emergency access

All tables were staffed by a facilitator, a note-taker and a content expert.

Residents were asked to share:

1. their questions of the relevant City experts so they could gain a fuller understanding of the seniors' housing initiative;
2. information specific to Wedgewood that City Administration needs to take into consideration as seniors' housing moves forward in the community; and
3. building site information pertaining to both the approved and alternative building sites that will inform Administration's report to Council. It was emphasized that community feedback is one important factor that Administration will take into consideration when providing a recommendation to City Council about the location of seniors' housing in Wedgewood Heights. Other factors that Administration uses to make recommendations to Council about the approved versus the alternate sites include:
 - the costs associated with each site;
 - whether the soil will support developments; and
 - the attractiveness to buyers/renters.



Key Themes

Frustration: As mentioned above, many of the residents at the open house also attended previous meetings with City Administration and the 2012 public hearing on seniors' housing in Wedgewood Heights. They expressed themselves loudly and clearly over several years: this housing is not wanted in their neighbourhood. They feel angry and frustrated that despite their opposition, the seniors' housing for Wedgewood Heights was approved by Council.

Division over building location: Many residents feel, reluctantly, that they could accept the housing if the location is moved further east on the site so that the entrance is from 184 Street. That solution would make the traffic flow easier to cope with. There are many others, however, who are equally adamant that the site should not be changed. They point out that the school site was always going to be developed, even though the nature of that development is different. They do not feel that it is right to change the zoning of existing park space because of pressure from some Wedgewood residents.

Homeowners' association fees: There was a concern that the seniors living in the new development would not be required to pay fees similar to those that existing residents pay for the upkeep of the park and the community. Equity is an important principle for residents in this respect.

Design details: The height of the proposed development is particularly important for many residents. They want to ensure that the development fits the general look and feel of the community. They feel that they have invested considerable time and money in making their community park esthetically pleasing, and want to make sure the seniors' development is built with the same esthetic considerations in mind. That sentiment extends to the residents of the building: Wedgewood community members have great pride in their community, and their hope is that whoever lives in the seniors' development feels the same way.

Traffic: Residents are very worried that the volume of traffic will increase in the neighbourhood with the seniors' development, particularly since there is only one entrance into the community along

"Why does the city keep expanding its border when it has declared that infill is a priority? If infill is not really the priority, then consideration should be given to maintaining green space in communities."

Resident

"By development of the school site at this (the approved) location you have taken away a heavily used park area for children playing soccer in the community. How is the City replacing this for the children of the community?"

Resident

"I don't see why our neighbourhood has to move the site. It's fine where it is as the city has planned for the slight amount of increased traffic. There is a special interest group just trying to push it as far out as they can. The old NIMBY phenomenon. We don't need extra costs incurred."

Resident

Wedgewood Boulevard. There are already issues with traffic at 184 Street and Wedgewood Boulevard, which, they feel, would be exacerbated.

Table discussions

Seniors’ Housing Program

Many residents were anxious to hear what the development would look like. They feel that the number of storeys and the design standards used will be critical factors for their community, along with maintenance of the development. The City explained that since a developer had not yet been selected, none of these decisions had been made definitively, and that residents could be involved in a future design engagement process when a builder is selected. The building can be a maximum of four storeys and 14 metres tall, which is four metres taller than other homes in the community. The final building design and layout will be determined in the design engagement process with the developer.

Some people were nonetheless concerned that the restrictive covenant (RC) parameters for the site had not been clarified. They said that consultation to confirm the RC parameters should happen before the land is sold. Wedgewood community members have spent a great deal of money to preserve the beauty of their community through the homeowners’ association, they said, so this development must also be visually attractive.

Several residents expressed their approval of a seniors’ residence in Wedgewood: they embrace the opportunity to age in their community with their friends and family around them.

“If this has to go ahead the City should work with our community to create detailed developmental guidelines (landscaping requirements, bigger setbacks, parking and garbage concealment, etc.) and then take the land and its development specs to market.”

