



THE WAY AHEAD

TRANSFORMING | EDMONTON

BRINGING OUR CITY VISION TO LIFE

City of Edmonton

First Place Program Open House: Blue Quill

What We Heard Report – February 2015



Table of Contents

<u>Page 3</u>	Introduction
<u>Page 4</u>	Key Themes
<u>Page 5</u>	Table Discussion
<u>Page 5</u>	New Home Builder
<u>Page 6</u>	Property Values
<u>Page 7</u>	Building Location
<u>Page 8</u>	Building Site Diagrams
<u>Page 9</u>	Parks and Open Space
<u>Page 11</u>	Transportation
<u>Page 12</u>	First Place Program
<u>Page 15</u>	Conclusion

Introduction

Following City Council's direction to investigate approved and alternative building sites for the First Place Program and extensive consultation with the community league about community issues and meeting format, a public open house for Blue Quill took place on October 22, 2014, between 6:30 and 8:30 p.m. Blue Quill residents were invited to attend the meeting through:

- a mail drop that was sent out via Canada Post two weeks in advance to 2,234 homes, including apartments and condos;
- a temporary sign put up in the community at 112 Street and Saddleback Road;
- information on the City of Edmonton's website; and
- information on the Blue Quill Community League's website.

Approximately 80 residents attended the open house.

The meeting began with an overview of the First Place Program by Councillor Michael Walters. Councillor Walters explained the importance of the program within the context of the rapid population growth that Edmonton is seeing. He also committed to helping residents explore ways to improve amenities in the park. While recognizing that in 2006, initial public consultation around First Place did not follow the usual process, Councillor Walters emphasized his commitment to First Place as an important housing initiative for the City of Edmonton, since it targets first-time buyers working as professionals.

Residents were then invited to visit themed tables, which were 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, a note-taker and a content expert.

Residents were asked to share:

1. their questions to the relevant City experts, so they could gain a fuller understanding of the First Place program;
2. information specific to Blue Quill 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 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 on the Blue Quill 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

The following represents the most commonly heard concerns shared at the individual tables by residents:

- **Consultation:** Many residents expressed disappointment that they had not been consulted about the First Place program at its inception.
- **Communication:** Some community members noted that they or their neighbours had not received notices in advance of the public meeting; others pointed out that their notice had only arrived the day before.
- **First Place Program:** Many residents at the open house, and online, are not in favour of the First Place program in their community, although they do see value in the principle of the program. They feel that Blue Quill already has sufficient multi-family apartment buildings; that traffic issues due to the LRT and bike lanes will be further exacerbated; and they are proud and protective of their park space. However, given that First Place is going ahead in Blue Quill, residents were generous with their time and advice about how to mitigate some of their concerns.
- **Building Location:** There seemed to be a consensus among residents that the alternate site (figure 2) would be preferable to the approved First Place site. The option of the alternative site made the prospect of First Place much more attractive for many residents, primarily because it leaves the most popular parts of the park intact. To quote one resident, *"it's the best of a bad situation."*
- **Density:** A common concern was that the First Place would be the first of several developments, and that both approved and alternate First Place sites would in fact be developed. Councillor Walters gave a commitment that that would not happen.
- **Type of development needed:** Some residents pointed out that seniors' housing would enable them to age in place, in their neighbourhood; others were enthusiastic about First Place as an option for their children, enabling them to buy into the neighbourhood they'd grown up in.

"Why did this meeting not take place years ago instead of after decisions have been made?"

Resident



The majority felt that if development was to go ahead, it should include seniors’ housing as well as First Place.

- **Traffic:** The impacts of the LRT are clearly still felt in the neighbourhood. Almost everyone expressed concerns about traffic volume, parking (particularly along Saddleback Road, making it dangerous to cross) and safety due to more people coming through the community.

Table Discussion - Questions and Answers

New Home Builder

Representatives from Landmark, the new home builder for First Place homes in Blue Quill, attended the meeting to talk through the community design engagement process and the design specifics that are available at this early stage.

The Landmark representatives explained:

- **Number of units:** 40-60, depending on the exact size of site.
- **Community engagement in the design process:** Residents who volunteer to become involved in the design process ensure that the aesthetics of the development fit with their community. Volunteers will have input on design elements including building size, site lines, building orientation, landscaping, materials and more.
- **Roadway width:** It will be in accordance with the minimum required for fire rescue vehicles.

