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City of Edmonton

First Place Program Open House: Bulyea Heights

*What We Heard* Report – February 2015





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## Introduction

Following City Council's directions to investigate approved and alternative building sites for the First Place Program, and extensive consultation with the community league and Homeowners Association regarding community issues and meeting format, a public open house for Bulyea Heights took place on October 29, 2014, between 6:30 and 8:30 p.m. Bulyea Heights residents were invited to attend the meeting through:

- a mail drop that was sent out via Canada Post two weeks in advance to 1,226 homes in Bulyea Heights, including apartments and condos;
- a temporary sign put up in the community;
- information on the City of Edmonton's website; and
- information on the Brookview Community League Community League website.

Approximately 130 residents attended the open house.

The meeting began with an overview of the First Place Program by Councillor Bryan Anderson. 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 in 2006, initial public consultation around First Place did not follow the usual process, Councillor Anderson stated that Council is committed to moving ahead with the program and responded to questions from residents.

Residents were then invited to visit themed tables, which were organized by frequently asked questions and from input provided by the community league and Homeowners Association.

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, a note-taker and a 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;
2. information specific to Bulyea Heights that City Administration needs to take into consideration as the First Place program moves forward in the community; and
3. building site information pertaining to both approved and two alternative building sites that will inform Administration's report to Council.



It was emphasized that community feedback is one important factor that the City takes into consideration when providing a recommendation to City Council about the location of First Place and seniors' housing on the Bulyea Heights surplus school site. Other factors that the City uses to make recommendations to Council about the approved versus the alternate sites include:

- the costs associated with each site;
- whether the soil will support developments; and
- the attractiveness to buyers.

## Key themes

- **Traffic:** Many residents pointed out that traffic is already a significant concern on Bulyea Road, as people take a shortcut through Bulyea Heights from communities to the south to get to Terwillegar Drive, particularly during peak hours. The traffic is further exacerbated as parents drop off children at George H. Luck school; residents voiced concerns about safety for children.
- **Scope:** There were questions about future housing developments. What guarantees are in place for residents that there won't be further development on the unused site in the future?
- **Consultation:** Many residents expressed disappointment that they had not been consulted about the First Place Program at its inception.
- **Park space:** In addition to providing green space for families, the soccer fields in Bulyea are well used. The southeast corner in particular is in demand for organized league soccer with little kids, while adults and older kids play in the north part of the park.
- **Parking:** People are already double and triple parking to drop kids off at school.
- **Building Site Locations:** The majority of people agreed that they would prefer a combined single use First Place site in the northeast site.

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*"It's a zoo when dropping kids off for school or pre-school."*

*Resident*

## Table Discussions

### Building Location

The City of Edmonton was specifically looking for local knowledge from community members to help inform Administration's recommendation to City Council about whether the First Place development in Bulyea Heights should be constructed on the approved or alternate location. Three options were discussed:

- the approved First Place and seniors' housing sites (figure 1);
- the alternate First Place and approved seniors' housing sites (figure 2); and
- a combined single-use First Place site (figure 3).

