

# First Place Program Open House in Belle Rive

WHAT WE HEARD: MAY 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, including one in Belle Rive. Prior to the April 21, 2015 public open house in Belle Rive, City staff met with the Evansdale Community League to explain the program and meeting format and to understand community issues. Belle Rive residents were invited to attend the meeting through:

- a mail drop mailed three weeks in advance to homes in Belle Rive, including apartments and condos
- temporary signs in the community
- information on the City of Edmonton's website
- information on the Community League website

An online questionnaire was posted on the City's website for people who were not able to attend the meeting.

The meeting began with a welcome and overview of the First Place program by Tim McCargar, Director of Strategic Planning with the City of Edmonton's Real Estate, Housing and Economic Sustainability Branch. Mr. McCargar explained the history of the program dating back to its approval by City Council in 2006 and the context of Edmonton's population growth. Councillor Loken was also in attendance to speak with residents and answer their questions.

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 and associated questions around property values
- New home builder (Rohit)
- Transportation
- Parkland change process
- Open space and use of sale proceeds
- Approved building site

Each themed table was staffed by a facilitator/note taker and subject matter 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
2. Information specific to Belle Rive that City administration needs to take into consideration as the First Place program moves forward in the community

## Key themes

- **First Place in Belle Rive:** Many residents attending the meeting were quite positive about the prospect of First Place in their community, particularly once their questions were answered by the City of Edmonton experts. Others, however, remained concerned about the increased traffic and, in particular, safety concerns that they felt increased traffic will bring for children walking to school.
- **Traffic:** There were some concerns that traffic is already a problem at the beginning and end of school and with drivers speeding through the community. Many residents felt that First Place will exacerbate those issues.
- **School capacity:** One resident felt that the school is already full and there is no space for new students, which some found particularly worrying as the First Place residents would inevitably include families with school-aged children.
- **Lack of consultation:** Several residents were extremely concerned about the lack of consultation in making the original decision to go ahead with First Place. They want to have a say in a change like this in their community.

*“It’s great to have housing that’s affordable (for young professionals) – but what about the traffic problems?”*

*Resident*

*“There are expensive homes in this area and we pay our fair share of taxes. We have worked hard to buy our homes and maintain our neighbourhood. Yes, new families need an opportunity for home ownership, but not at our expense.”*

*Resident*

## Table discussions

### First Place Program and property values

Residents had very specific questions about the First Place Program in Belle Rive:

Questions	Answers
1. What is the intent of the program?	The purpose of the program is to help young individuals and families (who have never owned property in Alberta) buy their first home.
2. What is the experience in other communities with First Place vis a vis property values?	In other First Place communities, there hasn’t been a significant change in property values. Overall, the effect is comparable to having a school across the way, which is minimal. Data from the Realtors’ Association of Edmonton and City Assessors reinforce that First Place shouldn’t significantly affect property values.

3. Is there information about the effect of First Place on the communities it went into?	The City monitors information received about impacts to neighbourhood with First Place. To date, negative impacts reported have been negligible.
4. Will the homes fit with the community visually?	Yes: Prior to development in any First Place community, design consultation takes place between the City, residents and the home builder to ensure that the new homes “fit” into the existing community. Residents who volunteer to become involved in the design process will have the opportunity to provide input regarding the aesthetics of the homes, such as building size, sight lines, landscaping, materials, lighting and more.
5. How will First Place affect property taxes?	Property taxes are calculated on a city-wide basis, so First Place will not impact your property taxes.
6. Do the First Place buyers buy the land?	Yes, but the land cost is deferred for the first five years, making mortgage payments more affordable and helping people into the housing market sooner.
7. Who typically buys a First Place home? Some residents are concerned about partying and drugs, especially next to the school.	Typically, young professionals and recent graduates are buying First Place homes including engineers, teachers, nurses and firefighters. First Place is very family-oriented, so, generally speaking, in five years’ time, single buyers are married and married buyers are starting to have children.
8. How much will the townhomes be worth?	In general, First Place homes are between \$270,000 and \$295,000. The value of the townhomes varies with each site based on the design, land value and market demand.
9. What happens when people can sell after five years?	After five years, the home becomes like any other home on the market.
10. Do people sell the homes for profit after five years?	In general, First Place homeowners are buying homes to settle down and have a family, not to rent out or “flip” their homes. This offers them some flexibility so that they aren’t being “locked into” a purchase that someday may no longer meet their needs.

11. When was the first First Place community built?	The first First Place communities were built in 2008 in Greenview and 2009 in Canon Ridge.
12. Have these been well-kept after five years?	Yes: they are governed by a condo board to ensure ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the building structure, grounds, internal roadway, etc.
13. Is there any plan to build a school on the Edmonton Public School Board site?	At this time, there isn't any plan for a school on the Edmonton Public School Board site.
14. How will First Place affect school capacity and student enrollment?	Neighbourhood students, including those from First Place homes, will have priority enrollment over students from other neighbourhoods.
15. Crime: is there higher crime in neighbourhoods with multi-family buildings compared to single-unit houses?	There is no evidence that First Place homes bring more crime to neighbourhoods. The majority of buyers are new graduates and young working professionals.

