

REFUGEE AND NEWCOMER HOUSING PROJECT UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION

That the November 21, 2022, Community Services report CS00788, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	For Information Only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work as we achieve our strategic goals.	Healthy City		
City Plan Values	BELONG		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Community Safety and Well-Being
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C437A - City Land Assets for Non-Profit Affordable Housing • C601 - Affordable Housing Investment Guidelines • Blatchford Vision 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CS00789, Community and Public Services Committee, November 21, 2022 • CR_7720, Community and Public Services Committee, August 25, 2021 • CR_7520, Community and Public Services Committee, October 16, 2019 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the August 25, 2021, Community and Public Services Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

2. That Administration provide a progress report on the status of the proposed Refugee/Newcomer Housing Project.

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Executive Summary

- In January 2021, the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd. and Right at Home Housing Society proposed the development of a purpose-built facility in recognition of refugee/newcomer needs for affordable housing and health services.
- From February to September 2022, Administration has been working to identify possible land parcels as new development options for Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd. and relevant stakeholders.
- A site was identified in the Blatchford redevelopment area that appears to meet most of the community needs and is undergoing further review by stakeholders.
- If the stakeholder review determines that the Blatchford site meets the development requirements, Administration may bring forward a report to Executive Committee for approval of a less than market sale and or funding contribution to support this initiative. The timing of this report would coincide with the updated business case work and preliminary design efforts, which may take up to 18 months to complete.

Report

Identification of Refugee and Newcomer Housing Project Land Parcel

The Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd. is a co-operative started by and for newcomers. The organization has provided holistic family support, community engagement and collaborative initiatives with public institutions. Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd. includes more than 100 brokers serving more than 2,000 families a year within and beyond 30 cultural communities.

In January 2021, the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd. and Right at Home Housing Society submitted a project proposal to Administration, which was included in the August 25, 2021, report CR_7720, State of Immigration and Settlement in Edmonton.

During the August 25, 2021, Community and Public Services Committee meeting, Committee directed Administration to work with community partners to progress on a proposed refugee/newcomer housing and health care centre development. Since November 2021, a steering committee made up of representatives from Administration and community members have participated in a process to collectively identify a site on a single piece of land that would be ideal for the development of refugee/newcomer housing and health care centre. It was the intention that this first development would serve as a functioning model for future infrastructure across Edmonton.

Using existing operating budget, Administration provided \$50,000 to support Right at Home Housing Society, who have collaborated with the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd., for the development of a comprehensive business plan. This funding was matched by an additional \$50,000 by Right at Home Housing Society, for a total investment of \$100,000.

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Between February to September 2022, Administration has been working to identify possible land parcels as options for the community to consider. Some of the options presented included: lots at Blatchford, surplus school sites and city land assets in established neighborhoods.

Through the collaborative process, the steering committee community group identified Blatchford as their preferred location based on criteria developed by the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd. These criteria included walkable access to amenities such as newcomer support services, schools, language learning programs and the transit system.

The committee also prioritized land zoned to allow multiple uses, including large family-oriented housing in townhomes, as well as apartments for smaller families and seniors.

Blatchford Site

From Administration's review, the location and potential project proposed align well to the Applicability, Principles and Investment Guidelines of City Policy C601 - Affordable Housing Investment Guidelines. While the potential Blatchford site is smaller than the ideal size sought for the project, rezoning could be pursued for low to medium-rise residential density as desired by the community group. The proposed rezoning could allow for mixed use, which aligns with the City Centre Area Redevelopment Plan. The mixed use could accommodate a refugee clinic that was part of the original development proposal.

The site parameters are under review by the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd. and Right At Home Housing Society to determine the site's suitability and financial feasibility. If the site is deemed to be suitable and financially feasible, Administration will bring forward a report to Executive Committee for approval of a less than market sale and/or funding contribution to support this initiative.

This site would require Administration to coordinate the demolition of existing structures, subdivision, rezoning, and servicing. Should a recommendation be brought forward to Council within the next 18 months, the estimated timeline to prepare the land for development is currently 2024/2025. The Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd. and Right At Home Housing Society project team would proceed with the development process for design and construction, aligned to Blatchford's architectural guidelines and sustainable development standards.

Financial Implications

The city contribution method and budget impact will be explored as part of the Business Case process, should the project appear suitable and feasible. Funding for this project has not been included within the proposed 2023-2026 budget.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

In 2015, Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative Ltd. collaborated with Homeward Trust to undertake a housing survey related to housing challenges in the lives of families and communities. The results of this survey were used to convene a dialogue with newcomers in collaboration with the City of Edmonton and EndPovertyEdmonton. Newcomers shared stories of

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lived experience with housing providers and policy makers from all levels. The learnings from these community insights informed this project.

GBA+

Edmonton's recently completed Housing Needs Assessment explored available quantitative (based on 2016 Census data) and qualitative data to determine the overall need for affordable housing in Edmonton and how housing need impacts different segments of Edmonton's population. The population groups that were prioritized for this work were considered in order to understand their unique housing needs, through a lens of inclusion and equity. One of these groups is "Newcomers" which includes immigrants and refugees who have settled in Canada over the last five years.

As per the 2021 Census data, 363,910 or 26 per cent of Edmonton residents are immigrants. Of these, 74,680 individuals or 5 per cent of Edmonton's total population are newcomers who arrived in Canada between 2016 and 2021. According to the Statistics Canada 2018 Household survey, 31 per cent of recent immigrants were spending over 30 per cent of their income on shelter costs, in comparison to only 18 per cent of the general population. A household is said to have affordable housing if it spends less than 30 per cent of its total income on shelter costs.

Administration's engagement with community organizations serving newcomers revealed a multitude of factors that contribute to unmet housing needs:

- Newcomer families may be larger and need more bedrooms. The lack of units with three or more bedrooms and reluctance of landlords to rent to larger families to reduce wear and tear on units presents challenges for newcomers to find adequate and affordable housing.
- Newcomer families may frequently experience discrimination in searching of rental housing.
- Language barriers may contribute to limiting economic and job opportunities, which impact livelihood and thus housing affordability. It may be difficult for newcomers to navigate housing agencies that operate in English only. Additionally, accessible housing is also a critical need among many newcomer families.
- Newcomers may experience greater feelings of isolation and mental health issues in adjusting to a new country and culture. This is worse among refugees who may have no or temporary immigration status in Canada and therefore do not have access to health care or government financial assistance to meet critical needs.

Additionally, the loss of income or reduced income created in the early stage of the pandemic led some low-income newcomer families to experience food insecurity, further affecting their mental and physical health. The rising inflation in recent months continues to affect low-income newcomers adversely and worsens their overall ability to afford basic needs such as shelter and food.

Community organizations serving newcomers emphasized that adequate and affordable housing is a key social determinant of health and well being for newcomers. Incorporating a sense of community is also important to sustain housing and overall wellbeing outcomes. Improving the

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availability of larger and affordable housing units along with a greater focus on mental health resourcing and social support is needed to enhance newcomer health and wellbeing.