



City of Edmonton

First Place Program Open House: Haddow

What We Heard Report – February 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. Prior to the November 26, 2014 public open house in Haddow, City staff met with the Ridge Community League to explain the program, understand community issues and explain the meeting format. Haddow residents were invited to attend the meeting through:

- a mail drop that was sent out via Canada Post two weeks in advance to homes in Haddow, including apartments and condos;
- two temporary signs put up in the community;
- information on the City of Edmonton's website; and
- information on the community league's website.

Approximately 136 residents attended the open house.

The meeting began with a welcome from the president of the Ridge Community League, Jim Bradshaw. Secondly, Nathan Ip, public school trustee for ward H, talked about the process for declaring a school site surplus. Trustee Ip recognized the community's desire for a new school. However, he explained that this was simply not possible given the school board's budgetary constraints and the more-pressing needs of other communities. Finally, Councillor Bryan Anderson gave an overview of the First Place Program. Councillor Anderson explained the history of the program dating back to its approval in 2006 and the context of Edmonton's population growth. While recognizing that initial public consultation around First Place did not follow the usual process in 2006, Councillor Anderson stated that Council is committed to moving ahead with the program and responded to questions from residents prior to the facilitated table discussions occurring.

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
- new home builder
- transportation
- property values
- parkland and open space
- building site feasibility

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



2. information specific to Haddow that the City needs to take into consideration as the First Place program moves forward in the community.

Key Themes

Lack of consultation: Many residents were frustrated and angry that the decision had been made to go ahead with First Place Housing without their input. While acknowledging the need for housing in the city, most people felt that Haddow is simply not the right community for First Place homes.

“The decision about First Place has already been made without public input, which is so disappointing for the whole community.”

Resident

Building on land that is currently used as parkland: Haddow residents are passionate about the green space in their community. They worry about the impact of the First Place development on community soccer for their kids and outdoor recreational space for their community.

Parking and traffic volumes: Safety is already a concern around the park because of the numbers of cars parked and the volume of traffic during rush hour. Some residents shared concerns that the First Place development would only add to this issue.

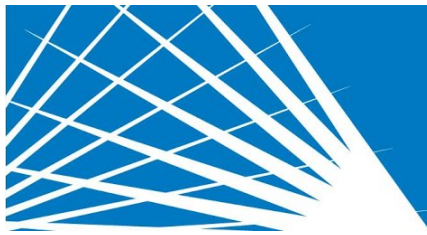
Financial loss: Despite information to the contrary, many resident of Haddow remain convinced that the First Place homes will have a significant impact on the value of their property and that they will have to pay increased property taxes for a devalued home. They also want to see any proceeds from the sale of the land returned to the community (for the development of Haddow park, for example).

Table Discussions

First Place Program

Many of the Haddow residents expressed the view that the First Place Program is not a good fit for their community. They felt that there are other, more appropriate locations for First Place in Edmonton. Some said that they had worked hard to buy their home in the Haddow community, and did not understand why others should “get this break.” One person made the comment that First Place should be considered subsidized housing, since “a \$50,000, five-year, interest-free loan *is* a subsidy.” There were concerns that after the initial five-year period, First Place homeowners would flip their properties to make a profit, and that the maintenance of the property would begin to slip. Several residents, however, appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the First Place Program, and were satisfied with the answers to their questions.

There were also many specific questions about the program, including:



| Questions | Answers |
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| 1. What happens when First Place homebuyers want to leave before the five-year term is finished? | Owners can sell their home before the five years is up, transferring the deferral on the land cost to the new owners. |
| 2. Does the new buyer get any of the program benefits? | The new buyer benefits from the deferred land cost for the remainder of the five-year period. |
| 3. What is the average income of the people buying these homes? | The average household income of First Place buyers in 2014 was \$65,000. Many buyers are new graduates and young professionals, including teachers, police, planners and nurses. |
| 4. How can you say this isn't subsidized? Who is paying the mortgage for five years? | The person or couple who buy the home pay the mortgage, just as any other homeowner does. |
| 5. Is there any interest that accumulates on the deferral? Who pays for that? | There is no interest that accrues on the deferral. |
| 6. What happens to the homebuyer if they still can't afford the land when the five-year clause ends? | The City worked with local banks to develop and implement the program. The lending institutions ensure buyers are qualified to access required deferred land funding at the end of the deferral period. There have not been any mortgage defaults since the program was approved in 2006. |
| 7. How will you enforce that people stay there for five years? | The five-year deferral period refers to how long buyers have to repay the City. The land deferral does not mean buyers must live in the home for a minimum amount of time. First-time buyers purchase homes to enter the housing market or raise families and intend to remain in their homes until their housing needs change. There hasn't been any home flipping since buyers started moving into First Place homes in 2009. |
| 8. What will prevent flipping in five years? | The buyer must pay the deferred land value within five years of taking possession. After the land value is paid, the townhome is like any other home and can be rented out. City research indicates that most buyers view purchasing a First Place townhome as a place to raise family and not to flip property. |



