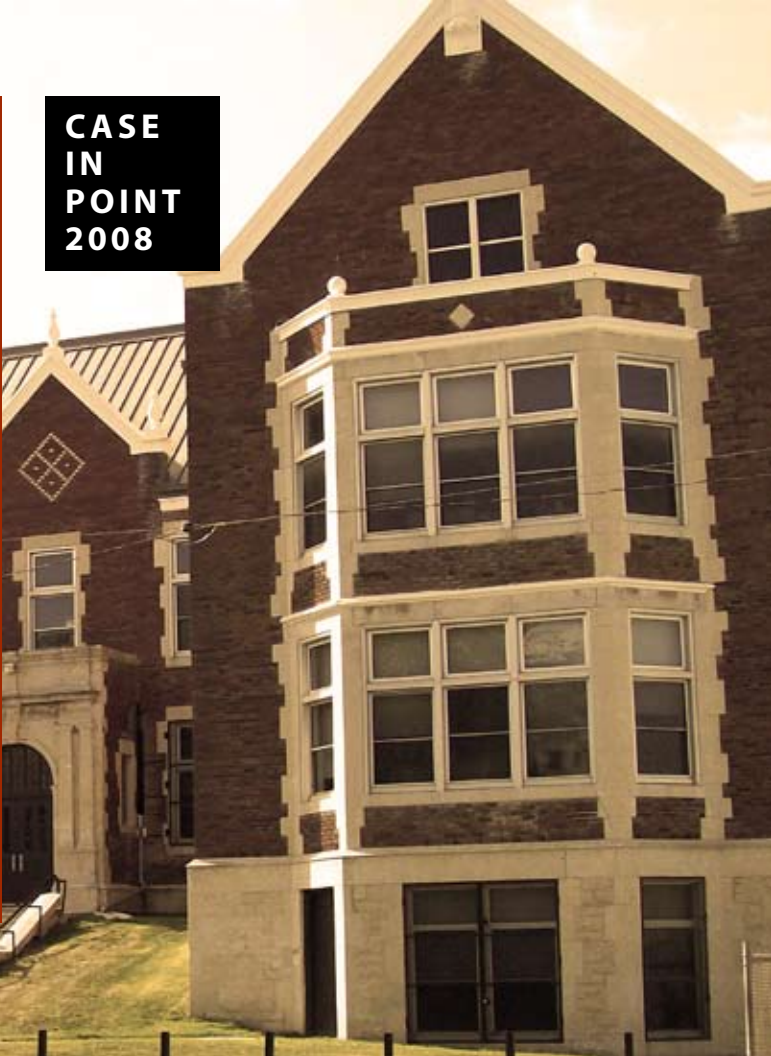


CASE
IN
POINT
2008

Community Knowledge Campus Planning

Learning from an Edmonton
Experiment in School Site
Planning and Neighbourhood
Development

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Abstract

Concerns over school site planning in new and developing neighbourhoods - especially the number of surplus sites – prompted the City of Edmonton to spearhead a study to look at the planning and delivery of school sites. The result was the ‘Community Knowledge Campus’ model, which provides an opportunity for integrated educational, recreational, community and public service facilities. These serve as focal points for surrounding neighbourhoods, and will hopefully prevent unused land and encourage the speedy delivery of schools and community facilities.

Development of a process to involve as many of the actors whose involvement is critical has recently been made part of the planning process for new neighbourhoods.

This article looks at the development and implementation of the CKC model, and asks how well it has been received to date.

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Introduction

Vincent (2006), studying the intersection of municipal and school planning, reminds us that the quality of schools impacts the prosperity of cities, and the manner in which cities change and develop impacts the quality of schools. The 'problem in the separation of school facility planning from municipal land use planning is that there is no institutional framework that even creates a space for these planning entities to plan together'. He identifies a number of obstacles that exist in this regard: the 'silo planning phenomenon', school site size requirements, funding issues, and fluctuating student populations.

