

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aging in Place: Promising Practices for Municipalities

PURPOSE

The *purpose of this report is to provide City Council with "sufficient information on Aging in Place principles and promising practices, and how it will impact new and infill community planning."* This report does not address service delivery considerations.

A basic definition of what is meant by 'Aging in Place' is "simply a matter of providing the opportunity for people to remain in their home or neighbourhood as long as they are interested and able to." As described in *Aging in Place: A Tool Kit for Local Governments* prepared by M. Scott Ball for the Community Housing Resource Centre:

"Aging in Place is a tool designed to help local governments plan and prepare for their aging populations... Most recommended changes in neighbourhood or community design are simple 'smarter' alternatives to conventional auto dependent development patterns. While necessary to support older adults, these changes enhance the quality of life for citizens of all ages and abilities."

Many of the recommended promising planning and practices are already reflected to some degree in the City of Edmonton's Smart Choices Checklist, which is an important tool in building complete 'life cycle' or intergenerational communities.

BACKGROUND

The December 2007 report *Aging in Place: A Neighbourhood Strategy* by Community Services Consulting Ltd. made recommendations to the City on implementing an Aging in Place strategy to meet the needs of the city's growing seniors population. The report recommends that the City's role in implementing a neighbourhood strategy include research, facilitation, advocacy, awareness building and provision of expertise.

Before the City moves forward on these recommendations research is needed into Aging in Place practices from a land use and development perspective, and how these practices will impact both new and infill community planning. The purpose of the current study initiative *Aging in Place: Promising Practices for Municipalities* is:

"To begin articulating potential roles and responsibilities for the Municipality. The report would provide some strategies for integration of Aging in Place principles for new and infill community planning from a physical development perspective."

Findings from research conducted for this report reveal that a number of North American cities have adopted planning principles and practices that support development and redevelopment of communities that are livable and sustainable. These communities are referred to by a number of terms including 'complete communities', 'intergenerational communities', 'sustainable communities', and 'livable communities'. The planning principles used to create these communities are considered to be universal as they benefit all abilities and age groups, not only seniors.

The City of Edmonton has made a good start in setting new policy directions through its new City Vision and more recently its new *Municipal Development Plan* (MDP) 'The Way We Grow' and *Transportation Master Plan* (TMP) 'The Way We Move'. Particularly relevant to Aging in Place neighbourhoods is Section 3 of the MDP which speaks

to creating 'Complete, Healthy and Livable Communities'. The desired outcome of the new policy is best summarized by the following quote:

"...provides for attractive and well served communities with an emphasis on compactness and walkability, active transportation, higher densities related to transit, integrated and mixed uses with proximity and access to daily needs and environmentally friendly buildings."

Other City plans, studies and initiatives that address elder-friendly neighbourhood design speak to the need for housing choice and affordability, mixed use, improved mobility, safe and accessible community parks and facilities, visitability and the need for community gathering places for social interaction include:

- City of Edmonton Urban Parks Management Plan, 2006
- Edmonton Cornerstones Plan 2006-2010
- Edmonton Zoning Bylaw Amendment to Increase the Opportunity for Secondary, Garage and Garden Suites, Bylaw 15036 (underway)
- Residential Infill Guidelines: A Manual of Planning and Design Guidelines for Residential Infill for Mature Neighbourhoods, Final Report, November 5, 2008
- Walkability Strategy (underway- for completion spring 2009), Stantec Consulting
- Sidewalk Strategy (for Council approval February 2009)
- New Neighbourhood Design Guidelines (for completion March 2009)

METHODOLOGY

The three step methodology undertaken by project consultant Armin A. Preiksaitis & Associates Ltd. can be briefly described as follows:

Literature Review

A literature review related to Aging in Place practices and strategies was completed. Relevant reports include those available from the City of Edmonton, the World Health Organization, examples cited in the *Aging in Place: A Neighbourhood Strategy* report, and others. In addition to web research, we will also contact Community Services Consulting Ltd. and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for leads on best practices for municipalities. This background research was an important stepping stone to developing a questionnaire to survey promising practices in other cities. Three documents that were particularly helpful in providing a framework and informing this study were:

- *Checklist of Essential Features of Age-friendly Cities*, World Health Organization, 2007.
- *Aging in Place: A Toolkit for Local Governments*, prepared for the Community Housing Resource Centre by M. Scott Ball.
- *Age-Sensitive Development* by David Salvesen and Philip Hervey, Urban Land, Urban Land Institute, February 2005.

Learning from Other Cities

A survey was developed to identify best municipal practices and approaches to creating Aging in Place communities through infill planning and development. Twelve North American municipalities were surveyed with responses re-

ceived from Calgary, Alberta; Victoria, BC; Winnipeg and Portage la Prairie, Manitoba; Ottawa, Ontario; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Minneapolis and St. Louis Park, Minnesota; and Kensington-Wheaton, Maryland.

Roundtables with Local Experts, Stakeholders and Developers

Two roundtables were held with 17 local experts, stakeholders and developers knowledgeable in age-friendly planning and developments trends and strategies. The list of invited participants was developed and reviewed with Community Services Department.

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings have been organized around eight (8) planning principles that provide promising practices to support the development and redevelopment of Aging in Place communities.

Principle #1 – Diversify the Housing Stock Available for Seniors

As people age their needs, lifestyles and abilities often changes. To facilitate Aging in Place, communities require a variety of housing options to meet the changing needs and preferences of seniors. Housing choices would ideally cover the entire continuum from independent to supportive living - single detached homes, secondary suites, rental apartments, condos, townhomes, assisted living and continuing care facilities. Related to this are housing modification programs to retrofit homes, as well as alternative living arrangements such as house-sharing and co-housing.

Concerns and suggestions made by roundtables participants included the need for intergenerational housing, need for elevators in adult-only buildings, concern over fire safety in seniors buildings, retrofitting existing homes, need for FlexHousing and universal design in new housing construction, and relaxing parking standards for development of assisted care facilities.

Although amendments have recently been made to the *Edmonton Zoning Bylaw* to facilitate the construction of secondary suites, certain housing types suited to seniors (eg. co-housing) are currently not recognized in the Zoning Bylaw. The process for getting parking variances for seniors' accommodation, particularly assisted care facilities, could also be streamlined.

Principle #2 – Promote Mixed Use Development

Mixed use refers to the integration of residential, commercial and institutional land uses into a neighbourhood, building or complex. This mix of uses facilitates Aging in Place because it allows frequently-used shops and services to be located within the neighbourhood, ideally within walking distance of where seniors live. The closer these shops and services are to housing, the more livable and sustainable the neighbourhood. This allows seniors to be more independent and less auto dependent.

Council recently facilitated the development of mixed use urban villages such as Century Park, Strathearn Heights Redevelopment, Station Pointe and the Downtown North Edge, where higher density residential forms for a range of age and income groups will be able to live in close proximity to shops, services and transit.

Principle #3 – Locate Seniors Housing Close to Facilities and Services

Proximity to services refers to locating new or infill seniors development within public transit access or walking distance to larger institutional and commercial services not traditionally located in neighbourhoods. General Guideline #9 in 'Planning and Design Guidelines for Residential Infill in Mature Neighbourhoods' states "*Residential Infill is encouraged on sites in proximity to LRT stations, high frequency transit corridors, and shopping centres.*"

Roundtable participants felt that older shopping centres with grocery stores such as Meadowlark, Bonnie Doon and Westmount provide good locations for seniors housing. Integration of publicly accessible facilities such as libraries, seniors drop in centres, and community league halls were also important locational considerations.