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| 9. What is the selection process for the people who get to purchase homes? | Any buyers who meet program eligibility criteria may purchase a home on one of the 20 development sites as they become available for sale. Eligibility criteria are listed on the City’s website . |
| 10. Will the City of Edmonton regulate the maintenance of the property? Or will the condo board be responsible for maintenance? | A condo board is created by the builder to ensure the new homes are looked after in the future. |
| 11. What is the process for declaring a school surplus? | The school boards regularly review their needs for vacant school sites. Sites they don’t require for future schools are declared surplus and returned to the City. |
| 12. This land was paid for by the community in their lot prices, knowing a park or school would be placed there. How is the City, which is making a profit from the sale, returning those funds back to the homeowners? | The land was provided to the City by the developer as a condition of subdivision approval. Council has directed First Place sale proceeds be shared with school boards. City proceeds are used to support the Cornerstones affordable housing initiative . |

Approved Building Location

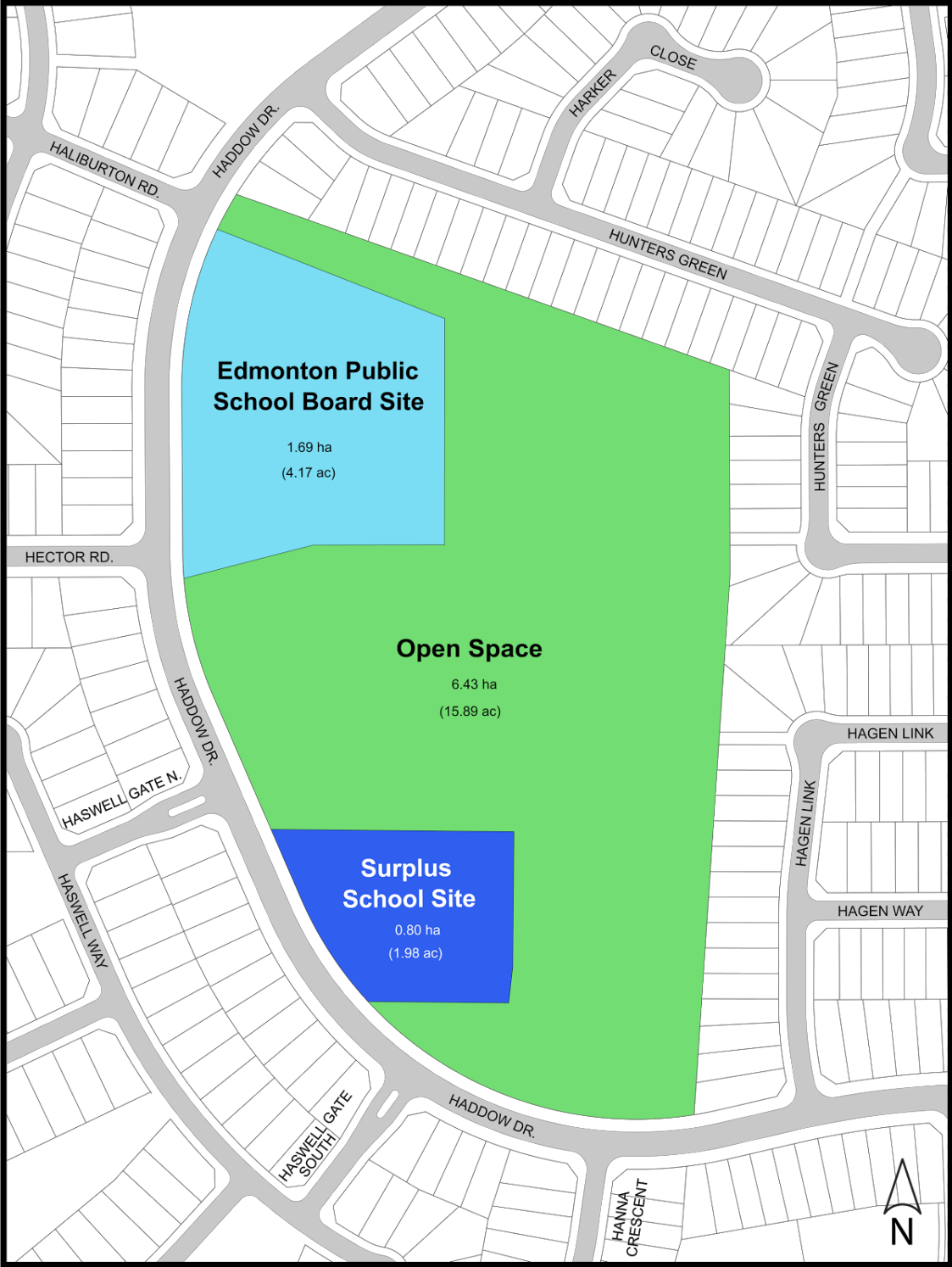
While the majority of residents attending the meeting were adamant that they did not want First Place in their community at all, some were also unhappy with the location. They were upset at the prospect of losing the designated school space, and they were also concerned about the impact on traffic. One suggestion was made to move the site further southeast to address traffic concerns. Residents said that the development would be an eyesore right in the middle of the park, and questioned why it could not be put in one corner or edge of the park.



