

Cornerstones: Building Success

Access to safe, secure affordable housing is a basic human need and a key element of healthy and complete communities.



City Council approved the first of the annual Road Maps for Cornerstones Plan Implementation starting in 2007.

Origins

In the last decade, a climate of rising rents and higher house prices led to growing public concern about the significant lack of affordable housing in Edmonton. City Council saw a need for action, and approved *Cornerstones, Edmonton's Plan for Affordable Housing 2006-2011* in 2005.



Through its Cornerstones program, the City took a lead role in increasing the supply of affordable housing. The City initiated partnerships with other orders of government, as well as private and community-based housing providers, to create an additional 2,500 long-term affordable housing units over the Plan's five-year timeframe—and succeeded beyond those expectations.

Council committed funding, the Province followed suit with block funding, and the City brought more partners on board with the Plan from the private and non-profit sectors. This represented a distinct shift from the City's previous roles as a limited funding partner and a facilitator for other housing provider efforts. This new role allowed the City to set its own course by making efficient use of funding opportunities and aligning its efforts with those of developers and housing providers in both market and non-profit sectors.

The City has delivered timely and effective assistance through the Cornerstones program, committing funds for over 3,000 long-term affordable housing units and exceeding Council's initial target. These units have already become homes—ninety-six percent of units provided under all Cornerstones delivery streams are currently occupied.¹

¹ Does not include the Fixed-Rate Rent Supplement and Secondary and Garage Suites programs.



What we did

Leveraged City funding. Council recognized that a City investment of \$25 million over five years would not, on its own, be sufficient to achieve the 2,500 unit target. The City funding investment was intended to secure significant additional funding from a wide range of other government and housing provider partners.

Encouraged a mix of housing. The Cornerstones program supported a variety of affordable housing types, engaged a mix of development partners, and utilized a range of approaches to creating additional housing units.

Refined the program. Since the initial Plan was approved, the City made a number of improvements to program delivery. This included ensuring that Cornerstones projects accommodated persons with disabilities. The City streamlined its procedures for evaluating and approving applications for Cornerstones funding, and encouraged more family-oriented housing units and developments in alignment with Council priorities. The City has also worked to ensure that affordable housing units are blended within existing communities and developments, and complement focused neighbourhood revitalization and urban renewal initiatives already underway (e.g. Boyle Renaissance, The Quarters Downtown, and transit-oriented development guidelines).

Investments

The City has funded the creation of over 3,000 units with over \$150 million in Cornerstones funding from 2006 to 2012. The program focused on providing a portion of the capital costs required for the development of new affordable housing units and other types of housing stock.

Cornerstones Program funding totals over \$150 million, including:

- An initial \$25 million investment from the City of Edmonton over the first five years of the program, plus subsequent allocations of City funding as the program evolved;
- Over \$109.6 million from the Government of Alberta through its Block Funding Program, plus \$1.25 million for the Fixed-Rate Rent Supplement Program and \$875,000 for the City's Fee Rebate for Affordable Housing Program; and
- \$1.25 million from the Government of Canada for the Fixed-Rate Rent Supplement Program.



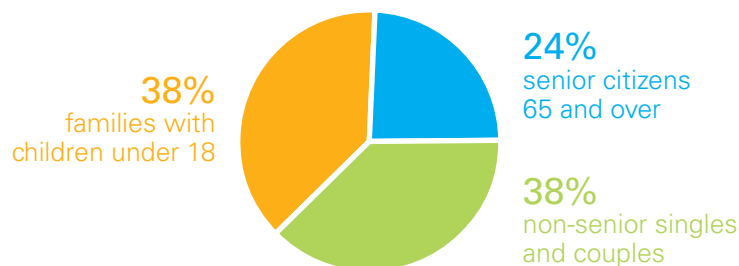
The City developed Cornerstones program delivery streams based on best practice reviews from other non-market housing funding bodies.

Mayor Stephen Mandel officially announced the Cornerstones program Secondary Suites grants on June 12, 2008, and the first grant file was approved on August 19, 2008. This aspect of the Cornerstones program put Edmonton on the map as a leader in encouraging this type of housing. The City identified key zoning changes and improved inspection services. Its “carrot approach” was so successful in increasing compliance that it was able to exponentially increase the number of safe, legal suites in Edmonton. The success of the grant program raised awareness of the benefits of secondary suites beyond the scope of the grants, to the point that half of the new suites were created voluntarily by homeowners who had not applied for funding assistance. This kind of support for secondary suites is unheard of in other municipalities.

