



First Place Program Open House: Twin Brooks

“What We Heard” report

by Civic Property Services

Sustainable development | Real Estate and Housing
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Background

When neighbourhoods were planned in the past, land was set aside for shared school park sites. Within these school park sites, land was set aside for school buildings, league buildings and open space.

Since 1959, the City has worked collaboratively with school boards and the community on the planning and decision making for these school park sites through a [Joint Use Agreement \(JUA\)](#). Under the JUA, local school boards are required to review parcels set aside for school buildings every three years to confirm if they are still needed for school purposes.

Occasionally, when school boards conduct their reviews they will determine that some of these undeveloped sites are no longer needed for school purposes and declare them surplus to school needs. As a result, a number of the parcels set aside for schools were never developed.

If the school boards declare a parcel surplus to school needs, the JUA between the City and the school boards affords the City first right of refusal on acquiring these sites. The City conducts a corporate-wide review to determine if the sites are needed for civic purposes, such as flood mitigation, transportation right of way, or open space. If no civic need is identified, acquiring the land for other uses that align with Council direction and leverage existing infrastructure investments can be considered.

Ultimately, City Council makes the final decision on the use of sites acquired by the City which are not needed for civic purposes. Since 2006, City Council has directed that Administration use these sites to create new housing choices to meet current and future housing needs in Edmonton.

First Place Program- Overview

In 2006, 20 vacant school building sites were declared surplus by the school boards and approved by Edmonton City Council for residential development under the City’s First Place program. The City’s First Place program teams up with banks and builders to develop vacant surplus school building sites into attractive townhomes that are market priced, with a five-year deferral on the land portion of the mortgage to make them more accessible to first time home buyers.

Landmark Homes and Rohit Communities were selected by the City in 2012 as the builders for the First Place program following an extensive request for proposal process. Landmark Homes is the builder advancing the First Place program in Twin Brooks. When City Council approved the First Place Program it required Administration to ensure local residents would be engaged in designing the new homes to ensure a good ‘fit’ within the existing community.

Prior to the development of any particular site, City staff hold an open house in the community to:

- **Share information:** Ensure residents are fully informed about the approved development and answer any questions they might have, and
- **Recruit residents for the Design Engagement process:** Recruit six to eight residents to participate in the design engagement process used to design the new homes. This process includes providing input on design elements, such as building orientation, massing and rooflines, site access, vistas, and exterior home design details and landscaping.

Twin Brooks First Place Program Site - Open House

The City hosted an open house on Saturday, December 3rd, 2016 from 11 AM to 3 PM at the George P. Nicholson school to allow residents an opportunity to learn more about the First Place development occurring in Twin Brooks.

A number of avenues were used to promote the open house to Twin Brooks residents, including:

- A mail drop sent out to area homes, including apartments and condos, via Canada Post two weeks in advance of the meeting
- Three temporary signs put up in the community
- Information on the City of Edmonton’s website
- Information on the Community League’s facebook page
- An email to community League board members
- An email to Twin Brooks residents who are members of the Edmonton Insight Community

Approximately 150 of the 6,250 Twin Brooks residents attended the December 3, 2016 open house or provided comments. Residents who were not able to attend the meeting, or who had further comments to add after the open house, were invited to access the information and provide comments and questions online. The online information was available from November 28, 2016 to December 10, 2016, and 19 residents chose to access the online resources.

The open house and online content focused on a number topics which were previously identified by the Twin Brooks Community League, including the:

- First Place Program
- Design Engagement process (information and sign-up)
- New home builder- Landmark Homes
- Traffic and transportation planning
- Property values
- Parkland and open space

City of Edmonton staff were on hand at the open house to engage with residents and answer questions around these topic areas.

Comments and Details by Topic Area

Based on resident feedback from the open house and online survey tool, a number of themes emerged both in support of the program, and concerns with the program. These include:

- Fundamental belief that everyone should have access and the right to a good home.
- Attracting young families to the community.
- Concern that the development will impact traffic (ex. An increase in traffic on already busy roads, particularly on 12th avenue).
- Concerns with the prior Council approval process (feeling the development is being imposed on residents).
- Concern about the building site location.

- Loss of green space and soccer fields.
- Post-construction safety around the building site, particularly for children going to and from school in the community.

The following section of this document shares the comments related to each of the topic areas focused on at the open house and in the online survey.

First Place Program

Twin Brooks residents shared the following comments related to the First Place Program.