This case study looks at one city's recent experience in dealing with the first of these four planning problems – the gap between community planning and school planning. Over the last few years, the City of Edmonton has re-examined the way school sites are planned in new neighbourhoods. This is due to the abundance of school sites, the inefficient use of land for school and civic purposes, and in some cases, the tardy delivery of school facilities. The result has been a new model for school site planning – the Community Knowledge Campus model – as well as a new Needs Assessment framework to encourage early collaborative participation between existing and potential stakeholders. What the project seeks to do is to help alleviate the problems identified in the previous model, to encourage schools of all levels to develop partnerships with other community ser-

vice institutions, and to facilitate better dialogue between those involved.

We begin by outlining the origins of the CKC concept, some of the principles and guidelines that are involved, then look at how the model has functioned since it began in late 2007. Tom Young, a planner with the City of Edmonton, offers some insights into his experience with the model.

Concept Development

The Future School Sites Study

In the city of Edmonton, concerns about the timely delivery of schools in newly developing areas, as well as an inventory of nearly fifty vacant sites, led to a new model for school site development. Headed by the City's Planning and Development Department, a team was assembled to this problem. The Future School Sites Study (FSSS) Working Committee was made up of members from Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Infrastructure, Edmonton Public Schools, Edmonton Catholic Schools, the Urban Development Institute, the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, as well as the Community Services, Transportation, Asset Management & Public Works, and Planning & Development departments of the City of Edmonton.

The following vision statement was produced:

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 complementary recre-

Example



George P. Nicholson Elementary School

One example of the types of partnerships that could be explored is that of George P. Nicholson elementary school. Situated in the Twin Brooks neighbourhood, this site also hosts two partner organizations: a YMCA daycare, and a Capital Health Authority clinic.

YMCA Daycare

The YMCA provides daycare services to children from 19 months to 6 years of age, and before- and after-school services to school-aged children. The daycare facility accommodates up to 48 children in daycare and 48 children in before/after school services. Although in the same building as the school, the daycare occupies an entirely separate space, with its own entrance.

Capital Health Authority Clinic

The partnership with the Capital Health Authority includes an on-site health clinic, offering Well Baby and Child Health Services such as vaccinations and weigh-ins.

Adapted from: <http://georgepnicholson.epsb.ca> (April 22, 2008)

ational, community and public services. They will be “beacons” at the heart of the community that are relevant, adaptive, flexible and accessible. (City of Edmonton, 2003).

Three major findings emerged from the study:

1. The ‘Joint Use’ and shared development of school sites and adjoining park sites should continue to be used. The dedication of Reserve land for education, parks and recreation uses, provided for in the Municipal Government Act, was seen to be legitimate. The use of joint use agreements was also seen as being legitimate.
2. The Community Knowledge Campus concept should be used to enhance a community focal point. While the school site itself is a major focal point for a community, the opportunity to provide a limited range of educational partnership opportunities on-site and a wider range of community service partners on adjacent sites is seen as a way to enhance this role.
3. The move away from the ‘one elementary school per neighbourhood’ model to that of larger catchment areas will likely continue, due in part to changing demographics, ‘open boundary’ policies, dispersed urban development patterns, and the slow build out of projected neighbourhoods. This trend will likely mean centrally-located school sites serving clusters of neighbourhoods.

In July 2003, Edmonton City Council approved the Future School Sites Study (FSSS) Report, which presented a three level conceptual model for CKC development – Neighbourhood, Community and District levels:

At the Neighbourhood level, there will generally be a park, but there may or may not be a school site. The latter depends of the size of the Neighbourhood, whether or not there is a nearby school or CKC site, and the relative isolation of the Neighbourhood. Possible partners include a Community League facility, a daycare, or a public library.

A Community level CKC, on the other hand, is intended to serve several Neighbourhoods. Centrally located, it would provide opportunities for a wider range of partners, either on reserve land or on land that abuts the site. These could include a Community League facility, a library, daycare, public health clinic, or even a seniors' home or a day hospice.

