Affordable Housing Advisory Board
A City of St. Albert Board

Report

Affordable Housing Land Use Incentives

Overview of municipally-provided land use incentives for affordable housing development

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Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

As the authority on how a community's land is used and developed, municipalities across North America are providing various land use incentives to encourage affordable housing development.

This report assesses several land use policies that the City of St. Albert could use as to encourage affordable housing development. These incentives include:

- density bonuses,
- inclusionary zoning policies,
- infill, intensification, and adaptive reuse policies,
- manufactured home support policies,
- mixed-use development support policies,
- open space requirement reductions,
- parking requirement reductions,
- roadway, sidewalk, and stormwater infrastructure standard reductions,
- secondary dwelling unit support policies, and,
- setbacks, lot size, and lot shape requirement reductions.

The report provides an overview of each incentive, as well as providing examples of how they are used in North America, and whether they would be feasible in St. Albert. The following table summarizes the findings of this report:

Policy	Viability	Considerations
Density bonuses	Viable	• Helps developers defray the costs of affordable housing development
Inclusionary zoning	Not viable	• Not permitted in Alberta • Could lead to tangible affordable housing assets, if legislative changes are made
Infill, intensification, and adaptive reuse	Somewhat viable	• Infill and adaptive reuse developments require a supply of vacant urban lands and dilapidated buildings, which St. Albert does not have • Intensification may be useful by subdividing existing large lots into smaller ones
Manufactured homes	Viable	• Reduces housing construction costs
Mixed-use developments	Not viable	• Downtown land costs are too high • Other lands require redistricting • May be useful in proposed urban village developments
Open space requirements	Not viable	• St. Albert does not enforce open space requirements beyond provincially-set municipal reserve requirements
Parking requirements	Viable	• Reduces land costs for new housing projects
Roadway, sidewalk, and stormwater infrastructure	Viable	• Reduces new housing project infrastructure costs that are passed on to households
Secondary dwelling units	Not viable	• No support from Province of Alberta through building and fire codes • Could be highly useful for affordable housing development if new codes are created
Setbacks, lots size, and lot shape	Viable	• Reduces land costs for new housing units • St. Albert is currently proposing to change regulations for lot sizes and setbacks

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Introduction

Role of Municipalities in Affordable Housing Development

Municipalities are responsible for the development and welfare of their communities. This responsibility involves balancing the needs of the community with the interests of its citizens. One area where this balance must be maintained is in the community's land use and development. Various interests such as economic development, housing, and recreation must be balanced with the community's need for proper development and sustainable land use.

To fulfill this responsibility, municipalities are granted the necessary powers to control the location and intensity of community development. These controls, which are codified by the municipalities into land use bylaws and engineering standards, guide the orderly development and construction of local lands, buildings, streets, and infrastructure. These bylaws can be written to promote or discourage certain land uses, depending on the municipality's needs and interests.

Municipal land use controls can be used to promote the development of affordable housing. By providing various land use incentives, municipalities can eliminate legal obstacles and promote new affordable housing projects. These incentives can act as rewards for developers of affordable housing, or as measures of enforcing municipal housing interests.

Residential Land Use in St. Albert

The City of St. Albert currently encompasses a land area of 3,606 ha. This land area is primarily used for residential purposes, covering 36 percent of all lands within St. Albert. The remainder is divided into commercial, industrial, parks, and other uses, and is shown in Table 1:

Table 1 – Area by Land Use, April 2004

Land Use	Net Area (ha)	% of Total City Area
Residential	1,298.0	36.0
Urban reserve	652.1	18.1
Parks	390.8	10.8
Industrial	170.2	4.7
Commercial	135.5	3.8
Direct control (commercial / industrial)	134.6	3.7
Institutional	132.2	3.7
Non-parcel lands (roadways, railways, river)	692.7	19.2
TOTAL	3,606.0	100.0

Of the residential lands that are developed, the majority is designated for low-density residential uses (R1 and R2 districts), including single-detached and semi-detached housing. The rest is currently used for medium-density apartments and condos, and is outlined in Table 2:

Table 2 – Developed Residential Lands in St. Albert, April 2004

Density (Districts)	Net Area (ha)	% of Total Area
Low-density (R1, R2)	1,078.0	89.3
Medium-density (R3, R3A, DR, DC residential uses)	128.64	10.7
TOTAL	1206.64	100.0

Land Use Planning and Development in St. Albert

St. Albert's land use planning and development is governed by three key documents: the *Municipal Development Plan*, the *Land Use Bylaw*, and the *Municipal Engineering Standards*.

