EVOLVING INFILL IN EDMONTON

Development Services Branch
• Put simply, infill is new housing in the mature and established areas of the city.
• Infill construction can often mean increasing the number of houses in an area, for example replacing a single house with two smaller homes or a duplex.
• It can also include one for one replacement such as replacing one house with another.
• Infill also means additions to existing properties, for example adding a basement suite or garage suite to an existing house.
• Housing types like row housing, and apartment housing also all fit into the infill category.
• Infill has been happening for a long time in our city.
Now that we know what infill is, the question is why is the City so interested in it?

Between 2012-2014 over 60,000 people moved into Edmonton. That is roughly equivalent to the entire population of the City of St. Albert.

We anticipate having a population of over one million in 5 years time.

As a City we’ve had to decide how we want to grow in order to provide homes for all the new Edmontonians.
● One option would be for the City to continue growing outwards
● This approach didn’t align with the City’s vision to become a more compact and sustainable city - it means more people driving and living far from work and amenities.
● This way of growing outwards also comes with major costs, with billions of dollars to be spent by taxpayers for the upkeep and maintenance of the roads and infrastructure in these suburban communities
● As a Region, we’ve also decided this isn’t the right way to grow. Our Capital Region Growth plan calls for a minimum level of density across all of Edmonton and surrounding municipalities.
● Edmonton’s Municipal Development Plan, *The Way We Grow*, approved by Council in 2010, sets out a goal that a minimum of 25% of all new housing in the city should be located in existing neighbourhoods.
● At present, we are reaching about 13% of new housing being built in existing neighbourhoods.
In addition to helping manage overall City growth, infill was also seen as a way to address some of the challenges being faced by mature and established neighbourhoods.

All neighbourhoods go through a very regular process called the Neighbourhood Life Cycle:

- there is a population boom of young families when they are first built, the kids grow up and leave, their parents age, and then neighbourhoods either revitalize themselves or fall into a decline.
- In Edmonton, many of our communities are at the point where the graph deviates.
Our mature neighbourhoods are aging and their populations, overall, are shrinking.

Over 40 years, our mature communities lost over 73,000 people. You can see this depicted in the map here - the red neighbourhoods are the ones that experienced significant population decline - including Laurier Heights, circled in black.

Addressing population decline is important because it relates to how our schools, stores, and sewers are used.

It signals that we aren't making best use of the existing community amenities we have, which is not financially stable in the long run.

A really clear example of this is with schools - with fewer young families we see schools in mature neighbourhoods being closed by the Province for being under capacity: with so few students, they just aren't financially viable to run and maintain.
Infill can be an effective tool to help reverse some of this population decline and help rejuvenate neighbourhoods.

Instead of closing schools, more young families in the neighbourhood means schools can stay open.

Laurier Heights' 2015/2016 school enrolment is 469 students, while the school's capacity is 660 which makes the utilization rate 71%.

Backpocket Information:

- In June of 2012, a community sustainability task force called Elevate presented a report to City Council with three broad goals,
  1. work with all orders of government to plan better
  2. capitalize on community strengths for a sustainable future
  3. create the foundation for education and lifelong learning
- Council endorsed the ELEVATE report enabling City staff to continue working with its partners to move forward on the recommendations, and to define and identify a collaborative course of action with inter-jurisdictional participants.
- The three school boards, along with the Governments of Alberta and Canada, approved ELEVATE in principle, demonstrating their philosophical support for working together on this community sustainability initiative.
- Currently the Edmonton Public School Board and ELEVATE are breaking ground by creating a new process for the school boards and the City to plan school locations and the future use of closed schools, together.
• Infill provides housing options - like garage suites or townhomes that help ensure people can stay in the neighbourhoods they love, no matter what stage of life they’re in.

• Currently many of Edmonton’s mature neighbourhoods are made up of primarily single family homes with few other housing types

• Increasing the variety of housing types in a neighbourhood will help people who are looking to downsize and stay in their neighbourhood
● Infill housing also saves people transportation costs - if they can live closer to work, stores, and transportation, a family might only need one vehicle, saving them thousands every year.
● And it saves all taxpayers money by making best use of existing infrastructure.
But despite these benefits, we know that infill comes with its own challenges.
Change is very hard, particularly in places that we love.
Often, infill comes as a surprise to people. When they first buy or move into a property, they might expect their neighbourhoods to stay pretty much the same forever.
People worry about the changing look and feel of their neighbourhood or losing mature trees.
What we hear from communities is that they are worried about construction next door, whether that is mess, safety, noise or damage,
We also hear concerns about property values, access to parking, and increased traffic
Addressing these concerns is the key to getting infill right, and the City has taken a number of initiatives to make improvements.
In 2014 the City developed Edmonton’s Infill Roadmap - a two-year work plan to advance infill. Over 1000 Edmontonians participated in building the roadmap and it guides our work internally and with citizens and partners.

