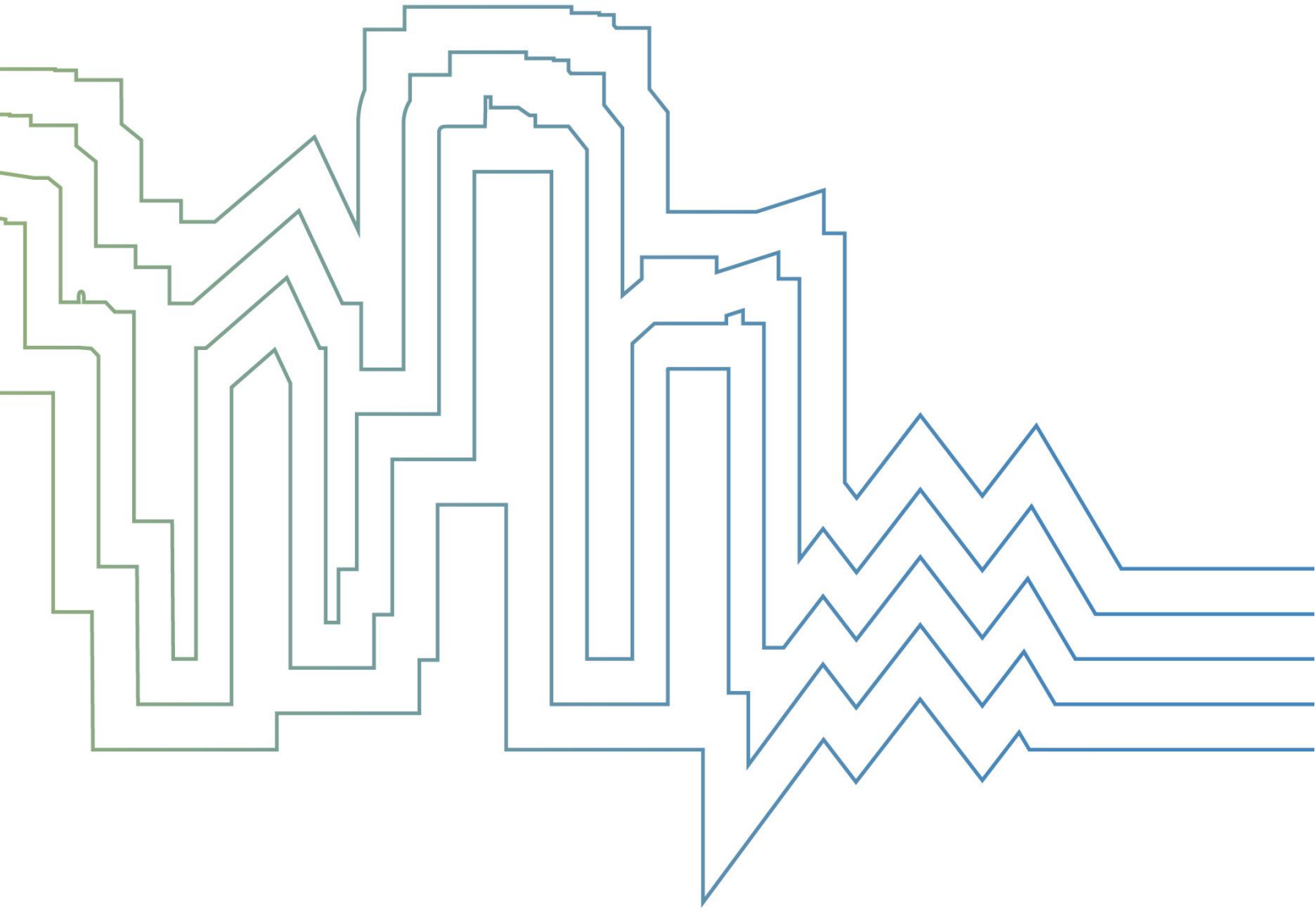
# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ON
# AFFORDABLE HOUSING
# IN EDMONTON

OCTOBER 2019



A report to inform the work of the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*"I don't think it's up to us to say, these people yes, these people no. I don't think that's the impetus behind wanting to know the project beforehand at all. It's more about thinking on a more macro level of city planning -- what is going on and why is this happening? And not in terms of 'this is our community and you are some people who are going to be coming into it' but more as "this is a community that is going to share with whoever is living in this community and how can the community be made better for whoever it is that's living here."*

If given the chance, stable and quality housing can produce positive outcomes to community health and education, and ultimately improve neighbourhood conditions and perceptions. For instance, families that are in unstable housing are more likely to face intergenerational poverty, with external risks such as infestations, food insecurity, overcrowding. In addition, unsafe neighbourhoods that could have detrimental effects on physical and mental health. However, there is still formidable public opposition to providing quality affordable and safe housing to vulnerable populations, as developments that would expand affordable housing stock are seen to pose a risk to the dynamic and safety of the neighbourhood. Reasons for this vary from fear, racism, safety, or more commonly, and concerns around decreased property values. This NIMBY-ism is a complex attitude and its roots are heavily context-dependent.

At present, there is currently a shortage of 22,550 affordable housing units in Edmonton and pre-existing affordable housing is concentrated in specific pockets of the city, with some neighborhoods shouldering the majority of the burden. Having long since advocated for a balanced approach to affordable and supportive housing with an equitable distribution throughout the city, the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (the Federation) welcomed City Council's Executive Committee's decision to pass the recommendations contained within City Policy C601, the City-Wide Affordable Housing Framework. The new framework seeks to address these neighbourhood-level housing imbalances by establishing an aspirational target of 16% affordable housing in every neighbourhood throughout the city. This policy was developed in an effort to decrease the significant housing pressures facing Edmonton's most vulnerable and to broaden the range of housing choice available in all of Edmonton's neighbourhoods.

In order to explore the effects of current public engagement practices on the acceptance of affordable housing in Edmonton, the Edmonton Social Planning Council was tasked in early 2019 to conduct focus groups across the city with Community League members. Below are the research questions, our findings, and recommendations to Community League members, City administration, and affordable housing developers.

1. **What novel approaches can be adopted to reboot a community's way of thinking, helping them to embrace positive change and future opportunity?**

Throughout discussions with Community League members, the single most critical aspect of public engagement was transparency about the use of public input. It is this feature, as outlined in municipal policy and the literature, which makes public engagement distinct from public information sharing. Participants wanted to feel heard early-on in a project and see tangible examples of how their feedback was used, or an explanation of why feedback could not be used. Feeling heard led to feelings of trust, whereas the opposite was true; not feeling heard, or having engagement be conducted as a "checkbox" led to mistrust and skepticism about the engagement process and also the developments themselves. Seeing their input up for consideration has been cited as a successful way for housing developers and providers to engage the public. In order for participants to "feel heard", engagement must be structured as dialogic, iterative, transparent, and relationship-based.

Each neighbourhood has a different dynamic, and this should be considered when deciding upon what type of solutions work best with regards to embracing the development of affordable housing and future opportunities. Conventional approaches to educating the masses through experts may be inappropriate or insufficient, because it fails to consider other factors such as the neighbourhood's current social context and the ideologies that the community holds. For instance, community discussion should also focus on the realities of property values and impacts on quality of life when the site is established and running.

Greater awareness of housing as a human right is currently missing from the discourse among the public, and building this awareness would increase buy-in and support for affordable housing development. While the right to adequate housing has been enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights since 1948 (United Nations, n.d.), its translation into domestic policy has been slow. Only recently has Canada's National Housing Strategy been launched, which has intentionally taken a human rights-based lens. This lens outlines that every Canadian has the right to adequate housing. The plan is grounded in the principles of inclusion, accountability, participation, and non-discrimination. There is evidence from this study that a human rights-based approach is being adopted by developers, but gaps exist in policy that prevents its full implementation.

Evidence from focus groups suggests that there currently exist stereotypes of the poor that are exhibited by gatekeeping and "othering". Negative stereotypes of tenants may or may not be held by members within a community, but when they are present, feed into and exacerbate fears related to changing neighbourhood quality and collective identity. These biases are the true root of NIMBYism, and should not be conflated with reasonable concerns residents may have related to urban form and livability. Public engagement is in many cases, the first interaction between members of the public and those with lived experience of poverty. In cases where neighbourhood residents hold discriminatory or bigoted views of those living with low-income, public engagement on affordable housing development may need to tap into the broader anti-poverty movement to change these perceptions. Community League members, and all neighborhood organizations, should engage in introspection and explore any unconscious biases to ensure that opposition to developments is rooted in design-related concerns rather than negative stereotypes of new tenants.

2. **How can ensuring early and ongoing engagement with community members positively affect housing outcomes?**

Early and ongoing engagement allows for a dialogue to be created, and facilitates a deeper understanding of affordable housing within a community. It also allows for

more meaningful negotiations, where developers are able to gather feedback and reflect it back to the community, who in turn reciprocate the process. Community League members unanimously wanted notification and engagement about site developments as early as possible. Continuous delaying of public engagement may lead to members of the public being discordant and more likely to mobilize in opposition to a development.

When integrating mixed housing or redevelopment, a great deal of caution must be considered. Although revitalization leads to improvement in property housing, safety, and can spur economic development, it may not necessarily enhance the lives of its marginalized tenants and may lead to paradoxical impacts. Building relationships and a common understanding between groups will take time, and early and ongoing engagement is critical to facilitate this. The study found that part of the reason why communities oppose housing in their neighbourhood is the lack of understanding that it is not just a symptom of other issues in the community like low wage, recidivism, and high costs of health care, but that it is also a root cause of all these subsequent problems. Simply explaining that housing affordability is a problem that is detrimental to vulnerable populations is not enough, even when evidenced with facts and statistics. By taking a human rights-based approach to housing, members of the public can begin to see how NIMBY-ism leads to harm for marginalized communities. This highlights the need for not just ongoing engagement, but also support for integration of affordable housing tenants even after a development is completed.

3. **How can we balance the current fabric of a neighbourhood with the need to achieve diversity in housing type?**

Change is an inherently uncomfortable process. The composition of the neighborhood in which residents live is connected to the residents' sense of identity, and new developments may be viewed as a threat. Resistance to the construction of affordable housing are also rooted in the belief that building such sites will ultimately decrease the values of the property in the neighbourhood. However, there are various ways to mitigate the devaluation of their property, chiefly by designing and developing quality affordable housing to match neighbourhood conditions. Such design considerations should result in little to no impact on the property value of houses near the site. Participants also voiced concerns about how affordable housing developments would affect amenities and the social fabric of neighbourhoods. Especially of importance were the preservation of green spaces, which were important for well-being and community building. Parents were also concerned with the distribution of schools compared to the number of children in a neighbourhood.

According to the literature, affordable housing developers, and the human rights-based approach to housing, implementation should not be solely about protecting the property values of those who have higher income, as it would discourage low-income residents from feeling at home with their housing. When these existing community residents do not have the necessary information with regards to specific policies and its benefits, they end up relying on general stereotypes and misconceptions that further exacerbates NIMBY attitudes on affordable housing, and reliance on these biases can intensify social exclusion and segregation. When that happens, power is further centralized into an already entitled group, further focusing on individual self-interest rather than the betterment of the community. Therefore, in the interest of helping vulnerable Edmontonians without access to adequate and safe housing, all parties should be prepared to compromise.

4. **Are there context-specific design concessions that affect people's way of life that can be implemented to improve community support for affordable developments?**

Participants in focus groups revealed that negative past experiences with public engagement will adversely affect affordable housing tenants. The frustration and resentment related to a housing development may be transferred to the new residents. Participants offered potential solutions, such as incorporating changes into the built form. This could include a community room, green spaces, or something as simple as outdoor mailboxes. However, developers and providers suggested that these solutions may not be uniformly appropriate according to budget, and in some cases, new tenants

require additional levels of security where it would not be possible to incorporate public or community spaces.

In most cases, design-specific changes can only go so far. A more effective solution would be to work with communities to separate prejudices and biases from concerns about built form and land use. There is potential for the City of Edmonton to play a larger role in advocacy in reducing the stigmatization faced by those living in poverty. Numerous stakeholders felt that there was a lack of policy support to guide public engagement on affordable housing, especially in regards to elevating the voices of those with lived experience.