### New Home Builder

Representatives from Rohit Communities, the new home builder for Belle Rive First Place, attended the meeting to explain the community design engagement process and provide as many design specifics known at this early stage. They explained the successful design engagement processes completed in eight other communities to date. The builder also explained that:

- The approved zoning for the site can accommodate between 67 and 86 units
- Each unit will likely be between 1155 and 1290 square feet in size
- The design engagement process involves five to ten residents to meet with the City and builder over three to four meetings to design the new homes, including access, orientation, landscaping, lighting, materials used and more.

Questions	Answers
1. What will the lighting in First Place be like?	The builder is required to provide lighting on the First Place development. The placement and lighting style are determined through the design engagement process.
2. Is green space a priority?	Yes: in other First Place developments, well designed walkways and gardens were built with input from the design engagement groups.

3. How will construction affect traffic?	Traffic will be controlled to ensure safety for the neighbourhood. There will be no disruption to sidewalks. No detours are expected outside of a few days for the sewer line connection. That schedule and contact information for questions will be shared with the community.
4. What's the timing for a construction day?	It depends on a variety of conditions including weather, but typically construction occurs between 7:30 AM and 8:00 PM.
5. Which direction will the units face?	This has not been decided yet; the direction the units face will be determined through the design consultation process.
6. Is there a potential for flooding in basements?	<p>The builder is required to meet City of Edmonton specifications, submit comprehensive plans and get approvals. They have to show, for example, how water will be managed in the case of a rare, large-scale ("100-year") storm.</p> <p>Belle Rive has an upgraded drainage line and can accommodate additional capacity. There will be less of an impact on the drainage line with row housing than with a school.</p>
7. What kind of "green" guidelines will the builder follow?	The City has pushed for an Energuide rating of 80, which would mean the homes would be designed with elements like low-flow toilets, high efficiency furnace and energy efficient appliances.
8. How many bedrooms will be in each unit?	There will be 2 or 3 bedrooms in each unit.

### Transportation: Traffic, Roads and Parking

Concerns about First Place development in Belle Rive primarily centred on increased traffic volumes in the community, and in particular on speeding traffic in the vicinity of the school. Several residents were concerned that the width of the roads are inadequate for high volumes of traffic, particularly with windrows in winter. Some residents felt that blind spots created by these conditions would inevitably lead to accidents.

*“Street parking on 87 and 84 Streets is always crammed. Because parking is on both sides of the street, the roadways get very narrow. Is there an option to have parking on only one side?”*

*Resident*

There were also some concerns expressed about parking spillover from the First Place development; some felt that the visitor parking ratio of 7:1 will be insufficient.

Questions	Answers
1. Will there be a traffic study?	At this time, there is no traffic study planned in relation to First Place. In general, the increase in traffic due to First Place will be less than the current roadway capacity.

### Parkland Change Process

Residents were informed about the “Change to Parkland” process that they can access through their Community Recreation Coordinator if they wish to revisit the use of open space adjacent to the building site.

*“This unplanned population density increase is unfair to residents expecting parkland and school access. North Edmonton urgently needs a new high school, and this location has already been zoned for this eventuality. Please consider maintaining the current high quality of life you have already set for residents of Belle Rive.”*

*Resident*

Questions	Answers
1. Can the permanent fields be shifted?	They most likely cannot be shifted; however, it depends on what happens with the temporary fields.
2. Could some of the fields be closed during construction?	Construction should not have an impact on the permanent fields – but there could be an impact on one of the temporary fields.



3. Where is the pathway?	The pathway is part of the utility corridor, so it won't be impacted.
4. Is there a change that the playground and basketball courts won't be built?	Those are the responsibility of the Community League. The Community League has indicated they are almost finished fundraising, and the playground and basketball courts will likely be built next year.

### Parks and Open Space

It was explained to residents that development will not occur on land that was intended for open space when the site was assembled, and that the permanent sports fields will remain. The number of sports fields are determined by the school and the Urban Parks Management Plan.

*"I like that the park is safe – that there's lots of natural surveillance."*  
*Resident*

Questions	Answers
1. What impact will First Place have on recreational facilities?	First Place homes will only be built on the area originally designated for a school. The parkland change process provides the opportunity to reconfigure temporary sports fields that may be impacted.
2. How much space will there be between the new buildings and the shared use path?	The design engagement process will determine the orientation and layout of the townhomes. Design elements will be considered to preserve access to the park.
3. Will there be public pedestrian access through the First Place site for kids going to school or the park?	Yes. There will be generous landscape treatment along the edge of the site and in the interior to help make this a pedestrian-friendly space.
4. What about plans to build a rink, tennis courts and other park amenities?	This could be part of the Parkland Change Process. The Community Recreation Coordinator is the best person to discuss this with.
5. Why is the walkway around the north lake not maintained? There is a lot of garbage and it's being used as an off-leash dog area.	The commitment was made to look into this and to do a walk-through of the site. Residents were also reminded to call 311 with specific concerns such as off-leash dogs.

## Conclusion

About 80 Belle Rive residents attended the First Place meeting. The reaction of those who completed the open house evaluation form showed that residents felt welcome, encouraged to share their views, that their concerns were understood, and that the open house was well-run.

A number of residents volunteered to take part in the Design Engagement Process with Rohit Communities, which is the next stage in the First Place process.

The feedback that residents gave at the Open House will be taken into serious consideration as City Administration moves forward in developing First Place in Belle Rive.

The City of Edmonton would like to thank all the residents who participated in the meeting and shared their feedback.