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THE FUTURE OF CALGARY'S COMMUNITY PARKS

**A Political Analysis of the Public Policy Debates on
Use of School Reserve land in Calgary**

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Executive Summary

In Alberta, municipal policy regarding the preservation of urban park space has been evolving since legislative changes were made in 2010 to enable municipalities to use surplus school reserve sites for a range of purposes in addition to green space. Many competing demands for these sites have been put forth by a variety of proponents, including citizens and community associations, school boards, the development industry, affordable housing providers and advocates, and municipalities.

This capstone project examines the politics that underlie the current public policy debates on these competing uses of municipal park space in Alberta, in particular, the re-use of vacant school reserve sites for affordable housing. The desire to build affordable housing or other community services on Municipal and School Reserve (MSR) lands has arisen as a result of two economic factors: 1) Alberta's resource-based economy creates a short-run, cyclical volatility in housing demand and pricing; 2) this is exacerbated by the long-term goal of reducing urban sprawl, which puts upward pressure on land costs by restricting the supply of suburban land available for new housing. In Alberta, these factors came together when the "superheated economy" of 2006 and 2007 strained housing supply across the province, doubling house prices in three years, and leaving many with inadequate shelter. One solution that has been embraced by municipal and provincial leaders in both Calgary and Edmonton is the use of vacant school reserve sites for affordable housing. In 2010, legislation was amended to allow vacant school reserve sites

to be used for affordable housing or other community services, instead of being used for parks.

This report provides an analysis of stakeholder concerns and interests that may help government officials anticipate the nature of the political and public interest in park redevelopment so that they may consider more inclusive and transparent policy proposals regarding the utilization of city lands. The key stakeholder concerns identified through this project include: an information imbalance between government decision-makers and residents of neighbourhoods with potential surplus school sites; impacts on adjacent homeowners; a diminishing supply of surplus school sites; an uncertain need to use surplus school sites for housing; and an evolving political environment.

While The City of Calgary (The City) Municipal Development Plan and Open Space Plan acknowledge the inherent conflict amongst competing interests in public lands and provide policies to balance the demands, these policies were developed before the *MGA* was amended to allow repurposing of school reserve sites, resulting in policy gaps and a number of political challenges. The City can address these challenges by improving transparency in municipal decision-making and responding to stakeholder concerns regarding future use of vacant school reserve sites.

Key recommendations include informing and consulting citizens, mitigating impacts on neighbourhood park space, making policy amendments, strategically planning and building affordable housing, and minimizing political uncertainty over land use by continuing to modify the methodology for determining elementary school requirements and informing homebuyers in new communities regarding the potential future development of school reserve sites.

Introduction

Alberta's cyclical, resource-based economy leads to years of rapid growth in which tens of thousands of newcomers migrate to the province for the plentiful jobs, only to leave when the economy cools. The housing industry struggles to keep pace with demand during the boom cycles, leading to price escalation, low vacancy rates and shortages of affordable housing. The boom cycle is typically followed by a bust, resulting in high vacancy rates, depressed prices, and the potential for financial losses in the housing industry, which tempers investment in affordable rental buildings.[1]

This short-run, cyclical volatility in housing demand and pricing is exacerbated by the long-term goal of major cities to reduce urban sprawl and improve financial and environmental sustainability, which puts upward pressure on land costs by restricting the supply of suburban land available for new housing. While a compact urban form is projected to be more sustainable and affordable for society as a whole,[2] a policy of reduced land supply contributes to a long-run increase in the price of land, according to the Bank of Canada.[3] As a result, it can be expected over the long-term that house prices will outpace inflation, housing affordability will decrease, and the demand for the municipality to provide affordable housing for lower income residents will grow. The main factors that contribute to the long-run rise in housing prices in Canada are an increase in demand due to growing population and income, combined with a decrease in supply due to "the increasing scarcity of land for residential development, primarily in urban areas," according to the Bank of Canada.[4]

In Alberta, these factors came together when the "superheated economy" of 2006

[1] Mario Toneguzzi, *Conference Board Predicts Slowdown in Condo Starts Will Persist until 2017*, 2015.
[2] *The City of Calgary Municipal Development Plan*. Calgary, Alberta: The City of Calgary, 2009, 2-8.
[3] Brian Peterson and Yi Zheng, *Medium-Term Fluctuations in Canadian House Prices*. (Ottawa: Bank of Canada, 2012), 30-33.
[4] Ibid.

and 2007 strained housing supply across the province, doubling house prices in three years, and leaving many with inadequate shelter.[5] In order to address the housing crisis at that time, municipal and provincial governments, housing advocates and the building industry joined forces to identify innovative solutions. One solution that was embraced by municipal and provincial leaders in both Calgary and Edmonton was the use of vacant school reserve sites for affordable housing.