To increase acceptance of affordable housing and to improve the public engagement process, this report makes the following recommendations:

- Create a campaign to increase awareness of what affordable housing is. A successful campaign will also draw ties to the human rights-based approach to housing so that members of the public see how NIMBY-ism leads to harm of the most vulnerable. Also use unconventional messengers, such as religious leaders, conservative politicians, and those with lived experience of affordable housing.
- Break down silos between members of the public, developers, and City administration. Accomplish this by having ongoing, dialogic engagement, where engagement begins early to allow for context-specific concerns to be fully explored with each engagement.
- Restructure public engagement to have clear expectation setting as the first step of the process, where community members, developers, and administration outline what are the desired outcomes of engagement, and how engagement will be conducted.
- Create a guiding set of principles to anchor public engagement processes in a human rights-based approach to housing. Due to the high sensitivity of public engagement to the specific project and neighborhood, it is not appropriate to develop rigid policies.
- Increase support for community building and integration between new housing tenants and pre-existing members of the community. While design-specific approaches such as building community rooms or allocating outdoor green spaces may be one solution, this may be expensive and may impose upon other needs that are specific to vulnerable populations. Rather, community building programs may be more effective, especially after a development is completed.
- Employ non-traditional engagement formats, as preferences vary widely accordingly to the individual. Walking tours of successful affordable housing developments were cited as successful tools for increasing understanding and acceptance of developments. Neighborhood walkthroughs given to developers and administration may help to highlight the experiential aspects of a neighborhood and allow for innovative ways of hearing community feedback.

# INTRODUCTION

Adequate and safe housing has positive benefits to individuals and communities.

Rejecting opportunities for stable housing can have detrimental effects on the individuals and families who need it the most. If given the chance, stable and quality housing can produce positive outcomes to community health and education and can ultimately improve neighbourhood conditions and perceptions (Mueller & Tighe, 2007). For instance, families that are in unstable housing have children who perform poorly at school, have higher drop-out rates, and consequently would be unable to acquire jobs that pay well enough to remove them from social assistance. Additionally, when families are kept in unstable housing, they are faced with external risks such as infestations, food insecurity, overcrowding, and unsafe neighbourhoods that could detrimentally affect their physical and mental health. This would indirectly result in poor academic performance. Studies have found that if children are not reared in quality and safe housing, they can develop and maintain health issues, both physical and mental, as they age (Seagart, 2003; Marsh, Gordon, Heslop, & Pantazis, 2000; as cited in Mueller and Tighe, 2007). Unstable housing can also exacerbate mental health problems, stress, and anxiety as families navigate their lives which may be filled with uncertainty.

However, even with these effects in mind, there is still formidable opposition to providing quality affordable housing to vulnerable populations. Embracing positive change and future opportunities in an established community can make it difficult to adopt practices and developments that pose a risk to the dynamic and safety of the neighbourhood. Reasons vary from fear, racism, safety, or more commonly, property values. There must be a change in attitude and increase in educating service providers with regards to their experiences and how those experiences have affected their lives. Similar to the City of Edmonton, the City of Red Deer (Nielson, 2015) found that there is a great need for the public and stakeholders to be more informed about the lived experiences of individuals who are homeless and available support services in place in the city. Societal attitudes may create barriers and challenges to

affordable housing (Government of Alberta, n.d.). Public opposition to the creation of affordable housing may make it difficult for some communities to increase their supply of this vital resource. Some communities are concerned that the current market can create the risk of discriminatory rental practices, especially towards disadvantaged groups. Similarly, many vulnerable individuals may be denied services or dissuaded from accessing services. If and when people are unable to access important services, it may further exacerbate their existing conditions and further entrench them into a cycle of poverty.

Having long since advocated for a balanced approach to affordable and supportive housing with an equitable distribution throughout the City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (the Federation) welcomed the City Council's Executive Committee's decision to pass the recommendations contained within City Policy C601, the City-Wide Affordable Housing Framework. This policy was engineered in an effort to decrease the significant housing pressures facing Edmonton's most vulnerable and to broaden the range of housing choice available in all of Edmonton's neighbourhoods.

Edmonton currently has a shortage of 22,550 affordable housing units (Edmonton non-profit housing provider working group, 2019). At present, affordable housing in Edmonton is concentrated in specific pockets of the city, with some neighbourhoods shouldering much more of the responsibility than others. The majority of neighbourhoods have an affordable housing ratio of 0 to 5%, whereas some neighbourhoods have more than 30%. The neighbourhood effects of concentrated poverty are well-documented and dramatic, with public and assisted housing units in Edmonton often constructed in ways that have reinforced spatial disparities in the past. However, the new framework seeks to address these neighbourhood level housing imbalances by establishing an aspirational target of 16% affordable housing in every neighbourhood throughout the city.

In the past, there have been complicated fiscal and political realities that have impeded the expansion and dispersal of Edmonton's affordable housing stock and, if not meaningfully addressed, may continue to undermine efforts to securely house Edmonton's most vulnerable. In order to promote the efficacy of this policy, the Federation approached the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) to conduct research on behalf of the Federation, whose ultimate goal is to reduce poverty by improving housing stability in the City of Edmonton.

The intent of this research was to engage with and respond to the context specific variables in Edmonton's many diverse communities and seek to understand how to build acceptance in all communities for increasing their affordable housing stock. As such, the following questions are asked:

1. What novel approaches can be adopted to reboot a community's way of thinking, helping them to embrace positive change and future opportunity?

2. How can ensuring early and ongoing engagement with community members positively affect housing outcomes?

3. How can we balance the current fabric of a neighbourhood with the need to achieve diversity in housing type?

4. Are there context-specific design concessions that affect people's way of life that can be implemented to improve community support for affordable developments?

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) phenomenon is a social response to facilities and sites that are unwanted by existing neighbourhood inhabitants (Schively, 2007). This NIMBY attitude has unfortunately led to major delays and costs for affordable housing developments and even caused projects for vulnerable populations who need it most to be abandoned fully. Opposition to affordable housing often focuses on a perceived connection to affordable housing and issues with safety, property values, crime, and overall decrease of the quality of the neighbourhood (Nguyen, 2005; Schively, 2007). Members of the community also resist based on assumptions about the quality of affordable housing structures and traffic congestion from new residents in the neighbourhood. This phenomenon is complex and is often rooted in individual ideology (such as stereotypes), safety, and their own personal beliefs about the necessity of these sites (Nguyen, 2005; Tighe, 2010). Many of these individuals actually support the idea of increasing the supply and support for affordable housing, however, they reject that idea that this type of housing be built in close proximity to their homes (Tighe, 2010).

There have been various projects in the City of Edmonton that used effective public engagement procedures to combat and dispel this NIMBY attitude. Some of these strategies include adopting consistent communication with the public, integrating input, and disseminating project information to all interested parties. For instance, the Lendrum Housing Consultation Board established by the City guided consultations, interactions with communities, engaged with all affected groups, and mediated issues and problems (Walters, 2018). Forums and open houses were transparent wherein project information was constantly shared with all interested groups and more importantly, incorporated public feedback from the start of the project's design and at all subsequent stages (itstartswithhome.com). The public was also provided information on what the next steps were for the project, further exemplifying the transparency that the development is practicing. Additionally, public engagement acted as a way to educate the public. There was a breakdown of definitions to ensure that participants knew the benefits of the project and how different it is from other types of housing. This can effectively reduce the risk of assumptions about who will be living in the units and how the project can benefit the prospective tenants, as well as the entire neighbourhood. A similar project with the Londonderry neighbourhood yielded similar procedures and results (2016). The Londonderry development is a mixed-income design – meaning it consists of subsidized units, and market rental units. The goal of this kind of development is to help raise equity through market units to help pay for long-term maintenance of the building, and allow individuals and families to remain in their units if their income changes (Crowther, 2017). The project replaced extremely run-down row houses and put forward a high-quality design. This investment and quality of design means that surrounding property values are more likely to increase than decrease. Mixed income housing also increases the likelihood of social integration because neighbourhood stigma for the building is lower and there is greater likelihood of interaction across income types (Kleit, 2001).

Because every community is different, parties involved must consider the climate of beliefs and ideals that they hold. For instance, in a review conducted by Thurber et al. (2018), they found that housing policies that integrate low-income individuals with those who are affluent is not a natural housing pattern. That means that social integration does not occur easily, especially when blending in the needs and values of different groups. During their review, they found that different races have different preferences. White neighbourhoods continue to prefer neighbourhoods that remind them of sameness – whiteness. Meanwhile, racial minorities, like the Black respondents, will decide on a neighbourhood based on the degree of racial prejudice and hostility that is targeted towards them (Krysan, 2002; as cited in Thurber et al., 2018). Although this was done in the United States, it would not be far-fetched to assume that similar patterns can be seen in Canada, especially when

racial prejudice still continues to exist today. Hence, efforts to reduce bias and prejudice are an important step to integration.

Attempts at social integration does not necessarily translate to a successful outcome and there needs to also be a focus on the safety of the housing residents. Racial and class stigma can also be exhibited through higher surveillance and micro-aggressions that have the potential to negatively affect the quality of social life that these prospective residents will experience and may result in further social isolation (Thurber et al., 2018). In a case study conducted by August (2016), the author finds that attempts at revitalization and integration can lead to improvement in housing quality, neighbourhoods and safety. However, the most marginalized individuals are the least likely to experience any positive impact. Although the case study was based on an ill-designed affordable housing that was revitalized, the negative effects were observed. One such outcome was that these housing residents did not feel safer in their new location as they felt more visible and under a lot of surveillance from their neighbours who perceived them as unfit to be in their neighbourhood. Consequently, they felt very little sense of community due to loss of communal space, lack of respect from higher income residents, and micro-aggressions.

Conventional approaches to educating the masses through experts is inappropriate or insufficient because it fails to consider other factors such as the neighbourhood's current social context and the ideologies that the community holds (Plough and Krimsky, 1987, as cited in Schively, 2007). Consistent dialogue between experts and the community can foster consensus with regards to potential risks and benefits to development of the proposed site. For instance, community discussion should also focus on the realities of property values and impacts on quality of life when the site is established and running. Lengthy dialogue with stakeholders is effective and should include discussions with regards to whether the development or project will address a priority to improve the community; that the project is the best solution and explain why; that risks are minimal and mitigated; and that the location of the development is acceptable to all parties involved. Accordingly, when having discussions with the community, it is also important to take into account the types of values that that neighbourhood holds (Frameworks Institute, 2018b). Doing so will allow dialogue to flow in a way that they are able to empathize and support the proposed housing. In a project by the Frameworks Institute (2018b), they found that communication which aligns with the community's belief systems will lead to effective shift in thinking and a greater understanding of the challenges and risks that vulnerable individuals face, including their own safety.

Furthermore, discussion on housing should not only focus on the current community residents, but to also integrate those who will be moving into the neighbourhood. Duke (2009), found that various authors suggest that prospective housing residents be significantly involved and contribute to project plans since they are the ones who are impacted the most. Because they are directly affected, they need to play a large role in assessing, framing, and investigating the challenges in the community to help plan for and implement change (Thurber et al., 2018).

## Strategies

There are various drawbacks to integrating affordable housing to various neighbourhoods in the city. When integrating mixed housing or redevelopment, a great deal of caution must be considered. Although revitalization leads to improvement in property housing, safety, and can spur economic development, it may not necessarily enhance the lives of its marginalized tenants and may lead to paradoxical impacts (August, 2016).

In a review by Thurber et al. (2018), the authors find that although housing residents are spatially integrated, they are still segregated socially. The main reasons include the persistence of stigma and biases from those who have higher income, property management, and authorities. Most of these preconceptions have led to fear and heightened micro-aggressions towards their lower income neighbours. Consequently, property managers

and law enforcement officials heightened their surveillance over these tenants and have led to decreased levels of safety and heightened stress from oversurveillance. Housing residents are also under scrutiny as any type of behavior that may be deemed as non-compliant or any slight complaint against them are immediately used to punish them.

Although social interaction was present, it was among their income groups, not across (Thurber et al., 2018). This has further exacerbated the social segregation that these tenants experience. As mentioned, a study by August (2016) showed that improperly designed social housing have led to detrimental effects to low income tenants. When housing units are clustered together, it lowers the opportunities for interactions (Thurber et al., 2018). Hence, proper dispersal of units will be beneficial socially for these marginalized households; mixing the incomes will also mix the racial composition of neighbourhoods, fostering diversity.

Scattered-site housing is a type of affordability housing program wherein units are built throughout an area rather than clustered in one area of a neighbourhood. Scattered-site housing residents are fairly well-integrated with their neighbours (Kleit, 2001). However, they are no less embedded in their neighbourhood than if they were living in social housing as the lack of interaction is a reflection of an old neighbourhood interaction pattern that would persist no matter where they lived. In order for prospective residents of affordable housing to interact with their neighbours, a high level of dispersal is needed as people living in similar types may interact only among themselves. This can then subsequently decrease social isolation and create a better sense of community.

