EDMONTON INFILL TOUR
LET'S TALK INFILL!
REPORT
Let's change how we see and think about Infill.
Let's start a new conversation.
Let's explore Infill.

How would you define infill? What is your perception of infill in Edmonton? Can you think of any examples of infill in the city? What could infill look like? How can infill be guided to support the future sustainability, prosperity and well-being of our neighbourhoods and communities?

These are the questions that sparked the Edmonton Infill Tours. Infill is a hot topic in the City. With recent city council debates regarding zoning and lot subdivisions, managing sustainable growth of our cities is a critical issue, and expanding the dialogue around infill is necessary. There are people for infill, people against it and those that are undecided. It is important that we begin to talk about infill progressively and identify planning and development possibilities which meet the needs of local communities and support wider sustainability and resiliency across the city. To support this aim the University of Alberta’s City-Region Studies Centre, in partnership with key stakeholders including the Infill Development in Edmonton Association (IDEA), CITYlab of the City of Edmonton and Stantec, hosted a series of infill tours in January 2015.

Designed to create an engaging and inclusive experience to explore the various facets & forms of infill, the tours permitted the collective imagination of how infill could best suit/serve/fit/enhance our maturing neighbourhoods. Participants, drawn from the community and from stakeholder groups, participated in two exercises: an exploratory tour of a variety of types of infill emerging in the city, and a deliberative workshop to imagine & speculate on the future of infill and how it could foster growth & strengthen communities, as well as the city. The ultimate goals of this exercise were to provoke a conversation around infill among a variety of participants to create opportunities to carry this dialogue beyond to the wider community. Reflecting a core value at the City-Region Studies Centre, we hoped to create opportunities for communities to participate in the ‘city’ and collaboratively imagine possible urban futures.

The tasks given to our tour participants were to:

• learn about infill and Edmonton’s Infill Strategy
• meet expert stakeholders, architects, developers and city-planners
• explore the links between infill of and the past, present & future and the city

"The greatest value I found in some of the examples of infill that we witnessed was the potential to create a community-centered space that is built and maintained in a more sustainable way than we’ve traditionally seen. I now think infill provides our city with a great opportunity to reshape our neighbourhoods on those terms."

-Participant
The Tour

The infill tour consisted of four stops through four different mature neighbourhoods in central Edmonton: Bonnie Doon, Queen Alexandra, Riverdale and Westmount. The sites were selected from a list of submissions to the Infill Development in Edmonton Association’s Sites for the tour were determined to present a variety of types of infill in a variety of mature neighbourhoods.

The tour took place on a Saturday. All the participants—or infill tourists—gathered in the morning and were provided with an overview of how the day was structured. Each tourist was provided with an Edmonton Infill Tour handbook. The handbook provided everyone with a basic definition of infill, types and context within the city, and the current status of infill in Edmonton. The handbook was also a way to guide each participant’s experience through the infill sites by providing information on the mature neighbourhoods visited and listing thought-provoking questions to consider the ‘bigger picture’ of infill at each stop.
Tourists were divided into three guided groups and travelled by bus to each of the sites. Each stop/visit lasted around 45 minutes to allow for participants to tour each home as well as have a wander through the neighbourhood. The ‘wander’ was for tourists to get a sense of the community and take a more holistic look at the infill sites, in a wider context, to see how they affect and are affected by surrounding homes/spaces, as well as how they fit in with the neighbourhoods overall. Site hosts provided additional information at each stop regarding building materials, costs, and more. Bus guides took advantage of travel time between stops to discuss what tourists had observed and opinions within the context of infill in the city.

Taking photos was encouraged as an important aspect of the tour experience for reflection and to broaden the discussion to the community via social media using the hashtag #yeginfilltour. The participants photographed the aspects of infill that stood out for them, raised questions, supported infill or challenged infill in each neighbourhood. It was vital for participants to take many photos and notes, as they were going to be used in the deliberative workshop a few days following the tour. The photos were to be uploaded by tourists to the ‘Edmonton Infill Tour’ Flickr page.
Diverse participation was critical to bringing different ideas to the table and generating rich conversations. With well over 100 people applying for a limited number of spots, the organizers had the opportunity and luxury of ensuring a wide demographic of participants ranging from retired civil servants and stay-at-home moms to developers, planners, and architects. Participants were selected to ensure a variety of perspectives were included based on career, geographic location, gender, and age. Opportunities to engage in discussion with different individuals were incorporated into both the workshop and the tour and led to some great ideas.

“I didn’t hate everything I saw. It surprised me!”
-Participant

“Having never engaged with, really heard of infill, I found the tour incredibly informative. I enjoyed talking with developers on the process; especially in terms of how they consulted with the existing community and the innovative approaches they had to the building process and its materials. I often think of dense living spaces as being made for singles or couples and was very interested to see that it can also be great for families. The tour made me reflect on the importance of neighbourhood amenities, such as schools, green spaces, grocery stores, etc. I also appreciated hearing insights from other tour members - there was a great balance of information given and reflective questions being asked.”
-Participant

“It was good to have a mix of people with diverse backgrounds, not just design professionals.”
-Participant

“I loved talking and hearing from different participants from different backgrounds. It was a great use of my time.”
-Participant

THE TOURISTS
The Workshop

The deliberative workshop was an opportunity to collaboratively explore what was experienced on the tour. This was an opportunity for participants to think about what infill meant for them, and to consider what infill could offer Edmonton communities. The evening session took place on the Tuesday following the tour from 5:00pm-8:00pm and included presentations and discussion activities.

