

# Community Sustainability Workshop

Organized by EFCL

7 pm May 10, 2011

Alberta Avenue Community Hall, 9210 118 Ave

**Attendees:** See the names listed at the end of the document  
Community Sustainability Task Force members (7)  
Community people (44) representing 21 neighbourhoods, one church, one senior's organization  
EFCL staff/volunteer (4)

## Welcome and Opening Comments

Allan Bolstad, ED of EFCL stated that the formation of the Community Sustainability Task Force is a bit of a breakthrough - bringing the municipal and provincial government together along with the School Boards, and representatives of businesses and citizens. This workshop will provide input to the Task Force and their recommendations. It is the beginning of the conversations which can be continued beyond this evening. A second meeting will be held to zero in on recommendations.

Michael Phair, Co-Chair of the Task Force, provided information on the Task Force and introduced the members in attendance. The Task Force plans to finish their work in November/December, 2011. The recommendations of the Task Force will be aimed at increasing the vitality of mature neighbourhoods; those built before 1972. These neighbourhoods include approximately half of Edmonton's population.

## What are the Problem Areas for Mature Neighbourhoods?

### Notes from small group discussions:

#### Table 1:

##### Schools

- Daughter is going to J.H. Picard, concerned about school closures, for a lot of problems education is the long-term solution. Schools are a glue that keeps communities together.

Don't even know why the school is closing,

- Fair to say that the disconnect between the two stakeholders (councillor and Catholic board) is a problem?

- Definitely, but further, there must be a solution, we still need schools in the core.

- And this cycle is going to occur for these newer communities eventually

- This phenomenon of closing schools is new, is it not? So what's different?

- A lot of the specialty programs are great, but it does make other things more difficult.

- School closures pull communities apart. Students go in different directions.
- When schools close what happens to the building?
- Lack of School Board communication and planning with others

Infrastructure issues

Do something about the alleys, homeless people going through garbage, suspicious vehicles cruising, lack of maintenance

Transportation---if you have to walk 2,3,4 miles to stores or schools, that causes issues. Need public transportation to nearby schools & stores.

With kids that get buses to school, for efficiency we could combine the Catholic and Public school buses.

What prevents a young family from moving into a mature community?

- Reputation. Some communities deserved, some undeserved.
- Street people aren't a problem, our attitude is the problem. Why can't societies be blended together? In my corner this works. It's not the people, it's the attitude towards them.
- As a culture, we geographically assign places to homeless people
- Housing stock is a problem for attracting families.
- Unsightly alleys can be fixed by fixing the other issues.

Agreement that schools are a primary issue.

Housing is an issue

Public Transportation as the third issue

**Table 2**

- Criminal Activity; unsafe park, needles, drugs, vagrants, prostitution
- Poor communications between members within neighborhood, CRC, agencies etc.
- Lack of community engagement; people are issue driven
- Closing of schools: Lack of investment in mature neighbourhoods
- Land costs are higher in inner city than suburbs
- LRT corridors breaking up communities
- Lack of recreation facilities. Lack of programs - programs have followed children to suburbs.
- Lack of coordination between civic, prov, fed, school boards.

**Table 3 - Problem Area notes**

- Poor area schools are being boarded up and students are moved to the outskirts. The schools are not getting enough money for renovations. Edmonton could become an empty donut hole like Detroit.
- Heard city came to Catholic School Board to ask for a partnership. A joint project could give the school board money for needed amenities.
- Cultural diversity is missing in the core because immigrants want a new house in the suburbs. It is cheaper to buy in the suburbs.
- The people living in the core moved there to be close to work/school. Do we tax incentives? Will we need to move to suburbs for schools?
- Difficult to meet neighbours with kids the same age as my kids.
- Redevelopment for family housing is difficult. RF3 - lots too small.

