

On July 14, 2011, the EFCL Board approved the following recommendation:

Recommendation:

EFCL suggest to the City that a definition of family-oriented housing include the following criteria:

- *Adequate number of bedrooms*
- *Adequate number of bathrooms*
- *Adequately sized private outdoor amenity space*
- *Secure fencing or other forms of enclosure of private amenity spaces*
- *Adequately sized outdoor play area*
- *Visual, audio and physical access to play area from the dwelling unit*
- *Superior sound proofing*
- *Adequate bulk storage*
- *On site laundry facilities*

Rational:

The EFCL Planning Committee and Board examined the existing Zoning Bylaw definition of a Family-Oriented Dwelling and concluded that it was inadequate. The definition specifies that the family oriented dwellings should be no higher than 3 storeys, have on average at least 2.25 bedrooms, and have direct access to a ground level amenity space. Using this definition, only small scale housing, or the first 2 or 3 floors of large scale housing could be 'family-oriented'. Furthermore, the definition does not include elements which are deemed essential, based upon a review of the notes from the Family Friendly Multi-Unit Housing Workshop, the literature on family housing, and the opinions of the EFCL Planning Committee and Board of Directors.

There is general agreement that the following elements are essential in defining family housing:

Adequate number of bedrooms: The most popular minimum number of bedrooms for families with children is 3 bedrooms, one for the adult(s), one for the girls and one for the boys. However, two bedroom dwellings are adequate for one child families. Thus there should be a mix of 2 bedroom and 3 or more bedroom units.

Adequate number of bathrooms: The market research indicates that 1.5 bathrooms is the minimum number of bathrooms sought by families, particularly if they are seeking 3 or more bedrooms.

Adequately sized private outdoor amenity space: An amenity area is space provided for the active or passive recreation and enjoyment of occupants of a dwelling. The private outdoor amenity space for families should be able to accommodate the whole family in a passive activity such as sitting and eating, as well as active activities for toddlers. The space should also be suitable for tending plants and minor household maintenance. If there is no secure and accessible shared, i.e. common amenity space, the private amenity space would need to be larger to accommodate the recreation activities of children. Since EFCL's Family Housing Workshop, EFCL has been using the following criteria as a guide for the minimum private outdoor amenity space required by families:

- a) 7.5 m² when common outdoor amenity space is provided
- b) 15 m² when the dwelling is at ground level and common amenity space is provided (the assumption is that larger units will be placed on the ground level)
- c) 30 m² when no common amenity space is provided.

Secure fencing or other forms of enclosure of private amenity space: Enclosures are important for the safety and security of children, particularly toddlers and preschoolers. Enclosures also help maximize privacy of individual dwelling units.

Adequately sized outdoor play area: Children of all ages should have easy access to appropriately sized, located, designed and landscaped outdoor play areas suited to their developmental and play needs. Ideally the size of the play area would depend upon the number of children sharing the space and their ages. However, this becomes difficult given the inability to predict the number of children and their ages. The Vancouver Guidelines specify that preschool play space should be a minimum of 50 m², and the total play area for all ages should range in size from 130 m² to 180 m². The Vancouver Guidelines suggest the play space be adjusted depending on the number of non-master bedrooms. They suggest 1.0 m² per non-master bedroom for pre-school play space, and 1.5 m² per non-master bedroom for older children. To date, EFCL has taken a very modest approach, and requested that family oriented buildings have a minimum 50 m² of common outdoor ground level amenity space. This is the minimum play space required for preschoolers, the age group needing adult supervision during play. Perhaps the minimum outdoor play area should be 130 m² to 180 m² to accommodate all age groups. The EFCL Planning Committee hopes to work with City Administration on Edmonton's criteria of adequate play space in multi-unit family-oriented dwellings.

Visual, audio and physical access to the outdoor play area: Guidelines of other cities emphasized the importance of designing family dwelling so that adults can supervise the play

area from their private dwellings. This is also the guideline most strongly supported by the developer at the EFCL Housing Workshop. In Vancouver, Portland and London, England, play areas in courtyards are highly recommended, but there are other possibilities. For instance, the play area may be viewed from a private balcony, and direct access is attained via a common stairway overlooking the play area.

Superior sound-proofing: To protect the privacy of family households, and the comfort of their neighbours, individual dwellings should have superior sound-proofing when abutting other dwelling units. The Vancouver Guidelines report that, "Research indicates that satisfaction with high-density living is very dependent on visual and acoustic privacy. Lack of privacy will increase a person's perception of crowding". Indeed, the noise from children next door may drive people to seeking adult-only residences.

Adequate bulk storage: The Guidelines from other cities, and even our Municipal Development Plan, states that adequate bulk storage for strollers and other bulk items is necessary for family housing. The Vancouver Guidelines specify a minimum of 2.8m² of secure bulk storage in each dwelling unit or near the entrance to the building, in addition to secure bicycle storage near the entrance.

On-site laundry facilities: All the Family Housing Design Guidelines emphasize the importance of having easy access to laundry facilities. These may be in the unit or be shared. However, in order to be able to do the household laundry and supervise young children, it is important for the laundry facilities to be in the suite. Thus it is important for households with young children to have the option of hooking up laundry appliances. (Laundry hook-ups in the suite are also important for seniors who have mobility challenges.)

Other considerations: The child/family friendly guidelines developed by other cities point to numerous features important to family housing, however, the above elements are deemed by EFCL to be essential, and can be easily defined in the Zoning Bylaw definition of Family-Oriented Dwellings.

However, EFCL recognizes other important considerations.

- EFCL believes that the grouping of family-oriented dwellings is important. There should be a critical mass of family-oriented dwellings to support child-oriented amenities and provide opportunities to build friendships amongst the children and their parents.

- On the other hand, the number of units sharing an entrance, security access and common amenities should also have an upper limit. This is strongly emphasized in some of the Guidelines of other cities. It is very important for security and community building reasons that the grouping be small enough for everyone to get to know each other.
- Indoor common amenity space is important in instances where dwelling units are relatively small, given our winter climate. Some Guidelines from other cities suggest indoor common amenity space be large enough for residents to meet. Other Guidelines caution that common indoor amenity space must be accompanied by an excellent management model, and the amenity space should not duplicate neighbourhood amenities.
- Pet friendly dwellings are critical for those families who consider their pets as part of their family. Children and seniors are particularly attached to their pets.
- There needs to be a variety of family housing to accommodate a variety of family types, including intergenerational families.

These are all factors to consider when defining Family-Oriented Dwellings and when creating policies to encourage family friendly housing.

For additional information please see:

- [April 2011 draft of EFCL's Child/Family Friendly Housing Guidelines](#)
- [Literature Resources](#)