Questions	Answers
1. How were the builders selected?	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 these 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 six communities to date, including Canon Ridge, Greenview, Tawa, Casselman, Caernarvon and Kernohan.
2. Does the builder have a say in which building location is approved?	The decision to build on the approved or alternate building location is not the decision of the builder. The City will determine the best building location based on technical, market and financial feasibility, in addition to community consultation.



3. Who do I contact to obtain a blueprint of the development?	Design engagement meeting notes, designs and diagrams will be posted on the builders' Facebook page following each meeting.
4. How many units per First Place development?	There will be approximately 40 to 60 townhomes in Blue Quill, depending on the building location. The exact number of units will be known once the design phase is complete.
5. Will the units be two bedrooms?	In general, First Place townhomes have between two and three bedrooms, depending on the site.
6. How big are the townhomes?	In general, First Place townhomes are between 1,100 square feet, plus basement, and 1,300 square feet, plus basement.
7. What will the townhouse height be?	Building height is limited by the land use zone CS1-CS4 for First Place townhomes and land use zone RA7 for seniors' housing. The final height will be determined during the design engagement phase with residents.
8. Will the seniors' site development and First Place site development be spaced out appropriately and landscaped?	Yes: existing zoning requires specific building setback distances and includes landscaping requirements. Residents are encouraged to get involved in the design engagement process. Residents of other communities have provided meaningful input to ensure the new townhomes fit into their existing communities.
9. When will construction begin?	Construction will begin once the design engagement process is complete and a development permit has been approved. This is anticipated to occur in 2016.

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 shared at the open house shows the effect to be minimal. However, a few residents were skeptical about the objectivity of the data because it was provided by the City.

- The point was made that if property values decrease, the City of Edmonton should not benefit with the increased taxes from additional housing.
- A concern was expressed that the City is implementing the First Place program to generate more taxes.

- Residents felt that the alternate First Place site would have the smallest impact on property values.

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 or not the First Place development in Blue Quill should be constructed on the approved or alternate locations. 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).

The majority of residents seemed to prefer the option of the alternate northeast First Place site (figure 2) adjacent to seniors' housing for a variety of reasons:

- Parking and traffic impacts will be minimized on the alternate site.
- The alternate site is more convenient for transit.
- It would maximize the amount of open space and playing fields still available to residents.
- Many residents are pleased with the planned seniors' housing and look forward to the prospect of aging in their community.
- Continuity of development with seniors' and First Place housing makes sense.
- The community has already worked to improve the park in the approved First Place site.

A few residents disagreed with the option of moving to the alternate site: they feel that the approved site is better for access to the LRT and the community league hall.

"My preference is both projects are located at Saddleback Road. It makes sense to keep housing projects together. I have concerns regarding parking and increased traffic as a result of the project. They need to be addressed."

