

Recommendations for Child/Family- Friendly Multi-Unit Housing

Neighbourhood Checklist & Housing Design Guidelines

**Prepared by the
Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues**

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These guidelines are based primarily on Vancouver and Portland's guidelines. Additional guidelines were also taken from London (England), Austin and Seattle, as well as recommendations from The Premier's Council in Support of Alberta Families.

The first draft of the guidelines were revised with input from the September 25, 2010 EFCL Workshop on higher density family housing guidelines.

A. Family Friendly Neighbourhoods

1. Housing is located within a safe and reasonable walking distance to family amenities:
 - a) Elementary school
 - b) Park/informal outdoor play area
 - c) Formal recreation facilities/playfields with organized activities for children
 - d) Community gathering place (e.g. Community League hall, community garden)
 - e) Grocery store
 - f) Public transit stop
 - g) Child Care/After School Care

A reasonable distance from family amenities is 400 m.

2. Streets can be negotiated safely and comfortably by parents and children:
 - traffic speeds, street crossing distances and street corner radii are minimized
 - bicycle paths/routes are provided, particularly in the vicinity of schools, parks and transit
 - sidewalks are provided on all streets
 - curb cuts/front driveways are kept to a minimum.
3. There is sufficient family oriented housing to support neighbourhood family amenities, and to foster companionships amongst children /families.
4. Schools are *integrated* with the neighborhood: have activities beyond the typical school day, welcome community members, and have support for children and their families.
5. There is a strong sense of community. There are community gathering places which are inviting. Neighbours know each other and support each other (via informal supports, and organizations such as Community League, Safe Parents, Neighbourhood Crime Watch). There is a sense of pride and cooperation in the community. Community members join together to act on issues of concern.
6. Families feel safe and secure in their neighborhood – safe from crime and traffic.
7. Activities for children are available without concern for cost (e.g. nature walks, skating at local rinks, inexpensive community run activities and facilities).
8. Integration of Ages: Diverse age groups live in the community and diverse age groups can live in one household. Children have access to their grandparents or other seniors, both parents and extended family. There are intergeneration community activities. Community members value and care for seniors.

B. Amenity Areas

Principles:

Common areas are important for children and adults to build community.

Children need safe, uninhibited outdoor play for their physiological and mental health.

Parents need to be able to allow their children outside without constant, close supervision.

Children need easy, casual access to children without a formal invitation to play.

Definitions

An amenity area is space provided for the active or passive recreation and enjoyment of occupants of a residential development, which may be for private or communal use and owned individually or in common.

Types of amenity areas:

- a) *Private Outdoor Amenity Area which could be a private yard or balcony/terrace.*
- b) *Common Outdoor Amenity Area is designed to accommodate passive and social gathering for residents, activities such as communal barbeque and gardening, or physical recreation activities.*
- c) *Common Indoor Amenity Area – an indoor space to accommodate social gatherings, meetings, craft or workshop area, or recreation activities and play areas.*
- d) *Childs Play Space is a communal play space for children with formal play equipment and some seating areas for adults.*

Private Outdoor Area:

9. The private outdoor space is large enough to accommodate activities such as eating, sitting, tending plants, quiet children's play, active toddler play and minor household maintenance.
10. Each family oriented dwelling has a private outdoor amenity space which is at least:
 - a) 7.5 m² when common outdoor amenity space is provided
 - b) 15 m² when the dwelling is at ground level (draft proposal, C of E) and common amenity space is provided
 - c) 30 m² when no common amenity space is provided.
 - d) 50 m², the play area recommended for preschoolers, is provided when common amenity space is not provided on-site or easily accessible in the community.
11. Private outdoor space is designed to maximize privacy and security. For ground level units, secure fencing is provided, which is critical for the security and supervision of very young children.

Common Amenity Area/Play Space:

12. The entire site is designed to withstand use by children – children play everywhere, including corridors, stairways, entries and landscaped yards.
13. Common amenity area includes play area(s) suited to the development and play needs of children of all ages.

14. The Play Area has a minimum of 2 hours sunlight Dec 21st; and has sun and some shade in the summer.
15. MOST IMPORTANTLY, each family unit has both visual and direct physical access to a common play area for small children.
16. Common outdoor space, especially play space, is secure from intrusion. The ideal design is a gated courtyard, however, the common space could be within a gated fenced yard, or on a rooftop with security access.
17. Ideally, play space and adult-oriented common amenity spaces are separated. Preference is given to ground-level space for children, and roof-top space for adults, for safety and ease of supervision of play spaces.
18. Children should have easy access to an outdoor play area of adequate size. The play area should range from 135 m² to 280 m². The play area should be a minimum of 50 m² for preschoolers and 85 m² for school children/ teenagers. The play space provided by the residential development could be reduced for school aged children if there is reasonable access to nearby playgrounds.
19. Except for developments that contain less than 20 Dwellings, a minimum of 2.5 m² of Amenity Area per Dwelling shall be provided as outdoor communal recreational space in addition to any other required Amenity Area. All minimum common outdoor amenity space should be provided at ground level and be aggregated into areas of not less than 50 m². Additional amenity space may be provided on rooftops, terraces or indoors.
20. Play space should have both hard surfaces and soft surfaces (e.g. sand, grass) for various types of activity. Play space should include some vegetation to provide children a connection to nature.
21. Outdoor Play Areas are segregated from vehicles.
22. Outdoor Play Areas are segregated from dog/pet "toilet" areas.