These three documents collectively guide what should be developed in St. Albert, where it should be developed, and how it is to be developed. Table 3 provides an overview of these documents:

Table 3 – Overview of St. Albert's Major Planning and Engineering Documents

Document	Summary
Municipal Development Plan	• "articulates the community's vision, goals, objectives, and policies to guide St. Albert's physical, social, and economic development" • addresses items such as: o growth management and urban form o housing and neighbourhood design o downtown, commercial, and industrial development o parks and recreation o open spaces and natural areas o transportation and infrastructure
Land Use Bylaw	• designates where developments may occur and what uses they may contain • addresses items such as: o development controls and regulations o parking regulations o residential districts, uses, and requirements o commercial and industrial districts, uses, and requirements o signage regulations
Municipal Engineering Standards	• states the standards for the design and installation of infrastructure • addresses items such as: o engineering and landscape drawings o water distribution, sanitary sewer, and storm drainage systems and connections o roadway, curb and gutter, and sidewalk standards o landscaping requirements o multiple family development standards

Report Structure

This report examines various land use planning and development incentives that could be provided by the City of St. Albert to encourage affordable housing development. These incentives include:

- density bonuses,
- inclusionary zoning policies,
- infill, intensification, and adaptive reuse policies,
- manufactured home support policies,
- open space requirement reductions,
- parking requirement reductions,
- roadway, sidewalk, and stormwater infrastructure standard reductions,
- secondary dwelling unit support policies, and,
- setbacks, lot size, and lot shape requirement reductions.

These incentives will be defined, with real-life examples of their use provided and assessed for their applicability in St. Albert. A presentation of these land use incentives will be made to the St. Albert Affordable Housing Advisory Board. After careful analysis, the Board may recommend courses of action to City Council.

Density Bonuses

Overview

Density bonuses act as an incentive by increasing the amount of developable floor space allowed in a project in exchange for a specified amount of affordable housing development. By increasing the overall value of the project, the provision of affordable housing units becomes more economical for the developer. Bonuses are typically awarded in downtown areas where greater densities will not greatly affect the surrounding neighbourhood or infrastructure.

Density bonuses are typically used with other financial and land use incentives such as reduced setbacks, smaller lots, and tax and fee exemptions. Although inclusionary zoning practices are not permitted in Alberta, density bonuses are also often provided as a compensatory measure to the increased cost of development borne by developers in areas with these practices.

Examples

City of Morro Bay, California

Zoning Ordinance 17.50 lists the incentives and density bonuses provided to single-family housing and condominium conversion developments. These density bonuses range from 20 percent of the total units for affordable housing projects to 50 percent bonuses for seniors housing.

City of Victoria, British Columbia

The Density Bonus Policy, enabled by British Columbia's *Local Government Act*, states the City's policy on density bonuses for the provision of affordable housing, special needs housing, and community amenities. These bonuses allow for additional development of up to 30 percent of the existing zoning regulations.

County of San Juan, Washington

The County's affordable housing policies call for the use of density bonuses in exchange for affordable housing development, as outlined in the *Comprehensive Plan*. These bonuses, outlined in the *Unified Development Code*, allow development to occur at two to ten times the normal density in some areas if affordable housing is provided.

Applicability to St. Albert

The City of St. Albert has already used density bonuses as a means of promoting better development standards. In both the current and proposed *Land Use Bylaw*, the density of downtown residential (DR) districts may be increased above the limit of 141 dwelling units per hectare at the discretion of the Municipal Planning Commission/Development Officer. So far, increased building densities have been permitted in two downtown residential developments. Since density bonuses are given as a discretionary practice, the inclusion of affordable housing units could be made to be a legitimate reason for a bonus.

Inclusionary Zoning

Overview

Inclusionary zoning policies use zoning laws and programs to require developers to provide a specified number of affordable housing units in new residential developments. Developers often meet these inclusionary policies by developing non-market housing, or by contributing funds-in-lieu of housing unit development. Many municipalities that use these policies exempt projects below a certain size or density to reduce the costs to developers.

Examples

Affordable Housing Ordinance

This Davis, California ordinance requires all ownership developments to build 25 percent of the total units as affordable houses. All new rental developments of five to 19 units are required to make 25 percent of units affordable, with larger developments increased to 35 percent. Cash-in-lieu may be accepted for projects with fewer than 30 units or 2.4 hectares of land under limited circumstances. In return, developers are given density bonuses according to California density bonus guidelines.

20 Percent Social Housing Requirement

The City of Vancouver requires developers proposing residential redevelopment projects in certain inner city neighbourhoods to set aside 20 percent of the site's land for affordable housing development. This land is then transferred to the City, which holds it until an affordable housing developer submits a satisfactory development plan and funds have been gathered for construction.

Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance

Boulder, Colorado's inclusionary zoning ordinance requires developers to contribute at least 20 percent of all new residential units as permanently affordable housing. Although the City prefers that the affordable housing be on-site, some provisions are made for off-site housing, land contributions, and in-lieu payments. Permanent affordability is ensured through restrictive covenants on resale pricing that are placed on each housing unit.

Applicability to St. Albert

Alberta's *Municipal Government Act* does not contain any references that allow municipalities to use inclusionary zoning policies. As such, the City of St. Albert is not permitted to require developers to set aside land or to build units dedicated for affordable housing.

To change this, the City would have to present a case to the Province of Alberta requesting a change to the *Municipal Government Act*. This could be a City-led initiative, in conjunction with partners like other mid-sized municipalities, or with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. Significant resources would most likely be required to make this change to the legislation.

However, once changes have been made to the Act, inclusionary zoning could be an effective incentive for the development of affordable housing. A requirement for non-market housing would be more easily bourn by a rapidly expanding housing market such as in St. Albert, and would lead to tangible asset development, either in the form of new housing units or in the creation of a development fund pool.

Infill, Intensification, and Adaptive Reuse

Overview

Neighbourhood infill projects are developments that fill in undeveloped or underdeveloped urban lands. Often these developments are residential, but in some cases, commercial components are included as well. These infill developments have the effect of intensifying the density of an area's population and land uses, and are excellent for revitalizing communities with little expansion of local public facilities and services. They can fill in empty areas in a community's built landscape or can adapt and reuse existing buildings for new purposes through renovation.

Infill projects can contribute to affordable housing development through reductions in new infrastructure costs. By building new housing units in areas of the city that can tap into existing utility lines, transportation routes, public services, and parks, project infrastructure costs can be greatly reduced. Additionally, adaptive reuse projects can reduce costs even more by eliminating the need to build a new structure. Instead, existing buildings like former commercial and industrial properties can be renovated to accommodate new uses like affordable housing. The cost of these renovations can be far less than new development and construction costs.

Examples

Garrison Woods

Located on the former site of CFB Calgary not far from the downtown core, this infill project contains 1,600 single-detached, semi-detached, and apartment-style housing units. The existing infrastructure was used and no new public services needed to be built. Included as part of this project is the Cyprus Greens affordable housing community. Sixty-five military houses were refurbished with the assistance of all three levels of government for sale to low-income households.

Single Family Lot Size Policy

This City of Richmond, British Columbia policy encourages residential intensification by permitting homeowners to subdivide their lots and sell the unused portion for additional housing development. These new small lots help affordable housing development by reducing the cost of land and new infrastructure construction required. The existing homeowners also make their houses more affordable by reducing their property tax assessments and through the one-time gains of selling the land.

Gibson Block

Originally built as offices with ground floor retail space, this 92-year-old flatiron building in Edmonton's downtown is a prime example of an adaptive reuse project. After a conversion to apartments, this building became dilapidated and uninhabitable and by the 1980s was ready for demolition. In the 1990s, the building was acquired by a non-profit group, rehabilitated, and adapted for reuse as a transitional housing facility for women.

Applicability to St. Albert

Municipal policies that encourage infill developments often rely on the redevelopment of vacant or dilapidated urban properties. These properties range in size from single residential lots that for some reason are underused to large-scale industrial and commercial lands like rail yards, factories, and shopping centres that have been vacated. St. Albert currently has a limited supply of both; there are few urban lots that are undeveloped. As such, City of St. Albert policies supporting infill developments may not be viable for the construction of affordable housing.

Similarly, adaptive reuse opportunities are rare in St. Albert. Affordable housing adaptive reuse policies require a supply of dilapidated or obsolete buildings that can be converted to residential use. Because of the vitality of St. Albert's neighbourhoods and a low rate of building

obsolescence, a City policy supporting adaptive reuse may also not be viable for affordable housing development.

On the other hand, residential intensification policies may be useful for promoting affordable housing. Because St. Albert has a significant proportion of residential developments with large lot sizes, a City policy encouraging the subdivision of existing lots may encourage affordable housing development. However, community opposition to increased urban densities and change to the city's established landscape would probably be generated, and would require substantial community involvement and awareness programs.

Manufactured Homes

Overview

Manufactured homes are houses that are built in part or in whole in a factory environment and transported to its final site for completion. Manufactured homes are known by others names such as mobile homes, factory-built homes, modular homes, panelized homes, and pre-cut homes. The differences between these terms are related to the relevant building code used, how the housing is built, and how they are transported to the site.

