

What We Heard Report

Michaels Park First Place Program: Site Location Preferences

Real Estate Branch
Financial and Corporate Services
edmonton.ca/firstplacemichaelspark

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Background

The First Place Program was established by City Council in 2006 to build housing for first-time home buyers who have modest incomes, on 20 surplus school building sites in 19 Edmonton communities. As of Fall 2019, First Place Program housing developments are built or being built in 14 communities. Michaels Park First Place housing will be the 15th community.

Michaels Park First Place Program

The Michaels Park First Place development consists of two surplus sites, originally meant for public and Catholic elementary schools. These sites (referred to as the 'split site Option 1') were identified and approved for the First Place Program in 2006.

Zoning allows for 42 to 54 townhouses per hectare of land, consistent with other First Place Program sites. The total size of the Michaels Park First Place site is 1.90 hectares, which means approximately 100 homes will be built. Rohit Communities is the build partner for Michaels Park.

In 2018, the City identified an alternative site to provide more flexibility in where the development will go in Michaels Park, referred to as consolidated site Option 2. The City wants to understand which site location ([split site Option 1 or consolidated site Option 2](#)) is best for the community.

Michaels Park First Place Program Timeline

1976

Original plan for Michaels Park was developed.

2006

City Council approved two surplus school sites in Michaels Park for the First Place Program.

2015

Sign put up in Michaels Park showing the sites for the First Place Program housing.

2018 September

Boreholes drilled for soil testing on the First Place Program sites. Soil deemed suitable for construction.

2018 December

[Alternative First Place Site B](#) identified and incorporated as a potential second site location.

2019 October

Drainage servicing studies were completed and approved for the two site options.

2019 November

Drop-in Public Engagement Event.

2020 Winter

Notice of Decision regarding selected building sites.

2020 Spring

Design Committee selected and design process begins.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Opportunity for Community Input

The City needs to decide which sites will be developed for the Michaels Park First Place Program housing. The City wants to understand which site location is best for the community.

Decision Making

The City of Edmonton's decision on the Michaels Park First Place housing site will be informed by:

- Community input regarding site location preferences and how the current open space is used.
- The 2018 site review (done by the City, EPCOR and a third-party geotechnical engineering consultant) which concluded all three sites are suitable for development.
- Financial considerations for the City and the builder, who will develop the area for site servicing, including any potential costs associated with sports field relocation and tree removal.

Role of the Public: ADVISE

This community input falls into [ADVISE](#) level on the City's Public Engagement Spectrum, which means the public is asked to share feedback and perspectives that are considered for programs, policies, projects and services.

Public Engagement Objective

The purpose of this public engagement was to determine the level of community support for each of the two site location options for the Michaels Park First Place Program. Citizens had the opportunity, both in person and through an online survey, to advise on which site location option they prefer, to explain their concerns and reasons for their preferred site, and to describe how they use the Michaels Park open space.

HOW WE ENGAGED

Timeline of Communications and Engagement

2006

- City Council approved the First Place Program on 20 surplus school sites across Edmonton.

2015

- Signage was placed at 76 Street NW and Millbourne Road West NW, identifying approved sites A and C as surplus school sites where First Place Program housing would be built.

September 2019

- New signage was placed at the corner of 76 Street NW and Millbourne Road West NW, noting the two different site location options, and that Michaels Park is the future home of First Place Program homes.
- The City of Edmonton First Place Program Michaels Park website was updated with the two site locations in September 2019:
edmonton.ca/firstplacemichaelspark

October 2019

- Mailout #1: information letters were mailed via Canada post to 1,168 residences and 20 businesses, in postal codes starting with T6K. The letter provided details of the Michaels Park First Place development, the City of Edmonton First Place website for more information, and invited recipients to the November drop-in engagement event.

November 2019

- November 13: notice of the November 27 drop-in public engagement event was placed on the [City of Edmonton Events Calendar](#).
- Mailout #2: an information postcard was mailed via Canada Post to 1,168 residences and 20 businesses in postal codes starting with T6K. The postcard included a summary of the project, an invitation to the November 27 drop-in engagement event, and the City of Edmonton First Place website for more information.
- Two meetings were held with City employees and two representatives from the North Millbourne Community League.
- November 22: Public Service Announcement released, available on Edmonton.ca and sent out to media and public who subscribe.
- November 27: Drop-in public engagement event (see below for details).
- November 27 – December 11: Michaels Park First Place Program Online Survey available.