Some of the strategies proposed by Stein (1992; as cited in Tighe, 2010) include: proactive and early meetings with the community; education and media outreach methods; partnerships with local supporters and advocates of affordable housing; gaining support from political leaders where possible; and open and honest dialogue (Stein, 1992). As each neighbourhood has a different dynamic, this should be considered when figuring out what type of solutions work best with regards to embracing the development of affordable housing and future opportunities. Public opinion theory is based on the idea that individual beliefs and values influence policy attitudes (Tighe, 2012). Case studies conducted by Scally (2013) show that these attitudes towards affordable housing are highly differentiated due to unique contextual circumstances. As mentioned, usual efforts to use statistics and education to disprove myths and fears tend to be ineffective because they fail to address historical and persistent inequalities created by exclusionary actions. The author proposes that one way to overcome these biased perceptions is to provide more information about these housing projects, including its finances, tax contributions, use of municipal services, and potential tenants (p.740).

When the neighbourhood does approve of housing, it is generally because they have a hard time visualizing its effects on their own community, but find it easy to support it when it applies as a general concept (Hankinson, 2018). These households will feel more threatened when there is heightened ambiguity over who will live in the housing units and how they will consequently change their lives. When it gets to that point, homeowners are easily swayed by biases and rumors. However, support for affordable housing may dissipate when these individual neighbourhoods are chosen as the location for housing. According to Hankinson (2018), a balancing of costs and benefits will require a macro-scale institution, in this case the City, to define how much each neighbourhood has to build. The neighbourhood will then be given control over where their share of housing goes in the neighbourhood. Overall, it would be a win-win situation; reduction on NIMBYism and still allowing neighbourhoods to have influence on their community. Although this can work, it is important to assert that ultimately, the housing that will be embedded into the neighbourhood is for those who need it, and those people must be included in the conversation as well.

# Messaging

NIMBY sentiments must be combated in both the individual and policy level through understanding formation of attitudes and public opinion, respectively (Rockne, 2018). As discussed, when people evaluate factual information, it is strongly influenced by their preconceived notions and biases. There is no single approach to opposing NIMBY due to its contextual characteristic. Other factors like the community's political leanings and the effectiveness of endorsers or messengers can affect how to sway neighbourhood attitudes.

In a study by Rockne (2018), the author examined various communication campaigns that were able to garner support for affordable housing. The study found that part of the reason as to why communities oppose housing in their neighbourhood is the lack of understanding that it is not just a symptom of other issues in the community like low wage, recidivism, and high costs of health care, but that it is also a root cause of all these subsequent problems. If people are unable to understand how these housing problems are created, they are less likely to support the cause for equitable housing. It is important to note how this issue has to be framed in order to effectively create support for affordable housing. Simply explaining that housing affordability is a problem that is detrimental to vulnerable populations is not enough, even when evidenced with facts and statistics. It is important to see the bigger picture, not just how the marginalized are affected. Thorough causal explanations of the dynamics of macro-factors will give people a chance to understand the larger context (Frameworks Institute, 2018a). Being able to use specific examples as to how the housing problems were created and maintained will provide the public with a better understanding of the issues and how proposed solutions can be effective. Communication must focus on how "people, advocates, and systems are all major characters – and in which a collective response is needed for a satisfying conclusion" (Frameworks Institute 2018a, p. 8). This includes elaborating on the idea that public policies are a strong driving force in shaping what options and services are available to people and is a key solution to housing. Furthermore, framing the housing problem this way allows the public to view this as a collective issue to be resolved, rather than a personal problem. By specifying and elaborating on these links, the public can understand the root causes of the problem and realize that the impacts of inequities extend to them, not just the marginalized, and see how solutions through changes in public policy can lead to improvement for everyone's lives.

A mixture of factual information and an effective messenger may be a possible way of influencing NIMBY attitudes. Having an aspirational message combined with specific effective solutions, with proof, would be a very beneficial component to communicating the issue of housing (Rockne, 2018). According to a different study by Framework Institute (2018b), messengers must align with the values of the community, or find voices that are unexpected to support these issues. In the study for instance, when looking at who would be an effective messenger to talk about poverty, the researchers found that when they quoted conservative politicians – ones that would be unexpected to support anti-poverty policies – they found that respondents were more moved by poverty messages; increased understanding of poverty, collective efficacy and responsibility; more likely to take action; and had more positive attitudes about benefits. The researchers concluded that the unexpected combination of message and messenger decreased the public's doubts with regards to the government's ability to address poverty, and allowed them to focus on solutions that would be effective in tackling the issue of poverty. Similarly, messengers who have lived experiences are also effective in delivering the issues at hand. By engaging with the individuals who have faced housing challenges, whether in the past or currently, it will give the public an opportunity to see how they have been impacted, what their needs and priorities are, and understand their plight through first-hand accounts (Maytree, 2016). The insights of those with lived experiences can also provide information on other potential success and challenges of any proposed solution to affordable housing. Affordable housing should not only be catered to the residents of the community but also to those who will be living in those units, as they are most affected by it.

When people hear statistical information, there tends to be an expectation from advocates that the numbers will speak for themselves. That may not always be the case and at most times, the public will need to have information presented to them in a way that they can understand, if the ultimate aim is to garner their support for affordable housing. By connecting such numerical information to the public's values to how this has affected people with lived experiences, and explaining thoroughly how everyone works together to make housing a collective issue, then it is possible to influence NIMBY attitudes. One such way for messengers to be effective is their ability to create an emotional impact if paired with the right messenger and the right valence, it is possible to create an effective impact (Rockne, 2018). In the Frameworks Institute (2018a) study, the researchers found that respondents are fully aware and understand that the housing issue does have negative impacts, but they are unaware that having quality housing can lead to an improvement in well-being. Their results showed that when communication is focused on expanding on how policies lead to inequities, it allows the public to see the broader impacts of these policies, and make solutions more credible. Explaining in great detail can help them reduce using "cognitive shortcuts" (p. 11) to simplify issues that are complex. Hence, the researchers suggest that there be an emphasis on the benefits of creating more affordable housing and stop highlighting the negative outcomes. The authors reason that the public is already primed to fatalistic thinking, so their doubts with regard to improving housing outcomes is reinforced when messages are focused on the negatives rather than the solutions.

One of the issues in safety with regards to NIMBY consciousness is that new developments that bring in low-income individuals into their neighbourhood would bring in an increase in crime. This may not always be the case according to a study by Galster, Tatian, Santiago, Pettit, and Smith (2003, as cited in Lens, 2013). The authors examined how prevalence of crime is affected by scattered housing. Initially, consensus from the neighbourhood expected an increase in crime rates, and even a subsequent decrease in property values. However, their results found no discernible impacts from these types of developments on crime rates, nor did they see a decrease in property values. If individuals were more integrated into a neighbourhood rather than be rejected due to internalized perceptions of who they are, it may decrease propensity for crime. Various studies have shown that social isolation and clustering is more associated with crime and victimization as it constrains their activities to a smaller geographic area (Griffiths, and Tita, 2009; Lens, 2013). Furthermore, community efficacy which includes trust, cohesion, and willingness to intervene can limit crime and disorder (Lens, 2013). Hence, a change in attitude about how low-income individuals will bring disorder in their neighbourhood will actually be beneficial to the overall quality of the neighbourhood.

Resistance to the construction of affordable housing are also rooted in the belief that building such sites will ultimately decrease the values of the property in the neighbourhood. However, there are various ways to mitigate the devaluation of their property (Nguyen, 2005). For instance, designing and developing quality affordable housing to match neighbourhood conditions and overall design should have little to no impact on the property value of houses near the site. Cummings and Landis (1993; as cited in Nguyen 2005), examined affordable housing units and its effects on property values and found that homes closer to the units were not negatively affected. Consequently, quality housing combined with good management can even bolster property values. Management that is quick to respond to resident needs and concerns can mitigate these negative effects, if present.

There are a few situations in which property values are lowered. One example is if new developments are located in an already dilapidated neighbourhood, and when affordable housing residents are clustered (Nguyen, 2005; Solano, Ekwaro-Osire, & Tanik, 2009). According to Hankinson (2018), external factors does not necessarily mean property values decrease. If anything, new housing upgrades the neighbourhood as it implies a positive outcome about economic trajectory. Housing that is properly maintained and a quality design can replace blight and depressing vacant sites and subsequently improve surrounding property values and encourage the community residents to renovate units.

According to Duke (2009), implementation should not be about protecting the property values of those who have higher income as it would discourage low income residents from feeling at home with their housing. The author suggests prioritizing the city's "use value" over its "exchange value." Use value refers to how the city's residents communicate, interact, and spend their daily lives; while exchange value refers to "capital generating activities" (pg. 112). Policies with regards to integrating low-income residents into more affluent communities tend to sacrifice the use value of those vulnerable residents and instead protect the exchange value of the higher income households. Designs must then focus on fostering communal spaces and encourage its residents to enhance the livability of their community through councils or forums so that residents have an equal representation in terms of decision making. Shared spaces can also increase their sense of community, further enhancing integration (August, 2016). It is very important that prospective housing residents also feel safe in their neighbourhood to foster and enhance their mental health and ensure proper transition and integration within the community. When the community is healthy and vibrant, affordable housing will not depreciate property values (Nguyen, 2005).

# METHODS

In order to generate practical recommendations, this study used a qualitative descriptive design (Sandelowski, 2000). In order to collect a sample of viewpoints across Edmonton, Community League Members (CLMs) were recruited across the city. Emails were initially sent out to Community League presidents with the plan of having twelve focus groups, one in each of the Federation districts. However, low sign-up rates and logistical challenges led to a reduction in the total number of sessions. This resulted in two Community League districts per focus group. The full schedule may be found in Table 1.

The research team attempted to contact all 159 Community League presidents via telephone. In some cases, Community League presidents may have stepped down or had their phone number changed. The research team followed appropriate action to ameliorate this, such as acquiring more updated information, following up through email, or leaving voicemails. Community League presidents and other members were thus relied upon to spread the word within their respective Community Leagues. How this was done was decided by each respective Community League and included word of mouth, Facebook postings, email, or meeting announcements. The participant information letter was provided to all CLMs upon request.

Focus groups were held at a Community League within either of the two districts to encourage participation. Participants were briefed at the beginning of each session on ethics and consent. Definitions of affordable housing and public engagement were provided and explained so that participants had a common framework. These definitions were derived from City of Edmonton resources, including Bill C601, the City of Edmonton Affordable Housing Framework, and the City's Public Engagement website. Questions were written and displayed to help participants understand the questions and prevent wandering far off topic. They are detailed in Appendix I.

In order to balance the viewpoints of CLMs, focus groups were also held with key experts and stakeholders in affordable housing development. These participants were recruited through the Non-market Housing Provider Working Group (or Shovel Ready), which is a working group convened by the City of Edmonton. A secondary method of recruitment was through the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH), a community-run network of non-market housing providers, frontline service agencies and staff, independent community advocates, and University of Alberta researchers. In cases where participants could not attend these focus groups, members of Shovel Ready or ECOHH were interviewed one-on-one, with the same question schedule as those used in the focus groups.

To ensure that participants and their information were ethically treated, the research team underwent a Secondary Opinion Review. This is a support tool provided through A pRoject Ethics Community Consensus Initiative (ARECCI). While non-profits such as ESPC do not require a formal research ethics review, the ARECCI Ethics Guidelines and Screening Tools allow for on-the-ground screening of research practices. A volunteer ethics reviewer examines each application and walks through the research process step-by-step with the researcher. Recommendations made by the ethics reviewer included simplifying the language of the participant review letter, and reinforcing that the Federation not be provided the raw data (i.e. focus group and interview recordings) to protect participants' anonymity. These recommendations are in line with standard practice and were followed. Participants received an exit survey at the end of the focus groups that collected basic demographic information.

All focus groups were recorded for later transcription to allow for greater accuracy and rigorous cross-examination. A qualitative descriptive lens was used to develop the research questions and frame the study scope. Transcripts were coded in NVIVO 12 using content analysis, as recommended for qualitative descriptive designs (Saldaña and Omasta, 2018).

# RESULTS

The number of participants may be found in Table 1. Focus group length typically took two hours long. The largest focus groups were E/F and I/J. Districts E and F were comprised of the inner city and contains the five neighbourhoods (Queen Mary Park, Central McDougal, McCauley, Downtown, and Alberta Avenue) on which there is currently a moratorium on new affordable housing developments (AHDs). These neighbourhoods have some of the highest percentage of affordable housing in Edmonton (up to 40% in most cases). In contrast, the large number of participants in focus group I/J can be attributed to high levels of engagement of Community Leagues within this district, as according to the experience and expertise of the Federation Community Planning Advisor. Due to low attendance in the first focus group for Districts K/L, a repeat session was performed this time hosted at a separate Community League.

For seniors, low income rates decrease with age, due to a combination of children and youth being financially dependent on their caregivers, and the universal benefits that are available once adults reach the age of 65. For these reasons, low income rates for seniors is much lower at 5.0% in 2016.

Most people who are in low income live well below the poverty line. Figure 5 illustrates how the challenge is greatest for lone parent families with one child; many would have to double their income to rise above low income thresholds. The gap decreased slightly from 2015 to 2016, especially for lone parent families, likely due to the new Canada Child Benefit (CCB) that took effect in mid-2016 (Harding, 2018).