Resident

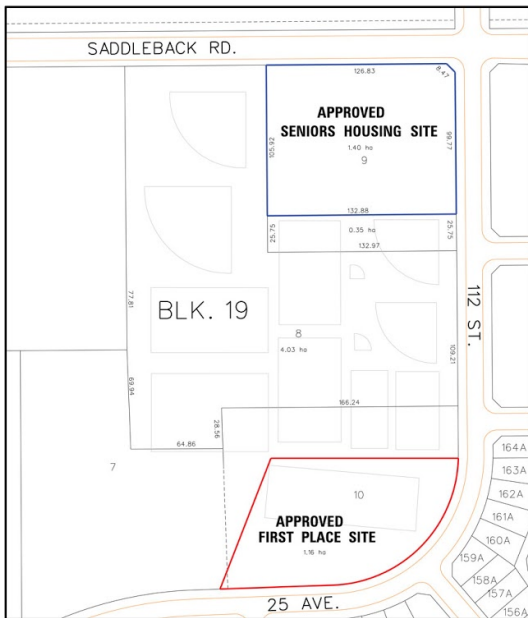


Figure 1
Approved First Place / Senior Housing Site Location

Figure 2
Alternate First Place & Approved Senior Housing Site Location

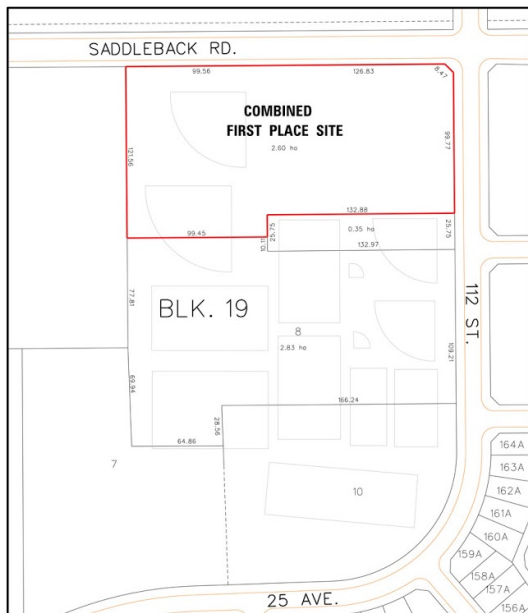
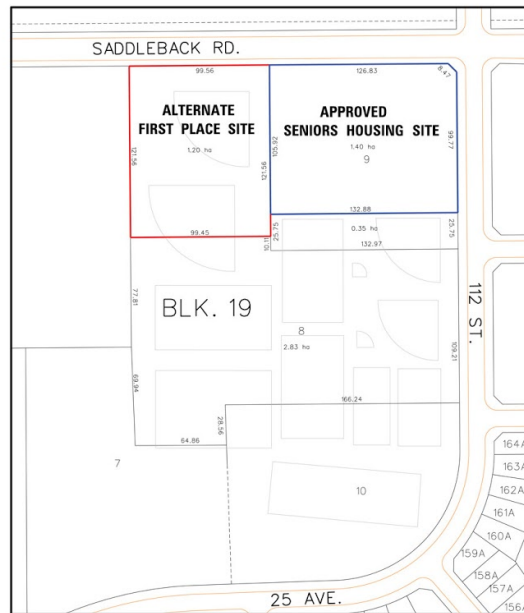


Figure 3
Combined Single Use First Place Site Location



Questions	Answers
1. What happens to the approved site if the alternate is selected?	The approved site stays as is and will be zoned as parkland.
2. What assessments of the proposed sites have been done in the past and now? Are they available to the public?	The technical and financial suitability assessments for both sites were completed by City staff and shared with residents at a neighbourhood open house in October 2014.
3. Will the location of First Place on the Blue Quill school site go to a community vote?	No. Community input on building location is one of several factors the City takes into account before making a recommendation to City Council.
4. What are the next steps in deciding the building location?	City staff will make a recommendation to City Council for a decision on building location in the spring of 2015.

Parks and Open Space

Many residents were concerned at the prospect of less green space and the loss of playing fields. Some clearly felt that there is an overall focus in the city to develop buildings – but not to enhance green space. There were many questions about the per capita green space ratio (captured below), but essentially residents felt that numbers do not quite satisfy their perception that green space in the city is shrinking.

“The approved First Place location blocks access to the park from homes along 25th Avenue – and use of the hill for families could potentially be obstructed.”

Resident

However, many were also intrigued by the idea of redeveloped park space with other recreational activities so that people of all ages could enjoy the park.

- Suggestions of possibilities for a redeveloped park include:
 - Expand the hill, and include walking trails.
 - Develop a picnic area – and “conversation areas” with trees providing windbreaks and shade – similar to the sitting areas of 111 Street and 34 Avenue.
 - Replace the playground with one that “doesn’t give children splinters”; include a spray park.
 - Ensure the hockey and basketball spaces are flexible for use in other sports.

“There are very few large soccer fields in Edmonton for adults and older children so we need the large space. As well it would be terrible to lose the toboggan hill. It is used daily in the winter.”

Resident



- Consider the amphitheatre in the context of other park space.
- Rethink the north areas and baseball diamonds that are rarely used.
- Start a community garden, so that people can grow things they can't grow in their backyard because of their exposure.
- Ensure there's still space to walk dogs.
- The idea of keeping the toboggan hill (a defining feature of the community), and enhancing it, was received enthusiastically. It was pointed out that this would be an option if the alternate site was approved.
- The soccer fields are heavily used, so it will be important to preserve as many of them as possible.