- You want people to live in the same area their whole life. If school goes, kids go, it turns into slums.
- Marketing in suburbs is a co-effort by many developers, but one-offs in core don't get same coverage. Also, high-rises are going all in one spot, Oliver, which is too expensive for families.
- The city doesn't abide by zoning or ARP's.
- The problem is to fill the empty commercial buildings. Revitalization makes things look better, but still there are a lot of absentee landlords, derelict buildings, and vacancies. Still need to travel to get groceries.
- Inadequate planning and reinvestment. Need more community development and do development ourselves.
- Suburbs do well because they are new and have low crime rate. Their only problem is transportation.
- Mature neighbourhoods need improved housing stock and revitalized commercial spaces.
- Problems with revitalization processes: don't lead to an ARP - statutory change, and restraints on undesirable commerce.
- Crime is a problem; need schools to be hubs.

#### **Table 4**

- Crime and Safety: Lots of homeless people skew demographic
- Lack of diversity of people/lack of diversity & choice in housing
- Poverty concentration- lack of economic diversity
- Concentration of non-market housing and social services
- Targeting programs for special populations that result in a skewed perspective on our communities. Services are recruiting certain types of people to the downtown neighbourhoods.
- Agents that perpetuate "ghettoization" - liquor stores, pawn shops, adult video stores etc.
- Religious groups force people to listen to sermons to get their food.
- Lack of community/connectedness**
- Lack of intergenerational support**
- Restrictive covenants/conditions on use of property - grocery store problem. The province needs to change the land titles act.**
- Protectionism exists.**
- Lack seniors' homes in the community to keep seniors in the neighbourhood and free up homes for families. Need aging in place options.
- Housing projects "dumped" into our communities
- Urban sprawl cultivates the downtown neighbourhoods
- Aging population; local schools being starved of kids.
- Problem of housing affordability for young families in neighbourhoods near the "donut".
- School closures
- Spot zoning is creating problems. Need Area Redevelopment Plans to create a vision for the neighbourhood(s).

#### **Table 5**

- School closures and vacant buildings**
- Ritchie: Poor distribution of schools; vacant schools**
- Community involvement**

-Competition of hall with multi-plexes (??)  
-Not enough seniors housing  
-Absentee landlords, drugs  
-Grovenor: roads; LRT cutting through neighbourhood;  
-Eastwood: Aging community building; school closure  
Alberta Ave looks great but just off it is horrible; crumbling streets,  
drugs, prostitution, absentee landlords

-No collaboration of EPSB, City, Community League; each group works  
against each other.

-Riverdale: Lack of collaboration of school and community league. New  
developments knocking down homes. Housing co-ops provide affordable  
housing - need more. Not large enough population to draw stores/shops.  
Can't walk or bike to nearby shopping. Drugs and safety issues.

#### **Table 6**

-Loss of Young Families (with children)

- related issues – High Cost of Housing
  - Development of Adult-Only Housing Complexes

-Loss of Schools

- Province's disinterest in investing in older school buildings

-Lack of Coordination between levels of government

- One group passing the buck to the other.
- No organization able to deal comprehensively with problems affecting older  
neighborhoods.

-Personal Safety – Feeling safe to walk the neighborhood at night.

-Declining Infrastructure – Beat Up Roadways, Old Sewer Systems, Asphalt Sidewalks, Old Playgrounds.

-Lack of housing for homeless people

-Over-concentration of Social Agencies – drawing too many people with personal problems to one  
area.

#### **Top three Problem Areas reported by each group:**

(A) Schools closing

Lack of collaboration between groups like community and school board,  
Housing stocks (crumbling housing, need for renovations), public  
transportation

(B) Schools,

Public Safety,

Lack of forward planning between provincial, civic, school boards

(C) Loss of children/young-families and the things that contribute;

Lack of coordination between different levels of authority;

Social housing issues, personal safety

(D) Lack of diversity in housing and demographics (concentration of  
poverty),

Lack of comprehensive planning and vision, urban sprawl and poor holistic  
planning

(E) Lack of coordination between entities and with the people who are actually in the communities,  
Lack of incentives to live in the core, inequitable distribution of types of development (mixed demographics, appropriate commercial uses),  
Community must have some sort of power over its own destiny

(F) Schools,  
Infrastructure (roads, bike lanes, sidewalks),  
Collaboration between groups (school boards, CoE, developers, EPS)

Five major problem areas identified:

- Schools
- Housing
- Collaboration
- Demographic changes
- Public Safety

Participants asked to regroup based on their interest area, and focus the discussion on the solutions to the specific problem area assigned to the table.