Who we served

The Cornerstones program provided housing to those who needed it—individuals and families with modest incomes. It was focused on projects for independent living, although it did include a stream of funding to Homeward Trust Edmonton to deliver some supportive housing.

Cornerstones residents by household type:



Overall, many Cornerstones housing providers have gone further than the requirements of the program by offering rents that are lower than the maximum level (85 percent of average market rent for a comparably-sized unit).

An independent evaluation of the Cornerstones program confirmed that it was well-received by both non-profit and for-profit project proponents.





“This apartment has given me independence again—a beautiful home I can afford on my own. It certainly has given me a new lease on life. I’m only three blocks from the seniors centre. I’m exercising three times a week, I’m taking art classes... I’m living again.”

~ Gloria Woloschuk, Prince Rupert Manor

Investments by C program stream,

Cornerstones program stream	Funding (millions)
New construction of affordable housing (not including inclusionary)	\$60.1
New construction of affordable inclusionary housing	\$13.4
Purchase of existing housing stock for affordable housing	\$17.1
Fixed-Rate, Fixed-Term Rent Supplement Program (delivered through Capital Region Housing Corporation)	\$13.3
Secondary, Garage and Garden Suites program	\$12.7
Fee Rebate For Affordable Housing Program (FRAHP)	\$0.6
Land purchases for affordable housing	\$17.2
Transitional housing (delivered through Homeward Trust Edmonton)	\$11.3

Cornerstones 2006-2012

The Provincial Task Force on Affordable Housing and advocacy by Mayor Stephen Mandel and Councillors Karen Leibovici and Michael Phair led to increased provincial funding to develop housing solutions at the municipal level— three consecutive years of provincial block funding commitments to municipalities for affordable housing.



# of units	Council goal fulfilled	Positive outcomes	Inclusive	Diverse	Mixed-use tenancy	Energy-efficient components
964	Transforming Edmonton's Urban Form 4.0 – Complete, healthy and livable communities through: 4.4 – Housing Choices 4.5 – Affordable Housing 8.0 – Working within our Region	Encouraged new construction to meet growing demand	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Improving Edmonton's Livability 3.1 – The City nurtures a caring and inclusive society 3.2 – The City increases opportunities to improve the lives of its vulnerable population 3.3 – The City reduces physical and financial barriers to housing, transportation, libraries, recreation, social and leisure opportunities for residents 4.1 – Edmontonians enjoy safety and security of person, place and community 6.1 – The City of Edmonton is a socially-sustainable society	Encouraged increased long-term affordable units in private developments to meet growing demand	✓	✓	✓	✓
240	Transforming Edmonton's Urban Form 4.0 – Complete, healthy and livable communities through: 4.4 – Housing Choices 4.5 – Affordable Housing 8.0 – Working within our Region	Prolonged the useful life of existing rental housing for occupancy by lower-income households Repurposed underutilized space for safe, affordable housing	✓	✓	✓	✓
849	Improving Edmonton's Livability 3.1 – The City nurtures a caring and inclusive society 3.2 – The City increases opportunities to improve the lives of its vulnerable population 3.3 – The City reduces physical and financial barriers to housing, transportation, libraries, recreation, social and leisure opportunities for residents 4.1 – Edmontonians enjoy safety and security of person, place and community 6.1 – The City of Edmonton is a socially-sustainable society	Delivered funding to make rents more affordable for lower-income people	✓	✓		✓
538	Transforming Edmonton's Urban Form 4.0 – Complete, healthy and livable communities through: 4.4 – Housing Choices 4.5 – Affordable Housing Improving Edmonton's Livability 3.3 – The City reduces physical and financial barriers to housing, transportation, libraries, recreation, social and leisure opportunities for residents 4.1 – Edmontonians enjoy safety and security of person, place and community	Offered assistance to homeowners to bring property up to safety standards and, supplement their income Increased stock of safe, affordable rental housing	✓	✓		✓
154	Transforming Edmonton's Urban Form 4.0 – Complete, healthy and livable communities through: 4.4 – Housing Choices 4.5 – Affordable Housing Improving Edmonton's Livability 3.2 – The City increases opportunities to improve the lives of its vulnerable population 3.3 – The City reduces physical and financial barriers to housing, transportation, libraries, recreation, social and leisure opportunities for residents	Offered assistance to homeowners to bring property up to safety standards and improve accessibility Improved energy efficiency of housing units and fixtures	✓	✓		✓
66	Transforming Edmonton's Urban Form 4.0 – Complete, healthy and livable communities through: 4.4 – Housing Choices 4.5 – Affordable Housing 8.0 – Working within our Region	Repurposed underutilized space for safe, affordable housing			✓	✓
140	Improving Edmonton's Livability 3.1 – The City nurtures a caring and inclusive society 3.2 – The City increases opportunities to improve the lives of its vulnerable population 3.3 – The City reduces physical and financial barriers to housing, transportation, libraries, recreation, social and leisure opportunities for residents 4.1 – Edmontonians enjoy safety and security of person, place and community 6.1 – The City of Edmonton is a socially-sustainable society	Addressed provincial priority to support the provision of transitional housing	✓	✓		✓

