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making the grade:

community knowledge campuses

from vision to reality

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I. Background and Context

Faced with rapid new residential development in the City of Edmonton, the issue of developing school sites in a timely and efficient manner has become a recent topic of study. Changing

trends in demographics and a growing number of vacant school sites signaled a need to rethink the manner in which schools sites are planned and delivered. In 2003, Edmonton Planning and Development assembled a team of professionals with direct involvement in school site planning. This committee was tasked with developing a vision and strategy to present to City Council for future school site development.

Phase one of this three part study involved visioning workshops, which helped define the role and placement of school sites

in future communities. The committee identified major trends impacting school site planning, land use principles that would inform the location of schools and a vision for future school site planning. The result of these sessions culminated in the creation of a "Community Knowledge Campus" model that would act as a focal point for newly developed neighbourhoods.

Community Knowledge Campuses Defined:

"A structure or groups of structures, on a site located near the centre of a community. Its primary use is the provision of educational opportunities, along with a range of compatible partner uses, which collectively provide a focal point for the community."



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The CKC model is an innovative way of sharing resources and creating partnerships to serve clusters of adjacent neighbourhoods. The model is scalable; dependant on the service delivery range. In areas of 5,000 to 20,000 people, a CKC may include school sites and joint use park facilities. Larger service areas (20,000 + people) may include opportunities for schools, capital rich recreational facilities (pools, public libraries, rinks etc.) and district level parks (Hughes, Kostashuk, 2003).

The CKC model builds on best practice research and is a new concept to Edmonton, to Alberta (Grand Prairie has recently initiated a CKC) and western Canada.

Transferability

Changes in demographics such as the trend toward smaller families coupled with dispersed development patterns, open school boundaries and slow build-out rates mean that CKC models are

less of wish and more of a necessity. They take into account economies of scale, mitigate against decreases in peak student generation and help ensure that future developments have a central focus. Vacant school sites are not



Three Phase Future School Site Study Process

simply an issue limited to Edmonton. Winnipeg has 14 such sites (Empty Promises for New Schools: Developers show sites province won't build Winnipeg Free Press, November 1, 2004) and is facing increased pressure to find a solution to this problem.

II. Facts of the Case

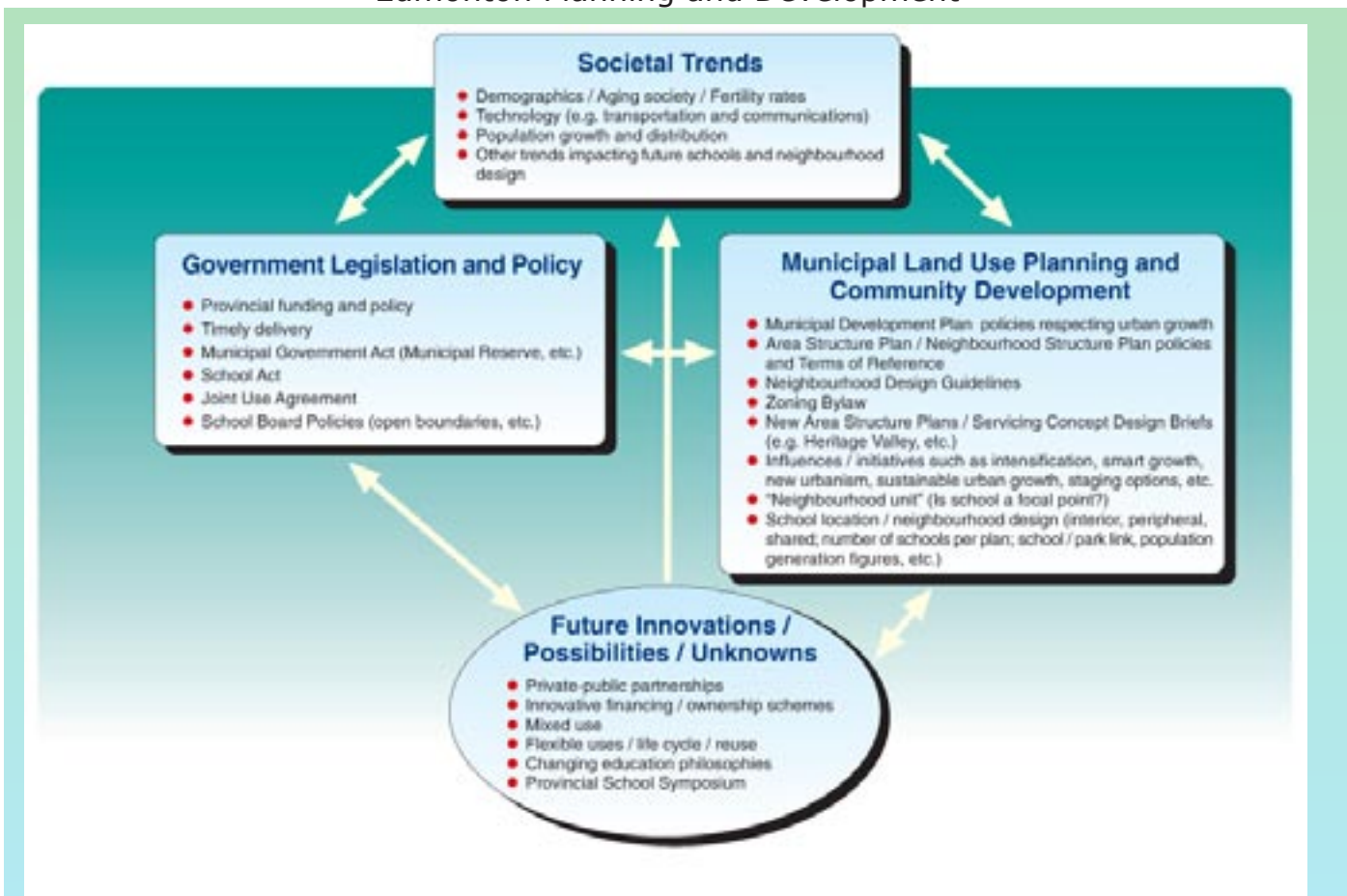
Future School Sites Study Working Committee - Vision Development