Questions	Answers
1. How does the park in Blue Quill compare to other neighbourhoods?	The school/park site assembled in Blue Quill reflected the planned future development of shared school and park lands approved in the 1970s. This site met standards of the day for both three school buildings, shared sports fields and open space requirement.
2. How is green space calculated for a neighbourhood with high density like Blue Quill?	School and park sites were assembled on shared sites to meet future populations based on schools planned throughout the Kaskitayo Area Outline Plan (the area within 34 Avenue, 119 Street, Blackmud Ravine and Highway 2), including shared sports fields, space for a community league and open space.
3. Are school grounds included in this calculation?	Joint school/park sites assembled at this time meet both school and city needs for building sites and shared open space.
4. Is there a budget to redevelop the park space?	<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 (CRCs). The contact for this kind of work is the CRC assigned to the</p>



	neighbourhood. Note that the purpose of the recreational needs assessment is not to discuss whether existing building sites should be changed to park space.
5. What is the developer’s responsibility in funding park space?	When Blue Quill was assembled, developers only provided land to the City and had no responsibility for funding any development on the school/park site. The City funds minimum park development, and enhanced development on parkland is cost shared by the City and neighbourhood.

Transportation

Bike lanes, increased traffic and other issues due to the LRT (parking, light sequencing at the crossing on 111 Street) were all significant concerns that formed the context to transportation discussions. Many residents pointed out that getting in and out of the community is already difficult during peak hours. Parking and traffic implications must be considered in the context of the cumulative effects of the LRT, Century Park, Skyrattler, First Place and the seniors’ site.

- The intersection of 25 Avenue and Saddleback Road is already congested. If the approved site goes ahead, traffic issues there would be further exacerbated and become potentially dangerous.
- Speeding on 112 Street south of the approved site is another ongoing concern.
- On-street parking in the neighbourhood is limited and frustrating due to the proximity of Century Park LRT. Local roadways in the area have resident only parking restrictions. Residents were split on whether these were adequately enforced. Transportation advised that the park and ride lot is currently under review and to call bylaw enforcement for parking concerns. Parking for the First Place/seniors’ sites will be on-site and not require on-street parking.
- On-street parking on the south side of Saddleback Road west of 112 Street/25 Avenue is at capacity due to the LRT (there is no parking restriction on this stretch). Parking is occurring adjacent to this intersection and limiting visibility for residents turning right onto Saddleback Road. This was a repeated comment and concern for residents.
- The signal timing at 111 Street and Saddleback Road is frustrating residents leaving the area. Residents noted that the timing of trains at peak times meant that they could wait five minutes or longer to turn left onto 111 Street. This was a repeated comment and concern for residents.
- Residents of the apartments to the west of the alternate site walk across the soccer fields to/from Century Park LRT – a trail is clearly visible on aerial imagery. Residents suggested adding a crossing on 112 Street at 27 Avenue to enhance safety.

- 112 Street/25 Avenue was recently resurfaced and has not been repainted. A majority of residents expressed that they would not like to see the bike lanes return

Questions	Answers
1. Can you share the traffic analysis that was done in considering both building location options – in particular the impact at the LRT crossing at 111 Street and Saddleback Road?	A traffic study will be conducted in early 2015. Results of the study will be shared with the community league and posted on the City website.
2. Can 119 Street be extended south into Twin Brooks to alleviate traffic on 111 Street?	Council has decided not to use 119 Street to access Twin Brooks.
3. Will both developments contain parking? Will parking on the street be required?	Each development will contain sufficient parking for residents and visitors required by the zoning by-law. No street parking will be required.

First Place Program

There were many detailed questions about the First Place program and the specifics of the development planned for Blue Quill. Those questions and answers are captured below.

- Some residents were enthusiastic about the idea of First Place homes.
- Many others felt that it doesn't align with free market principles and that the City of Edmonton should not be in this business.
- There were also concerns that despite measures put in place, residents might be tempted to flip their apartment for a higher price, which could artificially inflate the market.
- There were comments that First Place is not a good fit for Blue Quill as a community, which already has a large number of apartments and condos.
- Many residents were extremely frustrated by the lack of consultation (that they have no control over development in their community).

“Blue Quill already has an unusually large number of families living in apartments/ condos compared to other communities. The type of buildings these are attract younger families. The First Place program would augment that ratio disproportionately.”