Public Engagement Event

Residents were invited to a drop-in public engagement event at the North Millbourne Community League on November 27, 2019 from 6-9pm. For those who could not attend, there was an online survey open from November 27, 2019 to December 11, 2019 where citizens could provide their input. Forty-nine people attended the in-person event and 24 people completed the online survey.

The drop-in event was an open house style with poster boards around the room with information about the First Place Program, the Michaels Park Site Location Options, and areas to provide feedback. There was a five minute presentation at the beginning of the evening to welcome participants and help explain the opportunity for public input.

Participants could provide written feedback by posting sticky notes on poster boards around the room so others could see their comments. They could also provide feedback by filling out a written comment form. The types of feedback requested included a board asking people to indicate, with a sticky dot, the building site option they preferred, why they preferred this option, how they currently use the Michaels Park open space, and general

comments about the First Place Program. Attendees were also offered an event feedback survey to complete, with room for comments.

WHO WAS ENGAGED

Residents

Through communications from the City, residents and businesses in Michaels Park and the eastern portion of Tweddle Place as well as the North Millbourne Community League and the surroundings communities were invited to participate in the public engagement.

Demographic Information of Participants

Based on the responses received on feedback forms at the in-person event and the online survey, some demographic information about attendees was offered, including age range, gender, ethnicity, disability status, employment status, income, education, neighbourhood, postal code and, if applicable, how long they have lived near Michaels Park.

Participants identified about equally as male or female, with several who preferred not to answer. The majority of participants were from Michaels Park, with some from Tweddle Place and other communities across the City. There was a spread of ages represented from 18 to over 55, with a large portion of attendees at the in-person event being over 55 years old. The age spread in the online survey was more even. Most attendees were employed or retired. There were a few attendees who identified as a minority or person with a disability. Most participants have lived in the area for over ten years. All household income ranges and educational levels were represented in about even numbers.

External Stakeholders

- North Millbourne Community League
- EPCOR
- Rohit Communities

Internal Stakeholders

City staff from the following areas were consulted on the feasibility of both site options:

- Development Services, Established and Developing Communities Unit
- Development Services, Industrial and Commercial Unit
- Development Services, Residential/Multi-Residential
- Development Services, Subdivision Planning Unit
- City Planning, Open Space Networks and Assembly Unit
- Community Standards and Neighbourhoods, Southeast District
- Building Great Neighbourhoods and Open Spaces, Open Space Planning & Design
- Assessment and Taxation, Residential South
- Assessment and Taxation, Residential and Residential Condos
- LRT Expansion & Renewal, Valley Line
- Community and Recreation Facilities, Facility Bookings & Rentals
- City Operations, Sports Fields

MICHAELS PARK FIRST PLACE SITE OPTIONS

Site Location Options

There are two site location options for the Michaels Park First Place development.



Split Site Location (Option 1): The split site consists of Approved First Place Site A and Approved Site C (both blue), which are the original surplus school sites that City Council approved in 2006.

Consolidated Site Location (Option 2): The consolidated site consists of Approved First Place Site A and Alternate Site B (black diagonal lines). In 2018 the City identified the alternative site to provide more flexibility in where the development will go. **The consolidated site option requires broad community support before it can be approved by the City.** If the consolidated site is chosen by the City, housing will not be built on Approved First Place Site C.

In 2018, all site location areas in Michaels Park were reviewed by various City departments, EPCOR and a third-party geotechnical engineering consultant. The review concluded that all three sites were deemed suitable for development.

Community Context

There are three large-scale projects underway or planned for development in the Michaels Park area.

Work on upgrading the drainage system began in 2013. In recognition of the impact this work would have on the community, the City deferred developing the Michaels Park First Place housing from 2014 to now.

The Valley Line Southeast LRT is currently under construction, with a planned opening in 2021.

There is zoning approval to build a 12-storey mixed-use development at 76 Street NW and Millbourne Road West NW, kitty-corner to the Michaels Park First Place building Site A. As of January 2020, there has been no Development Permit approved for the site.

Some residents expressed concern with the cumulative impact (or potential impact) of adding the First Place Program housing to this list.

WHAT WE ASKED

At the drop-in public engagement event and in the online survey participants were asked:

- Which site location option (split or consolidated) do you prefer?
- Why do you prefer this location option?

To better understand the community's needs and preferences, participants were also asked:

- How do you currently use the Michaels Park open space?
- What questions, concerns, opinions and perspectives do you have about the Michaels Park First Place development, or about the First Place Program in general?

The answers to these questions will help inform the City's decision on site location for this initiative.