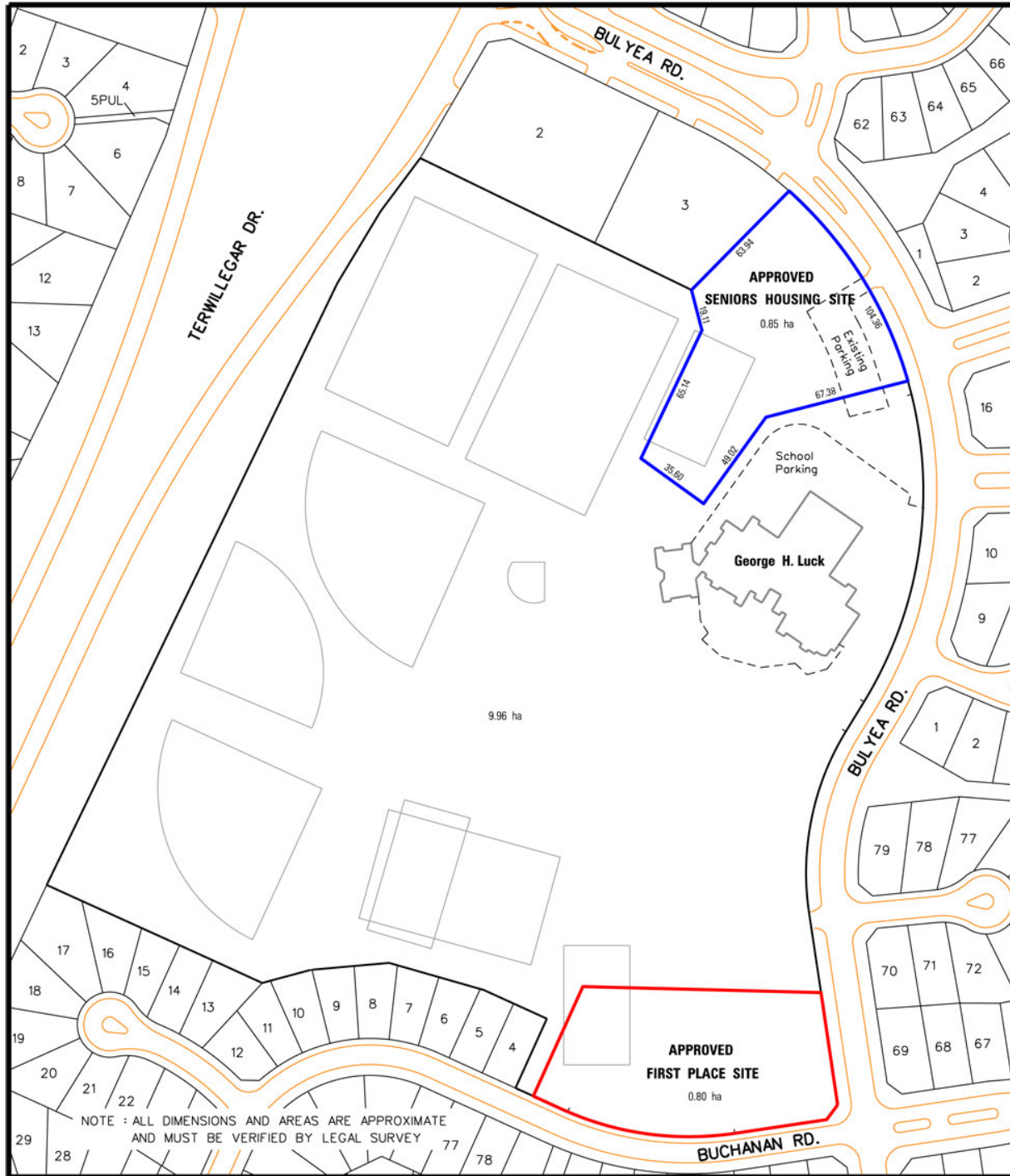


Figure 1: Approved First Place and Seniors' Housing Sites

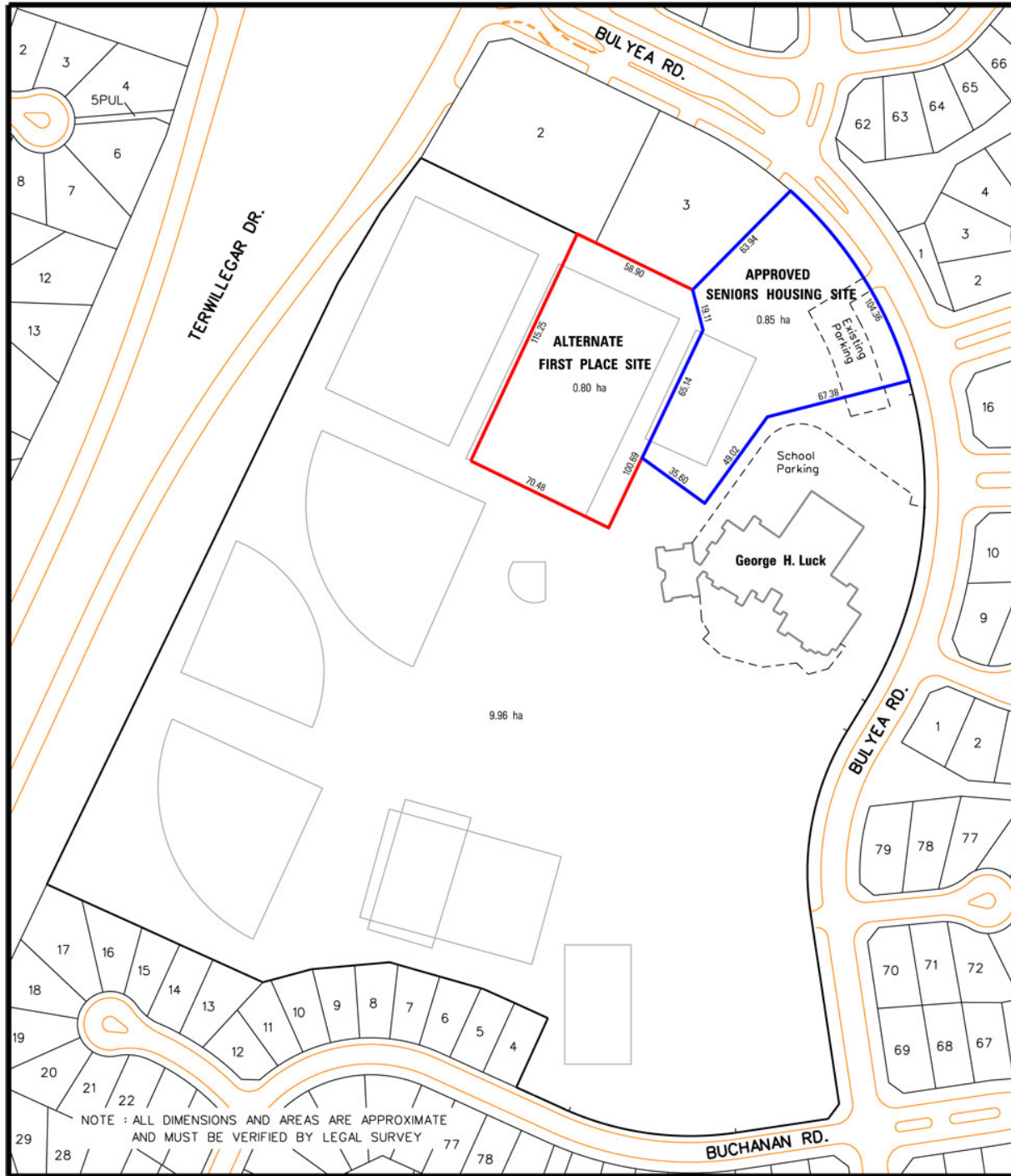


Figure 2: Alternate First Place and Approved Seniors' Housing Sites



Figure 3: Combined Single-Use First Place Site



The majority of residents were in favour of the combined single use First Place location (figure 3) for a number of reasons:

- The park space would not be broken up by the development and some residents thought the park would be more accessible from the street.
- The soccer fields in the southeast corner are well used, particularly by smaller kids. The approved site for First Place would box the soccer fields in. There were also many concerns about parking that would be available for soccer games.
- Loss of parking was a concern, but with the single-use First Place site, there might be an option to expand existing community league parking.
- There is a temporary parking lot in the approved site, which is used for soccer.
- A few people said they prefer seniors’ housing, since seniors don’t drive as much. Others pointed out that seniors’ support staff do drive, and traffic would increase with shift changes.
- Access to the park is very important. There needs to be sightlines and walkways from the road.

*"We strongly prefer and support the Alternate location, rather than the SE corner. This corner area is the only open green space near us, and we highly value this, as do all of our neighbours. Green space is such a precious benefit and limited resource. Once developed, it is lost for the area and its residents for all eternity, and can never be restored or recovered."*

*Resident*

Those who are in favour of the approved First Place site (figure 1) have a number of reasons:

- The soccer pitches for small children in the southeast are only used in the spring.
- The alternate site is too close to the school grounds. Construction and increased traffic would be dangerous for the children.
- It is too close to the gas station.
- The north site is much noisier and isolated from the community.