Resident

Questions	Answers
1. Did you evaluate other cities that have similar types of programs/ developments?	In 2006, no other Canadian cities offered a similar program. The First Place Program was developed in response to Council's decision, which was made



	with input from City staff, local financial institutions, CMHC and the local chapter of the Canadian Home Builders' Association.
2. Why is the City developing this land?	Edmonton is growing and needs to create greater housing choice for people coming to Edmonton. Council has directed that 25 per cent of new growth should occur within the City to make full use of existing infrastructure. Development of new homes on vacant surplus building site fulfills Council's directions.
3. How many First Place developments have been developed so far?	At the end of 2014, a total of eight design engagement processes have been completed for 475 new homes. Sales are completed in Greenvew, Canon Ridge, Tawa and Caernarvon. In Kernohan and Casselman, sales are ongoing. Home sales in Larkspur will begin in 2015.
4. Is there an age restriction for who buys? Is it just for young couples?	There is no age restriction. Anyone who is a first-time buyer in Alberta, has a household income of no more than \$117,000 per year and is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident is eligible. Eligibility details can be found on the City of Edmonton website, at edmonton.ca/firstplace
5. Do you need to qualify for a mortgage in order to qualify for the program?	Yes – you will need to qualify for a mortgage in the same way you would for buying any property, with or without a co-signer.
6. What is the entry price?	The purchase price of new homes varies with each site based on the results of the design process, differing land values for each site and the current market demand for home features.
7. Is there a restriction on how long people have to live in their First Place unit? If a person leaves the program early what is the penalty?	Every buyer must live in the new home and are required to pay the deferred land value five years after taking possession. The majority of pilot site home buyers are still living in their homes five years after development. Some pilot site families have left the program prior to five years due to growing family size or to pursue job opportunities outside of



	Edmonton, but there is no penalty for leaving the program early.
8. Is First Place similar to Habitat for Humanity in terms of monitoring?	No. First Place Program was established in 2006 to develop and build up to 1,000 new townhomes on 20 surplus school sites over the next 10 years. The program was established to help individuals and families who have never before owned property in Alberta buy their first home. All homes built under the program are market homes.
9. Why is Blue Quill suitable for First Place when existing homes are valued at \$500,000?	The City needs to increase housing choice across Edmonton and support growth within existing communities. It is common practice to develop townhomes adjacent to single family homes in neighbourhoods being developed throughout Edmonton today, and there is no evidence to suggest the development of new townhomes has a significant effect on adjacent existing home value.
10. Does the province dictate which sites are surplus?	No. A Joint Use Agreement supports collaboration between the City and the school boards for the planning and assembly of shared sites. Vacant schools sites are regularly reviewed under this agreement. Sites no longer required by school boards for future schools are returned to the City.
11. What are tax payers providing to the First Place program?	Taxpayers do not contribute to First Place townhomes. The land was given to the City under the MGA by the developers in the 1970s for the school building. The City is only using unused (but serviced) building site for developing new homes.
12. What will this development look like after 20 to 30 years? Is there data emerging from early First Place developments?	After the five-year deferred period is over, the homes are like just another home in the neighbourhood. Each site has a condo board in charge of property maintenance.
13. Where does the revenue from First Place go? Why doesn't any of it come back to the community?	The net proceeds are shared equally between the school board and City of Edmonton's Housing section to develop affordable and seniors' housing across all city neighbourhoods.



14. When will the final decision be made about the site for First Place?

The City is moving ahead to build First Place homes in Blue Quill on either the approved or alternate location. Administration will bring a report to Council in spring 2015 with a building site recommendation.

Conclusion

About 80 Blue Quill residents attended the First Place meeting. There was also an online questionnaire provided for residents who were not able to attend the meeting. 14 residents chose to respond to the questionnaire at edmonton.ca/surplusschoolsites. The majority of people who provided feedback said they were able to get the answers to the questions they had about First Place, and felt that they were leaving with a better understanding of First Place. Most residents found that the roundtable format gave them the ability to ask their detailed questions of the relevant City of Edmonton subject matter experts.

"It's my first time attending a meeting like this and I am quite satisfied with the proceedings."

Resident

City of Edmonton staff were given a clear message from community members that there is an overwhelming preference for the alternate site as the location for First Place, with one or two exceptions. This feedback will be given serious consideration as Administration prepares to make its recommendation to City Council in the spring of 2015. City Administration anticipates that construction will begin in 2016.

In 2015, the City will seek 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 Michael Walters, the Blue Quill Community League, and posted to the City of Edmonton website.