- Some residents questioned whether or not there is the same need for housing in the city as in 2006, since the economic situation has changed since that time.
- There are perceptions that infill is a good thing for the city, and that choices for housing are important to suit the needs of a variety of citizens. However, many residents returned to what they feel is fundamentally unjust: that they believe the Municipal Government Act (MGA) was circumvented; that they were not adequately consulted and that a proper process was not followed.
- There are some perspectives that the pricing isn't sufficiently attractive to young people. However, there were also individuals who expressed interest in buying one of the town houses or assisting their children in purchasing a home.
- Some residents expressed concerns regarding the location of the development; some parents in the community pointed out that the development will block their view of their children playing in the park from 12th avenue.
- There are concerns that the First Place development would change the character of the neighbourhood.

Questions	Answers
1. Why was the engagement plan for 2017 moved to 2016?	Interest expressed by the community league prompted Administration to hold the community open house in 2016. The design engagement process will begin with Twin Brooks residents in 2017.
2. Why was the Municipal Government Act (MGA) changed to go ahead with this development?	The MGA was not changed. The Province provided an exemption to allow City Council to approve the development without a public hearing, and to use sale proceeds from the program to support affordable housing development in other communities.
3. Is there still a need for First Place housing, given the economic downturn?	Yes, the need to help recent graduates and young families enter the housing market still exists and demand for the program is still strong.
4. How does the mortgage work?	New home buyers approach local banks to qualify for mortgage financing required to purchase their first home.

5. How does the land deferral process work?	New home buyers are qualified for mortgages by local banks and pay the land costs to the City at the end of the five year deferral period.
6. What precautions are put in place to ensure this doesn't become a rental complex?	The sales agreement requires new home owners to occupy the new home. This requirement continues through the five year deferral period, after which the homeowners have the same property rights as other homeowners in Twin Brooks.
7. Who is financing this?	The new home builder and buyers finance the development.
8. Who decided on the price of the units?	New home prices are determined by the new home builder (Landmark Communities).
9. How can I apply for the program?	Residents interested in purchasing one of the town houses can contact Heather Vear by email (heatherv@landmarkgroup.ca) or by phone (780-702-8344)
10. What kind of people are buying First Place units? Families with children?	Recent sales show that new homebuyers are a diverse group, with about half of buyers being couples and the remainder being single. In addition, the majority of buyers are currently living within a few kilometres of the building site.
11. Is there a concern that people will buy and then flip their home for a profit?	Our experience with development on other building sites located across the City is that the majority of buyers stay in their home beyond five years. Buyers must occupy the home they own, and during the deferral period families interested in leaving the program must seek approval from the City.
12. So far have you had any problems with people paying their mortgages?	There have been no mortgage defaults associated with the program since sales began in 2007/8.
13. What is the history of the site chosen for the development? Was it the original school site?	All First Place Program building sites were originally assembled for future school development and later declared surplus by school boards. The City has retained all planned open space adjacent to the surplus building site.
14. Why can't we say where we want the site?	The building site is located where there is safe access, next to transit stops and adjacent to underground infrastructure necessary to support the development.

15. Will the site be expanded?	No. The building site is a separate parcel and adjacent land will be rezoned to support school and open space uses as approved in the neighbourhood plan.
16. Is the same developer used for all First Place developments?	There are two new home builders for all First Place Program building sites (Landmark Homes and Rohit Communities), which were selected in 2012 following an extensive request for proposal process. Landmark Homes has been selected to develop Twin Brooks First Place site.
17. Is the City giving away the land?	No. Land for the approved First Place program is sold to new home buyers at market value.
18. How big is the homestead site and how is it avoided for in planning?	The homestead site is located west of the school and is about 0.5Ha. The approved First Place site is at least 350 ft away from the Homestead site .
19. How does the original concept plan for Twin Brooks (NASP 1989) fit with the current plan?	<p>The original NASP approved in 1982 (Bylaw 6259) projected a population of 9,064. Subsequent plan amendments raised and lowered this number resulting in a plan proposing 9,570 in 2013 (Bylaw 16502). Amendments respecting surplus schools sites included text indicating the statistics were not revised at those times.</p> <p>1982: Was two neighbourhoods each with their own school/park site</p> <p>2013: One neighbourhood with one school/park site. 4 areas were added to the neighbourhood over time (west of 119 St, south with release of ring road surplus lands, sw with a condo project and a multi-family site)</p>
20. What are the qualifications for the First Time homebuyers?	Qualification requirements are available on the City's First Place program website .
21. How do we access the studies that have been done on traffic and drainage, for example?	Appropriate technical studies are completed as required to ensure proper engineering design for the development. Due to the proprietary and technical nature of these reports, please address specific requests to the City at firstplace@edmonton.ca and to the new new home builder at Davidc@landmarkgroup.ca .
22. How can we stop this?	All required Council approvals supporting development are in place. Development is proceeding as directed by Council.