*"I am very much opposed to locating the First Place housing in the alternative site. There is no other housing nearby, it's too close to the freeway and the gas station. To my way of thinking there is no reason to isolate these new neighbors but that's what the alternate site would do. I feel that it would be a reminder of the mean spiritedness of the neighborhood every time we drive by."*

*Resident*

Questions	Answers
1. Can we move the site?	Council has supported development on the approved building site. Moving the building site will require Administration to request Council approve changes to zoning and the statutory plan.





<p>2. Is the configuration set? Can it go east-west instead?</p>	<p>Building site options are limited by the site configuration and the location of necessary servicing connections. The approved and alternative building sites are the only potential options.</p>
<p>3. What happens to the approved site if the alternate is selected? Will our park space be developed in the future? We want a guarantee that no future development will occur.</p>	<p>If the alternative building site is developed, Administration will request changes to zoning and statutory plans that support existing school and open space uses from City Council. These changes to zoning would not support further residential development outside of the building sites.</p>

### Parks and Open Space

Residents all agreed that they want to keep the continuum of park space as intact as possible. Some got into discussions about how the park space might be redesigned:

- The surplus school rectangle could be flipped across the north, behind the commercial area, and the soccer field moved closer to the middle of the park.
- There was a suggestion that the park include a perimeter trail with “workout stations” similar to varsity areas in Calgary near the university, where the path is made of crushed shale. A perimeter trail would encourage community fitness.
- Currently there are no paths, paved entrances or benches. Paved access to the fields is required.
- There was a suggestion that adult fitness equipment would be great, providing more things to do in the park.
- Accessing the park: if there is horizontal access across the back of the commercial area, it will create opportunities for crime. The answer might be to create a walkway from Bulyea Road, beside the First Place site, through to the park.
- There needs to be sightlines from the road into the park. Visibility is important in the space for parents to watch their kids.

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*“First, I don't agree with building First place at Bulyea neighbourhood. There is not much room for kids to play in the park, and kids need more park and playground. We pay taxes and the purpose is for better neighbourhood and not for a crowded area. Second, this program can choose new area, for example in the far south.”*

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*—Resident*

A commitment was made that when First Place is built, programming across the park will be examined, involving residents. There is a master planning process for changing park programming. The parkland change process provides the community with the opportunity to make recommendations for infrastructure changes in parks.



Questions	Answers
1. How much park space is guaranteed per neighborhood?	The amount of parkland for each neighbourhood is established through City policy when the community is first planned and built (and documented in an Area Structure Plan). Over the last 35 years, the City has set aside approximately 10% of the total developable area of each Area Structure Plan to meet park and school requirements. The Bulyea school park site, including the proposed school site, met the park standards existing at the time Bulyea Heights was built. The standards for all parks will be looked at as part of the upcoming review of the Urban Parks Management Plan.
2. How will this affect baseball diamonds? They aren't used. Can the ball diamond be repurposed?	The parkland change process provides the community with the opportunity to make recommendations for infrastructure changes in parks. This would include the potential for repurposing ball diamonds.
3. Does this program work directly with the Community league when revamping the parks in this area?	The First Place Program is independent from the parkland change process, but it may be possible to coordinate development if the parkland change process can be completed before the development of new homes.
4. If townhomes are built in the current location, how much would the access to the park be reduced?	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.

### Transportation

Traffic and parking were clearly already a source of significant concern for many community members, who fear that adding more people to the neighbourhood through First Place will exacerbate an already untenable situation. These were some of the comments residents made:

- Traffic has increased exponentially with people taking a shortcut through the neighbourhood to get to Terwillegar Drive.