District level CKCs are meant to service several Communities and a population of 20,000 persons or more. These can include a wider range of partners, while respecting the reserve limitations of the Municipal Government Act. Clustered in the centre of several Communities, the district level CKC could feature public service facilities such as fire halls or police stations, senior's housing, health clinics or social services, libraries, recreation centres, skating rinks, or performing arts theatres. This type of campus would feature a large district park that

CKC Conceptual Model

neighbourhood level

a. definition

Service delivery range is up to approximately 5,000 persons within a single, contained neighbourhood unit, within a Neighbourhood Structure Plan.



b. school/CKC overview

The School/CKC will generally not occur, except for unique situations (e.g. isolated or large neighbourhood). Generally, there will be one park per neighbourhood.

c. potential partnership continuum



community level

a. definition

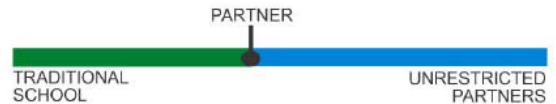
Service delivery range is two or more neighbourhoods of 5-20,000 persons within a Neighbourhood Structure Plan or Neighbourhood Area Structure Plan.



b. school/CKC overview

The School/CKC will locate near the centre of the community to serve clusters of adjacent neighbourhoods. It will include opportunities for a limited range of partnership uses as per MGA limits. It includes a joint use park site and can include a wider range of CKC partners on adjacent non-reserve land.

c. potential partnership continuum



district level

a. definition

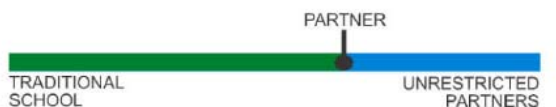
Service delivery range is two or more communities with a population range of 20,000+ persons within an Area Structure Plan or a Servicing Concept Design Brief.



b. school/CKC overview

The School (all levels)/CKC will locate in the centre of the district or sector in a distinct campus style. It will include opportunities for a range of CKC partnerships and will include district level parks. It can include a wider range of CKC partners, with limitations on reserve land.

c. potential partnership continuum



Adapted from: City of Edmonton, 2003

contains a number of sport fields and recreation facilities. (A District Activity Park is described in the City's Urban Parks Management Plan as being 33-35 hectares).

Off-Site Location Guidelines

These CKC sites are meant to be located in such a way that they will be easily serviced early in the development process, and should be located centrally among a grouping of Neighbourhoods. Sites should be placed along transit corridors, preferably collector roadways, and be near other services. Accessibility is important, and sites should be easily accessed by all modes of transportation, and where possible, link to open space and/or pathway systems.

On-Site Design Guidelines

Potential future needs should be considered in the site size and configuration, including shared parking or evening hour operations. Facility infrastructure sharing is encouraged among CKC partners in order to maximize the efficient use of land, services, and resources. Drop off locations should provide sufficient spaces and ensure safety, and on-street parking and loading spaces should be also be provided. School facilities – freestanding, or multi-use facilities with CKC partners – should contribute to neighbourhood placemaking, reinforce a community focal point, and contribute to a healthy environment. In site design, CPTED principles should be observed and principles of 'smart choice' promoted: including choice, vitality, viability and access.

Limitations

The Municipal Government Act limits the use of reserve land to a municipality, a school authority or by both jointly. Reserve land may only be used for a public park, a public recreation area or for school authority purposes. This means that any CKC partners that do not fall within this designation would have to be located off-site, on lands that are not reserve land. The removal of reserve designation is possible, but requires the consent of the City or in some instances, the City and the school authority, and requires a public hearing.

CKC Needs Assessment Guidelines

In 2007, the City of Edmonton Planning & Development Department devised guidelines to provide the necessary framework for a CKC Needs Assessment, as required by the 2003 FSSS. The guidelines are meant to provide those involved in the planning and development of school sites with the information necessary to conduct a CKC Needs Assessment, which in turn, should provide a clearer planning framework for the delivery of education and community service opportunities. Indeed, CKC Needs Assessments are now a requirement for new community plans or for amendments to plans that would affect a future school or CKC. The Needs Assessment is treated as an information requirement, much like a technical study, needed in the plan approval process.