Design Engagement (information and sign up)

There are perspectives that the design engagement process would not affect more than the cosmetic aspects of the development and that the design engagement is not an adequate alternative to the genuine community engagement that should have taken place earlier. However, there are other residents who were enthusiastic at the prospect of becoming involved in the design process, expressing interest in both the interior and exterior design of the development and wanting to ensure the building materials selected fit with the look and feel of a community that is 20 to 30 years old.

New Home Builder- Landmark Communities

Some of the views expressed include:

- Landscaping: Landscaping in front of the homes will be critical.
- Unit turn-over: ensuring that the condo board properly manages the units.
- Purchase price: The cost is actually too high for many young buyers.
- Land Price and Beneficiary: Some residents expressed the view that the City did not have to pay for the land, but the developer is now making money from that land, which ultimately should belong to the community.

Questions	Answers
23. What does each unit cost?	Home costs are determined by the new home builder and market conditions and are influenced by the design engagement process. At present, similar homes in Bearspaw and Kirkness are selling at around \$300,000, including the land value but excluding applicable taxes.
24. How many units will there be?	The exact number of homes to be built will not be known until the design engagement process is complete. The builder estimates the site would support between 35-40 homes. The maximum number of homes allowed under the current zoning for the approved building site is 43.
25. Who finances this?	The builders finance new home construction costs and buyers finance the land acquisition costs
26. Is there proper access for people with mobility challenges?	No, due to grading and site challenges and the development form allowed, there is no proper access designed for people with mobility challenges for this type of development. There are other development types other than First Place developments that may offer the proper product type and accessibility for mobility challenged people.

27. Does an 18 foot width allow for a double garage?	The builder has confirmed that an 18 foot width on drive under homes will support a double garage.
28. When does construction begin?	Construction cannot begin until the design engagement process is complete and development permit approval has been provided. The tentative construction start date is currently 2018.
29. Can the City and the developer work together to ensure quality landscaping?	Quality and fit of the development in the community are important. The developer is required to work with residents through the design engagement process to ensure that issues such as building site landscaping details are addressed.
30. Where will the garbage facilities be?	This detail is determined through the design engagement process
31. What will be done to ensure kids’ safety?	A safety plan will be prepared by the builder and shared with the school principal for review and comment before construction begins. This plan will indicate the construction boundary and entrance, along with muster points, nearby fire hydrants, bus stop, walkways, etc. The construction site will be fully fenced and the entrance gate locked overnight. In addition, the new home builder will work to minimize the hauling of materials from the building site off site as a means to mitigate risks associated with construction.

Traffic and Transportation Planning

Traffic

- Some residents suggest that 12th Avenue is already a busy street, with a curve that creates a perceived issue with sight lines. Many residents also talked about possible safety concerns related to children walking to school past the entrance to the development just as the new residents are leaving for work.
- Residents also took the opportunity to advocate for a connection to 23rd avenue from the Twin Brooks neighbourhood, in an effort to increase accessibility in and out of the neighbourhood during peak times.
- Some residents expressed concern about increased traffic on 111 street, which some residents perceive to have high traffic volume.

Parking

While acknowledging that parking will be included in the First Place program development for both residents and their visitors, some residents are concerned that there will still be an increase in the number of cars parked along 12th Avenue. Residents expressed concern that this would affect traffic and reduce parking places available for the soccer fields. The suggestion was made that parking on 12th Avenue should be limited to two hours.