What was funded

Approximately one-half of Cornerstones-funded units are family-suitable (two and more bedrooms), contributing to school-aged populations in the neighbourhoods in which they are located.

Cornerstones units have significantly exceeded the Alberta Building Code requirement for a minimum of 10 percent adaptive units for housing projects that are funded in whole or in part by the Government of Alberta.

Cornerstones-funded projects and units have been delivered throughout the city. These funded projects are supplemented by a significant number of funded standalone units spread citywide. These standalone units are provided through direct-to-landlord and direct-to-resident household Cornerstones rent supplements (849 units), Cornerstones secondary and garage suites grants (538 units) and the Cornerstones Inclusionary Affordable Housing Program (72 units).

Cornerstones efforts were expanded to address neighbourhood issues and complement major City urban renewal projects including the Boyle Renaissance redevelopment and the Quarters Downtown revitalization effort.

Twenty-one Cornerstones-funded projects, including 650 affordable housing units, will complement existing urban renewal and neighbourhood revitalization initiatives. These include:

- 30 affordable housing units in the Mount Royal Artists' Co-op planned for The Quarters Downtown;
- York Hotel land purchase in Boyle Street;
- 90 affordable housing units in the Métis Capital Housing Corporation seniors affordable housing project in Boyle Renaissance;
- 40 affordable housing units in the 200-unit BCM Five Corners Tower One in the Quarters Downtown;
- 50 affordable housing units in the 154-unit Glenwood Developments Ltd. mixed-use Norwood Village Apartments in Alberta Avenue; and
- 237 affordable housing units in Mayfair Village on Jasper Avenue at 109 Street.

Edmonton's housing context

Demand. Housing needs remain significant, with thousands of income-challenged households (low-income and those paying 30 to 50 percent of their income on housing) on wait lists for housing in the City and the Capital Region.