Stakeholder presentations provided additional insights from community, city and academic perspectives. The goal of the presentations was to ensure diverse perspectives were considered during the following discussions. The first presentation, “Valuing Infill,” explored what values are linked to infill and how those values are prioritized. With the presentations fresh in their mind, participants were divided into small groups for discussions. The activities facilitated the discussion by approaching the topic from a creative angle. Valuing Infill’s activity had participants work with a selection of pictures that they had taken over the weekend and associate those images with the values of infill. There is a lot of complexity of issues and values related to infill. Infill is a solution to increase density but at what cost? Is how it looks more important than how it functions within a community? Is it affordable for everyone? Does it strengthen community fabric or create gaps? What values would make infill more desirable and successful? After having organized the photos into values, they discussed if they had reconsidered how they value infill. These photos were then posted in the main meeting room to see how the groups collectively interpreted the values.
The second presentation “Visualizing Infill,” explored how the City and communities could imagine infill in Edmonton’s mature neighbourhoods. Visualizing Infill’s activity had small groups presented with a typical streetscape that they would encounter in any of Edmonton’s mature neighbourhoods. The groups were tasked with challenge of redesigning their given streetscapes, incorporating the previously discussed values and imagining what type and how infill could be incorporated.

There were no restrictions or bylaws that were to be considered, the sky was the limit and only their imaginations would hinder the outcomes. They were encouraged to think outside the box—which they did with enthusiasm!

Our tourists were given images of existing types of infill constructions, as well as with sharpies and markers to draw their own creations. Participants designed roof-top gardens, public skating rinks, and ground-floor businesses in the final products. The opportunity to work without limitations allowed for new ideas to emerge. Additionally, the activity was designed to be fun which reduced positional hostility in the discussion. The groups shared their streetscapes with the larger group and discussed their designs.
In response to the question: what did you like best?

"Making messy pictures. Daydreaming about what community looks like.”

-Participant
What Next?

The Edmonton Infill Tour and Workshop was an exciting collaborative event to encourage conversations around Infill in Edmonton. We hope that as the City grows so will these conversations.

Are you interested in thinking about infill in your community?

The CRSC is working on a downloadable kit with all the tools and materials (methods, worksheets, streetscapes etc.) needed for allow communities to explore infill themselves. Contact the CRSC for more information.

Thank you to all the participants, volunteers and organizers who helped make this event possible!

@CityRegions
#yeginfilltour

Edmonton Infill Tour

crsc.ualberta.ca/en/EdmontonInfillTour.aspx
Our Partners

**City of Edmonton- Urban Planning and Environment**

Building In. Let’s talk. The City of Edmonton embarked on a city-wide conversation about infill in 2014 as part of the Evolving Infill project. Over the course of the conversation we heard loud and clear: people really enjoyed the chance to talk about infill! The project ended in August 2014 with Edmonton’s Infill Roadmap, but the conversation hasn’t stopped. The City has recognized we need to advance a conversation about infill and neighbourhood change. This Infill Tour is just one opportunity to talk together about what infill means for our city as a whole. Thank you for joining us!

www.edmonton.ca/city_government/urban_planning_and_design/evolving-infill.aspx

**IDEA**

IDEA is a proactive advocacy group that provides education and resources on infill development to the community and industry. IDEA helps to connect organizations, experts, businesses and individuals in order to encourage high quality and vibrant infill development in Edmonton. It is our mission to promote and advocate for high quality infill development in Edmonton. We have a vision for Edmonton’s existing neighbourhoods to flourish with diverse housing and healthy lifestyle choices. We are excited that this event, Edmonton’s first infill tour, has potential to move the conversation forward and help our city to envision new possibilities for high-quality infill.

http://www.infilledmonton.com

**Stantec**

Stantec believes infill development is essential to renew and strengthen mature communities. Redevelopment brings in new residents, supports local shops and services, puts children into existing classrooms, and allows for a range of lifestyle choices across the city. Accomplishing these goals takes careful planning and has to start with a discussion about what works for Edmonton. We enthusiastically support the Edmonton Infill Tour as a way to engage in this dialogue, explore ideas, and craft made-in-Edmonton solutions to managing change in our swiftly changing urban neighbourhoods.

www.stantec.com

**City-Region Studies Centre**

This event was part of CRSC’s Regional Planning Speakers Series (RPSS). RPSS is a year-long educational program made up of a series of lectures, panel discussions and workshops. It is a forum for stakeholders including planners, architects, designers, community members, academics, and students. Our aim is to promote connections, share ideas and build capacity in ways which promote resilience and sustainability, develop robust economies, encourage collaboration and improve the quality of life of communities across the Province.

www.crsc.ualberta.ca