

Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness
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2024 October 18

To: Members of City Council

Re: Public hearing agenda item 3.13: Bylaw 20954 LaPerle housing

As the City of Edmonton experiences the many benefits of significant population growth and sees the development of new housing to meet this growth, Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH) wants to emphasize the importance of leadership by City Council to ensure the pressing need for lower-income affordable housing holds a priority position.

We are seeing a deeply troubling growth in the number of people who are homeless and the terrible human and fiscal costs associate with this. A few months ago ECOHH hosted a memorial service for 421 people who died of homelessness in 2023, up from the 32 deaths we identified in 2005.

Homelessness is not about individuals who are flawed. It is about decades of failure by governments to ensure there is decent housing for people with limited economic capacity. We know that unaffordable housing is often the beginning of events that can lead to homelessness. And even when people with lower incomes are able to maintain housing, it can be at the cost of many other elements of healthy lives, as the priority of a roof over one's head dominates choices.

There is a great opportunity at this time to act in a more substantial way to address the shortfall of tens of thousands of units of affordable housing in Edmonton, thanks to the availability of 11 surplus school site lands and the federal government's Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF).

As decisions are made about bylaws regarding development of housing, we urge the City to act to support the development of affordable housing that is fully consistent with the purpose of the HAF, to "accelerate the growth of supply and support the development of complete, low-carbon and climate-resilient communities which are affordable, inclusive, equitable and diverse."

This is an exciting opportunity for Edmonton to have resources to create such communities. It is essential to ensure communities develop that are not only affordable, but also inclusive, equitable, and diverse. The City's land sales site indicates being open to proposals where at least 30 percent of units are affordable-- a good start-- but it is silent about the other characteristics identified by the HAF.

ECOHH has a concern that the need for housing for larger families and other characteristics, such as accessibility, to ensure communities are equitable and diverse may be lost. We note that the rezoning for RMh16 and RMh23 will support development of townhouses, but will also permit building heights of 16 metres and more, so that apartments, more likely to reduce diversity of residents, become an attractive direction for development.

Given the HAF's clear commitment to affordable, inclusive, equitable, and diverse communities, we encourage putting a priority on using the energy and vision of non-profit housing developers, supporting them to ensure these sites do not end up providing only more housing for those with financial means for market rates.

We know from decades of evidence prior to 1990 that such public investment in non-market housing ensures a solid foundation for strong healthy communities and reduces and prevents homelessness. Even today in our city, it is the housing built in those years that forms the majority of the available affordable housing.

This is the time for City Council to act to use the valuable land it has and move ahead with a commitment to see housing developed in a way that ensures affordability and choice for a diversity of people who otherwise face grim possibilities for their housing, and to do it in a way that creates equitable communities, with all the positive benefits that offers. Not everyone will support this approach to action with these valuable sites, but the long-term well being of people, families, and communities will be a tremendous result if the HAF's description of what is desired guides action.

Sincerely,

Nadine Chalifoux
Chairperson