**Table 1. Summary of Focus Groups**

| Date | Participants | # | Location |
|---|---|---|---|
| April 17, 2019 | District C/D | 6 | Delton Community League |
| April 18, 2019 | District A/B | 3 | Calder Community Hall |
| April 25, 2019 | District E/F | 10 | Crestwood Community league |
| April 27, 2019 | District G/H | 3 | Brookview Community League |
| May 2, 2019 | District I/J | 12 | Hazeldean Community League |
| May 4, 2019 | District K/L | 1 | Aspen Gardens Community League |
| July 4, 2019 | ECOHH | 13 | Communitas |
| July 11, 2019 | Shovel Ready | 8 | Edmonton Social Planning Council |
| August 14, 2019 | District K/K (follow-up) | 4 | Leefield Community League |

A summary of demographic information is found below for all participants in Table 2. Of the 35 participants, 31 exit surveys were completed. Four participants had to leave early and were unable to complete the survey. Only aggregated demographic data is available to safeguard participant anonymity. Compared to the general demographics of the City of Edmonton, focus group participants were older, had a higher level of education, and more likely to be female as compared to the general population. The vast majority of participants were also born in Canada.

**Table 2. Results of exit survey (n = 34; 89.7% Response Rate)**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Born in Canada** | |
| Median Age | **55** | *Yes* | 88.0% |
| % Female | 65.7% | *No* | 11.4% |
| | | | |
| **Marital Status** | | **Highest education level completed** | |
| Married | 57.1% | Graduate | 20.0% |
| Single | 8.6% | Undergraduate or College Degree | 45.7% |
| Divorced, Widowed, Separated | 22.9% | University Certificate | 22.9% |
| Other | 8.60% | High School | 8.6% |

# Transparency of Engagement Practices

The single most critical aspect of public engagement is transparency of how community input is used or not used. The use of community input, as outlined in municipal policy and the literature, is what makes public engagement distinct from public information sharing. Participants wanted to feel heard early on in a project and see tangible examples of how their feedback was used, or an explanation of why feedback could not be used. Open and transparent dialogue, where residents' opinions were valued, was referenced in every single focus group, and repeated throughout the session. Below are examples:

"I think it's really nice to see the engagement ongoing as well. So to hear some feedback back saying that while we're aware that we're not running the show, it's good to hear 'We hear from your community and this and this and this.' I think it makes the project feel more collaborative and that's a nice feeling for -- it sort of alleviates some of that 'these people are coming in and building something!'" – District C/G

"So having that conversation really has to have the feedback process involved. There has to be a commitment to staying engaged throughout the entire process. Without that continual engagement, it's just words on a paper, which really have zero value. Especially when it comes to getting something done… And, to me, without being supporting and engaging throughout the whole thing, nothing will ever see fruition or change. And it's very important that the information that's being gathered is being used properly throughout the entire process." – District E/F

"Engagement… it involves giving people the information ahead of time. And then sitting down with them. Having a planned format, and a planned question. And it has to be a big question, not a little question. A big question- an open ended question. And be willing to sit down and listen to what people say, and then to take that and actually use it, or if you can't use it, explain why you can't use it. It drives me crazy what the city does." – District I/J

"Well they were getting a lot of detailed feedback where it was like, 'we really like this idea, but these are the things we don't like about it.' So they were able to kind of tailor different parts of the project to that feedback... and they took that feedback to heart and so most of the community's responses 'we like it like it is, we just want it approved so it's safe' so there wasn't in the end a whole lot of change in the design." – District A/B

"It's a necessity, it's a requirement, but it's typically it's a one-way dialogue it's 'here's a picture' and yes you have the opportunity to put little stick-em signs there but you never ever know whether those stick-ems have any value, or is this a dialogue or it's just a lip service that 'yes we'll take your comments and suggestions.'" – Districts D/H

"The city does information. There is no engagement. They don't listen. The analogy was 'you let me pick my wife, you let me pick what she looks like, but I get to choose the colour of her hair'. So, that's about the way it's gone, and then in our community even after we agreed on the colour of the buildings, they didn't even agree to that and changed it on us." (Districts K/L)

Some participants felt that the Developer and the City are do engagement as a "checkbox," where public engagement was simply being performed as a requirement of zoning or development bylaws. The idea of "ticking a box" came up separately in three focus groups. This is linked intrinsically to the idea of trust, as public information sharing was branded as public engagement in the past. One participant shared, "there's a lot of frustration because with the traditional format, because even when people come out and give opinions and say what they would like to see, that doesn't happen. Like everybody wonders, 'what happened to what we said? We all said we wanted this?' But then they just went and did what they wanted anyway. So there's a lot of mistrust." (District C/G). In some cases, there is outright disbelief as evidenced by, "When we hear 'We're gonna have a discussion about something" more often -- yeah 'we wanna listen to you' I don't think people believe it. I don't wanna say that people are just cynical and

jaded and disillusioned but like... it's the same old" (District A/B). Negative experiences impact the likelihood of individuals participating in future public engagement events. A participant from Districts E/F stated: "You can throw anything at me, and I still will say, 'Well, I've been burned 50 times, why would I want to try now?' And that reality happens sooner to people than for someone like me. All it would take is one time of being misused and then they don't want to engage." Within each focus group, there was a sentiment of frustration and fatigue within Community League members. Many reported being over-engaged and were tired of the lack of transparency behind many affordable housing development decisions. Multiple participants voiced a mistrust of public engagement processes and report that their feedback is not followed or used. In some cases, engagement processes and conflicts over AHD took years, and resulted in little to no resolution.

One way of building trust was to make community members feel listened to. Community members recognize their feedback may not be possible to be implemented in all cases. However, participants wanted developers to make more of an effort at compromise or at least inform residents about why their ideas could not be integrated. This was reflected in quotes such as "I would feel like you're valued. Your time and your ideas are valued. Even if it doesn't go through at least you're being explained to why things 'No sorry, we can't put three garages there because it's not gonna fit' or whatever" (District A/B). Another is to have tangible examples of where community input was received and implemented into a project. This underscores the need for multiple, timely sessions that allow for dialogue and a back and forth between community and other stakeholders. Transparency is also a key trait of positive public engagement sessions. A community member of Districts E/F shared "I know these things are tricky issues, like I get that people are, there's a lot of emotion behind all this, but you have to start from a point of being honest and telling the truth and having an honest discussion about this, otherwise you just shred your own credibility, and you don't get what you're trying to get." Another community member adds "Talk to us like we're people, like we matter. Right? Like we're just not your check with our tax dollars." (Districts K/L). In the case where there is a disagreement, this community member follows up with "I think the best way to follow that is the same you do in a marriage when you and your husband can't agree on something. Right? You negotiate. You sit down, you discuss it, you negotiate. I'm not going to get everything I want, [we're] not going to get everything [we want], but let's meet in the middle."

Compounding feelings of mistrust is the confusion when community members feel misled. "A lot of public engagement sessions… they just kind of throw a lot of information at you without any broader context to what it means, what the definitions are, how they fit in to the city's goals and policies and bylaws, so it creates kind of an animosity where citizens are expecting to be able to give input, from whatever is presented to them, but often that input isn't what the engagement is actually looking for. And then there's a mistrust that comes out of it. So the citizens feel like they're not being heard." (District E/F). Another participant opined, "I think a lot of times there's another vibe or an assumption, maybe unspoken, but the plan's already been made, and the engagement's kind of just a formality. And that really doesn't inspire confidence in the whole process, right, it actually erodes it. So I would expect that whatever does get said is listened to and that it has at least a possibility of having an impact on the final outcome" (Districts I/J). Rather than label session as being public engagement, participants felt that they would rather be told outright if decisions have already been made. "It actually feels like they're wasting your time when they do that. Because they're just informing you. Like, send me a letter if you don't really want my input. Tell me it's a done deal" (District I/J).

Community League members unanimously wanted notification and engagement about site developments as early as possible. "Right away, before the shovels hit the ground certainly" (Districts C/G). In cases where members of the public may become discordant or angry is when public engagement is delayed. "I think where maybe you get to the point where God himself couldn't shut that down is when the City waits too long, and they come when everybody's so angry and so frustrated. And everyone knows it's a waste of their time being there because the decision is made and stuff is already rolling"

(District K/L). Another advantage of early notification is that longer timeframes for engagement create more opportunities for repeated sessions to occur. Timeframes that are too short may lead to community members not feel as though there was sufficient dialogue or transparency. "There was not enough time within those two weeks to answer all the questions that we had. There was a lot of, some questions were answered, some of my questions were answered maybe because I'm the president, but there were also questions that were not answered. So not enough time to be responsive" (Districts E/F).

There was an awareness among Community League members that not all perspectives are included within the Community League membership. "My expectations are, hopefully, is that there actually is some public, initial public consultation with members of the community as a whole, not just a few core people and whatever." "Our Community League board had a lot of questions like how do you decide who's gonna be there, can you look at the community and see what we need, and when will you talk to the community because we can't speak for everybody." (District I/J). Information bottlenecks may occur within Community Leagues, whereby executive Community League members may receive information and not share it widely, be it intentional or otherwise.

# Acceptance of Affordable Housing

In multiple sessions, participants were unclear with the terms "affordable housing" and "Permanent Supportive Housing," even after definitions were given. The term "affordable housing" was reported to elicit a "gut reaction" from participants. "Affordable housing" is also a technical term with a very specific meaning and participants often associated it with low-cost market housing, as opposed to subsidized housing. "There's a large proportion of people in our neighbourhood who have sunk nearly a million dollars in their houses, and the moment they see the word affordable, you're gonna lose them. So I don't know how you overcome that. I guess that's a challenge because I think a lot of the neighbourhoods are… people just don't want it. It's finding a way to go beyond that word and engaging them" (District I/J). Another member of District I/J shared: "I'm having a little bit of confusion because there's this term affordable housing development, and to me development is a huge swathe of land that you put all the houses in at once." Participants felt that a rebranding to something "sexy" (used in two sessions) would greatly help build public support for affordable housing.

Perspectives on the impact of affordable housing varied widely and the specific concerns held by neighbourhood residents is dependent on location. There were the already well-documented concerns, such as affordable housing leading to decreased housing prices, increased crime, neighbourhood transience, and loss of green space. These concerns are often found in the literature and are known to City administration, developers, and other stakeholders. Evidence of stereotypes held by Community League members include:

"The people that you're talking about that may possible bring crime, they- like maybe we can be a bit more aware that that is a possibility for certain groups of people, so maybe we could like think a bit more about where- like we could have criteria for housing, so maybe only families will live in this community, or this house. And maybe adults can live in another community." – District K/L

"If you give someone subsidized housing, they pay less than somebody else because they can't afford it, for whatever reason. There's always a misnomer, or maybe it's actually the truth, that they're not gonna take care of it as well." - District D/H

"I think you're gonna get a lot of pushback from people who think that there's more concentration of one type of housing cause it affects their property, taxes, balance their attraction of their only investment in the world, next to sinking RSPs is their homes and they wouldn't want to see their homes, that they're paying property taxes for certain level of affordability of services being diminished because that is going on in our part of the world. You're paying increased property taxes for no better services." – District C/G

"Well, a lot of people associate affordable housing with a certain socio-economic cohort that is not theirs. I don't know a better way to put it. And they don't want that socio-economic cohort in their neighbourhood." – Districts I/J

"Part of it too is not just education of the developers, it's education of the communities that have this snobbish attitude towards these types of helps, 'cause at some point, they're all gonna [be] elderly, they're gonna need a place to live and is it gonna be in their community or are we gonna shuffle them off somewhere? Every family has a mental illness. You can't tell me that they don't. Every family has health problems... and these people need a place to live and they'd be better off in communities where families are, where they can be close to their families. So we need to be emphasizing the education of these people. We're not just bringing drug addicts into these places, we're bringing all kinds of people that need community support. People that may be in your family." - District E/F

Tied in with acceptance of affordable housing is the idea of complete communities, which was echoed in four focus groups. One member from District C/G articulated:

"I don't think it's up to us to say, these people yes, these people no. I don't think that's the impetus behind wanting to know the project beforehand at all. I think it's more about -- thinking on a more macro level of city planning -- what is going on and why is this happening? And not in terms of 'this is our community and you are some people who are going to be coming into it' but more as "this is a community that are going to share with whoever is living in this community and how can the community be made better for whoever it is that's living here."

Participants voiced concerns about how AHDs would affect amenities and the social fabric of neighbourhoods. Especially of importance were the preservation of green spaces, which were important for well-being and community building. Parents were also concerned with the distribution of schools compared to the number of children in a neighbourhood.