Manufactured homes promote affordable housing development by reducing the construction cost of the housing units. By building houses in a factory and then transporting the pieces or the whole unit to its site, housing developers can achieve savings through:

- reductions in weather-related delays and repairs,
- reductions in building material and tool theft and vandalism,
- bulk purchasing of materials and other economies of scale savings,
- labour cost savings through the employment of regular factory employees, as opposed to traditional methods of hiring contracted labour for individual projects, and,
- the use of assembly lines and computerized production, similar to car assembly plants.

It is worth noting that manufactured homes have come a long way from the stereotype of trailers filled with undesirable residents. Modern manufactured homes are built to the same standards as traditional site-built homes and feature designs that are virtually indistinguishable from conventional housing designs. As such, manufactured homes appeal to a greater range of households and household incomes, and do not negatively affect local property values.

Examples

Albion Sun Vista

Located in Greely, Ontario, this community is geared towards older adults and features wooded areas, a recreation centre, and a 27-hole golf course. The 888 to 1 511 square feet manufactured homes are primarily based on one of ten models, but they can be customized to individual household needs. Despite the upscale environment, houses are affordable to those earning between 79 and 105 percent of the area's median income.

West of Pennsylvania

Developed by East Brooklyn Congregations, a non-profit organization, this community in New York features 700 modular homes with another 500 planned for construction. These 1,338 square foot row houses sell for about 62 percent of the area's median income.

Wisteria

Located in Petaluma, California, this community contains 28 single-detached manufactured homes that were specifically designed and customized to appear similar to traditional site-built suburban homes, with no two houses looking the same. Homeowners in the community must have incomes lower than $46 200 per year, with houses selling for 62 percent of the area's media sale prices.

Applicability to St. Albert

So long as the development meets current planning and engineering standards and is not of a mobile home design, the City of St. Albert's *Land Use Bylaw* makes no discrimination between manufactured housing and site-built housing. This lack of distinction would allow manufactured homes with designs comparable to the existing housing stock to be used as a way to reduce building costs and increase local housing affordability. Public awareness campaigns may be needed, however, to counter community perceptions and opposition to manufactured housing.

Mixed-Use Developments

Overview

A mixed-use development is one that contains several land uses in a single structure. These uses can include office and retail space, residential units, and sometimes, light industrial space.

Mixed-use developments can promote affordable housing development by reducing land and ongoing building costs. By building residential units on top of commercial space, a smaller amount of land can be used for the development, thereby reducing the cost of land. In addition, the presence of a revenue-generating business can provide some relief to households from the burden of the building's ongoing maintenance and operational costs.

Examples

Bertha Station

This proposed development in Portland, Oregon, would feature 51 affordable seniors housing units on top of ground floor commercial space. This building would also contain a community centre and incorporate environmentally friendly technologies such as rainwater cisterns and native landscaping. Construction begins in the fall of 2005.

Gee How Oak Tin Apartments

Located in Seattle's Chinatown and International District, this mixed-use development has 21 affordable apartments located on top of street front shops. This building recently underwent $1.4 million in rehabilitative work, and is owned by the largest non-profit Chinese family association in Seattle.

Soma Studios and Family Apartments

The Soma project was a joint venture between the Citizens Housing Corporation and the Tenderloin Neighbourhood Development Corporation to develop a mixed-use commercial and residential building in San Francisco. The Soma contains 162 affordable studio and family residential units, as well as childcare facility, community space, and enough commercial space to house a neighbourhood grocery store and other shops.

Applicability to St. Albert

Both the current and the proposed Land Use Bylaws contain provisions for mixed-use developments. The MC district permits various office and retail uses in downtown area developments, with residential and office uses above the ground floor. Currently, the St. Thomas Manor, located at the intersection of St. Thomas and Perron Streets, features residential condominiums built over small street front shops. Although this development is not an example of affordable housing, it does provide a local example of how such a project would look.

An affordable mixed-use development in St. Albert would most likely not be viable. The high cost of land in St. Albert's downtown area would make affordable housing developments unfeasible, while the absence of any MC-districted properties outside the downtown area would necessitate a resource- and time-consuming amendment to the *Land Use Bylaw* and would probably generate community opposition to increased residential densities.

However, new mixed-use development opportunities in St. Albert may become available in the proposed urban village developments. Because the development proposals have not been approved, no information is available on what opportunities may exist.

Open Space Requirements

Overview

Many municipalities require multi-family residential projects to set aside a certain percentage of land for use as open space. This can be used as a method of controlling neighbourhood density, as well as to provide residents with useful public amenities such as parks and natural areas. Open space requirements can also be implemented in the form of maximum permitted site coverage, which regulates how much land area a building is allowed to occupy, as well as cash-in-lieu payments to the municipality that are used for recreational space and facility development.