The roadmap identified 23 Actions to take which are based on:
- Rules
- Process
- Collaboration and Knowledge
- Communication

Over the last two years we have worked through the Roadmap actions and we took over 30 “detours” from the roadmap with initiatives to address community concerns and promote better infill practices.

There are a number of initiatives I wanted to highlight for you tonight.
One of the major Action items in the Roadmap is the review of the Mature Neighbourhood Overlay, or MNO for short. The MNO was introduced when large, suburban-style homes began to be built in mature neighbourhoods, including front garages and much taller houses. In response, the City created the Mature Neighbourhood Overlay in 2001. The MNO is an “overlay” in the Zoning Bylaw. This means that it adds to and modifies the underlying zone. To give an example, most of Laurier Heights is zoned RF1 for primarily single family homes. A new house in Laurier can be built to 8.6m in height, compared to a new house on an RF1 property outside of the MNO, which could be up to 10.1m in height. Simply speaking, the MNO was intended to reduce opportunities for suburban style homes in mature neighbourhoods while also encouraging redevelopment in these areas. Following the creation of the MNO in Edmonton, The City of Calgary enacted a similar contextual approach to regulating development in their mature neighbourhoods.
During the roadmap consultation, we heard that the MNO should be reviewed to make it a more effective tool to encourage infill that responds to the context of a property.

The review is a year long process with extensive public engagement, for example, throughout the summer our team had over 5300 interactions through surveys and engagement activities.

And engagement continues this fall with the team doing another round of consultation, links on how to get involved are provided at the end of the presentation - there is one coming up tomorrow and another on October 5th.
The preservation of mature trees also emerged as an important issue, community members highlighted the substantial impact mature trees have on the look and feel of their neighbourhoods.

In response to these concerns the Zoning Bylaw was amended in June of this year to include tree planting requirements in all low density residential developments, and an incentive program where property owners can receive credit towards these requirements when they preserve mature trees.

Your community and others have asked how to further protect mature trees during redevelopment.

At present, the City is not allowed to enact private tree bylaws because of the limitations in the Municipal Government Act, a piece of provincial legislation that governs how all municipalities in Alberta operate.

Council has requested the Province grant this power as part of the current review of the Municipal Government Act.
As part of our infill work, we also looked at lot grading and drainage issues on infill sites.

There are two drainage issues associated with infill. The first relates to concerns about sewer infrastructure.

In general, small-scale infill projects have minimal impacts on existing city sewer infrastructure.

As we saw on the earlier map showing population decline, the infrastructure in mature neighbourhoods used to handle much larger populations than currently live in many of our mature neighbourhoods.

New development also typically has more water efficient fixtures, such as low flow toilets and taps, meaning they draw less on the existing infrastructure than a similar older home.

The other drainage issue relates to stormwater run-off.

We saw a number of instances where the grading on an infill site led to surface water draining into neighbouring properties.

To address this issue, the City developed a new policy in October 2015 to require lot grading plans as part of the Development Permit application.

This ensures this issue can be addressed at the outset and avoid any drainage issues associated with new housing in mature neighbourhoods.

The Drainage Department has launched a related pilot project called Rain Garden in a Box. This project encourages homeowners to build rain gardens
that capture stormwater run-off which helps reduce flooding and improve water quality, and can be a great addition for new or existing homes.
We also heard concerns from residents about poor construction practices on infill sites.

Over the past year and a half, we’ve taken a number of steps to address this issue.

The first has been to develop a range of materials to better inform builders of their obligations and point them to available resources. This included:

- a **Construction Site Checklist** with general guidelines that can be posted on-site
- a **Best Construction Practices Guide** which includes resources for those building within infill settings, best practice for ensuring safe work, and improving communication with neighbours
- and a **Construction Postcard** that reminds builders to be safe and provides contact information for more City resources

We’ve also added a number of processes to ensure builders have access to the right information by:

- offering **Pre-application meetings for infill developments** to educate developers on expectations and regulations
- Requiring all builders to sign a **Construction Site Management Acknowledgement Form** that highlights legislative requirements around safety, protection of adjoining properties, damage to public property, site drainage, site maintenance, site access, landscaping, etc.
- We are also in the process of establishing a **Development Completion Permit** that will require city inspections for all infill development to ensure its
• complies with their development permit.
Despite all these increased resources, we know that there may still be some builders who don’t follow best practice.

To help keep builders accountable, the City increased penalties for construction and development infractions in May 2016.

For example the fine for development without an approved development permit was $400 and it is now $1000.

Fines are also escalated after the first offence, so that if someone continues to not comply, they can be fined up to $2500 for each additional infraction.
The other piece of the infill conversation we heard was missing was clearer communication with nearby residents.

Over the past year, the City has also been busy improving our resources and processes to keep Edmontonians better informed of new development in their neighbourhood.

We have developed a guide called “What is Zoning” which provides some basic information on the land development process.