The CKC Needs Assessment model is meant to prevent the accumulation of vacant schools sites, and to promote

the timely delivery of school and community facilities. It is also supposed to promote early communication and collaboration between parties interested in school site planning, and to identify potential partners. The assessment should work out the best location, size, and configuration of a CKC site, as well as to identify complementary land uses and their impacts. Possible direction for zoning, permitting, or subdivision approvals are to be suggested. Finally, suggestions for developing a business case 'to a provincial government that favours partnerships and the creation of "synergies" and economies of scale when considering funding for public infrastructure projects' (City of Edmonton, 2007).

A Needs Assessment is to be conducted by the proponent of a plan or plan amendment, and should be completed in collaboration with all relevant departments of the City, local school boards, as well as other potential partners, such as public or third-sector organizations, or even private-sector partners. The Assessment is to be conducted in three phases: consultation, draft concept, and final needs assessment.

Planner's Perspective

Recently, a plan amendment for the Webber Greens Neighbourhood in West Edmonton was initiated by a developer. This amendment affected a school site. Tom Young, a planner with the City, has been monitoring the process and chaired the first meeting between stakeholders. Those involved in the

process include the relevant municipal departments, Edmonton Public Schools, Edmonton Catholic Schools, the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord No.2, and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (the local League member was contacted, but has not yet participated). Since the process is still underway, it is difficult to say whether it is functioning well. While there have been consultations between the developer's representative and the stakeholders, as well as one large meeting, no report has been sent to Planning & Development.

Asked whether the early involvement of a number of stakeholders offers any advantages to neighbourhood planning, Young believes there is some merit to bringing different groups to the table, in that some issues may be discovered early on in the process. While those issues brought up during the CKC Needs Assessment would have eventually been brought up during the plan amendment process, there can be advantages to early consultation. Ordinarily, amendments are circulated between departments and agencies during the review process, which often makes addressing these issues somewhat difficult. The CKC process has the advantage of bringing all those groups together at once, making it easier to see 'how different concerns and interests interact with each other'. However, since the onus is for the most part on the proponent to carry out the process, a lack of commitment or a less than thorough Needs Analysis could mean more work at the application processing stage.

According to Young, the CKC model has the potential to reinforce schools as important public institutions. Some of the advantages that may emerge include the creation of nodes of activity, reduced costs through shared infrastructure, as well as the potential for collaboration or sharing expertise between groups with similar interests. The creation of a community centre that more people can identify with – not just those with children – could help encourage social interaction. Such a centre could be a place where one might participate in local activities or gain access to social services or health care.

Still, much more could be done. Schools could be better used as community focal points if neighbourhoods themselves were conceived differently, 'in an integrated way with the rest of the city, rather than these compartmentalized units that are supposed to function on their own'. There are many problems with a conventional suburban development model that segregates land uses and fails to recognize the need for better mixing, and a more human-scale neighbourhood. Indeed, Young suggests the system for school planning and land dedication contributes to less efficient, unsustainable and inequitable development patterns.

While the CKC concept is not a bad idea, it is a very small step in the right direction. The CKC model is very much limited by the restrictions placed upon it by existing legislation and policies. The number of potential partners is still

limited by 'what can be done on school sites without changing existing rules and regulations too much, and it doesn't go very far in identifying new overlaps in community uses'.

Conclusion

All in all, while the CKC model may lead to better decision-making and less surplus school land, it is still a fairly minor adjustment to what already exists. The concept was spurred by problems in assembling school sites and delivering a product in good time. CKCs were meant to enable better school planning by bringing stakeholders together early on, as well as creating more a diverse civic space at the centre of a Neighbourhood or Community. Although the model seems capable of improving communication during the planning process, of lessening the potential for surplus land, and for encouraging more efficient land use, it seems to be hobbled by limited partnership potential, persistent suburban development patterns, and a potentially troublesome land dedication system.

Resources

City of Edmonton. (2003). *Future School Sites Study: Summary Report*. Edmonton: Planning & Development.

City of Edmonton. (2007). *Community Knowledge Campus: Needs Assessment Guidelines for New Communities in Edmonton*. Edmonton: Planning & Development.

Works Cited

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