THE WAY AHEAD

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| Questions | Answers |
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| 1. Can we investigate site relocation of the proposed First Place site? | Council directed development of new homes to occur on the vacant building site declared surplus by school boards. City staff will be implementing program on the approved site unless the site is technically unsuitable for the development. |
| 2. Have utility services been put in place or will they need to be installed? | Services sufficient for a future school were installed along Haddow Drive when the roadways were built. The First Place development will use these existing services. |
| 3. What is the process for future surplus sites designation? | Every three years, school boards review vacant building sites and confirm their future needs with the City. If a school boards declare a site surplus, other school boards may acquire the site. If no other school board needs the site, the City will acquire surplus sites. |
| 4. What happens to the functionality of the remaining space? | School/park sites are designed to accommodate both buildings and open space. Only vacant building sites are repurposed. The planned open space remains intact and will continue to function as it does currently. |
| 5. What is the timeframe for decisions regarding site design? | Typically, the design engagement process occurs as a series of meetings between volunteers, the City and builder over a two-month timeframe. |
| 6. The geotechnical notice sent by the City indicated that soil testing was going to be done on the planned Catholic school site (now the First Place Program location) and to the south of it. Was it done in both areas? | Yes, soil tests were conducted for both sites. |

Parks and Open Space

A recurring theme was residents' dismay at the prospect of First Place being built on land that is currently vacant and that they use for recreation. The point was made repeatedly that open spaces are integral to communities, particularly since we as a society want to encourage children to get outside to play as much as possible. The park in Haddow, residents said, is well used. There were many specific concerns about the soccer fields in a community which, they pointed out, is seeing a growing number of young families.



| Questions | Answers |
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| <p>1. Has the City determined what parameters are used to determine park space?</p> | <p>This site met the park standards that existed when assembled, and none of the planned park space has been approved for development or declared surplus by the City.</p> |
| <p>2. Are barriers to park access considered in site locations?</p> | <p>New homes are being built on vacant building sites only, so access to open space will be no different than if the planned schools had been constructed.</p> |
| <p>3. How can residents be sure the statistics and research for park adequacy have been completed?</p> | <p>This site met the park standards that existed when assembled, and none of the planned park space has been approved for development or declared surplus by the City. The standards for all parks will be reviewed as part of the upcoming review of the Urban Parks Management Plan.</p> <p>New homes are being built on vacant building sites only, so access to open space will be no different than if the planned schools had been constructed upon the land reserved as a school building site.</p> <p>City Administration has completed this research.</p> |
| <p>4. What will happen to the existing soccer fields within the First Place program location?</p> | <p>It is common practice across the city to remove temporary sports fields located on building sites, including surplus school building sites.</p> |
| <p>5. If there is a cost to relocating soccer fields who will pay? Is it on the community league?</p> | <p>The sports fields planned for this site have not been installed. The Community Services department is preparing to install the large soccer field planned for the east portion of the open space in 2015.</p> |
| <p>6. Will the existing park uses be changed?</p> | <p>Building site development respects the adjacent open space and works to minimize impacts on it. If a community wishes to revisit the use of open space adjacent to a building site, the City has an established change to parkland process to help communities review community needs and ensure adjacent open space is meeting resident needs.</p> <p>This process is performed regularly as communities work together with their Community Recreation Coordinators</p> |