### **Solutions to Public Safety - group notes**

- Lighting--Target Hardening - CPTED
- The use of public space; when the public is out there, crime is not
- Getting to know your neighbors
- Positive Engagement:"Can I help you find somewhere? You must be lost!"
- Deal with broken windows and graffiti in the alleys
- Programs to help private owners with damage to their property and help with reporting; and help those who cannot afford it. Should be a year round program.  
Convince people that the streets are actually safe.
- Sir Robert Peel's principles of policing: The police are the public and the public are the police.
- We make an effort to get to know our neighbors, and encourage them to report crimes.
- Improve traffic safety: Speeding enforcement, create the designated bicycle lanes which have been promised for years. When LRT is built, provide safe bike lanes.
- Transportation safety added to LRT expansion plans
- There is a broken branch hanging on my street, called it in, it's still there
- Infrastructure programs to increase public safety - fix sidewalks and roads, trim trees.
- Need greater bylaw enforcement & education (what you can and cannot report); need an effective complaint number - 311 not always working.
- So how do we reduce things like drug use and break & enters?
  - maybe harm reduction programs and safe injection sites?
- Cora: Bylaw education (what you can and can't report)
- Complaint Reference Numbers--get them when you report!

## **Solutions to Collaboration - group notes**

Successful examples:

- Oliver non-profit day care and the elementary school
- Greater Edmonton Alliance brings citizens, unions, churches and organizations together for a common cause. Were very successful in saving prime agriculture land in Edmonton.
- A smaller scale example --Lawn bowling club collaborates with league and others

What groups should collaborate?

- All levels of government, private sector, school boards, community leagues and other volunteer groups.....
- Community leagues should be empowered to broker these relationships

Developers come in with their own idea; the community needs to define what they need.

Challenge for community leagues: how do we communicate with citizens who are not active in the community? Leagues may be a small group representing a large, diverse group. People have busy lives; they may only get involved when they don't want something in their neighbourhood. If you want community leagues to be involved you need to give them the teeth to have their voices heard.

Are leagues willing to collaborate with the private sector to create more multi-unit developments? It can be a good thing.

Is our government structure adequate for what we need to do? We are designed for growth. Do we need to redefine priorities? Do we need to find new ways for school boards and municipalities to be at the same table? Do we need to work towards neighbourhood sustainability as opposed to a plan?

The police and social services need to be collaborating.

Characteristics of good collaboration:

- Strong relationships
- Includes all levels of governance - school board, city (including Council), province, police, businesses, leagues...
- Takes ownership
- Gives power to the community. Community is front and center.
- Part of government structures-- appropriate structures

## **Solutions to Demographic Imbalances - group notes**

**Isolation of seniors and isolation of immigrants, Solution: Don't isolate seniors in separate buildings; don't put immigrants in one building. Better to design a % of development for different groups, in order to improve communication between groups.**

Lack of cultural diversity, Solution: Tax breaks to ease expense for newcomers.

EFCL is working on solutions to equitable housing for various income groups, and families with children.

Best to have small scale development of 10-12 people.

Housing stock is expensive in desirable mature neighbourhoods or low cost in undesirable mature neighbourhoods. Land speculation happens.

Investors sit on property, waiting for land values to increase.

Solutions:

- Increase taxes on empty lots to encourage movement/development.
- Create a neighbourhood plan and stick to it. Get land owners to follow the plan.

Housing Co-ops are designed to keep communities diverse; most co-ops require a range of income groups.

LRT is taking commuters to core of city, but not enhancing the core. The LRT should have more stops and serve the core.