Taking this one step further, there are some CLMs that are explicitly welcoming to people from vulnerable populations. Their concerns lie in having adequate and appropriate places for new residents to live:

"I don't mind the thought behind the [project], I think it's a great idea. But the location that they're putting it in is right next to the Abbottsfield area. And in that area, it's a rougher neighbourhood. Lots of trouble. Police are constantly about and what we've been told is that this building is going to be housing refugees. Syrian refugees, whoever wants to come in. And I'm thinking 'Well, that's great! But why are we throwing them in that spot?'" – Districts C/G

"We've seen like a really big increase with people needing supports in our community. I think since the Ice District -- that whole fiasco. And also, we have a lot of issues with slum landlords in our neighbourhood where we're having people coming in and rent on a really short-term basis because the houses are not really equipped for people to be living in them, and lots of turnover there -- which is a huge issue in our neighbourhood. So we're hoping that we can, you know we'll be able to improve affordable housing so that affordable housing doesn't mean you know renting a house full of molds from a really iffy character that's doing other things in the neighbourhood that we're not happy with either." Districts E/F

Despite concerns, there are members of the public and Community Leagues who see value with affordable housing developments

"On my block we also have privately owned duplexes where I would say its absentee landlords or neglectful landlords. And I think the people in those homes would be a lot better off in government affordable housing than in these privately owned kind of substandard places and there's also a lot of turnover. And you know there's like weeds in the garden and so on, and it's sad. So I personally would like to see more government affordable housing and fewer private, badly run affordable housing. Government affordable housing is a good option, a better option to the substandard rental market." – District E/F

"There will be a large part of the community who won't really care. But there will be key people. And those key people are likely the ones that are going to connect with the people living there and it might be just like that little ice breaker that makes the difference. It is important for the neighbourhood residents to understand the building and the residents so that it easier for the neighbourhood residents to then connect with the people who would be living there." – District D/H

"So for the people that are the affluent communities, like who say, 'We don't want anyone in our community that doesn't make more than $250,000 a year.' I say, 'Shame on you.' Because those people that make less, they're great people too. And they have a lot to offer and a lot to give you, and you can learn from them. Shame on you for judging." – Districts K/L

"When we're talking about communities, close knit communities- it's really easy for people to have a knee-jerk reaction, but I think there's a lot of value in those communities and neighbours." – Districts I/J

When pressed on what leads to prejudice and exclusion of affordable housing tenants in communities, one participant from Districts C/G replied "I think that's because the housing was probably challenged when it first came through and people weren't happy how it was shoved down their throats. So unfortunately, the people in there are stigmatized not because of who they are but

because they moved into a property that's stigmatized." A potential way to ameliorate social isolation of people living within affordable housing developments is to incorporate changes into the built form. "It's a common meeting place… you put something as simple as a bench next to a mailbox. And there's a place to socialize type of thing. You need to, people are getting more and more segregated throughout their lives type of thing. You need to give people the opportunities and the means, the support to actually meet other people so they're not segregated." (District D/H)

Participants acknowledged that there were wide variations in acceptance of affordable housing, especially when viewed as a subcomponent of development in general. "Each community is different. Each community has different cycles right. Some are aging communities, older communities, there's different things. So the needs for each community are different. To indicate that 16% and in this community, it may be not work in that community cause they're looking for maybe more senior residents or social gathering place or something within their community for development" (Districts D/H). Variations exists not only between Community Leagues and neighbourhoods, but within groups as well. "It's not just for housing, but it is a NIMBY thing I think because if you have people at that table that are from the old guard and you're trying to build something new and different in your neighbourhood, it's really hard to sell it if that's the group that you're talking to. It's pretty tricky" (District A/B). Community Leagues are their own entity who represent their membership, not necessarily all members in a neighbourhood. Despite this, they still act as an important conduit between the neighbourhood residents who are members, and City administration and developers. Words used to describe the function of Community Leagues included "disseminating information," "spearheading," and "main connector to the community."

When asked about distribution of affordable housing among the City, questions on which areas should have more AHD were considered and which neighbourhoods would be prioritized. "Why are they always constantly going back to the same neighbourhoods that already have affordable housing in their neighbourhood? Why aren't you going to the affluent neighbourhoods where they don't have that?" (District K/L) Another participant voiced: "So the neighbourhood that squeaks the most doesn't get it. You got complaints about all the development of Edmonton, how big it's growing and all these new communities that are being built. And how much affordable housing is in all these new communities? Zippo" (District K/L). In contrast, a participant from Districts E/F said: "We're in the 15-20% range as of 2017. I don't think it's changed. I don't think it ever will change due to the physical makeup of the community." Participants also questioned why certain sites were chosen, through comments such as: "There was no thought given to location to bus routes, to pharmacies, or to grocery stores or anything like that. It was just 'this is where we had a spot, and this is where we're gonna put it'" (District D/H).

# Housing Developers and Other Stakeholders

Outside of the perceptions of community members, there exists a diversity of stakeholders who are involved in the development, provision, and management of affordable housing. In our focus groups, affordable housing developers were represented, though some also acted as providers. A focus group was also hosted at the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOHH), a network of housing developers, providers, front line staff, independent community advocates, and researchers. An invitation to participate in this focus group was extended to all ECOHH members. In order to protect confidentiality, the following titles will be used: Developer and Provider or ECOHH Member (for all ECOHH participants who are not developers or providers). Note that these participants were not speaking on behalf of ECOHH and participant comments cannot be attributed to ECOHH as an organization. Participants from ECOHH included independent community advocates, University of Alberta researchers, and frontline staff.

Housing developers and providers are mandated to do public engagement if rezoning is required. However, there are cases where public engagement is not required, such as when a development permit is already acquired or a rezoning is not necessary. Housing developers and providers may still perceive public engagement as necessary to the process. Therefore it is important to examine what drives the public engagement process. Developers and providers views on how public engagement can be beneficial to the development process of affordable housing are below.

"The only reason that a development is required to is if it's making an application that requires variances. I think it's an important distinction for this kind of room to understand the implications because we are serving a certain population and because there's public dollars involved, there's an implication that we should or need to and that it's best practice that I understand it. It really should be noted that from a development perspective, a market developer does not have to do that. And so when we talk about what we're required to do, we should be careful with that language of are we required to or is it, and what that created, what that extra burden of consultation outputs." – Developer and Provider

"Doing what's right. A lot of work to go into community engagement. It is not an option to not do it and not to listen. One way or another, you will end up paying for it. [We] may as well do it right and work with the community. [We] cannot set a precedent that people are just here to check a box and that we don't care about what you say." – Developer and Provider

"When the input is in the interest of a design element or something that I think you can see how it either adds value or doesn't encumber us like, so some of that can be the orientation of the site. There can be sometimes just the entry and where are the entries position relative to the building or can be things that maybe we didn't think about. And it can be beneficial that way. I think when the expectations are costly and would be more than we can afford for what added value they contribute, or when they're not something that we can commit to in the long term, I think there's a huge integrity thing about the way that the non-profit sector feels they're engaging. We're not going to tell you we're going to do something and then not do it." – Developer and Provider

There is a vast diversity of public engagement practices. In contrast, the following are examples of when the public engagement process have been detrimental, or seen as less valuable. There are cases where

"Overall, engagement from a systemic perspective into a community is fairly non-existent. It really is just paying lip service to what... So engagement happens, but only certain things are picked up from that engagement that fits the agenda of the system that's conducting the engagement. What that does is it further marginalizes people."- ECOHH Member

"I say burden in terms of like, it's real money. It costs money, it delays projects, it puts certain things at risk. And so there is that burden." – Developer and Provider

"I would say that looking back over 20 or 25 years, my

sense is that mostly engagement is apologetic or defensive. If it involves non-market housing of any sort of the categories, it's approached like, 'Well, we got to try to convince the people that the deserving folks that are already here, that they will allow or they'll at least not resist what we want to do." And that's always irritated me. I think it's, like Laura said earlier about the human right to housing, it's in a front to that. And so most engagement that I've seen, some better, some worse, has always struck me as being underlined by that classist perspective that means you... It begins... The roots of it are in apology that we would be coming to you to consider this kind of thing and that troubles me." -- ECOHH Member

"The underlying tone there is not as housing as a human right, the underlying tone is we have to placate these middle class folks who have certain values and we have to see how the poor folks can fit in." – Developer and Provider

Underscoring this challenge is the unique challenges and features of each development. Developers and providers share:

"There's every single one of us probably approaches it differently. We might hire consultants, we might not, we may engage consultants that do really focused real estate engagement work and they'll take that approach. We might engage consultants that are much more on that kind of community relations side, so they'll take another approach. So there is no real, even beyond the lack of certainty as to when and how the lack of certainty is to scope." – Developer and Provider

"It was earlier when you said are some projects harder than others and I wanted to actually really like, and it's not to pick on any, there's so many different ranges of housing within this space when we talk about non-market and so as much as we go on any players, but you know, if you're a large management body and you have lots of land and you're replacing really old stone, the community engagement that you can do on that scale. And for how long you can do it is quite different than if you're a smaller operator and you're taking money you don't have and holding land that you don't know when you can develop and you're trying to." – Developer and Provider

"We had a lot of support from the [Community League]. They said they didn't want affordable housing, they wanted permanent supportive housing. So that works in our benefit. But then in other neighbourhoods where we have land, they want affordable housing and not permanent supportive housing. So I think that helps navigate where you can go because of what the community is saying they want. I mean we could go where we want, but you want to work in conjunction with the Community League, you want to have a good relationship with your neighbours to some extent." – Developer and Provider

Compounding challenges of implementing feedback from neighbourhood residents is that developers and providers exist between multiple sectors, such as government, direct service provision, and the public.

"Housing security is becoming another challenge and people's lives are a new challenge. So, for me, not only that, but an accountability to my community also means the thousands of people I know just through my organization that require access to the housing and not just housing, but housing with supports and those important services on site. And so when I'm doing engagement process and being asked to support the needs of what the community says, especially when you're being approached by another body, say, government who's asking you to do that process for them, it often puts organizations that do that work in really terrible, awkward situations in community. On one hand, our participants are saying, "Where's this housing?" And on the other hand, the community is saying, "Well, we support affordable housing, but not in our neighbourhood or can't look like that." – Developer and Provider

"We have projects and then once we get the permit and the communities still didn't like it and I say community and that it can also be three or four people when the rest of the community is very happy with what you're doing. Those three or four people, it's like an open discussion ongoing, we are still expected to deal with community assumptions about the project even if they're not real. We still have to respond as if we're still in the process of getting approval." – Developer and Provider

"We've really tried to bring people, policy makers,

decision makers, housing advocates together with newcomers who are in need of affordable housing. And so we've done that and very carefully facilitated processes, we've prepared both the policy makers and the people who would like affordable housing or who live in affordable housing beforehand to engage and we've provided food, transportation, childcare, and linguistic and cultural interpretation to make sure that the different parties understand each other. And the sharing that we've done has primarily been story-based, on both sides, asking for authentic responses from the policy makers about what drives them to do the work that they're doing. That's why." – ECOHH Member

"We don't go into the community as [organization] with the intent of not being a good neighbour… We want to be part of the community and we want to have a community relations strategy. But that's really different from the requirements and engagement and pre-development. And so those nuances are some of the things that I think we wrestled with." – Developer and Provider

"There has to be give and take in all processes on all sides. It's not about placating the Community League. It's saying, 'You need to make adjustments and people moving into this neighbourhood need to make adjustments.' I mean, that's what interculturalism is asking. It's asking not to have these... Maybe Community Leagues could decide what's really important to them in a neighbourhood and have conversations with that of people who will be residents of affordable housing about what's really important in the neighbourhood. And build that mutual accommodation and understanding." – ECOHH Member

How public engagement is structured also varies according to previous history of development, size of the project, who owns the land, how the project is funded, which developer is involved, neighbourhood demographics, flooding risk, and available amenities.

Generally, developers and providers wished to work with community members, but could not always incorporate feedback. How developers/providers handle the vast array of feedback they receive, and how they attempt to be transparent is illustrated below.

"Just how we're going to populate the building, who's going to be on what floor, stuff like that, we can't meet those expectations and do our work and help people. So sometimes community might be looking for things or making suggestions that are like… and I'm not patronizing, they don't understand why that isn't possible and maybe won't because that's not their wheelhouse, but that's just that happens. It's really rarely an issue of not being able to accommodate a reasonable request. I think that when a community says, 'They didn't hear us', sometimes it's when it's a similar thing to appealing on a parking variance when parking is not the issue at all. You're not worried about the parking, you really are… It's the only way that you can appeal the project. And sometimes people will feel they weren't heard when it really, what was being suggested was just not something we could accommodate." – Developer and Provider

"So then you're navigating opposite asks from the same people who are directly behind, what do you say? Of course we'll do a light study that's quite easy to do and we're having three different buildings, not one large building. So that's attainable. But then there's requests that don't make sense that you still have to field. So I think that could lead to people feeling like they're not being heard. But an average developer who's not doing affordable housing wouldn't have to feel that question of having a wall block, not letting people see into your yard." – Developer and Provider

"There are times where the Housing Developer and Provider will spend significant time, energy, and monetary resources to implement feedback "tried their darnedest" to incorporate comments, concerns, but there are examples where the conversation ends with "We don't want that development there, not ever." – Developer and Provider

"We have projects and then once we get the permit and the communities still didn't like it and I say community and that it can also be three or four people when the rest of the community is very happy with what you're doing. Those three or four people, it's like an open discussion ongoing, we are still expected to deal with community assumptions about the project even if they're not real. We still have to respond as if we're still in the process of getting approval." – Developer and Provider

In terms of measuring success and outcomes, multiple participants voiced that there is no set requirements or indicators to guide public engagement. Determining when engagement can be considered complete, or when it is deemed adequate for approval at City Council or by development boards, has no clear standard.

