

# First Place Program Open House in Kirkness

WHAT WE HEARD: APRIL 2015

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## Introduction

Following City Council's approval of the First Place Program, City staff are implementing residential development on approved surplus building sites in phases throughout the city, including one in Kirkness. Prior to the April 14, 2015, public open house in Kirkness, City staff met with with the Hairsine Community League to explain the program, understand community issues and explain the open house format. Kirkness residents were invited to attend the open house through:

- a mail drop mailed three weeks in advance to homes in Kirkness, including apartments and condos
- temporary signs in the community
- information on the City of Edmonton's website
- information on the Community League website

An online questionnaire was posted on the City's website for people who were not able to attend the meeting.

The meeting began with a welcome and overview of the First Place program by Tim McCargar, Director of Strategic Planning with the City of Edmonton's Real Estate, Housing and Economic Sustainability Branch. Mr. McCargar explained the history of the program dating back to its approval by City Council in 2006 and the context of Edmonton's population growth. Councillor Gibbons was also in attendance to speak with residents and answer their questions.

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

The theme tables were:

- First Place Program and associated questions around property values
- New home builder (Landmark)
- Transportation
- Parkland change process
- Open space and use of sale proceeds
- Approved building site

Each themed table was staffed by a facilitator/note taker and subject matter expert.

Residents were asked to share:

1. Their questions of the relevant City experts so they could gain a fuller understanding of the First Place program
2. Information specific to Kirkness that City administration needs to take into consideration as the First Place program moves forward in the community

## Key themes

- **Welcoming First Place:** The majority of people at the meeting felt that the approved First Place makes sense in their community, and would be a good fit for Kirkness.
- **Traffic:** Short-cutting through the community to access Victoria Trail has led to a greater volume of traffic. The concern is that the First Place program would further exacerbate issues around speeding and traffic volume.
- **Parking:** Even though First Place includes ample parking for residents, there were some concerns that visitors' parking would spill over onto adjacent streets.
- **When can I buy?** Several people at the meeting were eager to take advantage of the First Place program to buy their first home.

*"I like the site. I'd rather see an existing site used than having to go and buy someone out, or tear down the trees... but traffic is an issue."*

*Resident*

## Table discussions

### First Place Program and property values

Residents had very specific questions about the First Place Program in Kirkness as follows:

Questions	Answers
1. How many townhomes will there be?	There will be approximately 60 to 70 townhomes in Kirkness. The exact number of units will be determined during the design engagement process.
2. What will happen to property values?	Based on other communities' experiences and data from the Realtors' Association of Edmonton and City assessors, the effect on property values is expected to be minimal.
3. What if I buy a First Place home and my income increases after the first year?	An individual's salary is expected to increase over time. Therefore, there is no penalty for an increase in income after the first year.
4. Can people leave the program early?	Yes: owners who are leaving early can sell their home and transfer the deferred land cost to the new owners or, they can pay out the deferred land payment earlier than expected.

5. Can we see the building sites that are not sold out?	Residents are welcome to visit First Place showhomes in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Casselman Landing: 5203 149 Avenue, built by Rohit Communities</li> <li>● Kernohan: 311 Clairview Road, built by Landmark Homes (opening spring 2015)</li> </ul>
6. Who sells the units?	The builder sells the units. In Kirkness, the builder will be Landmark Homes.

### New Home Builder

Representatives from Landmark Homes, the new home builder for Kirkness First Place, attended the meeting to explain the community design engagement process and provide as many design specifics known at this early stage. They explained the successful design engagement processes completed in eight other communities to date.

Residents were particularly concerned that First Place housing must fit the look and feel of the neighbourhood. Many residents were happy with the options presented to them to consider for design, but one comment was made that the community expects a better design than that used in Kernohan First Place.

Questions	Answers
1. What makes this program desirable compared to other options for buyers?	The City defers the homeowner's cost of the land, allowing them to repay this portion to the City after five years. The deferral of the land cost allows families to lower their mortgage payments and, often, qualify for a mortgage sooner.
2. What will the prices be?	The purchase price of new homes varies with each site based on the results of the design process, differing land values for each site and the current market demand for home features.
3. How big are the units?	The units will be approximately between 1,000 to 1,450 square feet, not including the basement.
4. What are typical condo fees?	Depending on total number of units, condo fees range between \$100 and \$160.
5. When will the units be ready for purchase?	In Kirkness, construction and sales is currently scheduled to occur in 2016 or 2017.

### Transportation: Traffic, Roads and Parking

Despite enthusiasm for First Place in Kirkness, there were several concerns about traffic in the community and the impact First Place would have.