*“Currently, the intersection of Burley Drive, Buchanan Rd and Bulyea Road becomes quite congested at peak travel times including school start and dismissal times. School and city buses further exasperate this problem. It is a dangerous intersection and many drivers along Bulyea ignore the stop signs.”*

*Resident*



- Getting out of the neighbourhood at peak traffic times can take more than 20 minutes.
- The seniors’ housing will involve staff and visitors driving in and out, which will also add to the congestion.
- There were concerns about the preschool children crossing at Bulyea Road and Buchanan Road due to traffic.
- Dropping kids off at the school is already difficult given the high volume of traffic. Many residents expressed their fears for children’s safety.
- In the future, young families will not be attracted to the neighborhood because of the traffic, and the area will degenerate.
- There is a temporary parking lot that parents use when their kids are playing soccer. There is the possibility of moving this lot next to the community league building. The issue of parking for soccer games came up repeatedly.
- Transit: with the increased population there should be increased transit, especially after 5:30 p.m. People who work downtown often don’t finish work before 5:15 p.m.

Questions	Answers
1. Why can’t you consider a site along Terwillegar Drive?	The City has reviewed this option. Access directly off of Terwillegar drive would be unsafe and is not supported by the City’s Transportation staff.
2. There needs to be some parking for the soccer players – how is that going to work? It’s important that parking is part of the redesign and residents are involved in the programming for the park.	The parkland change process allows for discussion of this issue and may support development of additional on site parking for sports field users.
3. As part of this development, will the overpass at Terwillegar Drive and Bulyea Road be constructed so the traffic can flow properly? If not, will the city close off the third lane going south on Terwillegar just before Bulyea?	Constructing an overpass will not be a part of the First Place development. Currently, there is no funding in place for the overpass on Terwillegar Drive.
4. What will be done to prevent cars from shortcutting from Rabbit Hill Road onto Bulyea Road? What about traffic calming measures?	In 2013, Transportation conducted a study and determined that shortcutting was not a significant issue in the area; therefore, no traffic calming measures are currently in place.
5. Will there be increased transit?	A development of this size does not typically warrant a significant increase in transit services. However, a review of current service is possible in the future.



<p>6. Removing the gravel parking lot that is used for school drop offs will generate more traffic at the school . What can be done to mitigate this risk? Can alternate drop-off parking be arranged?</p>	<p>The parkland change process can investigate if additional parking can be developed outside of the building sites.</p>
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**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.

**New Home Builder**

Representatives of Rohit Communities, the new home builder for First Place townhomes in Bulyea Heights, 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 Communities representatives explained:

- **Number of units:** 40-80, depending if development occurs on the approved or alternative building sites.
- **Community engagement in the design process:** Residents who volunteer to become involved in the design process ensure that the new home design fit with their community. Input is requested on such issues as building massing, numbers, orientation, colours, height of building, access to the site, site layout and landscaping.
- **Roadway width:** It will be in accordance with the minimum required for fire rescue vehicles.

Residents were particularly concerned that First Place housing must fit the look and feel of the neighbourhood. One person specified that they should be no more than two stories tall and they should not have three tab shingle roofs.

*“Changing the purpose of land intended to be used for a school to a multi-unit housing site is an enormous change to the negative. An additional school is nothing but a positive for these communities. We purchased our land and built our home with the understanding that a SCHOOL would be built on the corner of Buchanan Road and Bulyea Road. I doubt the city will reimburse us for the reduced value of our home if a multi-unit housing project goes up instead.”*

*Resident*

Questions	Answers
<p>1. How was the builder selected?</p>	<p>The City did a request for proposals. Landmark and Rohit were selected based on set criteria that included experience with community engagement.</p>



<p>2. How many units will be on the row housing site?</p>	<p>There will be approximately 40 to 80 townhomes in Bulyea Heights, depending on the building location. The exact number of units will be known once the design phase is complete.</p>
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### First Place Program and Seniors’ Housing

In answer to questions about the First Place Program, it was pointed out that First Place housing is only built on land that was reserved for a school – not on planned open space. The approved First Place site will have approximately 40 to 80 townhomes. If the alternative site is combined with the seniors’ site to support First Place only, for example, it would support provide 70 to 80 homes.

*“I want to keep seniors who live here now in the neighborhood”.*

*Resident*

The seniors’ housing will be for mixed-income seniors, so some will be market units and some affordable. If the decision is made to combine the First Place and seniors’ housing, a significant improvement in site servicing will be required at a significant additional cost.

