

# Surplus School Sites



## **What We Heard Report September 2023**

## 2 City of Edmonton, Community Services Department, Social Development Branch Surplus School Sites What We Heard Report 2023

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### ABOUT THE PROJECT

In 2015, Council approved *Policy C583: Guidelines for the Development of the 2009 Surplus School Sites* to guide the development of the 2009 school sites declared surplus by Edmonton school boards. The purpose of the policy was to establish guidelines for residential development on these sites in order to maximize economic viability, public benefits, and connections to the communities in which the new developments were located, while remaining flexible enough to respond to local conditions and community needs.

The policy is being brought forward for review now for several reasons: it is best practice to evaluate policies on an ongoing basis to ensure effective implementation; there have been several revisions to the regulatory framework, requiring a policy amendment to bring the policy back into alignment with its regulatory governance; and, it is prudent to do a fulsome review to ensure that the appropriate mechanism is in place to enable appropriate development of the sites moving forward.

This document includes a summary of the feedback gathered at these meetings. Input from stakeholders has been used to inform the tools and options that will be presented to the Executive Committee in December, 2023.

### WHO WE ENGAGED

The following areas of Administration were engaged as part of this review process:

1. Public Engagement
2. Corporate Policy
3. Communications
4. Community Services, Business Planning and Performance
5. Property Services, Real Estate, Valuation and Advisory Services
6. Real Estate, Real Estate and Housing, Land Development Planning
7. Real Estate, Property Sales
8. Legal Services
9. Urban Planning and Economy, Branch Manager's Office
10. Urban Planning and Economy, Integrated Infrastructure Services, Parks and Biodiversity
11. Urban Planning and Economy, Planning and Environment Services, District Planning
12. Edmonton Public School Board
13. City of Calgary
14. Private developers

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## WHAT WE HEARD

### Community Response

- Residents are not comfortable having affordable housing tenants living in their neighbourhoods.
- Significant opposition due to community concern that will result in a loss of green space.
- Developers turned down operations sites due to public opposition
- Multi-phase engagement is extensive and resource-intensive.
- Preferable to regulate the use, not the users.

### Affordability Requirements

- Due to community response and additional engagement requirements, a developer was unable to deeply subsidize units as it would result in different types of tenants.
- The affordability requirements are nearly (if not fully) impossible for a profit developer to achieve, without deep subsidization.
- Developers are able to provide near market subsidization but cannot achieve deep subsidization, with a financially feasible proforma.

### Evaluation of Current Policy

- With only one site developed, the policy has not been successful.
- For the policy to be successful, there are numerous factors which must be in place: land, funding, a developer, and an operator.
- The policy was established to help communicate that these sites are intended for affordable housing. By failing to develop the sites to date, communities have the impression that the sites are open space and parkland. This effectively undermines the initial engagement.
- There needs to be a time period within which affordable housing needs to be developed on site to provide clarity to the communities.
- Getting sites to development-ready is an involved process, which can become even lengthier due to improper zoning.

### Recommendations for Policy Direction

- The City should sell the sites for market residential development and direct proceeds to either buy existing buildings where zoning does not need to change and convert to affordable housing, or buy land in new areas and build there.
- The City should retain the sites that can be developed over the next budget cycle and give the remaining sites back to other departments for other purposes.
- The City should initially offer sites to housing developers. If they are unable to develop the sites, open up a competitive process that stipulates evaluation criteria (eg. more points for more affordability), with net proceeds of sale accruing to the housing reserve for strategic redeployment (eg. in Transit Oriented Development locations).
- Recommend policy amendment that retains an affordability target and direction for the sites.
- Recommend repealing the policy and adopting an internal standard. This will demonstrate due diligence to school boards. Internal standard should reduce affordability requirements.
- The City should sell off the less desirable sites.
- The policy is largely duplicative. Support repeal of the policy.
- These sites should be treated as any other development site
- Affordable housing is housing - should not differentiate between housing types or age of tenants. Creating distinctions between housing type and tenants creates opportunities for discrimination.