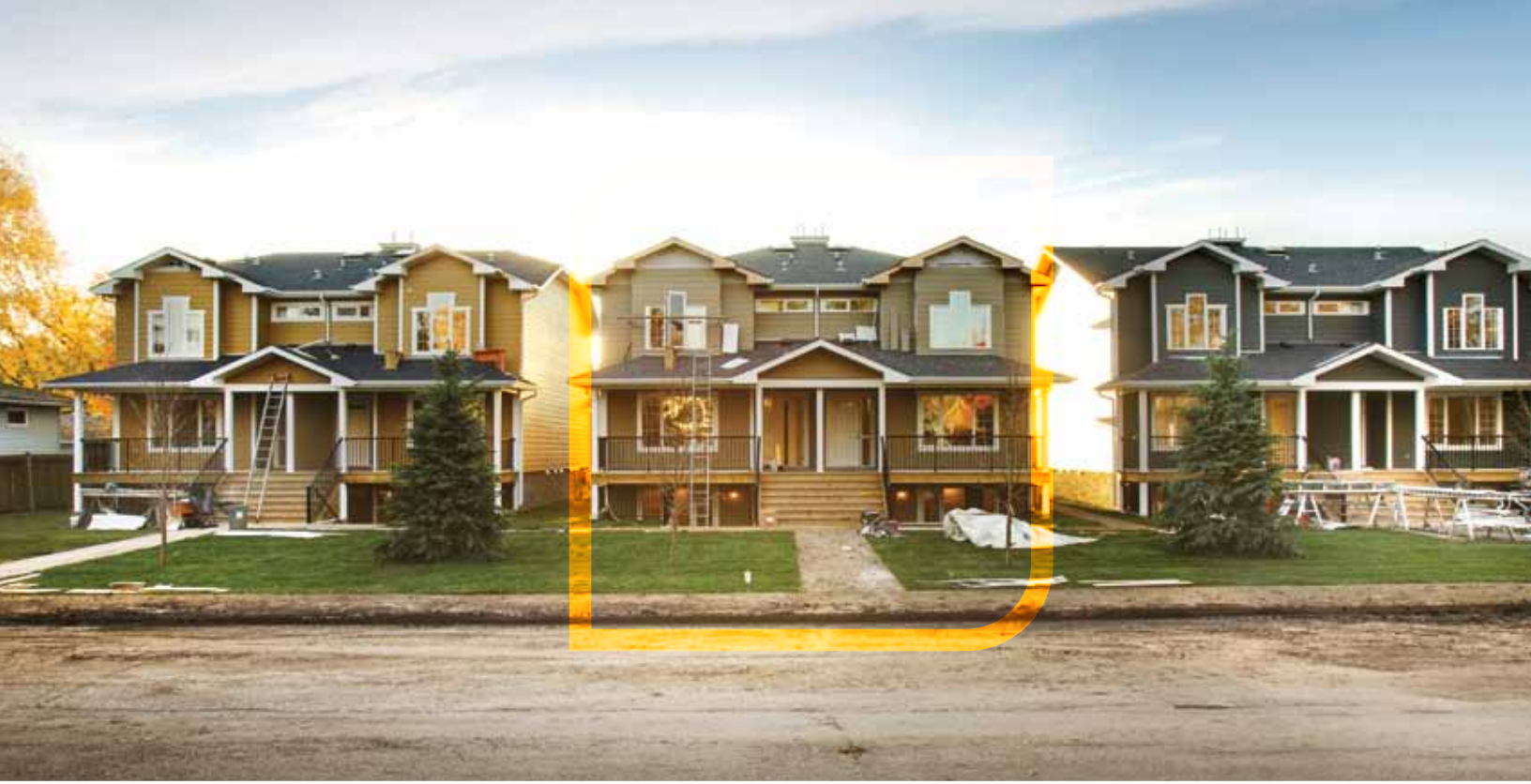
Roles and resources. Housing needs not met through market forces are constitutionally a provincial government responsibility requiring extensive financial and service support. Municipalities continue to lack predictable, dedicated, long-term funding from other orders of government. Through its Cornerstones Plan, the City has worked to leverage funding from a variety of governmental, nonprofit and private sources to create more housing options for Edmontonians. The City continues to allocate internal resources to maximize capital investments while ensuring the efficient and transparent review and approval of applications.

Geography. Affordable housing and related support services are concentrated in Edmonton. Edmonton is home to 70 percent of the Capital Region's population, but home to over 90 percent of its non-market housing supply. Most non-market housing outside of Edmonton is seniors housing. The Capital Region Board has acknowledged that housing is a shared responsibility, and has called for more support and coordination from the Province and surrounding municipalities to address the uneven distribution of and demand for affordable housing. A major Capital Region Regional Plan objective is to achieve a more equitable distribution of these units outside of Edmonton and close to future employment and transit service opportunities in the Regional Plan's priority growth areas.

Community engagement. The City has worked to better engage with communities to set the stage for positive community outcomes. This has included working with Community Services, the City's Great Neighbourhoods initiative, housing providers and community stakeholders to improve policy and procedures.

Changing public policy. 2009 was the final year of the three-year provincial Block Funding to municipalities to help increase their supply of affordable and transitional housing. In 2010, the Province distributed funding through an RFP (Request For Proposals) process. The "Edmonton Community Plan on Housing and Support Services 2005-2009" also ended in 2009, having been a key reference for the administration of the Cornerstones program.





Going forward

The success of Cornerstones is built on the strength of its foundation—committed funding and the strength of its business practices, including a transparent Housing Accountability Framework.

The Sustainable Development Department is introducing measures to implement other improvements, including internal coordination to support broader corporate outcomes and address public concerns. This includes:

- coordinating the review and update of the Edmonton Zoning Bylaw relating to definitions of Dwelling, Household, Group Home, Limited Group Home and Boarding and Lodging Houses;
- reviewing procedures and processes for issuing development permits to ensure consistent compliance with the intent of the Zoning Bylaw through effective training and awareness;
- reviewing Cornerstones program eligibility criteria to ensure alignment with desired outcomes for land use and affordability; and
- improved response to safety issues through inspections and addressing derelict housing conditions.

Safe and affordable housing is a vital platform for individual and societal health and well-being, for an inclusive society and for healthy and complete communities. The need and demand for a wide range of housing is forecast to increase with the significant economic growth in Edmonton and across the Capital Region over the next decade.

Acknowledgements

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