Comments from Bulyea Heights residents included the following:

- Concerns were raised about the increased traffic and noise of a combined site, traffic being a particular issue during peak times.
- Some residents are worried that additional children in the community through First Place will displace existing students from the school.
- Some people also pointed out that First Place prices are not affordable for a wide range of Edmontonians.
- The comment was made that townhomes on the south will be an eyesore.
- Four storeys are too high – seniors should stay closer to the ground for safety, some residents thought. Furthermore, it’s important that the seniors’ facility integrates well into the community. Residents were concerned about the uncertainty of what this housing would look like.
- Residents want to ensure the access to First Place is spaced separately from the school access to avoid confusion and conflict, particularly given the levels of congestion currently seen during peak hours.

Questions	Answers
<p>1. How many seniors’ homes are being contemplated across Edmonton?</p>	<p>When the eight seniors’ housing sites approved in 2012 are developed, approximately 1,200 new units will be created.</p>



	Edmonton's population of residents 65 years old and older grew by over 38,000 between 2006 and 2011, or approximately 7,600 people per year. Similar yearly growth in our seniors' population is expected for the next 20 years. The 75+ segment grew by over 21,000, or 4,250 people per year for the same time period. Building 1,200 units is a small percentage of the need in the next 10 years.
2. How many storeys would the building be on the combined site?	Should there be a seniors' housing component, it will be four storeys high, which is needed to efficiently and effectively provide kitchen, leisure, laundry and other services for the residents.
3. Is there a market for First Place?	The completed First Place projects across the city have been sold out. In 2014, sales occurred more quickly than expected.
4. What's the timeline?	The design engagement process is currently scheduled for 2016, with construction and sales occurring in 2017 or 2018.
5. Would you consider postponing the development?	Development needs to occur to meet growing housing needs in Edmonton.
6. What kind of seniors' development is going in?	The seniors' homes will be government-owned rental units with a range of care options. There will be a mix of market and affordable units. The City will own the land, with the option to enter into an agreement with a private developer.
7. What is the process for declaring a school surplus?	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.
8. 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. The net proceeds are shared equally between the school boards and City of Edmonton's Housing section to develop affordable seniors' housing across all city neighbourhoods.

## School space

Many residents are worried about the distribution of schools in the neighbourhood:

- They are concerned that the school, which attracts children from surrounding communities, is already full.
- They are worried about the implications for the children already attending the school of an influx of kids into First Place housing.
- They questioned, in fact, whether the school site actually needs to be declared surplus, since the school population has changed considerably since 2006.
- The timing is a factor to consider: it would be better to put off opening First Place until recently announced schools in the southwest of the city are operational to ease the pressure on George H. Luck School.

## Conclusion

Approximately 130 Bulyea Heights residents attended the First Place meeting. There was also an online questionnaire provided for people who were not able to attend the meeting: 29 residents chose to respond to the questionnaire at [edmonton.ca/surplusschoolsites](http://edmonton.ca/surplusschoolsites). The majority of people who provided feedback said they were able to get answers to all or most of their questions. Most also felt that they had a better understanding of First Place. However, many still felt that there should have been community consultations at the very beginning of the First Place project, and that while they might now have a better understanding of the program, many are still opposed to it.

The City of Edmonton was given a clear message from community members that:

- traffic is a significant problem in the community that must be addressed, particularly at rush hour and around the school;
- consideration needs to be given to George H. Luck School's capacity – and the effect of a new influx of residents on kids at the school from surrounding communities; and
- while the majority of residents prefer the option of the single-use First Place site (figure 3), there were a number of residents who preferred the approved First Place/seniors' housing site (figure 1) and the alternate First Place and approved seniors' housing (figure 2).

This feedback will be taken into consideration as Administration prepares to make its recommendation on building location to City Council in the spring of 2015.

In 2016, the City will meet with volunteers from the community to work with the City and the builder to design the new townhomes and ensure they fit into the neighbourhood. The design engagement group will have input on design elements including building size, site lines, building orientation, landscaping, materials and more.



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