The relaxation or elimination of open space requirements can reduce the cost of housing development. If developers are not required to provide the full amount of open space required, then the amount of land consumed for this purpose is reduced and the developer saves on land acquisition costs or can build a larger residential building relative to the size of the property.

Examples

LU-3 Infill Development Policy

The City of Berkeley, California requires a minimum amount of useable open space for every residential unit built. For example, the City's *Zoning Ordinance* requires that 200 square feet of open space be set aside for every mid-density residential development. This open space requirement is relaxed for affordable housing infill projects, which are permitted to include rooftop gardens and parks as part of the open space calculation. This reduces the amount of land required for open space.

Affordable Housing Incentive Provisions

York County, Virginia allows developers of single-detached housing units that will be sold below market rates to reduce or eliminate the County's 25 percent open space requirement, subject to approval from the local planning board. These incentives may also allow developers to avoid building on-site recreational facilities to reduce total housing project costs.

Density Bonus Program

This program, provided by Sonoma County, California, provides affordable housing developers with a minimum density bonus and at least one other incentive from a list that includes a 20 percent reduction in the local open space requirements. Other incentives include reductions in parking requirements, minimum lot size requirements, minimum lot width requirements, and setback requirements.

Applicability to St. Albert

The City of St. Albert currently has no formal standards for requiring new residential developments to set aside land for use as open space beyond the following requirements:

- *Land Use Bylaw* lot requirements like setbacks and maximum lot coverages,
- *Municipal Engineering Standards* landscaping requirements, and,
- *Municipal Government Act* requirements for the creation of municipal reserve lands during subdivision.

As such, reductions in open space requirements cannot be provided as an incentive for promoting affordable housing development in St. Albert. In addition, the City is unable to dispose of its municipal reserve lands. The City is permitted under the *Municipal Government Act* to set aside a maximum of ten percent of the land in proposed subdivisions for municipal reserve purposes, which the City fully uses for parks and schools.

However, as a related incentive, the City does assess a capital rec fee, which is designed to fund municipal open spaces and parks. Relaxation of this fee might act as a financial incentive towards affordable housing development in St. Albert by reducing project development costs.

Parking Requirements

Overview

All new residential developments must include a certain amount of space for vehicle parking. These parking requirements are set based on the type and density of the housing, and are usually stated within a municipality's land use or zoning bylaw. These requirements are based on projected demand for parking spaces, either from empirical observation or from other studies.

Because there is a direct correlation between household income and vehicle ownership, many cities reduce the parking space requirements for affordable housing projects. This has the effect of reducing housing development costs because less land is required for the development, and from the elimination of parking lot and/or structure construction costs.

In addition, a reduction in parking space requirements may lead to an increase in transit service ridership. Without the necessary space to park vehicles, households may be compelled to walk or take the bus more frequently. Amongst other things, this would lead to benefits such as walkable community designs and increased city revenues from greater ridership.

Examples

City of Los Angeles, California

The City of Los Angeles' *Municipal Code* reduces the amount of parking required for affordable housing projects based on the number of bedrooms and the distance from a transit station or major bus route. The Code also reduces parking space requirements for affordable seniors and special needs housing, and for single-room occupancy units.

Pinellas County, Florida

The *Land Development Code* of Pinellas County, which includes the cities of Clearwater and St. Petersburg, permits the reduction of parking requirements for affordable housing projects where it can be shown that the reduction will be compatible with the surrounding neighbourhood. The reduction in the requirement is set by the local board of adjustment.

City of Vancouver, British Columbia

Vancouver's *Parking By-law* sets reduced parking standards for affordable multi-family units, co-op housing, and seniors' supportive housing. Unlike the requirements for typical developments, which are based on both the number of units and on the size of the units, these reduced parking standards are based purely on the number of dwelling units.

Applicability to St. Albert

The City of St. Albert's parking requirements are similar to the requirements of other Edmonton region municipalities. However, there is room for the City to reduce requirements for affordable housing units. For example, in the proposed *Land Use Bylaw 9/2005*, the City will require two parking spaces for every apartment with more than two bedrooms. For an affordable housing project, this requirement could be relaxed because low-income households generally do not own two cars. This would reduce the land and development costs of the affordable housing units.

Given the City's investment in the Red Willow Park pathways and in St. Albert Transit, an elimination or reduction in the number of parking spaces may benefit the City through an increase in the number of pathway and transit users. Asides from the positive community spirit and environmental benefits, households may also spend less on ongoing transportation costs.