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| | (CRCs). The contact for this kind of work is the CRC assigned to the neighbourhood. |
| 7. Are the community league and sports leagues consulted to discuss use? | Yes – the community is an integral partner in the parkland change process. |
| 8. How is the usable space within the park going to be maximized? | Since the building site was assembled for a school, the usable park space is separate from the building site and does not change. |
| 9. How will the segregation of the site affect the design of the park? | The site has been planned and developed based on two building sites with adjacent open space and sports fields. The open space will continue to function the same way it does currently. |
| 10. How will the fencing around the site affect the functionality of the site? | The fence will have no impact on the functionality of the site. |
| 11. What will the impact be on community events currently held in the open space? | None of the planned open space’s functions will change, and community events can continue to occur. |

Transportation: Traffic, Roads and Parking

Most concerns centred on the volume of traffic First Place would add to the community and difficulties with parking. Parking is already problematic around the park in summer, residents pointed out, when children are playing soccer. At all times of the year, people park adjacent to the bus stop, too close to fire hydrants or otherwise illegally without anything being done to stop them. The point was made that the existing parking supply in medium-density residential parcels is insufficient.

Many residents are also feeling increased parking pressure as the new winter parking ban is implemented in the community this winter. They recognise the need because snow removal has been a problem in the community with on-street parking, but residents are worried they will have to walk several blocks from parking their cars to their homes. The concern is that increased parking from First Place would make that walk longer.

Overall the feeling was that more parked cars could have an impact on safety as children run between parked cars to access the park. The issue of safety was also raised in terms of the volume of traffic. Children catching school buses are dropped off between 7:45 and 8:15 a.m. at the bus stop by the proposed First Place site. Residents explained that the 10 Catholic and public school buses, the regular ETS buses and the cars of parents dropping children off already pose significant safety concerns. The suggestion was made that if the development goes ahead, traffic lights should be installed to increase safety.



First Place, residents said, would add to the volume of cars trying to get in or out of the community during rush hour. Haddow Drive is already backed up, and the right-hand turn from Haswell Gate South onto Haddow Drive was specifically mentioned as problematic. That could be mitigated by a parking ban on Haswell Gate South, one resident pointed out. However, the overall feeling was First Place would make existing transportation pressures intolerable.

| Questions | Answers |
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| 1. How is parking provided for the site? Will the site have enough parking spaces for residents? | First Place developments always contain sufficient parking for residents and visitors within the site. No street parking will be required. |
| 2. Will there be changes to ETS route 36 that runs to Haddow? | First Place homes will not affect ETS route planning. |
| 3. How many vehicles will each new family have? | Generally speaking, First Place buyers generally have one-to-two vehicles per household. |
| 4. Transportation said some years ago that they assume 10 road trips per dwelling per day. That means this site will create 500 trips. Will the infrastructure be able to support this? | Haddow Drive was designed with capacity to support traffic generated by all homes and two future schools. Traffic generated by First Place homes will be significantly less than that generated by a school, and there is roadway capacity to support development. |
| 5. If the First Place development meets or exceeds parking requirements, does that mean exceeding the school site land? | No. The First Place development will occupy the same space as the designated school site. Parking for residents and visitors will be included in the existing site. |
| 6. Has the City taken the seasonal parking ban into account for the parking issues inherent with adding more housing? | Each First Place development contains parking for residents and visitors within the site. Therefore, First Place will not create street parking issues. |

