



# COMMUNITY INFILL PANEL

PILOT PROJECT REFLECTIONS

NOVEMBER 2017



## INTRODUCTION

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The following document is a summary and reflection on the Community Infill Panel pilot project which took place between December of 2015 and September of 2017. The intent is to reflect on the experiences of those who participated and inform opportunities for the improvement of future panels. The reflections are from both City of Edmonton staff and panel members.

## BACKGROUND

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The Community Infill Panel was action 6 on the Infill Roadmap, which was developed as part of the Evolving Infill discussions that took place in 2013–2014.

## PANEL MANDATE AND PURPOSE

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As indicated in the Terms of Reference, the mandate of the panel has been to support administration's ongoing work to make infill easier to do and talk about by providing strategic advice and perspectives on key infill-related topics.

As a volunteer advisory group for City of Edmonton administration, the CIP was not a decision-making body. The panel was tasked to be:

- A two year pilot starting in December of 2015
- A place for robust, infill-related conversation from diverse perspectives
- Facilitated by two staff members appointed by the Sustainable Development Department (now the Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development Department)
- An opportunity for administration to gather feedback and advice on infill-related consultation, communication, engagement and roadmap actions, and complement existing and ongoing public engagement efforts
- Evaluated by the group



13

PANEL MEMBERS



10

COMMUNITY INFILL PANEL  
MEETINGS

# SUMMARY TOPICS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

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The panel met ten times over the course of two years and discussed a variety of topics related to infill in Edmonton. They contributed to a variety of Infill Roadmap action items and community engagement opportunities including:

**Mature Neighbourhood Overlay** a review of regulations that apply to Edmonton's Mature neighbourhoods as they continue to see new development.

- Identified additional stakeholders that needed to be included in the public consultation
- Confirmed the approach to setbacks and design regulations for residential development in mature neighbourhoods
- Suggested further refinement to requirements for a variety of building materials such as wood, stone and vinyl siding

**Defining Community Character** an exploration to better understanding what it was that people loved about their older communities. What aspects made them special and attractive.

- Suggested the City consider an option where the community provides a range of pre-designed options to for builders to choose from to reduce community friction

**Garden Suites Review** a review of the regulations that apply to all new garden suites.

- Confirmed City plans towards making garage suites a permitted use

**Parking Requirement Changes** a project looking to modernize parking requirements in the City of Edmonton.

- Affirmed direction to reduce parking requirements
- Highlighted importance of information

**Amenity Area Review** to provide clearer and more consistent amenity area regulations, similar to those found in other municipalities and help increase consistency in the amount of amenity area required across different areas of the city.

- Highlighted challenges with communal amenity space and opportunities for builders to have higher density if they provide additional amenity spaces

**Communication process** ongoing efforts to ensure we are communicating effectively on topics relevant to infill.

- Highlighted the need to ensure any communication was meaningful and relevant.

**Evolving Infill** an ongoing project to explore opportunities to welcome more people and new homes into our older neighbourhoods.

- Worked as a stakeholder group for the mapping session to inform where to put additional density in the City.

**2017 Infill Tour** intended to increase awareness and demonstrate good design currently being built in Edmonton's older neighbourhoods.

- Suggested tour theme focus on "missing middle" and housing diversity

**Infill Design Competition** a second competition to continue exploring innovation in infill housing typologies in 2018.

- Advised on the objectives and process of the competition

**Good Neighbour Guide** to help neighbours understand what roles the City, the builder and themselves can all play in the development process.

- Suggested changes in information, purpose and format

# REFLECTIONS

City employees who had direct work involving the Community Infill Panel were asked to provide their reflections on the panel. Members of the panel were also asked to participate in a group discussion at their last scheduled meeting regarding their experiences participating on the panel. For those who were unable to attend they had the option of contributing through an online survey. Their reflections were then grouped into comprehensive themes based on the topics which emerged in conversation and are explored below. Through the analysis of the discussions, many alignments were found between the City's experiences and those of the panel. Each of the main themes is explored in the following pages. These themes are:



**EFFECTIVENESS**



**SCHEDULING**



**STRUCTURE**



**DIALOGUE**



**SELECTION PROCESS**



**PURPOSE**



**ENGAGEMENT LOOP**

## EFFECTIVENESS

### City

Overall, administration felt that the pilot project was effective. It provided information and feedback on a variety of infill topics such as the Mature Neighbourhood Overlay, Garage Suites, and Parking Space discussions which was used by administration to inform their decisions.