Resident

“We wish to ensure that those of us who are currently living in this neighbourhood have a priority of being able to reserve a space in the seniors’ residence. We are currently seniors and will soon be needing a space.”

Resident

| Questions | Answers |
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| 1. Will the City ensure the developer has the financial means to complete the construction once it is started? | To enter into agreement with the City, the developer must meet financial criteria ensuring construction will be completed. |
| 2. Sale versus lease: will the City have more control with a lease arrangement? | The City is exploring an option to lease instead of sell the land. By retaining ownership, the City can have greater influence regarding end use, but this approach may limit firms interested in developing new homes on this site. |



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| 3. Can the community purchase the site? | Sale of this building site will occur only to firms seeking to develop seniors' housing on site consistent with Council direction. |
| 4. Is the seniors' housing site the same size as the original school site? | Yes. The seniors' housing will cover the same building site originally intended for a school. |
| 5. What was the process for the developer transferring ownership of the site to the City? | Land was provided by developers for a future public elementary school site, consistent with the approved statutory plan, when the neighbourhood was subdivided. |
| 6. What will the height of the building be? This is crucial for our neighbourhood. | The site is zoned RA7 for low-rise apartments. This will permit housing developments of up to four storeys or 14 metres, which is 4 metres taller than single family homes in the community. |
| 7. How can you enter into a request for proposal (RFP) without clarifying the restrictive covenant parameters for the site? | It is best practice to ensure that new developments visually and functionally integrate with their surroundings. The City will include restrictive covenant design requirements as conditions of future sale agreements. |
| 8. Who has the final say in design consultation if community members differ with the developer? | The City, builder and volunteers from the community will work together to reach consensus on design details through the design engagement process, which ensures the new homes fit in the community. |
| 9. Will this be assisted living or long-term care? How can community have input on the type and level of care? | The common categories for level of care are: independent living, supported living, supportive living and long-term care. The intention is to have a range of care provided within the development. The mix of levels of care will depend on which service provider wins the competition for the site. It is unlikely, however, that long-term care will be part of the development because it is not a permitted use with RA7 zoning. |
| 10. How does this fit with the Government of Alberta's long-term plan for seniors? | Because this development will likely not have long-term care, and will be focused more on independent living, it is not a provincial responsibility. |
| 11. How would the City deal with a request from the developer to increase the height or footprint to provide units at a lower price? | The current zoning limits the future building footprint and height. Increasing the building height would require a change in zoning and Council approval. |



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| 12. Will the City be pushing for subsidized or low-income housing? | Yes. <i>The Way We Grow</i> , the City's municipal development plan, states the need to create more housing choice, including non-market housing in all neighbourhoods. Further, the City's Housing section aims to create between 5% to 20% non-market housing in all neighbourhoods. Finally, if the project receives provincial funding for designated assisted living (DAL) then the Province sets the maximum rents. The surplus school sites provide an opportunity to make progress on these policy objectives. |
| 13. Will this be for one ethnic group? | No. |
| 14. What will the tenure (rental or ownership) be? | This will depend on the developer/operator, but the affordable units will likely be rental, and if they are provincially funded DAL units, will definitely be rental. |
| 15. Are units for sale or for rent? | Please refer to question 14. |
| 16. Will the residents pay fees to the homeowners association? | At this time, the homeowners' association fee does not apply to this development. However, the City can work with the builder to ensure new residents contribute to paying for the costs of enhanced maintenance funded by the homeowners' association. Since the amenities provided by the homeowners' association will create benefits for residents of this development, the City can work out an appropriate fee once a service provider is selected. |
| 17. How many people will live there? | The site can support approximately 150 to 175 homes within the approved zoning. |
| 18. Who decides who can live there? | The operator of the facility will decide, except for DAL supported units, where the Province may allocate people to locations. |
| 19. What is the time frame? | This will depend on funding and the timing of the site disposition and may depend on available provincial funding. |

Approved and Alternate Building Location

The City discussed soil suitability of the approved and alternative sites with the community league and homeowners' association when planning for the open house and arranged for soil testing to be



completed. Results were shared at the public open house that showed both building sites are suitable for building seniors' housing.