The creation of a model to address new school development in Edmonton was based on the idea that schools play an important role in establishing a community focal point. Since 1996, The City had been working with both school divisions to co-ordinate and share instructional space and recreational facilities through a joint use agreement. The desire to establish a comprehensive school

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development model that would compliment the existing agreement was paramount to the success of this initiative. Arm with these objectives, The City compiled a multidisciplinary working committee to help formulate a vision and strategy to present to City Council. Representatives were selected from the following stakeholder groups:

- Alberta Municipal Affairs Alberta Infrastructure
- Edmonton Public Schools
- Edmonton Catholic Schools
- Urban Development Institute, Alberta Chapter
- Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues
- Edmonton Community Services
- Edmonton Transportation and Streets
- Edmonton Asset Management and Public Works
- Edmonton Planning and Development



Factors influencing School
Site Decision-Making

The Working Committee held two visioning workshops that established a common desire to continue involvement in a Joint Use agreement beyond the date of renewal. Furthermore, the committee sought to enhance the agreement by articulating a vision

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of community engagement through complimentary partnerships:

"School sites in communities of the future will be centrally located, multi-use "community knowledge campuses" that serve students and learners of all ages and house a range of complimentary recreational, community and public services. They will be "beacons" at the heart of the community that are relevant, adaptive, flexible and accessible."

Phase two of the study dealt with creating a strategy to bring the shared vision into reality. Committee representatives emphasized the value of a co-operative planning initiative by underlining its effect on shared costs, effective community design, and efficient access to public parks and sports fields. In order to create a viable CKC model, the committee needed to identify societal trends, research provincial legislation, and review land use policies. A framework of factors, which influence school site decision-making, was drafted to guide the development of the CKC model.



CKC centrally located with links to new and existing neighbourhoods

Creating Opportunity for Innovative Partnerships

The CKC concept enables complimentary partnerships on Municipal Reserve Lands. The real value however, is the opportunity to broaden the uses of Municipal Reserve Lands to include a variety of land interests. This model encourages land consolidation between Reserve, public and private land. Although the current Municipal Government Act identifies limitations