WHAT WE HEARD

Preferred Site Location

Almost all residents had a strong preference for one site option or the other. The majority of drop-in attendees prefer the consolidated site, while the majority of online survey respondents prefer the split site. Some residents declined to provide their preference and instead expressed their desire for the project to be cancelled.

	Drop-in Event Results	Online Survey Results	Combined Results
Strongly Prefer Split Site (Option 1)	30%	61%	36%
Slightly Prefer Split Site (Option 1)	6%	0%	5%
No Preference	2%	0%	2%
Slightly Prefer Consolidated Site (Option 2)	4%	0%	3%
Strongly Prefer Consolidated Site (Option 2)	58%	39%	54%
Total Responses	100%	100%	100%

Combining the results from both the online survey and the drop-in event, 41% of respondents prefer the split site (Option 1), 57% of respondents prefer the consolidated site (Option 2), and 2% of respondents have no preference.

Themes from those who prefer the split site (Option 1):

- It will have less negative impact on homeowners whose yards back onto Michaels Park.
- There is value in spreading out the housing, because it will make the neighbourhood feel less crowded and will disperse the traffic and parking impacts.
- It will have less impact on the use of existing sports fields.

Themes from those who prefer the consolidated site (Option 2):

- It will have less impact on traffic and parking,
- It will cause less disruption during construction.
- It is farther from the community league hall and will leave space open near the community league for children to play.

Themes from both groups of respondents:**Concern about the loss of open space**

A common theme from attendees and survey respondents was that the site they prefer (whether split or consolidated) would have less of an impact on the open space at Michaels Park.

Many respondents do not want to lose open space in their neighbourhood. Some say it was why they chose to move to the area. Some say they use the space for one or more activities. Some feel there aren't currently enough sports fields. Others worry about families who do not have backyards and use the open space for playing and picnics. A few attendees noted that Site A has not been significantly used since the installation of the First Place Program Surplus Site sign in 2015.

Increased density

There are people who feel Michaels Park has enough housing and residents, particularly in light of the rezoning for a 12-storey, mixed-use development at 76 Street and Millbourne Road West. Some voiced concern about what they feel will be related impacts of increased density, including the potential for rising crime rates, increased traffic and parking congestion, and loss of green space.

Increased traffic and parking challenges

Many people, both drop-in attendees and online survey respondents, are worried a new housing development will mean their streets will be even busier, and parking, particularly for community events like soccer games, will become more challenging. They worry that the extra vehicle traffic and parking will make their community more unsafe, particularly for children. Some say there is a speeding problem on major streets in the area, and others are concerned about emergency vehicle access once the First Place homes are built, especially during soccer season.

Drainage concerns

Due to flooding in the past, some residents are concerned about the impact that the Michaels Park First Place Site will have on drainage in the neighbourhood. This is because some residents believe the current open space at Michaels Park is absorbing rainfall, thus helping prevent flooding in the area. Some are concerned that there are homeowners in the community who cannot get house insurance or can only be covered for a relatively small dollar amount, due to previous flooding. There are concerns that the Michaels Park First Place development is going ahead before the drainage upgrades are complete and before their efficacy is proven.

Concern with the overall process

There were residents at the drop-in engagement event who felt their voices would not be heard by the City. Some felt they have not been properly consulted about the development. Others said they do not trust the city and suspect that all three potential sites may be developed.

How Residents Use Michaels Park Open Space

Many respondents noted the open space is used in a variety of ways, and residents were clear that the open space is an important part of their community. The majority of respondents use the open space for walking, community league events, dog walking, and non-organized play and activities. As for the intensity of use, some feel the open space is very well used for sports and leisure activities. Others feel that outside of the outdoor sports season, the open space is not heavily used.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

In early 2020, the City of Edmonton will make a final decision on where the Michaels Park First Place housing project will be built: the split site (option 1), or the consolidated site (option 2).

The decision will be informed by which site is most feasible, both technically and financially, and by the input received from community members. Broad community support for the consolidated site (option 2) must be demonstrated for that site to be selected.

Residents of Michaels Park will be notified via Canada Post of the final site location and the decision will also be posted on the City's Michaels Park First Place Program website. This What We Heard Report will also be posted on the website: edmonton.ca/firstplacemichaelspark

In early 2020, the City will select a team of Michaels Park community volunteers for the Design Committee. Together with the builder, Rohit Communities, they will consider design options to ensure the Michaels Park First Place housing integrates well and brings value to the community. The design engagement group will have input on design elements such as site layout, landscaping, building colours, and materials.