"I bring that up in the context of who is community. So if there's clarity around that, it makes it easier for us to even initiate. And there are no materials that kind of speak to that. Not with the precision that allows us to kind of go into a contract with an engagement firm to lead it. And know what your outcome should be. There's no line that says this as successful and this is not successful. But besides loud voices. That's maybe the lack of support, just clarity on what it is the requirement is." – ECOHH Member

"Who determines what that success means? Because that's a big, big difference. Success to one group is definitely different than to the other. In my community, you can say there's one or two and that's it for success. And neither beat each other" – ECOHH Member

"We can't please everybody but can be on common ground. Demonstrate that you heard them, and conceded to some of their wishes and alleviated some of their worries. That is the meaning of successful engagement. The true testament to that is how well [the tenants] are integrated and how well they are accepted." – Developer and Provider

"So all of those things I think create a lot of ambiguity in terms of when an organization feels they've represented their project adequately and properly. And when then politically it's also heard that we did our best. So that's a level of uncertainty and I think that's the experience can be. So the evaluation of adequacy is very visceral and it's an opinion. So a Council member is going to think that you did adequate engagement when conflicts were addressed. Sometimes engagement doesn't mean that you've addressed all the conflicts. You can't always address all of the conflicts. That degree, every degree we move away from. What would be required by anybody doing development? We add another load level, almost exponential uncertainty." – Developer and Provider

"If it's appealed, we are expected to speak to more people, but what constitutes adequate, what constitutes engagement structure or what questions that were asked are sufficient in terms of the community feeling they are engaged?" – Developer and Provider

# Affordable Housing and Communications

Adding to the complexity of public engagement is how community members perceive affordable housing: what it means and how they feel about it coming to their neighbourhood. Developers and providers must navigate this when introducing new projects via public engagement. Messaging via what AHD is and how it impacts a community is explicitly considered a necessary step in the engagement process: "A lot of the work that we do is thinking about not just the front end of the implications, the development of projects and engagement directly in that way, but spending a lot of time and doing the work even before that and engaging and educating the community on what it even means when we're talking about specific projects like a permanent supportive housing. There might be tension in just the lack of awareness of what that project might look like." Public awareness and understanding of AHD is considered an important part of reducing stigma: "[Affordable housing], it's not as scary as they think it to be. You go back to education components. You can't blame people because they don't know what they don't know."

Not all housing developments are treated with the same reception, however. "If there's any of that language addicts, treatment, detoxing, any of those type of words are definitely triggers for people" (Developer and Provider). Regardless of the kind of community engagement, some developments may never be fully accepted in an area. "You could consult until you're blue in the face, but the reality is that there are people who don't like housing and don't like the term affordable housing and don't want anybody in their neighbourhood that they think might be different" (Developer and Provider). In contrast, community members may be excited for new developments. "Community engagement provides an opportunity for community members to mingle and have that conversation [with] someone who doesn't live in [affordable housing]" (Developer and Provider).

There are challenges as well with providing enough information as to not overwhelm, but enough information to be considered transparent. The following comment highlights how permanent supportive housing, as one of the most difficult to introduce into an area, due to its wide range of supports and delivery. "Communities can have an expectation of what a level of support might be associated with [permanent supportive housing] and it will turn out to be not 24/7, eight staff onsite. That's $1 million a year. Right? So not all supportive housing is to that level of support. So if we try to just oversimplify, we're still at risk of the community feeling that there's a bait and switch going on."

As mentioned before, housing developers and providers must interface directly with vulnerable populations. Often times, housing providers must advocate for the populations they serve. Below are comments about the discrimination that affordable housing tenants face:

"Perceptions about how you see someone or how they're dressed. But again, give real life examples of who are our tenants. Twenty percent of them are single parents who just aren't making as much money as a dual income earner. It doesn't make them bad people." – Developer and Provider

"Stigma is that they associate it with bringing crime to the area but they're not. They're just people where they have less income… just because they don't have money doesn't mean they're bad people they just need a hand." – Developer and Provider

"Something that definitely has come up in my research is that people who are housing insecure or homeless or people who require this non-market housing are really used as political fodder often. And so these messages come up during times of an election or we were talking about funding. You know it's going to come up again in the federal election in the fall. But then things really fall out very easily, so that would be my two bits about public engagement is that it's not meaningful most of the time" – ECOHH Member

"We're already working with vulnerable people. So we have the discussion in our organization, are we putting

our community members who will be living in these buildings in more vulnerable situations because people know exactly who they are and what their experiences have been in those situations. So as much as we do community consultations, we have the viewpoint that they're kind of discriminatory. And is that setting up someone who's already vulnerable for more failure or more success? And how do we navigate that if it's something that is required as a not-for-profit and we're trying to have people's best interests at heart. Are we really accomplishing that? It's hard to navigate." – Developer and Provider

"In your, let's say applications or beginning phases, you are required to I think, state the type of people, the type of services or type of living that will be provided. We too have been trying to be so honest and careful in our wording. And you almost feel like you're being embarrassed or not true to who the people are and it's a terrible feeling. So there is some expectations and when the community has consult, the community is asking the question. So if we have to have a town hall, they're asking the questions, can we say we don't need to tell you who the people are that are coming? I don't think that's helpful. Then for sure it's, 'Well they won't even tell us the type of people." – Developer and Provider

"We already serve vulnerable population. If we say we're not just going to tell you [who is coming to live with in a building] that blows up into something else because an imagination can carry it. Whereas if you're having an honest conversation, you hope that there's some logic involved but that's not always guaranteed as well. It's kind of a catch 22 because you want to be an honest operator and developer, but you also want to protect and really value who you are serving in that process." – Developer and Provider

Thus, housing developers and providers detailed how they managed serving vulnerable populations that they are mandated to serve, while navigating the public engagement process.

# The Human Right to Housing

While the right to adequate housing has been enshrined in Universal Declaration of Human Rights since 1948 (United Nations, n.d.), the translation of this into domestic policy has been slow. Only recently has Canada's National Housing Strategy been launched, which has intentionally taken a human rights lens. This lens outlines that every Canadian has the right to adequate housing. The plan is grounded in the principles of inclusion, accountability, participation, and non-discrimination.

There is ample evidence of human rights-based approaches being adopted, especially by housing providers and developers. Rooted in this approach is the idea of classism, and the idea that one "[does] not need to do public engagement to ask for permission" from the neighbourhood residents. The quotes provide examples:

"We're thinking about consultation on housing, that's a contentious thing because a lot of people are building their wealth through housing. And most of our new stock in private market is based on individual owners renting out condos. So and also when we're talking about affordable housing, supplementing the private sector, we need to rethink how we're even talking about affordable housing. The policies that reflect that. Then engagement can start. If you're doing engagement for the purpose of educating people on the importance of the right to housing or that that's law and there's rule against discriminating against people, and that's going to be enacted on, that's a different conversation. If we're talking about different types of affordable housing or how this works, those are all different conversations. But I think if we're not starting from housing as a human right, everything else falls away, and we're back to where we are and it's this piecemeal attempt." – Developer and Provider

"The Federal Liberal Party in the last federal election decided that they were going to write this national housing strategy because they were centered by the UN and we're the only G8 country not to have one. And it's just a political, rhetorical document. And so what was happening at the same time was there was also this conversation about mass migration, and so housing and migration were used interchangeably as political instruments to further this discussion about why federal liberals would be good in power because they have this... They were trying to make their political perspective meaningful to people. And that's when it comes up. And then you don't hear about it after that" – ECOHH Member

"Who's the most deserving? Is this a moral thing? I think if you're starting from that space of, 'Here's where we are beginning our conversation.' there's no space to talk about whether this should happen or could it happen or if it's the right thing. It's just housing reflected in the federal right to housing legislation that was just passed in the budget. It's just a basic human right. The right to housing is where we're starting from and then discussions flow from there, so that'll also cut down the other things that keep us busy and keep from these things actually moving on the ground." – Developer and Provider

"But what I've not seen much of evidence of is long-term engagement in the sense of us as a community learning together about the human right to housing. And what that means for how all of us live in communities. And that all communities should have a wide range of housing options available. So I'm maybe moving on to a different question about what should engagement really do. What would a city look like where you didn't have to have a memorial to remember people who died of homeless? So that may not show any immediate results of the Community League next month saying, 'Okay, we'll quit resisting this proposal going forward.' But what it's doing is planting some seeds that might, over a generation or a few decades, make a difference. That's more where I would wish engagement is happening." – ECOHH Member

"How can we all still feel that community need in terms of school, childcare, other things as a community, as well? And that's a City of Edmonton role, but if the City of Edmonton were to do a good engagement on understanding what are the gaps in terms of what

communities lack? How can we then bridge that gap while also including affordable housing? Having different types of affordable housing that suit the neighbourhood. I think despite what people feel, if we're doing a human right perspective, we're also meeting other needs. People are going to be more accepting of that and everyone gets something out of it. And if you're not doing that collaborative engagement, it's that top-down information at you. That's where this stuff breaks down." – Developer and Provider

The data illustrates how affordable housing developers and providers must balance meeting the needs of the clients they are mandated to serve and the requirements necessary to develop more affordable housing. This highlights how marginalized populations  no longer are the focus of affordable housing development, despite being the primary stakeholder.  Developers must be able to justify the need for why more affordable housing is needed, in addition to why a specific population would be moving in to a neighborhood.

# DISCUSSION

Overall, resistance to affordable housing development is multi-faceted, and in order to begin dismantling this attitude, it must be examined from various angles. Shifting demographics of neighbourhoods means a shift in the neighbourhood's collective identity which leads to a defensive reaction by neighbourhood residents. This was evidenced by dialogue where people provided descriptions of neighbourhood identities in relation to their own, and describing their connection to where they live:

> "Nobody who's making decisions about an area really lives in that area. They're not invested in the game. Like if you're gonna bulldoze my neighbourhood, I bought property, and I've got all the cards in the deck on the table. So someone's gonna come in and make all these grand plans but it's like 'you've got nothing in the game!' This is my life, you know?" – District C/D

> "I think we always want to hear about a meteor impact anywhere. Because it impacts you. Whether if it's 100 miles away, or next door. So every time there's a change in your neighbourhood, you'd like to know. Because whether it's police training depot, or headquarters, or prison, doesn't matter. It's just something that's gonna impact the neighbourhood and how you'll be seen and how you'll walk around and carry yourself being a member of that neighbourhood." District C/G

Neighbourhood residents may perceive AHD as competing for space valued amenities, especially communal spaces or public parks. This intersects with complex planning issues, such as infill, lot splitting, and zoning.

A second layer of resistance is rooted in stereotypes and perceptions of impoverished communities. The idea that there are struggling populations who are more deserving of help is alive and well in Edmonton. In a review by Tighe (2010), the author found that participants in various studies tend to associate poverty with racial minorities which ultimately influences the social policy positions and behaviors of those who hold these biases. Furthermore, those who have higher incomes wield more power to translate their biases externally through discriminatory behaviors and outcomes (Thurber, Bohmann, and Heflinger, 2018). This sense of changing identities is compounded by fears related to changes in the neighbourhood itself: lost amenities (especially communal and/or green spaces), overcrowding, and overall neighbourhood degradation. Developers and affordable housing providers had numerous examples of economic discrimination of tenants by neighbourhood residents. This suggests that there is gatekeeping and "othering" that are rooted in stereotypes of the poor. Negative stereotypes of tenants may or may not be held by members within a community, but when they are present, they feed into and exacerbate fears related to changing identity and neighbourhood quality. These biases are the true root of NIMBYism, and should not be conflated with other, more reasonable concerns residents may have related to urban form and livability. In cases where neighbourhood residents hold discriminatory or bigoted views of those living in low-income, public engagement on AHD may need to tap into the broader anti-poverty movement to change these perceptions. This includes the necessary groundwork for the public to better understand the causes of low-income and housing insecurity, especially in higher income neighbourhoods. Stereotypes are generalizations of populations based on beliefs about appearance, race, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status (Tighe, 2010). Internalized negative perceptions on groups of people have, and continue to, perpetuate discriminatory practices to certain groups of people which can influence the community's ability to make decisions and opinions about policies with regards to affordable housing. When these community residents do not have the necessary information with regards to specific policies and its benefits, they end up relying on general stereotypes and misconceptions that further exacerbate NIMBY attitudes on affordable housing. Reliance on these biases can

intensify social exclusion and segregation (McCabe, 2014). When that happens, it centralizes the political power in a single, already entitled group, further focusing on individual self-interest rather than the betterment of the community.