- **Volume:** Drivers use 151 Avenue and 30 Street to short-cut through the neighbourhood to Victoria Trail. The development to the West of 30 Street, residents said, has also meant that traffic has increased considerably.
- **Speed:** Because people are using these roads as a short-cut, they are also driving too fast. The comment was made that traffic coming off Victoria Trail is often over the limit. One resident expressed the need for traffic calming measures and more efforts to catch speeders.
- **Parking:** Because of the 6 four-plexes at 151 Avenue and Kirkness Road and the bus stop on both sides of the street, there is already limited parking on 151 Avenue. There was a concern that emergency access is compromised on 151 Avenue at 30 Street because the road narrows, especially when vehicles are parked on both sides. One resident pointed out that four-plex garages are small and short: If a resident has a truck he/she would have to park it out on the street. Another resident asked for extra visitor parking to be provided within the site to avoid people parking on the street.
- **Transit:** Some residents made the point that transit would need to be improved to the community in anticipation of First Place. Bus service right now is only hourly on the weekends; and buses sometimes do not leave according to the schedule, which means missing the LRT. If consistency of service improves, more people would take transit, one resident said. There were also some concerns about parking spaces at Clareview station: *“How can I park and ride if there is no space?”*

*“The traffic on 30 street is insane. Short-cutters are taking corners on residential streets at very high speeds. And the volume has doubled, if not tripled.”*

*Resident*

### Parkland Change Process

Residents were informed about the “Change to Parkland” process that they can access if they wish to revisit the use of open space adjacent to the building site. Residents talked about the existing water and sewer services enabling the parkland to be used for a skating rink or splash pad.

*“The 7 to 1 ratio for visitor parking is absolutely wrong, and absolutely wrong for the City. It is not sufficient. Anything that comes into here, including this development, needs a minimum 4 to 1 ratio.”*

*Resident*

Questions	Answers
1. What would the existing green space look like after First Place is developed?	The “Change to Parkland” process will review park programming needs. Depending on the review, the use of

	green space could be changed to modify sports fields and infrastructure like ball diamonds and soccer pitches.
2. Could there be a consideration for an internal path from 31 Street to 32 Street and the existing school?	The builder, City and volunteer residents can discuss design elements including an internal pathway during the design engagement process.

### Open Space and Use of Sale Proceeds

It was explained to residents that development will not occur on land that was intended for open space when the site was assembled, and that the permanent sports fields will remain.

Sale proceeds from First Place Program building sites will be used to support affordable housing in other areas of the city, as directed by City Council and approved by the provincial government.

Questions	Answers
1. Is there any chance that the First Place site could expand?	No: The size of the First Place site is equal to the size of the surplus school site.
2. Will men’s league soccer still be able to use the field on the eastern edge of the site?	The soccer field will be impacted however, the league can work with the City through the Community Recreation Coordinator (CRC) to minimize the impacts to sports fields.
3. Is there any plan for a school on the future school site?	At this time, the City is not aware of a plan for a school on the future school site.
4. Will the green space indicated on the map stay green?	Yes: The green space is zoned for parkland uses and will be retained as open space.

### Approved building location

While the majority of residents at the meeting were happy about the location of the First Place development, there were also some concerns raised:

- **Security:** One resident was concerned that the location of the development will enable people to conduct drug deals or other forms of crime, particularly in the north-west corner of the park next to the rail corridor.

*“The approved site makes sense to me.”*

*Resident*

*“That site doesn’t sit well with me. I’d rather see it where the park is, northeast of the current school.”*

*Resident*

- **Future school site:** Another resident expressed the view that it would have made more sense to have the First Place site on the future school site: it would be closer to the bus stop and would be less likely to impact parking.

Questions	Answers
1. How was the First Place site chosen?	New First Place homes will be built on the surplus school site. The school board declared the site surplus in 2006. It then came to the City through the Joint Use Agreement.
2. What happens to the future school site if it isn't used for a school?	It would need to be declared surplus by the school board. Another school board would have the opportunity to identify a need for the site. If no school needs are identified, the City has the opportunity to acquire the site for municipal purposes.
3. How is it possible to have 60 to 70 units?	It's possible because the units will be townhomes. According to the zoning by-law, up to 78 townhomes can be built on the surplus school building site.

### Conclusion

About 15 Kirkness residents attended the First Place meeting. The reaction of those who filled in a open house evaluation form showed that residents felt welcome, encouraged to share their views, that their concerns were understood, and that the open house was well run.

A number of residents volunteered to take part in the design engagement process with Landmark Homes, which is the next stage in the First Place implementation process.

The feedback that residents gave at the open house will be taken into serious consideration as the City moves forward in developing First Place homes in Kirkness.