Property Values

Many residents are concerned about the effect First Place townhomes will have on the value of their homes. Data from the Realtors’ Association of Edmonton and from City assessors shared at the open house shows the effect to be minimal. Residents had concerns about the validity of the Realtors’ Association study quoted on house prices. They felt that First Place housing is a very different proposition for the community than a school. Ultimately, there was a sense that Haddow residents



would lose financially on the value of the property and on proceeds from the sale of the land. They wanted to see any proceeds directed back into the community and their park.

| Questions | Answers |
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| 1. If multi-family developments typically cause a drop in market assessment of 1.5%, will there be an impact on my property tax? What percentage drop can I anticipate after development? | For the last five years, the City’s Assessment and Taxation branch has reviewed sales data from across the City. They have advised that generally speaking, the development of new townhomes will not have any significantly-different impact on adjacent property value than that of a school being developed on the building site. |
| 2. If my home value is negatively affected by this program, who compensates me? | If a minimal negative impact on property values occurs as a result of First Place, the City does not compensate homeowners. |
| 3. Will the assessed market value of my property decrease once townhouses are built? | The average annual increase in assessed value of residential properties for the 2015 taxation year across the city is 6%. Last year, the assessed value of houses near multi-family developments did not increase as much as the city average. They increased by 4.5 to 5%, rather than 6%. |

New Home Builder

Representatives of Rohit Communities, the new home builder for Haddow’s First Place development, attended the meeting to talk through the community design engagement process and as many design specifics as are available at this early stage.

The Rohit representatives explained:

- **Number of units:** 40-50, depending on which configuration is developed during the design consultation phase.
- **Community engagement in the design process:** Residents who volunteer to become involved in the design process work with the new home builder to ensure the fit of the new homes in the existing community. Input is requested on such issues as number and orientation of homes, exterior home details, height of the building, landscaping, including trees, access to the site and layout of the site.

Residents were particularly concerned that First Place housing must fit the look and feel of the neighbourhood. The comment was made that if First Place is going ahead, they want to be part of the process.



| Questions | Answers |
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| <p>1. How was the builder selected?</p> | <p>In 2012, following a competitive Request for Proposal process, the City selected two award-winning home builders: Rohit Communities and Landmark Group of Builders, to continue development of the First Place Program sites. One of the reasons for selecting the new home builders was for their experience with involving communities in designing new housing. Using input from residents, the builders have completed successful design engagement processes in seven communities to date, including Canon Ridge, Greenview, Tawa, Casselman, Caernarvon, Larkspur and Kernohan.</p> |
| <p>2. What will pedestrian access be like for the site?</p> | <p>Pedestrian access is one of the details addressed during the community design engagement process. On all other designs, pedestrian access was provided to each building site.</p> |
| <p>3. How many storeys are the homes?</p> | <p>The approved zoning supports homes of two-and-a-half stories.</p> |
| <p>4. What will you do to minimise the noise and dirt from construction?</p> | <p>The builder will take all possible steps to reduce noise, including operating during set construction hours and hiring a site supervisor to deal with issues promptly. Detailed noise and dirt reduction measures will be discussed between the City, builder and volunteers during the design engagement process.</p> |
| <p>5. Where is the proposed entrance to this site?</p> | <p>Entrance to the site is determined through the design engagement process with the builder and local residents.</p> |
| <p>6. Where will the design opportunity take place? Residents who are not mobile may find it difficult to travel out of the community.</p> | <p>The design engagement process will take place at a meeting location convenient to residents and the new home builder and will be attended by the City, builder and resident volunteers participating in the process.</p> |



Conclusion

About 136 Haddow residents attended the First Place meeting. Although some residents did feel that they had received answers to their questions about First Place, the majority of people who provided feedback on the meeting voiced their frustration at the lack of consultation in decision making on First Place. They felt that this meeting was too little, too late.

There was also an online questionnaire provided by Edmonton Insight Community for people who were not able to attend the meeting. Six residents chose to respond to the questionnaire at edmonton.ca/surplusschoolsites.

Accepting that the First Place development would go ahead in the community, some residents expressed interest in becoming part of the design consultation process. They clearly felt that this would allow them to shape the look of the development and ensure it fits with their community. In 2015, the City, builder and community volunteers will begin working together in designing the homes.

This “What We Heard Report” has been shared with Councillor Bryan Anderson, the Ridge Community League and posted to the City of Edmonton website.

*“Listen to us before making decisions
– not after.”*

Resident