Principle #4 – Provide for Barrier Free Design and Visitability in Buildings

Buildings and the access to them can often create significant barriers for seniors and persons with disabilities or reduced functional capacity. Accessible or barrier free design is needed in both public and private buildings and entranceways. This is sometimes referred to as visitability which has three accessibility features - persons of all abilities must be able to get to the door, get through the door and be able to use the washroom.

Roundtable participants felt that the City needed to encourage the development industry to incorporate universal design into new building construction. The availability and accessibility of public washrooms was also noted as a potential problem for seniors. Edmonton currently has policies and regulations that require accessibility and barrier-free design in all public buildings. In recent years, the City Administration and Council have started requiring the inclusion of barrier free policies and guidelines in amendments to area redevelopment plans and regulations to rezoning applications, particularly site specific Direct Control provisions.

Principle #5 – Provide for Public Transit that Recognizes the Needs of Seniors

In order to have an effective Aging in Place strategy, seniors need to remain independent and a large contributing factor to independence is mobility. However, it is recognized that as people age their functional capacity is reduced and mobility become a major barrier to Aging in Place. To address this barrier, it is important that a variety of safe and convenient transportation options are made available and accessible to seniors. These transportation options can include automobiles, public transit, DATS, shuttle buses, private transportation services or walking.

Current gaps identified in transportation options for seniors related to suburban neighbourhoods with high seniors populations being underserved by public transit, as well as the placement of bus stops and shelters and the availability of heated bus stops and seating. Although many age friendly improvements have recently been implemented within Edmonton Transit (i.e low floor buses, specific bus routes for seniors and special transit stops upon request) it was noted in the focus groups that many of these features are not well-known. Public transit can also be an issue for those providing care to seniors in suburban areas. Pedestrian connections between residential areas and commercial and institutional facilities are not always present in Edmonton neighbourhoods. The new *Transportation Master Plan* recognizes that a continuum of connected and integrated transportation options are necessary to allow seniors to age in place.

Principle #6 – Encourage Walkability by Providing an Attractive Pedestrian Environment and Navigation

Walking is recognized as a favored mode of transportation for many older individuals. Additionally, walking is known to have numerous health and social benefits. To encourage and facilitate walking, pedestrian environments must be appealing to users and designed to accommodate a variety of ability levels. Age-friendly pedestrian environments share the same features as walkable environments and should feature rest areas and benches, appropriate sidewalk width and surface materials, curb cuts, appropriate traffic light timing, grid patterned streets to create direct routes to destinations and landscaping. To aid way finding, seniors also benefit from signage that is easy to read and understand.

In a number of older Edmonton neighbourhoods, pedestrian environments are unsafe for seniors as sidewalks are aging and in need of repair or replacement. Snow removal and storage can also present barriers during winter

months. The new *Transportation Master Plan* addresses the need for more walkable environments in Chapter 6, and Walkability and Sidewalk Strategies are currently being developed.

Principle #7 – Recognize the Needs and Wants of Seniors in the Design and Programming of Outdoor Spaces and Gathering Areas

Older seniors can often feel isolated if they have either mobility restrictions or if there is a limited number of places for social interaction or activities. Cities, as well as private and non-profit organizations, need to plan or provide spaces – both indoor and outdoor - for seniors to gather and share in social and physical activities.

There is a shortage of year round, social spaces for seniors at the neighborhood level. Edmonton's new Urban Parks Management Plan has policies to address the growing demand for smaller park spaces, greenways, linear parks, formal gardens and community gardens. These provide alternatives to the traditional large neighbourhood parks designed to accommodate primary schools and playfields.

Principle #8 – Use CPTED to Enhance Community Safety for Seniors and Others

As seniors age and become more frail and vulnerable, a feeling of safety is very important to their quality of life both at home and in the community. Public spaces and neighbourhoods should use and apply Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidelines in their design to improve safety. These guidelines address features such as having well lit streets, appropriate landscaping and minimizing entrapment spots. It was noted in the roundtable discussions that having seniors reside in a neighbourhood can potentially increase safety as they provide additional "eyes on the street" while many people are at work.