St. Albert Residential Parking Requirements

Summary of residential parking space requirements as proposed in *Land Use Bylaw 9/2005*:

District	Use	Spaces Required
R1, R2	Single family, duplex, semi-detached	2 per dwelling unit
	Group home	1 per three sleeping units 1 per resident staff member
	Limited group home	2 per limited group home
R3	Apartment (bachelor or one-bedroom)	1 per unit
	Apartment (two-bedroom)	1.5 per unit
	Apartment (more than two-bedrooms)	2 per unit
	Townhousing	2 per unit 1 visitor space per three units
	Residential use visitor parking	1 per three dwelling units
	Supportive housing	1 per dwelling unit or per five non-self-contained supportive housing dwelling unit 1 visitor space per seven dwelling units 1 per employee
	Long term care housing	1 per five dwelling units minimum 1 visitor space per seven dwelling units 1 stall per employee
R3A	Apartment (bachelor or one-bedroom)	1 per unit
	Apartment (two-bedroom)	1.5 per unit
	Apartment (more than two-bedrooms)	2 per unit
	Townhousing	2 per unit
	Residential use visitor parking	1 per three dwelling units
	Supportive housing	1 per dwelling unit or per five non-self-contained supportive housing dwelling unit 1 visitor space per seven dwelling units 1 per employee
	Long term care housing	1 per five dwelling units minimum 1 visitor space per seven dwelling units 1 stall per employee
DR	Apartment (bachelor or one-bedroom)	1 per unit
	Apartment (two-bedroom)	1.5 per unit
	Apartment (more than two-bedrooms)	2 per unit
	Townhousing	2 per unit
	Residential use visitor parking	1 per three dwelling units
MC, BW	Apartment (bachelor or one-bedroom)	1 per unit
	Apartment (two-bedroom)	1.5 per unit
	Apartment (three- or more bedrooms)	2 per unit
	Residential use visitor parking	1 per three dwelling units

Note: the above table is a partial summary; exceptions and other uses are not noted.

Roadways, Sidewalks, and Stormwater Infrastructure

Overview

Roadways, sidewalks, and stormwater management systems are basic requirements in any residential development. Roadways can range in quality from simple dirt roads to highly engineered arterials, sidewalks can range from grassy paths to concrete walkways, and stormwater systems can range from roadside ditches to underground pipe and treatment networks. In general, as the complexity of the infrastructure increases, its design and construction costs will increase as well.

In many municipalities, the design and construction of hard infrastructure in new residential developments is paid for by the developer. These infrastructure costs are then passed along to households in the purchase price of their new homes.

By reducing the size and complexity of residential roadways and stormwater management systems, cost savings can be achieved and affordable housing becomes easier to develop. This requires an examination of infrastructure alternatives, such as narrow streets, reduced sidewalk standards, and the use of naturalized swales to catch and absorb rainwater. In addition, reduced roadway and sidewalk standards reduce the amount of land required for transportation, and can lead to land acquisition cost savings and greater residential density.

Examples

Canyon Rim Village

This traditional style development in Redmond, Oregon uses the State of Oregon's *Neighbourhood Street Design Guidelines*, which calls for narrower streets in residential areas. The development has set street widths at 28 feet (8.53 m), which is just wide enough for on-street parking on both sides and a centre lane for travel.

Right of Way Engineering Standards Revision

Through collaboration with the local home builders association and the regional planning commission, the City of Moncton, New Brunswick revised its engineering standards to permit the placement of sidewalks on only one side of the street in residential areas, and to eliminate sidewalks altogether on small courts and crescents. This has allowed for an increase in lot sizes and the number of developable lots.

Crown Street Special Environmental Treatment Project

This Vancouver, British Columbia project was developed to test an alternative to typical street design. Crown Street, located in a rural style residential area, was designed as a narrow, meandering street edged with structural grass and lined with swales. These swales, filled with native vegetation, collect and filter rainwater before draining off into nearby creeks. Permeable sidewalks along the street help to reduce the runoff.

Applicability to St. Albert

Roadway design standards

The City of St. Albert typically requires new residential developments to have roadways that are 11 or 12 m wide, with the absolute minimum for local residential roadways set at 9 m. Parking is permitted on both sides of the street.

These requirements could be reduced without significantly affecting traffic circulation and emergency vehicle access. Roadway widths could be reduced to 8.5 m and still permit on-street parking on both sides. The width could be further reduced to 7.3 m if parking was limited to one side of the street. Both of these widths are currently in use in Edmonton's inner city and in a few of its new residential developments. By reducing the

width of the roads, the cost of land used for roadways would decrease. The amount of stormwater runoff would also decreased due to the smaller area of impenetrable surface, leading to reductions in stormwater infrastructure requirements.