### Panel

Panel members who participated in the evaluation felt that the panel had been effective, and that their input had been considered as much as could be expected given that the advisory aspect of the Terms of Reference was quite clear. They indicated it was one of the better run panels they had experienced and commended the City for ensuring meetings were precise, to the point, educational, and encouraged intelligent discussion. Members indicated that their experiences on the panel helped them in their day-to-day discussions with friends and family as they began to better understand the nuances of infill. They valued feeling as though they were able to influence change in the city.

**“I learned things I never would have otherwise. Others were really smart, so you had to bring your A-game.”**  
– Panel member

# SCHEDULING

## City

While having a consistent and predictable schedule was initially considered by staff to be positive, it became apparent that the schedule was problematic as the pilot progressed. The challenge was matching project timelines with the pre-established meeting schedule to maximize the value of the panel's contributions. This misalignment occasionally meant that the input from the panel was less useful than it could otherwise have been.

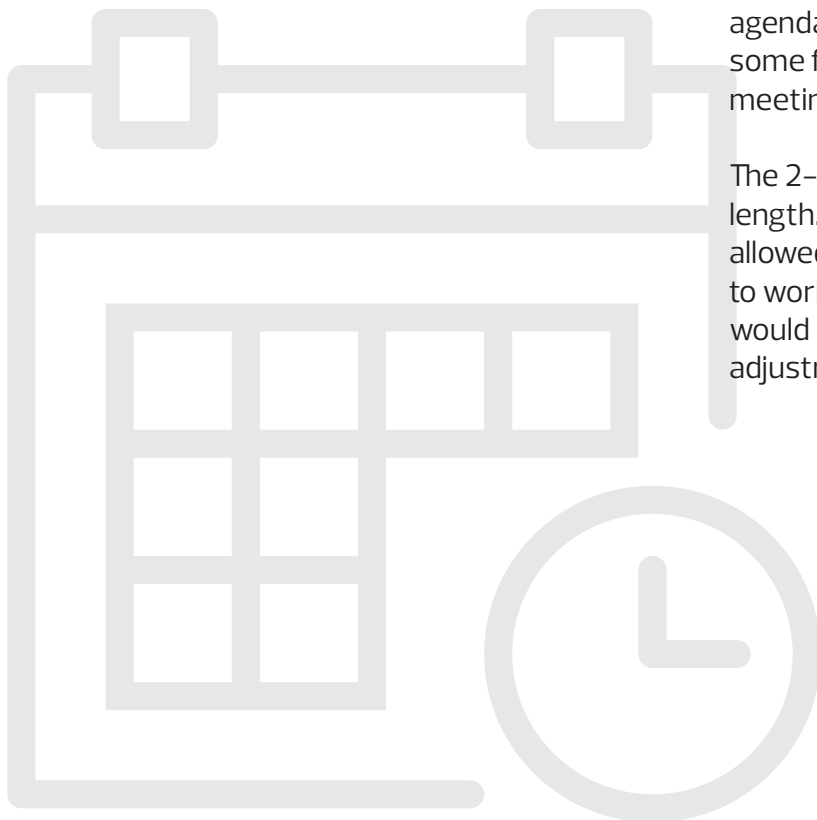
For example, some discussions may have been more informed if completed later in the project when communication tools were ready. In essence, once the larger Mature Neighbourhood Overlay, Garage Suite and Parking Bylaw projects were completed, the timing of the sessions led to difficulties finding relevant, interesting and timely materials with which to fill the agenda. Potentially this may have influenced attendance at the meetings. Some felt with long gaps between meetings (2-3 months), that it was not consistently top of mind, both for members as well as staff.

## Panel

The panel acknowledged that getting people's schedules to work out is difficult, and they reflected on the predetermined schedule for the Pilot. They indicated that monthly recurring meeting times (ie first tuesday of the month) would have been more effective. They also insisted that rather than create "busy work" that the City could occasionally cancel the meeting if there was nothing to discuss on the agenda. Overall, the Community Infill Panel felt that more frequent meetings and stronger leadership at those meetings could lead to shorter timeslots if desired by the City, though they did not feel shorter meetings were necessary. Members indicated more frequent meetings would help keep momentum. Some indicated that the group could have made better use of the online opportunities to collaborate outside of the meeting, others were unaware of this potential. There were musings during the discussion that alternating between face-to-face, and online or video conference could reduce costs.