Building location proved a contentious issue within the community. Many community members who came to the meeting feel strongly that the alternate site, with access from 184 Street, is the only way the development could become acceptable to them. However, many others who attended the meeting or subsequently submitted their views online want the development on the approved site, and cannot understand why an alternate site is being considered since it was never designated as such. Those in favour of the 184 Street option are skeptical that their voices will be heard, even if there is significant community support.

The City of Edmonton was specifically looking for local knowledge from community members to help inform Administration's recommendation to City Council about whether the seniors' housing in Wedgewood Heights should be constructed on the approved or alternate location. Two options were discussed:

- the approved site (figure 1)
- the alternate site (figure 2)

Approved site (figure 1): Those in favour of the approved site point out that they bought their houses knowing where the zoning was on the site, aware that the school might or might not be built, and aware that other housing could go up there. Some of those in favour of the approved site are in favour of seniors' housing. What they did not expect was that the site would be moved, and they consider this to be fundamentally unfair.

"The building should definitely be moved to the alternate site. Moving the access to 184th will still have an effect but to a lesser degree for most residents."

Resident

They pointed out that 184 Street south of the fountain is not constructed to City standards, and would require a considerable investment of taxpayers' dollars for proper drainage, curbs, paved surface, sidewalk and lighting.

Alternate site with access from 184 Street (figure 2): There are an estimated \$1 million in additional costs associated with building on the alternative building site location. These costs are from upgrading 184 Street from a rural to an arterial roadway standard, relocating utilities underground, removing the existing sidewalks and berm and relocating 44 trees from the alternative building site location. Potential buyers must pay the costs associated with the alternative building site, which means the final purchase price of the site may increase.

"I can understand building a development in a space that was always meant for it but it would be irresponsible to move the site at a major cost to the City for roadway upgrades and service relocation and more to build it in a space that was always intended to be a park space."

Resident



Some residents said they would like to see the financial feasibility assessment of each site broken down, and there was considerable skepticism about the re-siting costs: some felt they had been inflated.

If the approved site is used, some residents said, the narrow strip of park along 184 Street would not be accessible for community use, only for the seniors. Some residents prefer the alternate site as they wish to restrict access to the development from 184 Street rather than Wedgewood Boulevard.

| Questions | Answers |
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| 1. What are the soil testing results? | Soil testing revealed that both sites support the development. |
| 2. What assurance can you give us that the City won't build on both sites? | The City has committed to only developing the building site. Further, sales conditions will be placed on any developer/ housing provider. Another option being explored in seniors' housing locations is to lease instead of sell the land. By retaining ultimate ownership, the City can ensure the site remains as its intended use. |
| 3. How was the site chosen at the outset? | All seniors' housing sites were selected following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● a review of civic needs and Council-approved policies from <i>The Way We Grow</i> and <i>The Way We Live</i> strategic plans;● a review of existing neighbourhood housing types, density and tenure (i.e. renters and owners) compared to other city-wide averages, new Capital Region Board residential density targets and Council's desire to achieve a more equitable distribution of different types of housing options across Edmonton;● consideration of the size and configuration of the surplus building site and its proximity to existing, under-utilized infrastructure and transit; and● a review of submissions received through a 2011 public Request for Expression of Interest process |
| 4. Has re-siting happened before? Has the City ever chosen the more expensive option? | Currently, Administration is following Council's direction to explore the approved and alternative building sites in Blue Quill, Bulyea Heights and Wedgewood Heights. Cost is one of several factors the City will consider when determining suitability for development. |