Summary of solutions:

1. Tax incentives for developing specific types of infill and penalties for stale property
2. Great Neighbourhood Plans that are followed and revisited regularly.
3. Trains are being used as commuter transportation instead of tools for urban density. More stops are needed.

## Solutions to Housing - group notes

-Distribute non-market housing projects throughout the city. Create a moratorium on social non-market housing for communities that have too much.

-Provide incentives and security for families to move in.

-Ensure availability of some low-rent dwellings throughout the city, and availability of services throughout the city. This will allow people to move into communities of choice. Healthy communities have housing for diverse income levels.

-Stop the vicious cycle of non-market housing following concentrated social services, which creates more demand for social services in a concentrated area.

-There has to be a 'living wage' for people who are working - must increase the minimum wage.

-Subsidize people, not developers. No more \$11,000,000 for a developer.

-Housing that is affordable should be small in scale, scattered, and services should come to the people. Need an updated, 21<sup>st</sup> century housing/service policy. No more giant ghettos!

-Sustainable communities help "troubled" people. They have mixed demographics, diversity of housing, income, services, amenities, transit, and green space. Some neighbourhoods have had investments to achieve this (eg Rosedale, Whyte Ave area).

-Stop catering to Nimbyism and don't perpetuate it.

- Stop concentrating poverty, transitional and rental housing.
- Use Habitat for Humanity model.
- Developers need to stick with Neighbourhood Plans. No spot zoning or using direct control to override zoning bylaw.

## **Solution to Schools-** group notes

### Group 1: Schools & Collaboration

#### Collaboration:

There must be collaboration of School Boards, the City, parents, community members, & Alberta Education to keep schools in the community and keep communities vital/livable.

Everyone must be together; plan "holistically". At present the city plans badly and sprawls, and builds adult only infill in the core.

Province makes School Boards build schools out in the suburbs. Everyone needs to be transparent and plan differently together.

City policies and school board policies need to change simultaneously in order to revitalize core (central) neighbourhoods. For instance, the proposed Transit Oriented Development Guidelines suggests there be no schools within 400m of an LRT station. However, we need schools to keep neighbourhoods vibrant. The opposite policy should be implemented.

#### Schools in core(central) neighbourhoods:

There should be a plan to maintain a certain number of schools in the core so lower income people have good schools, not 'poor' schools.

Principle: City kids deserve to walk to good schools in their own neighbourhood.

Neighbourhoods go through life cycles. When original owners are seniors, the child population is the lowest, but over time the child population will rise again to some degree. Redevelopments will also change the number of future students. Plan for the future students too.

The number of future students depends of housing types. Assess what future housing types are needed.

NEW IDEA. Recognize the values and cultures in the core neighbourhoods. Develop specialty programs based on the values, culture and rich diversity. Keep specialty programs in the core so that students from central neighbourhoods have a community school that happens to be a specialty program. It could draw higher income students and families from the suburbs.

The new idea is to put special programs into core schools WITHOUT the regular program besides, and let that be the community school program to which the students adapt, and which must also adapt to the students.

Currently, the EPSB puts the regular program in alongside a special program, markets the daylights out of the special program citywide, but does not allow the regular program to market beyond the catchment area. Then when the

regular program falters, it becomes a great reason to say the community can't fill the school so it should close.

JH Picard School could draw on values, culture and resources of the local area. The existing French Immersion program could collaborate with existing arts and theatre groups in the Whyte Ave area. They could fund-raise for renovations. The supportive community and resources for such a program are already in existence. This makes more sense than moving the school to where the school board needs to build a new school, and the city needs to build a theatre, library, fields, without the support of an existing community. Keep the assets of the existing schools and community.

Maintain Complete Communities:

Many of the mature neighbourhoods are complete communities- let's keep them complete. There are schools within a dense housing area with supports, services, and commercial. Keep the school; keep a complete community so as not to neglect people who are not wealthy.

Make every school the best school it can be, not a competition between schools.