We’ve also developed a Land Development Guide to provide nearby residents with resources to respond to a proposed rezoning in their neighbourhood.

In October 2015, the City introduced new development permit notification letters that provides clearer information about development permits issued in your neighbourhood, and how you can get more information.

At the same time, we also introduced a requirement for builders to display a development permit sign on building sites.

This sign provides you with contact information for the builder and shows a drawing of the proposed development.

We are also working on a Neighbour’s Infill checklist that helps neighbours prepare for construction next door and provides further resources.

Our other efforts to improve communication with neighbours include:

- a new infill website
● a video series to share stories of Edmontonians who are looking for or have moved into new houses in mature neighbourhoods.

● And an Infill Design Competition to explore what “good infill design” might mean in the Edmonton context.

● The people’s choice award is currently open for voting and a link is provided at the end of the presentation http://edmontoninfilldesign.ca/
The City has also invested in additional staff resources to help support infill. As of this year, we have:

- **created an Infill Liaison Team** who is dedicated to coordinating, communicating and supporting infill related changes and initiatives to a range of stakeholders.
- We have also created an **Infill Compliance Team** to carry out proactive inspections during construction to ensure compliance to City bylaws such as the Community Standards Bylaw, the Traffic Bylaw, Zoning Bylaw, and Alberta Building Code.
- We also established an **infill development approvals team** made up of residential approvals staff focused on the review and approval of development permit applications for infill.
Other common questions we receive in regards to infill development are in relation to **vacant construction sites** and **asbestos abatement**

- Under the Zoning Bylaw, Demolition Permits and minor development permits must start within 1 year or the permit is considered expired.
- And under the Safety Codes Act, building must start within 90 days or the building permit will expire and likewise if construction starts and stops, the building permit will expire after 120 days.
- Beyond this the City has no authority to force development to be completed.
- City Council has asked the province for authority to tax vacant lots through the ongoing MGA review which would allow us to charge property owners for leaving their sites vacant.

- As for asbestos, Abatement of asbestos is regulated by the Occupational Health and Safety Code (OH&S), however, the City of Edmonton requires that at as part of an application for a Demolition Permit, the owner submit a signed form indicating that abatement is not required or has already been completed.
- All infill construction sites are subject to enforcement and inspection by Occupational Health and Safety and Alberta Health Services personnel.
• We’ve heard from some communities that are interested in creating an Area Redevelopment Plan.
• Area Redevelopment Plans (also known as ARP’s) help guide change and growth in existing neighbourhoods and provide policies to guide the City when we’re making development decisions in these areas.
• In the 1990s, the City created a number of ARP’s for individual neighbourhoods, but due to the sheer number of existing neighbourhoods, this wasn’t found to be a sustainable way to plan.
• The City is now focusing its ARP resources in areas where substantial change is expected in established neighbourhoods, particularly around transit and future LRT stations.
As an alternative to ARPs for every neighbourhood, the City currently uses the Residential Infill Guidelines, which provide a set of regulations that guide redevelopment in mature neighbourhoods that do not have any other plan in effect.

These guidelines include locational criteria and design objectives for where and how infill may be developed in a community - for example, this map shows where row houses are generally supported.

If a property owner in Laurier applied to rezone their property to allow row housing, the City would look to this for guidance. If it was across from a school site, the Residential Infill Guidelines would support that rezoning.

The City is looking to review the Residential Infill Guidelines in the near future and this is an opportunity for you to provide your input, keep an eye on the evolving infill newsletter for key dates.

The link to sign up for the newsletter is provided in the next slide.
There are many channels to stay involved and learn more about infill in Edmonton:

Tomorrow night between 4 - 8 pm, the Mature Neighbourhood Overlay Drop-In Session is being held at the University of Alberta, which will highlight some proposed changes to the MNO.

- A subsequent engagement session will be held on October 6th between 4-8 pm at the Chateau Louis conference centre.
- Admission is free and all are welcome to attend!

The infill website has a variety of resources for communities including signing up for The Evolving Infill Newsletter:

- The newsletter is emailed monthly provides details on engagement opportunities and updates on City infill initiatives, keep your eyes on this newsletter for updates on the next infill conversation (the follow up to the first roadmap) we hope to start in early winter.

For all matters “city” including infill, the City website has a “Public Engagement Calendar” which provides dates and times on upcoming engagement events.

The Edmonton Insight Community is a way to be part of an online citizen panel which provides feedback on City policies, initiatives and issues.

- A survey is emailed almost monthly.

You can follow the MGA review by signing up for their newsletter.

If you want to learn more about urban planning from Transportation to Infill,
- check out our planning academy courses using the link posted
- Another way to stay involved is to attend City Council and/or Urban Planning Committee meetings, you can just listen or request to speak to specific items in the agenda, links above
Thank-you for the opportunity to share some background on infill and talk about the changes we have been working on.