Indoor Amenity Space/Play Space

23. Common indoor amenity space for families with children is provided where the individual units are not suited to desired indoor activities.
 - a) An indoor play space for children and a teenage lounge could be considered.
 - b) A multi-purpose room should be considered for meetings and parties/social activities, especially if community facilities are not easily accessible. Multi-purpose rooms should be at least 28 m².
 - c) Common laundry rooms should be provided if units do not have laundry facilities. There should be a washer and dryer for every 10 units.

Additional Considerations:

24. Front yards on busy arterial streets are not appropriate amenity areas.
25. Provide active, interesting streets which can serve as public amenity areas, in addition to public parks.
26. Collective management of common amenity spaces is important in order for residents to feel they have control over their common space.
27. Install low glare, motion sensor controlled, smart design lighting in outdoor spaces.

C. Unit and Building Design

Materials:

- 28. Quality materials used to withstand intensive use by children
- 29. Non-toxic finishes for walls, cabinetry and floors

Bedrooms:

- 30. Minimum of 2 bedrooms with adequate square footage and layout to create an additional bedroom
- 31. Three bedrooms with 1.5 baths is the most popular and recommended.
- 32. Bedrooms large enough for bed, dresser, table/desk, floor space for playing

Layout:

- 33. Rooms have multi-purpose function
- 34. Dining floor is washable and waterproof (no carpet).
- 35. Kitchen and eating spaces are larger to accommodate family gatherings.
- 36. Combined living/dining/kitchen spaces are not recommended except in 2 bedroom, three person units and smaller. Larger families need two separate family areas – living room and the dining/kitchen room.
- 37. Bathroom is large enough for adult and child.
- 38. Bathtub is provided, not just stand-up shower.
- 39. Private outdoor space is visible from the kitchen.
- 40. Generous entry area for toys and equipment, storage of outdoor wear and dressing children; washable floor.
- 41. Sleeping areas not affected by proximity to neighbouring 'living areas'.
- 42. Bedrooms are not located adjacent to elevators, communal hallways or waste disposal chutes.
- 43. A "track" consisting of a loop that kids can run around, from the kitchen to the living room to the foyer and back is an asset.
- 44. Recommend a space and outlet for a washer and dryer.

45. Recommend flexible interior spaces to encourage individualization of units, and adaptation to family size and life cycle changes.
46. Recommend individually designed unit entries to facilitate distinct sense of ownership, privacy and visual interest. In the case of common entries and corridors, design solutions include a minimizing the number of units sharing a common entry and corridor, variation in corridor width, different door types and staggered spacing, and combination of recessed and flush entries.
47. Exterior lighting does not shine into bedroom windows.

Privacy

Acoustic privacy:

48. Provide acoustic walls and ceiling linings in common stairwells, lobbies and corridors.
49. Sound- proof common walls and floors/ceilings to the extent that neighbours are unable to hear children jumping and babies crying.

Visual Privacy:

50. Separate building facades by 24 meters (Edmonton Zoning Bylaw requires 10 m), OR screen windows and outdoor amenity spaces through landscaping or architectural screening.
51. In corridors, offset unit doorways.
52. Adjoining or opposing balconies to be avoided or screened.

Odours:

53. Ventilation and air circulation system should prevent odours from being dispersed between units as much as possible.

Storage:

54. Sufficient bulk storage for large household items such as strollers, wheeled toys, suitcases, sports equipment and holiday decoration: minimum 5.7 m³ (2.3 m² floor space) per unit; with at least 2.8 m³ within the unit.
55. Private, secure street level storage for outdoor items such as bicycles.

Safety:

56. Attention to windows (e.g. high windows above first floor to prevent falls), stair railings, stair configuration, play area enclosures, location of heaters, electric outlets
57. Wider corridors for strollers, tricycles, play space

58. Child safe balconies, decks, rooftop amenity spaces

Clusters:

59. Create a sufficient number and clustering of family units in buildings to minimize noise complaints and foster peer relationships for children.

60. Cluster units in groups of 30 to 40 units to facilitate community building. This cluster size is small enough to get to know all neighbours, and large enough to support common amenity areas.

Access and Security:

61. Private street access to self contained dwelling units and gardens should be encouraged in order to avoid many of the critical issues of housing with shared entrances/corridors/stairs/elevators. Issues include loss of privacy, security, and access to outdoor amenity spaces.

62. Consider a split security system for the main entrance and each landing when 40 or more units share the same entrance.

63. Provide ongoing staff management and monitoring of the building when more than 100 units share an entrance.

Additional Considerations:

64. Guest suites are an asset.

65. Design buildings for children to live on all floors, not just the ground floor.

66. Design building entrances and elevators to be 'hands free' navigated by people with children and goods in their hands.

67. Consider a variety of designs and sizes which appeal to a variety of household sizes and income levels, from very affordable units to luxury units.