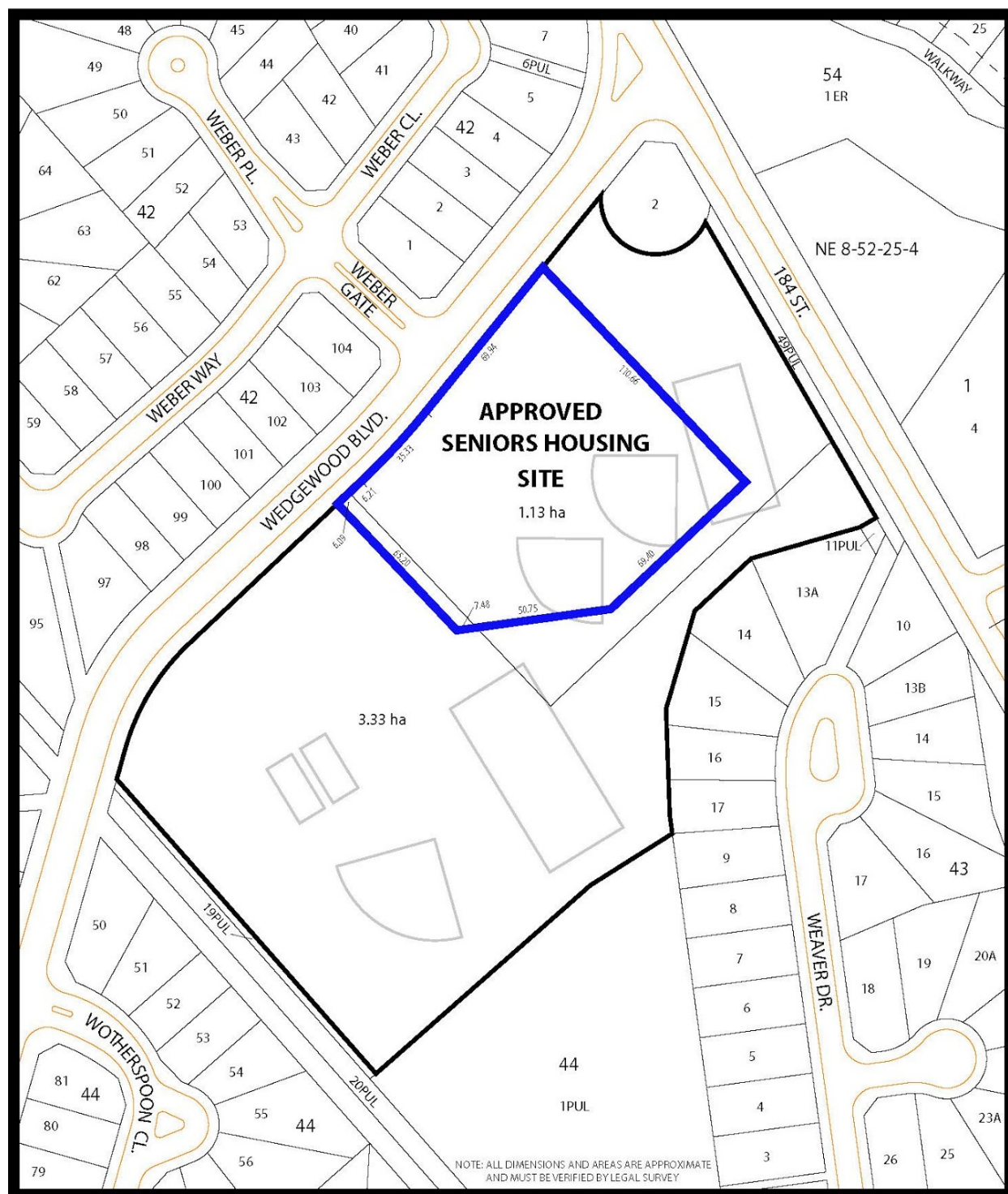
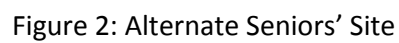


Figure 1: Approved Seniors' Site



Parks and Open Space

Access to the park is very important for community members. They would like to see a crosswalk and lights across Wedgewood Boulevard at the access point. There were concerns about how much of the existing park space the development would take up. City staff explained that the site will not exceed the original school envelope of 1.13 hectares. Many community members felt that dividing the park up by putting the development in the middle would make it more difficult to use the park and would pose a safety risk because of reduced sightlines. For these residents, the proper configuration of the park space should trump the financial cost of moving the development to the alternate site.