Sidewalk design standards

The City requires all new residential developments to place 1.5 m sidewalks on both sides of the street.

Using reduced engineering standards, this requirement could be cut in half by only requiring the placement of a sidewalk on one side of the street, or eliminated on low-traffic roads such as cul-de-sacs. Alternately, the City could reduce the width of sidewalks to as little as 1 m, which still complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility Guidelines and should not cause pedestrian congestion in residential areas. Both engineering standard reductions would decrease the cost of sidewalk construction, and reduce the amount of stormwater runoff, which permits the construction of smaller-scale stormwater infrastructure.

Stormwater infrastructure standards

The City maintains high engineering standards for stormwater management systems. Curbs must line residential streets, preventing the runoff of water into curbside planted areas. Instead, the rainwater is channeled into underground storm sewers, which are required in all residential developments to carry rainwater to detention ponds and ultimately to the Sturgeon River. The City's engineering standards also requires hard building surfaces to drain into storm sewers instead of allowing the water to be absorbed into the land. This requires additional capacity to be built into the storm sewer network.

By introducing naturalized streetscapes similar to Vancouver's Crown Street project and Seattle's Street Edge Alternative project, housing development costs could be reduced while increasing community green space and reducing the environmental impact. A naturalized streetscape allows rainwater to be absorbed by the land instead of being channeled through storm sewers using permeable road surfacing materials. The excess runoff drains into roadside swales, which absorb and naturally cleanse the runoff of pollutants. This eliminates the need for underground stormwater management infrastructure and its associated construction costs.

Secondary Dwelling Units

Overview

Secondary dwelling units, also known as accessory units, are units that use surplus space in existing housing. Secondary units are additional living units that contain separate entrance, kitchen, sleeping, and bathroom areas, and can be attached or separate from their primary units. Common forms of secondary units include developed basements and attics, developed garages, and on occasion, separate cottages or houses built on the same property as the primary house.

Secondary units contribute to affordable housing supplies by making better use of the existing housing stock. Often, a secondary unit will be cheaper to rent because of reduced development costs, shared land costs, and reduced ongoing maintenance costs. Secondary units also provide the primary household with a steady source of income, which can help make their housing costs more affordable as well.

Examples

City of New Westminster, British Columbia

New Westminster permits the development of one secondary suite per property in areas zoned for single-detached homes in two-family dwelling zones. These suites must conform to the City's design guidelines and technical standards, which include such requirements as parking, sizing, and legal ownership and liability statements.

Cities of Verdun and Sainte-Foy, Quebec

These cities have permitted two-generational housing, a variant of secondary unit development. This variant is designed to provide housing for two generations of a family; when the parents become unable to live independently or pass away, the secondary suite is reincorporated into the primary unit. These two-generational units share a common entrance, address, and parking areas, but are otherwise separate living units.

Town of Tiburon, California

The Town of Tiburon allows the construction of secondary dwelling units in its Mun*icipal Code*, policies, and resolutions. These regulations govern the size, density, technical specifications, and parking and building standards for secondary units.

Applicability to St. Albert

Currently, the City of St. Albert cannot legally allow the development of secondary dwelling units due to a lack of relevant information in provincial building and fire codes. A provincial MLA committee is currently examining what changes would be required to the *Alberta Building Code* and the *Alberta Fire Code*, with the final report expected for release in August 2005.

If the provincial code changes were made, the City could allow the development of secondary units through amendments to the *Land Use Bylaw*. Given the prevalence of large single-family houses in St. Albert and a growing affordability problem for local homeowners who are approaching or are of retirement age, an allowance for secondary units could be a highly effective incentive for the development of affordable housing for both seniors and young adults. A municipal grant program that provides assistance for development costs would further increase the effectiveness of this allowance.

Setbacks, Lot Sizes, and Lot Shapes

Overview

Setback regulations require that a building be situated at a certain minimum distance from the property's lot lines. These regulations are often used as a way of controlling density, as well as to ensure that developments meet open space, sunlight, and firebreak standards.

The reduction of setbacks can promote the development of affordable housing through a reduction in the amount (and therefore, cost) of land required to build upon. This could involve:

- reduced front, back, and side setbacks, and,
- zero lot line developments, which position the building at one edge of the lot, effectively doubling the size of the opposite setback.

This reduction in land costs could also be achieved using smaller lots, which can be smaller in depth, in the frontage, or both, and can be in conjunction with relaxed setback requirements. Small lots can be created through either a reduction in minimum lot size requirements, or the division of existing large lots that have excess space.