CONCLUSION

1. People over 65 are one of the fastest growing demographic groups in Canada. Statistics Canada data from 2006 reports that 11.9% of Edmonton residents (86,700 people) are over the age of 65.
2. The *Aging in Place: A Neighbourhood Strategy Report* states that:

"Three quarters of the city's seniors (65 and older) own and live in their own homes. Approximately four out of five have paid off the mortgage. Most of the 42,000 Edmontonians over 75 live in a few neighbourhoods in the southeast and northeast of the city, many in houses built in the 1970s or earlier. These older seniors may be reaching the point of having to decide whether to move into a care facility or stay in their homes. It can be assumed that most would prefer to do the latter, and research shows that may be the least cost alternative. However, elderly seniors may not be able to live independently in their homes and remain healthy without considerable help."
3. The same report indicates *"Edmonton residents age 75 and older tend to be clustered in more mature neighbourhoods. While the highest concentration of seniors is in Oliver, this is largely due to the number of senior complexes and assisted living facilities found there. Otherwise, the neighbourhoods of Kensington, Ottewell and Pleasantview have the largest populations of "elderly" seniors. Looking at seniors aged over 65 and older, Ottewell and Kensington again predominate, followed closely by the neighbourhoods of Boyle Street and Inglewood."*
4. Roundtable participants felt that factors such as ethnicity and gender need to be taken into account in planning for elder friendly communities. Generally, women live longer than men and their functional and social needs are often different. Women currently account for 57.3% of Edmonton's 65+ population. The city's ethnic composi-

tion is also changing, which has the potential to result in more intergenerational households. These demographic realities place different demands on housing, services and other amenities.

5. Aging in Place is simply a matter of providing the opportunity for people to remain in their neighbourhoods as long as possible rather than moving to a new community that may better service their needs. Many Edmonton seniors currently live in mature communities where a range of services and amenities already exist while a large number of senior citizens housing complexes are being constructed in suburban greenfield sites.
6. As previously discussed the City of Edmonton is already taking steps through policy adjustments in statutory plans, and community planning principles and practices. Implementation of these planning principles and practices cooperation amongst various City Departments, the public, private and non-profit sector. A pilot or demonstration project within an older neighbourhood can clearly show how these 'elder-friendly' initiatives can be implemented to build stronger and more attractive intergenerational neighbourhoods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Aging in Place planning principles and practices contained in this report be incorporated into the Smart Choices Checklist and be carried forward for inclusion into new or amended area structure and area redevelopment plans.
2. That the Aging in Place planning principles and practices in this report be included in the *New Neighbourhood Design Guidelines* being prepared by the Planning and Development Department.
3. That a review of the *Edmonton Zoning Bylaw* be undertaken to remove any barriers and streamline the process to facilitate development of various forms of seniors housing. These include FlexHousing, co-housing and reduced parking requirements for assisted care facilities to avoid a lengthy and costly DC-2 rezoning process.
4. That the City of Edmonton and other seniors' stakeholders encourage shopping centre owners to complete site audits and recommend improvements to be age friendly. The City may also consider an incentive program, similar to the City's façade improvement program, to encourage shopping centres to make these improvements. Shopping centres such as Meadowlark, Bonnie Doon and Westmount provide opportunities for seniors to gather and walk during winter months, but many have barriers and are not completely elder friendly.
5. That the City develop a pilot or demonstration project as part of its Neighbourhood Reinvestment Program to ensure that improvements to the public realm (roadways, sidewalks, park spaces, bus stops, community facilities) consider visitability and age friendly neighbourhood design.
6. That Council collaborate with the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council to educate and encourage groups like the Urban Development Institute, Edmonton Home Builders, Alberta Association of Architects, Edmonton Design Committee and Alberta Association of Landscape Architects on the importance of incorporating Aging in Place/ age friendly planning principles and practices.