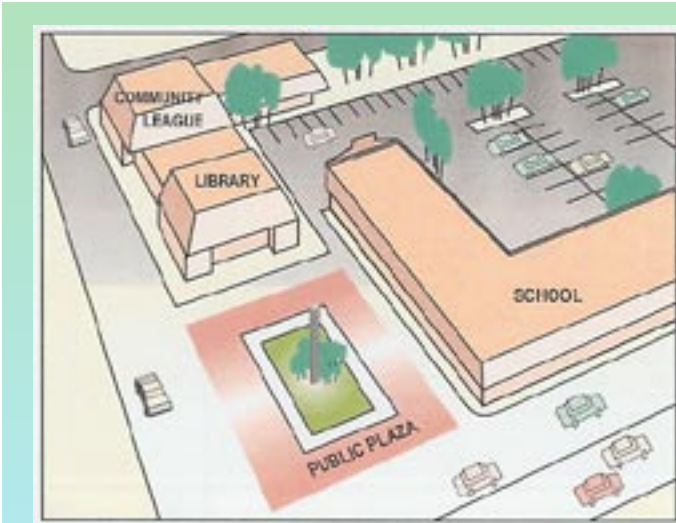
on partnerships within Reserve lands, Provincial approval of this model has initiated a review of the Act and triggered research into "Alternative Procurement Opportunities" (Alberta Infrastructure, 2003). This broadening of partnership opportunities, directly addresses the advantages of land assembly to create communities that place value on education and life long learning. The model consists of two key parts:

A. Shift From Neighbourhood to Community Level Schools

Traditionally, suburban neighbourhoods in most Canadian cities have been designed to house an elementary school that would

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service the surrounding community. Demographic changes as well as the opening of school boundaries have pointed toward a need



Use of public space as a
connector to community

for a more efficient means of developing school sites. The CKC model addresses these changes by allowing a scalable arrangement at the community and district levels proportionate to the scale and intensity of the area. An appropriate CKC is determined by applying a needs assessment as described in part B of the model.

B. Land Use Planning Process and Design Guidelines

This second part of the model outlines a process to follow for school boards and interested partners. It begins with a *CKC Needs Assessment* that requires stakeholders to consider a wide range of factors in order to identify an appropriate development. The process involves using a combination of stakeholder and community consultations, along with more traditional assessments in order to arrive at a broader picture of the future needs of the community. The information collected through the *CKC Needs Assessment* is then appended to the area structure plan. This allows a wider audience (i.e. planners, developers and community groups) access to this information when developing master plans and related policy documents.

The second part of the model also includes *Off-Site Location Guidelines for School/CKC Sites*. This section reinforces the original vision of ensuring that new sites are centrally located and linked to community assets such as parks, transportation routes and municipal waste collection systems.

The model's *On-Site Location Guidelines for School/CKC Sites and Facilities* outlines recommendations for shared parking, after-hours usage and CPTED principals. Stakeholders are encouraged to make efficient use of land parcel by positioning building in ways that leverage each facilities strengths and connections to the outlying community. These guidelines are intended to promote areas that create a community focal point and a strong sense of place (Hughes, Kostashuk, 2003).

III. Action and Interaction

Submitting the Model to City Council

The Future School Sites Study was presented to City Council's Executive Committee on June 25th, 2003. On July 2nd, City Council unanimously approved the study and endorsed the CKC model as an innovative means of working toward Edmonton's goal of being *a well-planned urban environment* (City of Edmonton Corporate Business Plan, 2002). Doug Kostashuk and Willard Hughes' engagement of such a diverse group of stakeholders impressed Honorable Bill Smith, the Mayor at the time. The fact that such a wide sampling of professionals involved in school facility planning could agree on a common vision hints to the success of future CKC arrangements. Upon approving the report, Council made a number of recommendations for follow-up activities including developing a process through which the model could be applied to existing neighbourhoods.

IV. Lessons Learned

Future School Sites: Impressions - Douglas Kostashuk

How did City Council react to the FSSS Summary Report?

City Council approved the *FSSS Summary Report* with relative ease. My view is that City Council generally felt that while the strategy might not necessarily solve the lack of timely delivery of schools concern, there was nothing to lose by applying this strategy. It appeared to be relatively well thought out in that it acknowledged evolving trends in school planning, yet still looked to the future for a new approach in the context of community development. More specifically, the Mayor at that time was most impressed by the fact that we had brought together representatives from such a wide range of organizations and managed to reach a consensus with respect to the development of the strategy.

Where there any lessons to be learned by this particular process?

