



Background information: First Place housing on surplus school sites

Many Edmontonians dream of owning their own home but don't have the financial resources to make it happen. Single parents, young professionals and recent graduates can find it particularly tough to break into Edmonton's housing market.

The City of Edmonton strives to be a place where people of all walks of life feel welcome and safe. Sustainable infrastructure – including greater housing choices – is an important part of making the city livable for everyone. In 2006, City Council approved the First Place program, which builds new townhouses for first-time buyers on vacant school building sites declared surplus by school boards.

Twenty school sites were declared surplus and approved for First Place housing in 2006. As of August 2014, completed developments across Edmonton have allowed 192 families to realize the dream of home ownership. The new homes are designed with the help of community residents to ensure they “fit” with the neighbourhood style and character.

How the program works

- Community residents help design the new townhomes, which are sold to homebuyers at market prices by the builder.
- 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.
- Homeowners are also able to build equity faster.
- A condo board is created by the builder to ensure the new homes are well looked after.



- New buyers must occupy their home.
- Two local builders, Rohit and Landmark, were chosen by the City of Edmonton through a competitive process for the quality of their homes and their experience with involving communities in design and “fit” of new housing.

Eligibility criteria

- Eligibility is restricted to those who have not owned a home in Alberta and have a household income of no more than \$117,000 per year.
- Must be Canadian citizens or permanent residents



- Able to qualify for a mortgage, with or without a co-signer.
- Have a personal net worth less than \$25,000 (excluding a primary vehicle, RRSPs, and the mortgage downpayment).

First Place and your community

The zoning for First Place sites allows builders to construct between 42 and 54 homes per hectare of land (depending on whether the building includes underground parking). On most sites, 40 to 50 townhomes will be built.

A community liaison group has been formed to improve communication about, and understanding of, the program. The group also helps the City understand local context that may influence new home development in each community.

Signs are being placed on all surplus school sites to distinguish school building sites from adjacent open space.

The city's project team meets with community leadership to plan public meetings to explain the program to residents and seek 6-8 residents to participate in the design of the new homes.

Why and how we have surplus sites

When land for school and park sites was assembled decades ago, parts of each parcel of land were allocated for future buildings as well as open space for school and municipal needs.

A [Joint Use Agreement](#) supports collaboration between the City and school boards, and the planning and assembly of shared sites.

Over the years, many communities did not achieve the planned populations identified in neighbourhood plans. As children grew and left, populations generally peaked below planned

levels and started to decline. On occasion, building sites set aside for schools were not developed and were later declared surplus by school boards.

Under the Joint Use Agreement, the school board regularly reviews its need for vacant school sites. Sites it does not require for future schools are declared surplus and returned to the City.

The City has a process for determining use of the surplus school building sites. All sportsfields planned for the school are retained.

Recent declarations of surplus school sites include 20 in 2006, and another 20 in 2009. In addition, sites with school buildings can be declared surplus, with first right to purchase offered to the City.

Of the total 40 declared surplus since 2006:

- 20 are approved for First Place
- 9 are housing sites with final use not yet determined
- 8 are planned seniors' sites
- 3 are retained for civic purposes

For more information

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