

Community Insight - What We Heard

Three methods of gathering community insight took place between December 2020 and July 2021. These methods included meetings, interviews, and field observations of more than 50 individuals. Below is a summary of what we heard.

Governance

- Successfully addressing the complex nature of problem properties requires a collaborative and integrated effort. As there is not currently one specific area with sole governance over the problem properties work, the necessary corresponding oversight over the multiple agencies and areas involved is not in place.
- The creation of a dedicated central entity to provide broad strategic direction and tactical action for decision-making for the mutual benefit of all stakeholders is paramount. This should include clear accountability for who is ultimately responsible for addressing problem properties, including internal stakeholder coordination to resolve issues, and clear lines of sight for the community.
- The process is reactive rather than proactive. Shifting to a proactive model would allow for a more systems-level approach for long term planning.

Enhanced Enforcement

- There is a spectrum of problem properties in Edmonton, many of which require different levels of response and enforcement. There is a desire for enhanced/stronger enforcement from Edmontonians, communities, businesses, the [previous] Council and the agencies/people that are dealing with problem properties and their owners. Problem properties also have land use issues. At times, some property owners capitalize on enforcement gaps and are able to pit agencies' mandates against each other. The ability for various stakeholders to work together to leverage the enforcement capacity of each other to address a problem property file is an essential part of making progress. There could be opportunities for joint training sessions for better understanding amongst all agencies. Other opportunities could include cross-training officers who may have more frequent contact with problem properties to preemptively spot any issues for follow-up by other officers with powers to enforce.

City Council

- Priorities of elected officials drive the resource allocation and the amount of attention to problem properties.
- Political will is needed to drive this work in a sustainable way.

Collaborations and Community Involvement

- Accountability to the community is key to success.
- Frustrated residents and communities are asking for work to address problem properties to be delivered effectively and efficiently, and they are sometimes taking on the issues themselves.
- The community is rich with lived experience, and many are motivated and eager to be involved in solutions. Given the complexity of the issue, some problem properties fall between or outside of the mandates of the enforcement agencies involved.
- Multiple interviews highlighted the need to extend collaborations to include ways to address the challenges faced by the tenants, the community and those impacted by problem properties. Furthermore, some social services agencies want to play a role but are challenged because of their capacity constraints.
- Community and businesses desire more forward-thinking action regarding problem properties after they are secured so that they do not have break-ins and fires. Communities want these properties to add to the value and vibrancy of the community and to not remain in states of non-development or receivership. Business Improvement Areas have a mandate to create areas that are destination locations -- a lack of vibrancy, safety and disorder goes against their mandate of city place-making. Once properties are satisfactorily addressed, there are increased perceptions of safety and morale in communities.

Supply and Demand

Property owners and housing

- While some predatory landowners and housing providers are taking advantage of vulnerable people and increasing their vulnerability, there is also a lack of an adequate supply of housing for tenants in need, as the demand for multiple forms of affordable housing is outpacing the current supply.
- Housing insecurity is part of the problem and needs to be part of the solution. Property owners are often the main cause of problems - they

can either no longer manage the property or they willfully and intentionally cause harm to the residents.

- Problem landlords seek out properties designated as Safe Housing as they have reduced minimum housing standards - there is an interest in increasing these standards.
- There is a need for more enhanced enforcement tools for the most problematic landlords operating illegal secondary suites and illegal lodging houses, properties with multiple infractions, owners who have multiple properties, and repeat offenders.
- There are no repercussions/ enforcement actions for 'no-show' inspections.

Tenants

- Complex social challenges like disability, mental health, high medical needs, trauma, poverty, substance abuse and addiction, social disorder and criminal activity, etc. are significant challenges for many living in problem properties.
- Edmonton's comparatively high number of prisons in the proximity also results in a lack of housing for the 'hard to house.' As people transition from prison, they require access to safe housing. However, there are not enough housing options for the hardest to house and those facing other social challenges who often have no place to live.
- Support services are needed to solve the challenges, but there is a lack of social support and supportive housing for many residents of problem properties.

Communities

- A small number of neighbourhoods in Edmonton have a greater proportion of problem properties than others. Many of these properties are rentals, and there are also issues with the stigmatization of neighbourhoods and NIMBYism.
- Improving the health, safety and quality of life in communities means effectively dealing with the negative impact problem properties have on neighbourhoods.
- There are chronic, ongoing, long-standing problem properties, as well as derelict and vacant properties that are causing community decay.
- Enhanced enforcement and other approaches will earn back trust from the public who have a perception of a lack of movement on some of the

longer-term properties. Recidivism is decreased at sites where the PPI team has visited and where the site has been remediated.

Education / communications

- Public education concerning all elements of problem properties is needed.
- People don't understand what constitutes a problem property, nor do they always comprehend the process involved in resolving problems. The need for education applies to Administration as well as to Edmontonians and the community.
- Broader communication is needed to enhance landlord, tenant and community understanding of the rules.
- Tenants need education about their rights, as well as information about transition services.
- Communities need open communication about properties that are not being actively addressed by all partners, yet are still seen as 'problems' by that community.
- There is an opportunity for better communication and a one-agency approach to City Council about problem properties.