Questions	Answers
32. Could there be a crossing light to the trail in the park?	A traffic study is being prepared. The opportunity for adding a crossing light at this location will be reviewed based on the traffic study.
33. Could there be a parking ban on 12 Avenue at certain hours?	Traffic Operation has reviewed the existing traffic flows at this location and confirmed there is no plan to place a parking ban on 12 Avenue.
34. Could we look at extending the school zone speed limit?	The school zones and areas are established based on the <i>Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation - Guidelines for School and Playground Zones and Areas</i> . The opportunity for extending the school zone will be reviewed if there are changes to the school site (i.e. expanding the existing school site).
35. Could there be a pedestrian flasher at the site access?	A traffic study is being prepared. Traffic Operation will review the opportunity for adding a pedestrian flasher at the site access based on the traffic study.
36. Where will the parking be? And what kind of parking will it be?	Parking for all new home buyers and visitors will be provided within the building site as required by the current site zoning.
37. Can the parking area for the Community League be expanded to accommodate demand for on-street parking?	Parking for the First Place development will be provided within the building site. If the Community League wishes to provide more parking spaces for the sports fields in the area, they may consult with Parks to see if there is any opportunity for parking lot expansion.
38. Can we have an LRT stop between 12 Avenue and 9 Avenue?	LRT Infrastructure Delivery is planning an LRT station between 12 Avenue and 9 Avenue on the west side of 111 Street. Over the course of 2017/2018, the LRT group will be updating the preliminary engineering and will open the opportunity assessing whether or not the Twin Brooks Station will be included in the long term plans or not. Public consultation will take place to support the decision making process at that time.

39. Can we have a bridge on 119 Street to 23 Avenue?	The Twin Brooks community lobbied City Council to eliminate the planned bridge on 119 Street . This planned crossing was eliminated by City council in 2011.
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Property Values

The effect of the development on house prices in Twin Brooks was a concern for some residents.

Parkland and open space

Green space is important for many residents, and part of the reason why they enjoy living in Twin Brooks. Residents shared that the park on the site is used not just for sports fields. It is also used by both the YMCA childcare and the school as part of their programming, and is integral to a vibrant community and resident’s lifestyle. In addition to concerns about losing existing, temporary sports fields to the development, some residents suggested that other parts of the park would be a better location for the First Place Program. For example, residents indicated the south soccer and ball diamonds are less well used.

Residents expressed concerns about the size of the fields (too small), and the amount of time the soccer fields will be closed as new fields are phased in, and that the new fields will face east/west so players will be running into the sun.

Some residents would like to see the Parkland quantitative analysis, and a public consultation process for the park use. There were comments that the information presented was misleading, because the rink and community league were not marked. Residents were particularly concerned about the effect of the development on the remaining green space, particularly that it would be hidden by the development and that safety would therefore be an issue for children playing there on their own.

Questions	Answers
40. Was the District Park considered for this development?	City Council’s direction was to develop the vacant building site declared surplus by school boards. No school board building sites were assembled on the district park site.
41. How does the green space in Twin Brooks compare to that of other communities?	Planned green space in Twin Brooks is comparable to the communities that surround it. Planned space in each community reflects the number of schools planned for shared school/park sites in accordance with the standards that existed when the sites were assembled.
42. How does our green space compare to other Canadian cities?	Comparisons with other Canadian cities indicate that Edmonton provides one of the highest per capita amounts of green space in the country.

43. Where will the kids play soccer?	The open space adjacent to the building site will continue to serve league, recreation and sports users consistent with the site plan .
44. What about other sport options, such as tennis?	Tennis courts are usually developed within the community league licence area. If the community wishes to pursue such development it may contact their Community Recreation Coordinator who will explain the parkland change process that enables such development.
45. How will we access the park when the development is built?	This park area was designed to function adjacent to two building sites. The change of built form from school to housing on one of the building sites will not affect the planned access to the park space.
46. Where will our kids play soccer while the development is being built?	The large soccer field adjacent to the school will not be affected by the First Place development and the City is considering construction of a new temporary field south of the First Place building site. Once building site grading is complete, two planned soccer fields south of the building site will be constructed consistent with the current site development plan. Grading changes are planned to occur outside of the soccer season to minimize impact to sports field users.
47. Why can't you pick another space?	City Council's direction is to develop the vacant building site declared surplus by school boards. There are no other alternative/suitable surplus serviced building sites available in this area that are owned by the City and approved for this development.

Actions

There was a strong desire by all residents for regular updates, including relevant dates for the development and what will be done to address their concerns. There was also enthusiasm for the design engagement process, with 17 residents expressing interest in participating in the design process and looking forward to getting involved. As a result, City Administration will:

- Invite interested residents to join a mailing list so they can receive future updates.
- Begin the selection of residents to participate in the Design Engagement process.