Another lot-related affordable housing incentive is to allow for different shapes of lots, as compared with the traditional deep rectangular lot. A differently shaped lot can provide the same amount of privacy and increase the amount of useable space while using less land, as compared with the traditional rectangular lot. Some alternative lot shapes include:

- square lots,
- z-lots, where the front and rear of the lot are perpendicular to the street but the mid-section is at an angle,
- staggered lots, where the back yard is shifted laterally from the front yard,
- pie-shaped lots, and,
- flag lots that are shaped like the letter L, with a narrow perpendicular street frontage and a large backyard parallel to the street.

Examples

Uniquattro

This unique project in Brampton, Ontario uses zero-lot lines and smaller lot sizes though a design that situates four housing units into one semi-detached design. Each 1300 square foot unit features three bedrooms, full kitchen and dinette, a dining room, garage, and semi-furnished basements. These units originally sold for 3 percent under Ontario's affordability guidelines, and 41 percent less than similar conventional lot homes.

City of Orlando, Florida

The City's Land Development Code permits reduced setbacks, lot sizes, street frontages, and other positive design features on affordable housing projects. The goal is to provide flexibility to the developer without negatively affecting the resulting development or the community's standards in general.

El Dorado County, California

To promote affordable housing development, the County has incorporated land use incentives into its Zoning Ordinance. These incentives include mixed-use zoning, increased building heights, reduced on-site parking, on-street parking allowances, density bonuses, reduced setbacks, greater lot coverage, and reduced lot size requirements.

Applicability to St. Albert

Given the price of land in St. Albert, smaller lots would lead to land acquisition cost savings. The proposed *Land Use Bylaw 9/2005* allows for a number of lots with frontages as low as 10 m in low-density residential areas (R1 districts), which would be beneficial for the development of local affordable housing. The minimum size requirements for other districts appear to be suitable for affordable housing development. For example, the Uniquattro development in Brampton uses 5.4 m lots. The *Land Use Bylaw* proposes 6 m frontages for similar townhousing units.

On the other hand, the proposed *Land Use Bylaw* does not make any accommodations for reduced setbacks or zero lot line developments, nor does it refer to any lot shapes other than the traditional rectangular and pie-shaped lots. Reduced setbacks and allowances for alternative lot shapes may reduce land costs further, and could increase the quality of the affordable housing.

St. Albert Setback Requirements

Summary of residential setback requirements as proposed in *Land Use Bylaw 9/2005*:

Minimum front yard

- 6 m for R1, R2, R3, R3A districts
- 4 m for BW district
- DR district front yards are at the discretion of the Development Officer
- The first and second storey of MC districts must be built up to the front property line, subject to some exceptions

Minimum side yard

District	Circumstances	Width (m)
R1	One storey, 10 to 14.5 m lot width	1.35
	One storey, more than 14.5 m lot width	1.5
	Two or more storeys, 10 to 14.5 m lot width	1.8
	Two or more storeys, more than 14.5 m lot width	2
R2	One storey	1.5
	Two or more storeys	2
R3	Townhousing	6
	Street-oriented townhousing, interior unit	0
	Street-oriented townhousing, end unit	1.8
	Street-oriented townhousing, corner lot	4
	Apartment, first storey	1.8
	Apartment, second storey	2
R3A	Less than 8.5 m height	3
DR	All uses	5
MC	All uses	0
BW	Where no firewall exists between buildings	2

Note: the above table is a partial summary; exceptions and other circumstances are not noted.

Minimum rear yard

District	Type of lot	Width (m)
R1, R2	With attached garage	6
	Without attached garage	10
R3	All uses	6
R3A	All uses	10
DR, MC	All uses	Development Officer discretion
BW	All uses	None

St. Albert Lot Size Requirements

Summary of residential lot size requirements as proposed in *Land Use Bylaw 9/2005*:

Minimum lot frontages

District	Type of lot	Width (m)
R1	Interior	10
	Corner	13
R2	Semi-detached, interior	8
	Semi-detached, corner	10
	Duplex, interior	13
	Duplex, corner	15
R3	Townhousing	30
	Street-oriented townhousing, interior	6
	Street-oriented townhousing, corner	10
	Apartment	30
R3A	All uses	35
DR, MC, BW	All uses	None

Minimum lot depths

District	Type of lot	Width (m)
R1, R2, R3	Pie-shaped or backing onto P district	30.5
	Adjacent to or backing onto a major arterial road	36
	Pie-shaped adjacent to or backing onto a major arterial road	33
	All others	33.5
R3A, DR, MC, BW	All uses	None

Maximum lot coverage

- 40 percent on R1, R2, and R3 (townhousing) districts
- All other R3 district uses are to be determined by the Development Officer
- R3A and DR districts do not have maximum lot coverage requirements