When working with communities, it is crucial to separate prejudice and biases from concerns about built form and land use. Residents reported having often felt frustrated that their concerns are dismissed as NIMBYism when in fact that are not opposed to the idea of AHD in their neighbourhoods. Rather, they desire holistic planning where the existing fabric and dynamics of a community are preserved or improved. In one specific case, members of a specific Community League were openly accepting of people from diverse backgrounds but opposed to development in general due to concerns of preservation of limited green space. Other CLMs reported that affordable housing developments are an opportunity to revitalize and bring diversity to a community. Adding to a layer of complexity, however, is that developers and providers reported community members using concerns over built form and use as a delaying or diversionary tactic, when in fact their opposition to development is rooted in prejudice and fears around new AHD tenants. This tension underscores the need for trusting, open, and relationship-based participation by both those doing the engagement and those being engaged.

Participants often cited feeling frustrated by the public engagement process. There was a perception of tokenism as a result of past public engagement lacking the opportunity to include input from participants. These sessions more closely resembled information sharing than true public engagement. A pivotal way to adjust public engagement practices is to tailor it to be meaningful to participants. To CLMs, meaningful engagement did not necessarily mean seeing their feedback implemented into the process, although of course this would be their ideal. Seeing their input up for consideration has been cited as successful ways to engage by housing developers and providers. Showing why their feedback wasn't implemented, in a transparent and open way, was similarly desirable for participants. In order for participants to "feel heard", engagement must be structured as dialogic, iterative, transparent, and be relationship-based. Participants reported wanting "the City to care," to "be treated like people," and for those doing the engagement to understand how neighbourhood residents lived might be affected by new projects. Participants also wished for greater accountability of developers. Many felt that developers performed public consultation to "check the box" but were not beholden to any of the community's recommendations. While time-consuming and expensive, more transparency can repair the City's relationship with disgruntled, disenfranchised community members. This would help restore trust in the public engagement process for future initiatives. The positive experiences that the City and housing developers and providers create today are likely to pave the way for greater public acceptance of affordable housing in the future. The influence of past experiences in public engagement can persist – community members have long memories (in some cases up to twenty years or more). The following is a rich example of how a Developer/Provider went over and above to meaningfully engage with a neighbourhood:

"They actually came to some of our Community League meetings to kind of meet us and figure out what was going on in our community and they buy Community League membership for anyone that rents from their apartment building. And just like that gesture, which actually doesn't really change that much, but that small gesture made everybody in the community feel really comfortable. And it's kind of an ongoing thing. Like they have this sort of small engagement with us as a Community League and it's something that I think people really value. It sort of says, yeah, we're here and we're listening and we might not be doing exactly what you say, but it's really nice to feel like it's a collaborative sort of effort."

As mentioned before, ongoing communication between involved parties should be encouraged to generate a general consensus. Collaboration among residents, housing agencies, local non-profit service agencies, and the local government create communities with viable institutions combined with comprehensive services (Kleit, 2001). Additionally, informal processes are also effective in promoting consensus as it incites creative and effective discussions that could generate acceptable solutions to

issues with regards to the site. Asking the public about what proper consultation should look like is a good starting point to lead to proper discussion (Schively, 2007). Ultimately, lengthy dialogue among stakeholders and the community they serve in which the nature of the problem and solutions are discussed can generate the necessary outcomes needed.

Many community members desire creative and reasonable solutions for affordable housing development. They have knowledge on how the neighbourhood functions and areas that may be improved. Community felt that city planners and developers were unable to consider all of the factors that affect a community. Concern over a mismatch between AHD and available amenities was prevalent. For example, building AHD for families where there was a shortage of school space, placing refugee families in areas that were isolated or away from public transportation, or building large apartment buildings where there was inadequate parking spaces. This is in tandem with community members feeling hugely burdened as they are forced to become technical experts. Another Community League, "tried to do [their] own community consultation on that, it was very messy and cost quite a bit of strife in the community." (District E/F). In multiple cases, CLMs discussed how as volunteers, advocating for on behalf of their community or Community League was extremely taxing. One Community League president describes it as a "full-time job." CLMs are pressured to become not only spokespersons, but also knowledgeable on sun/shade effects, parking, affordable housing, zoning, and even flood mitigation. Rather, the most useful way of using community feedback is to look at the experiential sides of living in a community, such as how public spaces and corridors are utilized, felt, and what are the implications for well-being and ease of living. Community members would prefer to be considered as experts of living in their community. "Where the paid people come in is when you actually do the studies you know. You do the surveys, you do the analytics, because that's a lot of work for volunteers to do" (Districts E/F).

The complex terminology related to affordable housing and homelessness can be confusing, and there is an opportunity to help educate neighbourhoods and the general public about what the benefits of affordable housing and how the different types of affordable housing are structured and resourced. For instance, Tighe, Hatch, and Mead (2017) found that affordable housing is often mistaken and conflated with public housing which is a term that is bounded by derogatory beliefs that elicit fear with regards to safety, poverty, and dilapidated housing, that further exacerbate discriminatory thoughts and practices. In multiple focus groups there was confusion with the terms "Affordable Housing" and "Permanent Supportive Housing," even after definitions were given. Negative past experiences have caused the term "affordable housing" to elicit a gut reaction from participants. Participants even reported that the term itself elicits concerns about the impact of new developments on current housing prices. Rebranding affordable housing could provide an opportunity to shift perspectives on AHDs and combat negative stereotypes in related to past developments. During focus groups, there was often confusion and disbelief about current affordable housing levels in participants' neighbourhoods. This was likely due to participants perceiving what most likely low market housing as affordable housing, instead of understanding which units were subsidized as is the technically correct definition. Both participants who supported affordable housing development and affordable housing developers/providers agreed that there is a need to educate neighbourhood residents and to "change the conversation" related to affordable housing. Education and communication is one way of tackling the myths and misconceptions that community members reported. "There's still a real public perception that affordable housing creates unstable communities, it brings in crime… we have the data to show that that is absolutely not true. In fact, inverse happens. Right, so I think that the public is not in the public, whatever that means, is not well engaged or well-versed in that" (ECOHH Member). Analysis of the data also shows that this is the case, as participants voiced concerns about safety and vandalism within a community. Other myths of affordable housing include concerns with overcrowding, decreased housing prices, and overall neighbourhood degradation. "I say burden in terms of like, it's real money. It costs money, it delays projects, it puts certain things at risk.

# Municipal Relations

Community members are not the only ones who seem to have been affected by previous negative experiences. From the community's point of view, the City has changed its public engagement practice. "The City has learned that it's confrontational. You wind up two polarized groups - the City in one side and the residents on the other. So this process today is the opposite, so it's a positive and so it's a dialogue, versus a monologue." Another discusses the how these changes are not entirely positive: "To the people who are running the engagement or who are administrators or whatever, everybody that I have met like development officers, people in real estate, people in affordable housing, people in public engagement whatever, they are all nice people. And they're trying to do their job. But I also find that they seem afraid. So I think there's a cover-your-ass culture and that has to change." (District E/F). This reluctance to take risks or be vulnerable has been noticed by members of other districts as well. In Districts K/L, there was a desire to have a town hall meeting, which was not granted until Community League pressured administration by contacting the media. CLMs believed that this was because the City and developers were going to be "attacked." This leads to sentiments that City and developers must be forced to listen to community input, which is contrary to the desired approach that City Staff reported wanting to take. In contrast, City staff who participated in focus groups voiced their desire for greater transparency and better expectation setting. While there is a desire to be more communicative, there are no set policies or procedures that ensure that these goals are met. In addition, the complex and unique attributes of specific developments make implementing and enforcing a standard set of policies and procedures close to impossible.

Uncertainty around the City of Edmonton's role in public engagement was present in focus groups with CLMs and stakeholders. A key belief that underpins the assumptions of participants is who actually holds decision-making power. For participants, regardless of who is the specific developer, "the City" is viewed as an entity that should be a leadership role. "I think the City in itself inherently is the keeper of the keys" (Community League Member, Districts E/F). Another CLM commented "The City's basically making all the decisions and all the, to a certain degree, the politicians are rubber stamping it and making their best decision based on the information they're given" (District K/L). While the City may not build, it is considered the organization that allows a project to proceed or not proceed (who "wins or loses" in the words of one participant). "[They] must be involved because there are questions only they can answer. We can't really speak for the City" says one housing developer and provider. On the CLM side, participants wanted more clarity on who was in a leadership position and whether or not they were physically present at public engagement sessions. On a granular level, CLM participants were frustrated that they did not know who worked for who, and compounded tension and mistrust. Leading into who is in a leadership role are questions of accountability. Participants wished for greater accountability of developers. CLMs perceived that there was a lack of good stewardship of their input and that it was not getting to or heard by those who could make decisions. Many felt that developers performed public consultation to "check the box" but were not beholden to any of the community's recommendations.

Another area that has strained municipal relations is the idea that private developers do not have to go through the same public engagement steps. Rather, they are able to purchase land, and if rezoning is not necessary, develop it how they deem fit, as long as all regulations are followed. Non-market housing developers in contrast, consider that since they are publicly funded, it is part of their due diligence to consult with the public even though it is not always mandated by legislation. These restrictions as a result of zoning bylaw has delayed increasing affordable housing stock, but proposed amendments to zoning bylaws may lead to the removal of such barriers related to affordable housing development (City of Edmonton, 2019). This demonstrates that there is political and administrative

will to move forward on the affordable housing agenda. The following quote aptly describes the potential future role that the municipality could play:

> "The City has lots of tentacles in community, lots of rules [roles] that they play. So they can be in a community very differently in a community animation kind of conversation that is actually creating expectations that the community is buying into a future vision for the community and they're supporting it." –Developer and Provider

Therefore, there is potential for the City to step in and play a larger role in advocacy. Numerous stakeholders felt that there was a lack of policy support to guide public engagement on affordable housing, especially in regards to elevating the voices of those with lived experience via a human rights-based approach to housing. Steps are currently being taken with the City of Edmonton's Affordable Housing Framework, but this Framework does not include accountability mechanisms or indicators for success.

Preference for specific formats (e.g. town halls vs. easels with notes) varies widely accordingly to the individual. The choice for specific set-up is also not within the scope of this project, as these decisions lie within the expertise of trained facilitators. In two cases, Community League members suggested the need for expert facilitation. "You have to be something where you can get proper feedback without also getting shouted down by people who tend to get a little off topic sometimes. We tend to go down some rabbit holes. So how can we get accurate and proper feedback without losing all of our time, losing everyone's interest?" (District E/F). In extreme cases, where individuals become belligerent or disruptive, escalation can be avoided. Another community member elaborates: "So the facilitator we had at a couple of our town hall meetings… he was able to shut that down and stop that. Right, he was able to quiet that person down. In a very nice way that the person didn't feel demeaned or finger shaken at, or embarrassed" (District K/L).

While the vast majority of feedback garnered at public engagement processes is reasonable and fair, extreme viewpoints are an unfortunate reality for public engagement. The converse to this is also true, where the expectations set within public engagement are not appropriate and it is not a true public engagement, but rather information sharing in disguise. In order to ameliorate this and to truly build a more cohesive public engagement process, a shared set of indicators for success would be useful. This could be done in multiple ways, where networks of developers and City administration, such as Shovel Ready or Together Wise, could create guiding principles, or suggested outcomes and goals of public engagement. There is currently no protection against classism or discrimination. A guiding set of principles for engagement that clearly defines these phenomena would help to identify and address this across the City. Another option would be to co-create engagement goals and expectations with community at the outset of each project-specific engagement.