All residents see the Wedgewood Heights school site and open space as a significant asset to their community, to neighbouring communities and to the city. There are seven other neighbourhoods whose residents use Wedgewood Heights’ open space. They talked about the value of green space and parks in healthy communities, particularly at a time when children are encouraged to get outside and play as much as possible – to engage in physical, healthy activities.

The other major concern was with the existing soccer fields. Residents talked about how heavily used the temporary fields are in the spring. If a school was to be built on the site, they pointed out, it would have soccer fields – unlike the seniors’ housing. The two are very different propositions for the community. They would like to see a new sports field constructed in the space left over if the alternate site is chosen.

“My husband and I moved our family to this single family neighborhood to get away from the busy, overpopulated new areas with condos and seniors housing and we LOVE and cherish the open field and space for our children to run in. We think it is very sad to see some wonderful green spaces being removed and the change in the neighborhood dynamic.”

Resident

| Questions | Answers |
|--|---|
| 1. How much of the park can, and will, be used for construction? For equipment and lay down areas? | Development on surplus school sites will be constructed on land originally assembled for school buildings (called the “building envelope”). Developments are not constructed on planned open space or parkland. In some instances, it was decided to temporarily use the school building envelope for sports fields, pending development of the school. The land surrounding the school building envelope will not be altered and will remain as open space/sports field for the community. |
| 2. Can we convert the baseball diamonds into other uses such as soccer fields? | The parkland change process provides the community with the opportunity to make recommendations for |



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| | infrastructure changes in parks. This would include the potential for repurposing ball diamonds. |
| 3. Can the trees and the hill be preserved through development? | The trees and hill must be removed if development occurs on the alternative building site. If development occurs on the approved building site, the trees and hill will not be impacted. |

Transportation: Traffic, Roads and Parking

Most of the traffic concerns centred on Wedgewood Boulevard, and in particular the intersection at 184 Street and Wedgewood Boulevard. Residents pointed out that this is the only intersection when people enter the neighbourhood. Some residents felt it is dangerous because visibility is bad and there is some confusion over the signs. Residents also pointed out that an accident at this intersection can mean access to the neighbourhood is blocked for hours. Residents felt the increased traffic from seniors' housing would make all of these problems worse.

There was some skepticism about the City's traffic analysis. Residents said that a traffic survey conducted during the summer months was not representative of the real picture. They asked for a traffic analysis to be conducted in May and June when the soccer fields are in use.

Parking for the seniors' housing was raised. Some residents said they want input into the building envelope and the parking layout. Others said they would like to see underground parking. The point was also made that there would need to be pull-in ambulance access for the development.

Other concerns were:

- speeding along Wedgewood Boulevard;
- parking: there should be a zero-tolerance parking ban along the park;
- the school bus stop exactly at the proposed access point to the development;
- ineffective crosswalks: there need to be lights installed; and
- transit access to the neighbourhood is inadequate for seniors who might be dependent on public transportation.

"Access to the building for the approved site is on a very busy road, as there is only one road into the community. Building a huge complex with curb cuts for the entrance would create road problems for all residents who use Wedgewood Boulevard."

Resident

"As a regular walker in the neighbourhood I already have concerns about crossing the street safely. Building on the designated site will add to the problem, not just for me but for the children who bus to and from school each day or who want to access the playground."

Resident



| Questions | Answers |
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| 1. What happens if, two to three years after construction, your projections are off and the traffic is significantly impacted? | If recent traffic projections are not accurate and traffic is significantly impacted, the City will evaluate Wedgewood Boulevard and consider ways to lessen traffic impacts. |
| 2. We would like to funnel pedestrian traffic across the east side of 184 Street by the fountain. Can you finish the crosswalk and sidewalk there? | Changes to existing sidewalks on 184 Street are subject to review and approval by Transportation if the alternate site is developed. Communities can inquire with Transportation for requests to add a crosswalk. |
| 3. What are the parking requirements of RA7? | The zoning requires parking for employees, residents and visitors to be provided on-site (not on the street). The design for the seniors' developments must meet these zoning parking requirements. |
| 4. Can the community insist on all underground parking? | Current zoning requirements address only the number of required parking stalls but not how they are provided. There will likely be a mix of underground and above-ground parking to maximize choice and efficient use of the land while providing a significant amount of affordable units. |
| 5. Would you consider traffic calming measures approaching the intersection at 184 Street and Wedgewood Boulevard? | Existing traffic volumes and collision statistics do not indicate that traffic calming measures are required and are therefore not currently being considered for this development. |
| 6. Can we ensure transportation access to the alternative site occurs only from 184 Street? | The alternative building site adjoins both 184 Street and Wedgewood Boulevard. Transportation would not limit access to both roadways. Limiting access to 184 Street would require a condition of sale. |