They also insisted that rather than create "busy work" that the City could occasionally cancel the meeting if there was nothing to discuss on the agenda. They suggested that there could also be some flexibility if there were a need for a special meeting to align better with project timing.

The 2-year term was considered an appropriate length. Members preferred the time which allowed for them to get acquainted and calibrate to working together. All present suggested they would volunteer again on such a panel, with some adjustments.



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## STRUCTURE

### City

The pilot project experienced changes as it evolved to meet the needs of Administration. One of the more disruptive changes was that multiple City staff members and sections chaired the panel (ie. Communications & Engagement, Zoning Bylaw, and the Infill Liaison Team) at various times throughout the two year term.

While the ability to shift as project needs dictated was viewed positively as subject experts were able to lead their meetings, having a single staff member to chair the panel for the duration would have been beneficial. They would be able to make decisive decisions such as scheduling changes, enforcing attendance and providing group facilitation. In addition to these types of decisions, it was suggested that having a mechanism such as a single panel chair who could revisit and alter the basic mandate and role of the panel would have helped ensure its ability to successfully contribute to ongoing projects.

A consistent chair may have helped minimize challenges such as finding topics for discussion, sharing the value brought by the panel with other internal groups, or limiting additional workload required by other staff to prepare for meetings.

### Panel

Members felt the panel was well run but indicated there were some challenges with its structure, including:

Changes in City staff chairing the group led to difficulty in maintaining stability and consistent facilitation styles.

Some facilitators were strong and well-trained while others struggled to keep the panel on task.

Members indicated the need for a strong chair or facilitator to ensure panels are effectively run and kept on task. While the Community Infill Panel was itself an action on the Infill Road Map, other actions were also being implemented over the two year term of the panel. The formation of the Infill Liaison Team, which was more naturally oriented towards chairing a community panel, meant progress was being made. While members understood this, they referred to it as “fixing the plane while flying it”.

Receiving advanced packages with materials to review was appreciated and there was some discussion surrounding why this practice ended part way through the panel term. Understanding that there were members who did not complete the pre-reading, they felt that meetings should have been conducted with the expectation that members had done the meeting prework and arrived prepared. This would have better set the expectation of active participation and preparation.

Members agreed that they liked the facilities and food. They appreciated the first meeting included a vote for the panel to decide on items like venue and time.