# Community Building: PE as the first "handshake"

When individuals are put in a neighbourhood that is perceived to be unaccepting of them, it affects not just their mental health, but their physical condition as well (Wilson, Elliot, Law, Eyles, Jerret, and Keller-Olaman, 2004). Hence, cultural changes in the form of reduced biases are a prerequisite for lasting changes (Thurber, Bohmann, and Heflinger, 2018). The City, providers, and developers must ensure that there is mutual acceptance from the neighbourhood and the prospective tenants with regards to integration of the affordable housing in their area. Some community members may also want to become better neighbours with new tenants after AHD takes place. However, there is minimal support for community building to occur between new tenants and pre-existing community members, especially after a project is complete. Evidence from community workers suggests that there needs to be a sustained effort to build community between affordable housing tenants and mainstream neighbourhood residents. These efforts may take years, and public engagement sessions are only the initial "handshake" in this long-term relationship. In a study by Garvin, Cannuscio, and Brannas (2013), the researchers found an increase in feelings of safety and social cohesion in the community, and a decrease in crime presence after the revitalization. They hypothesized that altering vacant environments, which have been highly associated with violence, would reduce crime as it would decrease the available opportunities to engage in illegal activities such as drug use, sales, and gun storage. In the Edmonton context, providing vulnerable individuals and households these types of opportunities would promote higher productivity and a greater sense of community, especially if they are involved with other community members and volunteers. In Edmonton, between the neighbourhoods of Riverdale and McCauley alone there are over 200 vacant lots that can be used as a resource (Government of Alberta, 2016).

Participants viewed the creation of affordable housing as an opportunity to revitalize the neighbourhood and to bring in much needed diversity into new areas. This was echoed by housing providers and developers. Developers also stressed that AHD need not be that different from other housing and has the potential to be integrated into a neighbourhood's existing schemata. AHD tenants themselves carry rich and "captivating" life experiences, and these assets can be shared with other community members, even though they are unconventional. In most cases, residents might have a "mind your own business" mentality but there are opportunities for community between the willing.

Community division is also challenging because the mentality of residents may remain as "Us and Them. They stay divided. It perpetuates poverty" in the words of one City of Edmonton staff. "It perpetuates helplessness and apathy." This intergenerational poverty is exacerbated with lack of social inclusion and building social capital. When AHDs were not perceived to do proper public consultation, participants reported a deep dislike of the physical building. This dislike was transferred to the individual tenants within the affordable housing development (described as a "hatred" by one participant). This has been shown in the literature to cause harm to these already vulnerable community members that have led to AH tenants to be ostracized in the areas in which they live. The following is an example of how a positive public engagement process has led to long-term social integration of affordable housing tenants:

> "I have seen where people talk about good engagement. Particularly with supportive housing. Where, before they come into the community they actually spend a long time getting to know the neighbourhood, and for people to get to know some of the people that will be housed there, or hope to be housed there. And it's a totally different arrangement. All of a sudden you're getting people 'Oh I could do your flower beds, I'll plant you this, I'll donate this.' It becomes our project rather than your project. It becomes our neighbourhood project. And that's the sign of success, I think, of what affordable housing project- where people feel that they're so much a part of it that… they want to contribute to it. And that should be the… my expectation is to start early

and build that kind of relationship where it becomes the neighbourhood project." – District I/J

CLMs touted the value of being able to see and envision a project. "I went for an open house walkthrough McConachie area and it was fantastic. Just the experience of understanding what the building was about, how it all worked, what kind of programs are being offered in there. And it was a great way to understand what is in that community." Another member commented "It would be really helpful, like they were saying, to have some testimonials, or- like the people that would be needing that kind of housing to come and talk to the community and say this was my experience. Or even with affordable housing, like if there are some neighbourhoods that have success with affordable housing building built, like maybe they can use that experience to talk to other communities." – Districts I/J

Alternatively, educating pre-existing community members about how to support vulnerable communities may be highly beneficial in reducing stigma (e.g. change expectations on landscaping/gardening for the exterior, building empathy for those struggling with mental health issues or addictions, or even simply understanding above average security measures). Upholding examples of success may show skeptics that AHD can work and bring good to a community, such as increased diversity or renovating older or poorly managed buildings. In some cases, tours of successful and existing AHDs may ameliorate fears and build support. In a study by Frameworks Institute (2018a), the authors found that public support on affordable housing is increased when advocates provide a detailed explanation on how historical and current structural discrimination creates and maintains disparities and then showing how a positive outcome can be achieved. By looking at how different neighbourhoods look at those who are vulnerable and framing messages in a way that they can empathize with, and where they can see how the housing problem affects the collective, can be an effective message to sway their positions on housing.

# LIMITATIONS

While steps were taken to ensure that this study was conducted in as rigorous and thorough a manner as possible, there are limitations to this study. The first is that given the way participants were recruited and sampled, these findings may not be fully representative of the general population. The exit survey demonstrated that the voices of first-generation immigrants, youth, and men, were underrepresented and further research must be done to explore their perspectives. Trained facilitators were not targeted as a subsample, and so their expertise on public engagement is not included in this report. Lastly, but most important, those with firsthand experience of living in affordable housing were not specifically sought after. This is a significant gap as these individuals and families are the most affected by affordable housing development.

# CONCLUSION

Public opposition to affordable housing development is very real; stories of home owners' association taking developers to court, organizing to protest, and speaking out at City Council were shared. Ensuring that the design of new AHDs fits with the neighbourhoods has been a sticking point and it remains a key concern. This can include design, size, and appearance. Myths regarding what affordable housing is and how it affects neighbourhoods in terms of overall livability, housing prices, crime, and safety are also still prevalent. Common concerns about AHD included negatively affecting housing prices, increased crime, neighbourhood transience, and loss of green space. These concerns are often found in the literature and are known to City administration, developers, and other stakeholders. Neighbourhood residents can and do mobilize in response to poor engagement and become a significant barrier to affordable housing development and alleviating homelessness. They can affect the development of affordable housing stock, and examples where density was brought down in a development. Affordable housing developers and City Administration must ensure high quality engagement, or risk direct impacts to affordable housing development in the city.

Ensuring good public engagement can play a pivotal role in increasing affordable housing stock. Early communication means that community members may have time to familiarize themselves with pertinent information that may be more technical, such as affordable housing definitions, the scope of the engagement, and what members of the public can expect to be "on the menu" of items that are up for discussion. In cases where the public's suggestions are not followed, participants felt it extremely helpful for follow-up explanations to explain why this did not occur. While time-consuming, more transparency would help restore trust in the public engagement process for future initiatives.

In cases where neighbourhood residents hold discriminatory or bigoted views of those living in low income, public engagement on AHD may need to tap into the broader anti-poverty movement. Groundwork needs to be done for the public to better understand the causes of low-income and housing insecurity, especially in higher income neighbourhoods. Affordable housing developers should understand that shifting demographics of neighbourhoods means a shift in the neighbourhood's collective identity. This leads to a defensive reaction by neighbourhood residents. Shifting the perception of AHD as something positive or emphasizing similarities may help to avoid this reaction.  Upholding examples of success may show skeptics that AHD can work and bring benefits to a community, such as increased diversity or renovating older or poorly managed buildings. In some cases, tours of successful and existing AHDs may ameliorate fears and build support. Supportive CLMs may also be excellent community animators and key collaborators during the public engagement process. Community panels where this has occured have been shown to be successful in past Edmonton projects.

Housing conditions affect both individual and community health to a great degree. A human rights-based approach recognizes this intersection between housing and community well-being, and there is a role in government to protect vulnerable populations from being subject to insufficient housing. What was not often recognized by CLMs is that stigma and resistance to the development of sufficient adequate housing within a community infringes on these rights. A targeted campaign to neighbourhood residents and the public at large may do much to help the public recognize the role they play in helping marginalized populations. This campaign could bust myths related to affordable housing, such as impacts on crime, safety, housing prices, and overcrowding. Most critically, a marketing campaign should target stereotypes and prejudice against impoverished communities. The root causes of NIMBYism are rooted in these biases and amplify concerns related to urban form and complete communities. Care should be taken to ensure that this campaign does not set unrealistic expectations of engagement, and clarify that

neighbourhood residents do not have the right to gate keep or exclude economically marginalized tenants from living in a community. A human rights-based approach to housing would help to keep those with lived experience in poverty and affordable housing remain the primary stakeholder in any public awareness campaign.

Development and the resultant change is an inherently uncomfortable process. All parties must prepare to compromise, while prioritizing a human rights-based approach whereby the most vulnerable are afforded their right to safe and adequate housing.

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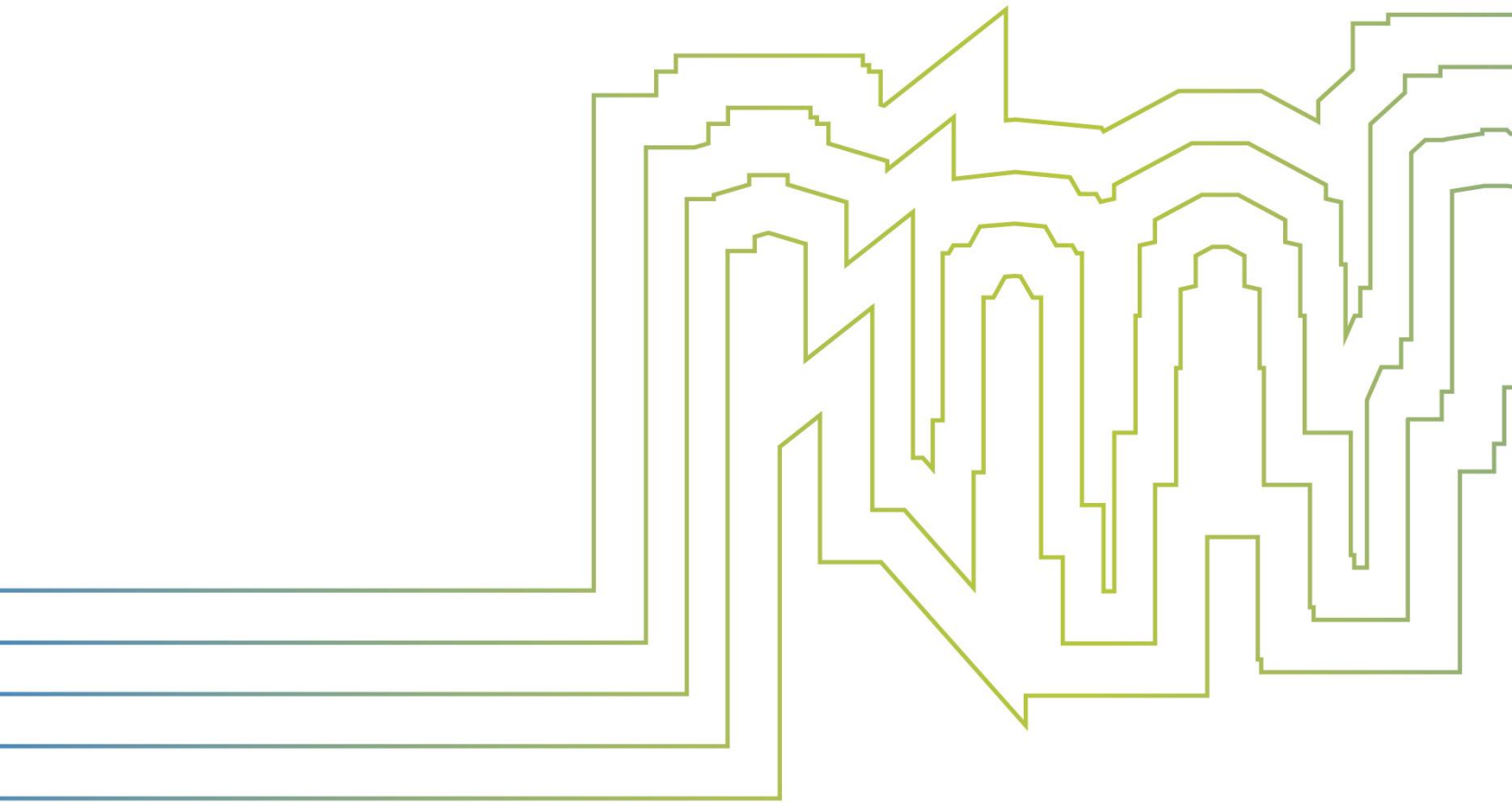
# APPENDIX 1.

## COMMUNITY LEAGUE MEMBER FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. There has been a diversity of experiences that people have had in affordable housing developments. Please give a brief overview of your experiences in the past with affordable housing development in your neighbourhood or Community League. Alternatively, you can discuss new developments in your neighbourhood in general.
2. What were your expectations with past projects or current expectations with affordable housing developments?
3. What new things would you like to see from City of Edmonton in respect to public engagement?
4. We recognize that with new developments there can be structural changes to your neighbourhood. What are aspects of your community that are a priority for you to be preserved or changed?
5. What are the things would best support new residents coming into your community? What are effective ways that we can build public support for creating more affordable, quality places for people to live?

## STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Please describe you or your organizations past experiences where you engaged with the public regarding affordable housing developments.
2. How did the process of doing public engagement inform your work?
3. As developers of non-market housing, you are often working between numerous sectors (e.g. housing, construction, non-profit, community, and government). Please describe this process and how it has affected your work as non-market housing providers.
4. If you had to choose one thing that you wish community members knew about affordable housing development, what would it be?
5. What is one thing you wish you or your organization knew in regards to the community's concerns about affordable housing development?