If anything, this experience reinforced the fact that when undertaking a plan or project, it is always best to try and include as many people as you can, especially those who are to be directly affected by what you are doing. Consequently, it is important to recognize that people from different backgrounds and organizations will bring something to the table and although you may try to treat everyone as equals, there will always be some organizations, which carry enough influence that you have to ensure that they are definitely going to *buy into* what you are trying to accomplish. In the FSSS process, one of the

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school boards was somewhat more reticent to the CKC concept and arguably wasn't such a willing supporter. I assume that this was, not because they really disliked the concept but because they were somewhat cynical about it, given that they had previously attempted a partnership which had met a lot of resistance.

What do I think of the CKC Concept?

I think it's a great concept, especially when one takes into consideration that planners are often attempting to create a *focal point* or something with an *urban village* ambience in new communities. What better than to use a school in order to get the ball rolling in this regard. Once the school is built, it can or will serve as the *un-official* community focal point since they are often *the* common point of assembly for students, parents, teachers and others using the school facilities. The CKC concept, with its potential for a wider range of partnerships at the same location, can only enhance the level of activity that occurs. This was a significant reason why the CKC concept was selected to be a part of the City of Edmonton's *Smart Choices for Developing Our Community: A Catalogue of Ideas*.

Will the CKC concept materialize in Edmonton?

Right now, it is really difficult to predict what will happen. While the concept looks great on paper, in city planning offices, etc., it does face a variety of challenges to its implementation. These challenges are mostly associated with the partnerships that are necessary for this to happen.

What are the challenges to the creating the partnerships?

I believe that Alberta's buoyant economy is a double-edged sword in this regard. On one hand, it's drawing lots of young people to Alberta's cities thus contributing to the need for new schools. Yet, at the same time, the school boards now seem to have the financial resources to simply go on their own. Why get involved with a partner when you don't have to?

Aside from the financial benefits that can be gained through a partnership, there are other factors that will discourage them. Provincial legislation in Alberta, which allows for land to be donated then designated for educational and recreational purposes, does not allow for many other kinds of partnerships. This fact was recognized by the Alberta government but making necessary changes to the legislation are not likely a high priority today.

CKC partnerships can be like a marriage and thus, there are plenty of complications to be considered. For instance, there are legal implications related to insurance, how a CKC will be managed both cost-wise and administratively. Each partner may wish to maintain or re-enforce their unique identity, which will lead to management and perhaps design issues related to the style and appearance of the building. Then there's always the danger that one of the partners might want a divorce, or simply vanish by perhaps going out of business. The latter scenario is more likely to occur where less than stable private interests are involved. Which takes me back to the previous question about ...

Whether or not, a CKC will occur in Edmonton?

I think that if Edmonton were able to establish a CKC, at either the community or district level presented in the model, then it'll demonstrate the value that such a structure can have to the vitality of a community; and then, perhaps some others might evolve. Unfortunately, unlike other places in Alberta, notably in Grande Prairie with *its district-level CKC*, Edmonton just hasn't got to that level yet. Prior to this strategy, Edmonton managed to create a neighbourhood-level CKC of sorts at George P. Nicholson Elementary School. Here 350 students share their school with a YMCA daycare and a Capital Health clinic.

What I do know is that, despite the challenges, if there is a will, a way be found to make it happen. The City of Edmonton is presently developing *needs assessment* guidelines that will hopefully facilitate discussion between potential CKC partners early in the planning and development process. However, aside from this bit of match-making on our part, partnerships can't be forced.

However, despite the challenges, there has been some recent rumours late that discussions are underway concerning such a partnership in one of southwest Edmonton's new suburban areas. We'll just have to see what happens, so stay tuned!

V. Resources

Alberta Infrastructure. (2003). *Public private partnerships: Alberta infrastructure guidance document* (Guidance Document. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Alberta Queen's Printer. (P3 Guidance Document)

Alberta Infrastructure Learning Housing and Facilities Branch. (2003). *Minister's symposium on schools implementation plan: Use of school reserves subcommittee report* (Implementation Plan. Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Alberta Queen's Printer. (School Reserves)

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Alberta's Commission on Learning, & Alberta. Alberta Learning. (2003). *Every child learns, every child succeeds: Report and recommendations*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Learning.

Hughes, W., & Kostashuk, D. (2003). *Edmonton future school sites study report background report* (Internal Council Report No. 1). Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: City of Edmonton. (Future School Site Study)