Keep schools as public assets.

## Group 2: Schools

Problems

-Closing a school in a neighborhood is a death knell for that community. Families leave, new families stay away, community is branded as being an undesirable place to live.

-School Closure reviews are hard on local citizens and poor advertising for the neighborhood. Repeated school closure reviews are extremely demoralizing for local citizens and highly damaging for the reputation of the community.

-School buildings are being let go - province isn't providing enough money for renovations.

-City council/school boards/provincial government aren't working together, mapping out a strategy for schools.

-Environmental and infrastructure costs associated with urban sprawl - constantly chews up more farmland, requires more infrastructure, including schools.

-Boarded up, unused schools are eyesores in the area and negative advertisements for the community.

Solutions

-School Boards need to repair and upgrade older schools.

-Building a new school, from time to time, in an older community would be a big confidence booster.

-Government should consider providing tax breaks for families with children in older neighborhoods.

-School boards should rent out vacant space to other users, particularly those that provide services to the local community.

#### Issues Requiring Research

- What are the funding models used to finance schools?
- Can a school board construct a new building on an old site? Is anything stopping them?
- Is it legal for housing complexes to ban children? Should governments allow these types of complexes? Should they allow them near schools?
- What is stopping unit owners from fencing off common yard space in condominium developments? Is it illegal? Do they simply need the agreement of the other condo owners?
- Can a literature review be done on actions other communities have taken to prevent or reduce school closures?

### **Summary of Solutions, reported to large group:**

#### **Public Safety**

- Increase public use of public spaces
- Target hardening (crime prevention through environmental design)
- Social programming (graffiti removal, harm reduction)
- Increased Traffic Safety via speed enforcement, & provision of bike lanes
- Infrastructure repair - broken window theory - people will care for things that are beautiful and well maintained.

#### **Collaboration**

- Community front and centre
- Relationships are key (get to know people, trustees...)
- Appropriate government structure; do changes need to be made?
- Have councillors involved
- Taking ownership of things that are happening in our own communities
- Incorporate all levels of government, and developers---communication

#### **Demographic Changes**

- Tax incentives for developing attractive infill for all age groups and incomes
- Penalties for developers who stall on sites
- Neighborhood plans that are developed and followed up on (we do have ARPs, but they're old and haven't been followed up on)
- Train/transit system with lots of stops for local community use, not just commuter use

#### **Schools**

- Main point made was it is time to start investing in school infrastructure in older schools just like the city is showing their faith

investing in streets etc in older communities. People are getting tired/turned-away by the school closures

- Governmental levels working together to see investment put into these older neighborhoods and their schools
- Tax breaks for families moving into older neighborhoods
- In term of city and school board long-term plans, can they build a school on an old site? what's preventing? what funding models are available? why is the city allowing child-free developments?

## **Schools (2)**

### **+Collaboration**

- Recognizing there are certain cultural values that don't develop in the suburbs but do in the core
- Ensure diversity and mixed demographics
- Planning holistically
- Transparency
- City kids deserve to be able to walk to schools in their own neighborhoods
- Put specialties in the inner schools along with regular programs
- +Diverse use
- Instead of having a competition between schools, look to the health and welfare within the communities
- Look at why we have the open boundaries, why we have that competition

-Long term plans, maybe 10 years of busing kids but in the long term busing may not be needed

## **Housing**

- Distribute non-market housing throughout city
- Incentives for families to move in
- low-rent in downtown
- Break cycle of concentrating social services in the core, thus providing social housing in the core, thus creating more demand for social services in the core
- Develop area plans and adhere to them instead of changing the rules
- Provide living wage for people who are working
- Subsidize people, not developers
- Affordable housing should be small in scale, spread-out, non-labeled (non-stigmatized)
- Create communities of choice (eg Rossdale)
- Debate about NIMBYism, don't perpetuate it
- Services should be brought to distributed sites; no more creating giant ghettos

## **Resources**

Who should be at the table to discuss and implement needed changes?