Emergency Access

Some residents expressed concerns through the homeowners' association about access for emergency vehicles to the community, and so Edmonton Police Services and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) staff were asked to be present at the meeting. Several community members feel that 184 Street is not currently well-maintained enough to be effective as an emergency access to or from Cameron Heights. At the open house, EMS staff assured them that it is. They pointed out that access to Wedgewood Heights is limited because of ravines and the transportation utility corridor, but

"How can you imagine 500 households having to get in and out if there is an emergency and a lane is blocked? Especially during construction."

Resident



that has been alleviated to some degree by the continued maintenance of the emergency access on 184 Street and with ample road width on Wedgewood Boulevard.

Property Values

City staff explained that data from the Realtors' Association of Edmonton and City assessors show the effect of a seniors' housing development on house prices to be minimal, but residents were skeptical. They feel that while a school might have a positive impact on property values, they fail to see how seniors' housing could be anything but negative. One resident pointed out that schools were a specific attraction in a neighbourhood: his family had built their house there precisely because they believed there would be a school built. Others pointed out that while the development is under construction, it will be extremely difficult for residents who are trying to sell their homes.

"My house backs on the green space where the building site is proposed. How will it not have a significant impact on my property value? Currently I have a green space to look out to; soon it will be a building, with traffic and ambulances coming and waking me up in the middle of night."

Resident

| Questions | Answers |
|---|---|
| 1. Are you looking at other examples of seniors' housing in Edmonton? We need more specific data. | Yes. The City's Assessment and Taxation branch reviews examples of seniors' housing in Edmonton and their effect on housing prices. Specific study areas have been created for seniors' housing on surplus school sites, monitoring if the market values of properties directly affected by these sites react differently than properties affected by other seniors' housing complexes. Generally speaking, results show that market values in both cases are affected similarly to that of a school site. |
| 2. What is the average home value adjacent to and surround the seniors' housing, compared to the average of homes in Wedgewood? | The average 2015 assessment for single family properties in Wedgewood Heights is \$653,500. The average 2015 assessment for properties with the surplus school site seniors housing study area in Wedgewood is \$652,500. There are a total of 516 single family properties in Wedgewood Heights with values ranging from \$462,500 to \$3,676,500. Only nine properties are included in the surplus school site seniors' housing study area in Wedgewood, with values ranging from \$514,000 to \$853,000. |



Conclusion

Approximately 96 Wedgewood Heights residents attended the seniors' housing public open house. There was also an online questionnaire provided by Edmonton Insight Community for people who were not able to attend the meeting, and 23 residents chose to respond to the questionnaire at edmonton.ca/surplusschoolsites.

This feedback will be taken into serious consideration as City Administration prepares to make its recommendation on the seniors' housing building location to City Council in the spring of 2015.

In 2017, the City will seek volunteers from the community to work with the City and builder in designing the new seniors' housing project.

This "What We Heard Report" has been shared with Councillor Michael Oshry, the Wedgewood Heights Homeowners' Association and Community League, and posted to the City of Edmonton website.

"Regardless of where the seniors facility is built, sadly, it will change the dynamics of this community, which is now a vibrant neighbourhood where families gather with their children to play sports, picnic, and fly kites in the open fields, take memorable pictures at the fountain, ride bikes along the pathways and utilize the ravine, to one where traffic becomes an issue and rules change to accommodate the shift in population."

Resident