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## DIALOGUE

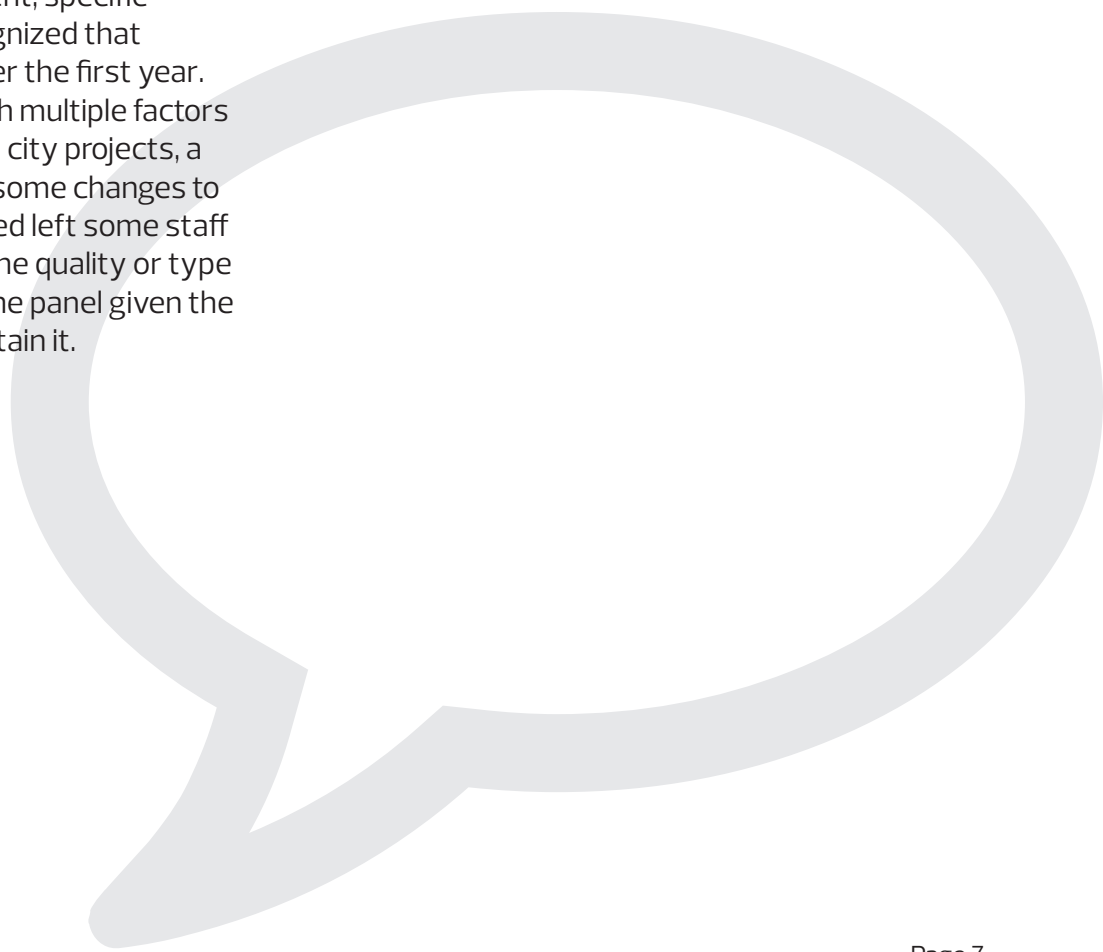
### City

Members were active and interested in the infill discussion, though this interest was seen by staff as tapering off towards the end of the pilot. Most staff voiced that they saw clear value in the diverse perspectives provided by the panel. These community voices may not have been accessible through commonly engaged and organized stakeholders such as Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, Infill Development in Edmonton Association, NAIOP (Commercial Real Estate Development Association), Urban Development Institute, and Canadian Home Builders Association. Many staff suggested that the discussion grew to reflect a deeper understanding of the topic than what they would hear in a more traditional workshop or open house format.

Staff found the panel interested in high level conversations and, to some extent, specific regulations. However, they recognized that interest seemed to dissipate after the first year. This appeared to correspond with multiple factors such as a lull in major infill related city projects, a change in Panel chair, as well as some changes to panel membership. Topics covered left some staff feeling they were not receiving the quality or type of feedback they wanted from the panel given the additional work required to maintain it.

### Panel

All members valued the open and honest dialogue, specifically the wide variety of educated perspectives which allowed them to gain insight into the various topics. They indicated the balance of the discussion topics was good, with a wide range from very technical deliberations of trying to turn neighbourhood aesthetics into regulations, to much more philosophical discussions surrounding community character. The members agreed that it was valuable to have the opportunity to learn from the City what challenges they faced.



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## SELECTION PROCESS

### City

Staff felt that the selection process was robust and enabled a diverse panel with a high level of expertise. This process was found to be useful as it enabled the addition of new, previously vetted members when panelists stepped down throughout the pilot.

### Panel

Some on the panel indicated that there was some initial confusion as to whether the panel was more political or administrative in nature. Some indicated that the application process seemed to suggest it was political in nature. Being more clear in this respect may have allowed the City to make better use by including the panel on discussions regarding broader messaging and other aspects of communications. They reported being happy with the diverse makeup of the panel, and the high level of expertise present.

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## PURPOSE

### City

While it was meeting the purpose in the Terms of Reference, many staff felt they would have been better served if the panel was more prominent. Many staff indicated that the panel's comments should have been highlighted at council as well as in council reports and in proposals. It was generally felt that it was not used to its full potential.

### Panel

Members mostly felt that the mandate of the panel was met if the City felt that the feedback provided by the panel was useful in helping to inform infill projects and policies. The panel felt that if a new panel or board was ever created that it would need a more specific mandate. Some suggested the mandate could have been better met "if administration asked some of the more difficult questions" that perhaps weren't being addressed by current projects at the City.

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## ENGAGEMENT LOOP

### City

While input from the panel was used, and did inform decisions, it was difficult to demonstrate a direct link between how the panel's feedback was beneficial, both in the eye of the public, Council and administration. Without the Community Infill Panel's specific input being included separately in reports, staff found it difficult to later articulate specifically how the panel's advice and insights were used to inform policy, regulations and other projects. There were also discussions that indicated knowing how the panel's information would be used and-

incorporated as well as how it would be shared with council and the public, may have changed the method of engagement.