Mayor and City Councillors  
City Manager  
City Planning and Development: Gary Klassen, Manager  
TOD Guidelines team  
City Housing Branch: Walter Trocenko  
Office of Great Neighbourhoods  
City Community Services  
City department that said they would give money to move JH Picard

Alberta Departments, including Housing, Education

All School Boards

Federal Government - Urban Development Agreement (UDA)  
5 year deals among federal, provincial, municipal governments to  
work together on serious place based problems and to engage  
community organizations and local residents in solutions

EFCL  
Community League Districts/Area Councils  
Community Leagues

Residential development companies  
Parking lot land owners  
Safeway site owners

External Planning Consultants, e.g. from Portland  
Chicago Planning Department  
Dan Burden re walkability

Community Response to Urban Disorder (CRUD) 996-4728  
City Office of Traffic Safety  
Neighborhood Watch  
CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) EPS 421-3333  
City Bylaw Enforcement

Churches - eg. St. Faith's Ave Church in AB Ave

Social Housing providers  
Social Workers

### **Follow-up:**

Results of Workshop will be distributed to the Task Force, participants,  
and put on the EFCL website.

Next conversation target date is Wednesday, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

Options for continuing the conversation: Electronic forum on EFCL  
website; initiate your own working group to do research or your own  
conversation group to more fully develop your recommendations.

Michael Phair said the Task Force will consider all input, and will produce a report with recommendations in the fall. Please complete the questionnaire handed out or go to the Task Force website, [www.CommunitySustainability.ca](http://www.CommunitySustainability.ca)

Thank you Alberta Avenue Community League for providing the gathering space.

Thank you all for participating.

**Community Sustainability Workshop Attendees,**  
May 10, 2011

Task Force	Barbara Fung
Task Force	Deanne Patsula
Task Force	Michael Phair
Task Force	Rosalind Smith
Task Force	Tegan Martin-Drysdale
Task Force	Brian Staples
Task Force	Cassandra Haraba
Alberta Avenue	Blake Betteridge
Alberta Avenue	Bruce Shaw
Alberta Avenue	Cris Basualdo
Alberta Avenue	Gerard Forget
Alberta Avenue	Guy Amyotte
Alberta Avenue CL & District G EFCL Planning Comte rep	Cora Shaw
Alberta Avenue CL, President	Karen Mykietka
Argyll	Joann Schneider
Boyle Street	Manon Aubry
Boyle Street	Woon Lam
Boyle Street & District F EFCL Rep.	Alf White
Central McDougall	Warren Champion
Eastwood	Barb Heather
Fulton CL, Communications Director	Scott Davies
Fulton Place	Jim Hawkins
Fulton Place	Sheila Thompson
Fulton Place	Tracy Stewart
Fulton Place CL, President	Gavin Martinson
Fulton Place, VP	Jessica Davies

Glenora CL, VP	Mark Nicoll
Glenwood CL, & District E EFCL Planning Comte rep	Jamie Post
Grovenor	Kelsey Armstrong
Hazeldean	Gabriella Richmond
Highlands	Anne Romanow
Highlands resident & volunteer	Yvette Cioran
Highlands, & District G EFCL Board rep	Christine Bremner
Inglewood	Philip Miller
McCauley	Rob Stack
McCauley	Wendy Aasen
Oliver	Anne Lambert
Oliver	David Howatt
Oliver	Delores Nord
Ritchie	Allan Paquet
Ritchie	Katie Humilde
Ritchie	Monika Trott
Riverdale CL	Donna Koziak
Riverdale CL	Kevin Minaker
SAGE	Roger Laing
Spruce Ave	Elke Siebels
St Faith's Anglican Church (AB Avenue)	Tony Spencer
Strathcona	Geoff Ceilin
Westwood	Lorne Larsen
Westwood	Rob Hauck
	Bev Uibel
EFCL staff	Allan Bolstad
EFCL staff	Bev Zubot
EFCL staff	Val Pachal
EFCL volunteer	Keith Zubot-Gephart