### Panel

While Community Infill Panel members did not stress that closing the loop was essential, some felt they would like to know what changes came about because of their input, in which direction or where they had an impact.



## PERMANENT INFILL ADVISORY BOARD

The panel was adamant that the City should strongly consider a more formal, permanent, infill advisory board. Members felt that it would provide significant value to the new Council, to administration, and to the public. While some of the reflections below may fit into other categories in this document, they are unique in that they are forward looking. As such, they are better discussed in the context of informing future direction should the City choose to establish another infill panel or board.

The group indicated that there are still many infill issues that have not yet been addressed where a community advisory group could be of use. They suggested there are many benefits to a group that is not driven by reacting to specific issues such as a particular build. An external board, for example, could have the legitimacy and trust to create positive community perception around what the City is trying to achieve. They feel that if citizens know that there is a group charged with the task of considering infill on their behalf in a measured and thoughtful way, there will be more confidence when changes and decisions are made.

There were many suggestions made by the panel should a new infill advisory board be created. They felt the interview process of a board should be deliberate and challenging. It should be rewarding to be selected so members feel the need to represent citizens well. They suggest the City continue to have a demographic wish list, and be strategic about who is on the board. For the first term it may be useful to do a call out to the existing panel as well as the general public and use existing members who are interested to help set an effective pace and avoid some of the challenges with starting a new board.

Members suggested having a clear and comprehensive Terms of Reference, along with enforcement procedures for the formalized body, where attendance is monitored. Setting expectations such as the following would be helpful:

- When a member is lost/removed, have potential shortlisted members on wait list
- If you miss two meetings, someone follows up to see if you are still interested

They felt the more informal nature of the current panel may have been somewhat responsible for the reduced attendance.

Finally, members indicated that the new board should be acknowledged through Council, and able to influence decisions. They could be at arm's length, but have their yearly workplan approved by Council and report separately from administration in a manner similar to the Edmonton Transit Service Advisory Board. Research, recommendations, and reports, while working with administration, would predominantly be done by the board itself, using their resources in a different more constructive way.

## LESSONS LEARNED

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The reflections of both administration and the Community Infill Panel members provide us with insight into some key lessons learned from this pilot. These reflect which aspects of it should be repeated, and which need to change to promote a better, more effective panel and are outlined briefly below.

### Enhancing the selection process:

- Using a more aggressive recruitment strategy to create a larger pool of applicants to choose from to start and when replacements are needed

### Improving panel discussions:

- Ensuring staff assigned have strong facilitation skills
- Designing sessions to facilitate desired outcomes
- Consider requiring a panel recommendation at the close of each meeting or topic
- Having a consistent Chair to keep discussion on point and ensure consistency

### Changing panel scheduling:

- More frequent, regular meetings
- Shorter or similar length meetings
- Having some level of flexibility for meeting dates to respond to project timelines

### Improving the panel purpose:

- Determining more specifically what Council and administration needs from a panel
- Having a built-in mechanism to update and change the purpose or mandate as required
- Having an opportunity for the panel to help drive the discussion or topics they discuss

### Improving the reporting mechanisms:

- Having specific reporting mechanisms for the various stakeholder groups identified in the Terms of Reference (i.e. to council, to committee, to administration, to the panel)
- Tracking and sharing outcomes of panel input

### Ongoing need for a community led infill body:

- Members and staff predominantly see value in an independent panel which is non-reactionary
- Caution needs to be taken regarding the scope and scale of any future panel or advisory board

## CLOSING

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The pilot has been a valuable experience for the City and has contributed to a variety of infill initiatives over the past two years. The reflections provided by both panel members and staff at the conclusion of the pilot can be used to inform future direction should the City choose to establish another infill panel or board. The City acknowledges and thanks panel members and staff for their contributions and commitment to the pilot and providing feedback.

## THANK YOU

The City of Edmonton would like to thank the following Community Infill Panel members for volunteering their time and offering input and feedback on various infill initiatives.



**Steve Curtis**



**Christopher Dulaba**



**Kember Handzic**



**Sandy Pon**



**Puneeta McBryan**



**Carol Moerth**



**Anne Huizinga**



**Bryan Sandilands**



**Maryam Razavy**



**Katie Warwa**



**Kyle Willes**



**Luca Petrashyn  
Brandon Webber  
Jamie Kitlarchuk**