Calgary, for example, has more than 8,000 hectares of municipal parkland with 5,600 park sites, including many neighbourhood parks that are located on land designated as either Municipal Reserve (MR) or Municipal and School Reserve (MSR).[6] Of particular interest are an estimated 70 to 80 school reserve sites which have remained vacant since the 1970s to 1990s for a number of reasons, including declining birth rates that reduced the need for schools, delays in fully occupying communities, and decreases in provincial capital funding for schools.[7] These sites are seen by some as valuable parks and sports fields, and by others as an underutilized bank of 200 to 300 acres of developable land owned by The City and the school boards.[8] If affordable townhouses were built on these lands, a conservative estimate of 3,000 homes could be accommodated, making the land an appealing target for redevelopment.

This Capstone examines the politics that underlie the current public policy debates

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[5] TD Bank Financial Group, *Alberta Ready to Defy Boom Bust Cycles of the Past*, TD Economics, Toronto: Toronto Dominion Bank, 2007), 2.
[6] The City of Calgary, "Parks, Pathways and Natural Areas," http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Parks/Pages/Locations/Parks-pathways-and-natural-areas.aspx.
[7] "The Controversial Eighties; The Restructuring Nineties," The Alberta Teachers' Association, http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Teaching%20in%20Alberta/History%20of%20Public%20Education/Pages/The%20Nineties.aspx.
[8] A list of potential surplus school reserve sites in Calgary is not publicly available; however, in 2007 Mayor Bronconnier estimated that Calgary had an estimated 80 vacant school reserve sites that could be declared surplus to school board needs. By 2009, 16 of these school reserve sites had been declared surplus. By 2015, seven of the 16 sites had been reallocated to another school board (FrancoSud), used for storm water retention, or used for other purposes. In 2015, nine surplus school reserve sites remain, with an estimated 64 school reserve sites with the potential to be declared surplus, totalling 73 current and potential surplus sites. The school reserve portion of a Municipal and School Reserve (MSR) site is typically three to four acres and could accommodate 40-43 townhouses at a medium density development such as in the Edmonton First Place Program for entry-level home ownership.

on these competing uses of surplus school lands in Alberta. Context for the analysis of public policy debates is provided through a review of the legislative and policy framework, including relevant City of Calgary plans, policies and bylaws; an overview of Calgary's urban parks system; and a review of political analysis and political stakeholder analysis methodology. This provides the foundation for the analysis of the public policy debates, to enable a more thorough understanding of the perspectives of the varied stakeholders who hold an interest in whether this land is developed, and if so, how it is used. The project focuses mainly on Calgary as a case study; however, Edmonton has progressed more quickly on its conversion of surplus school sites to other uses, and hence has also been examined for additional insights into the public debates on this policy issue. The report concludes with a discussion of potential policy options that may provide insights into how the political and stakeholder interests in the utilization and potential repurposing of Municipal and School Reserve lands could be addressed.

A Brief History and Overview of Calgary's Urban Parks System

An understanding of Calgary's parks system and the competing demands for urban land requires a look back at the history of the city's parklands over the past century to a time when civic leaders first saw parks and recreation as integral to the creation of a "more desirable and beautiful place to live," according to the book, "Calgary Celebrating 100 Years of Parks," published by The City in 2012. The City describes donations in 1910 of "substantial tracks of land" by wealthy private citizens, whose names are immortalized in some of the city's favourite places, such as Riley Park and Shouldice Park.[9] Land developers donated property that later became Tuxedo and Bowness parks, in exchange for "access to City infrastructure" such as the waterworks and street railway systems.[10]

In 1911, City Council ruled that "no further subdivisions would be approved unless a minimum of five per cent of proposed subdivisions were deeded to the city for parks purposes."[11] Also that year, the rapidly growing municipality contracted famous planner and landscape architect Thomas Mawson to develop a city plan that envisioned public green space within walking distance of every residence.[12] Although the Mawson plan was never implemented due to the economic constraints brought on by the First World War, The City did by 1922 adopt "a policy for preserving land for parks" which would become some of Calgary's well-known inner city parks.[13] Moreover, the principle that every home should have easy access to park space has continued through to the current Open Space Plan.[14]

The end of the Second World War brought economic prosperity to Calgary, along

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[9] The City of Calgary, *Calgary Celebrating 100 Years of Parks*, (Calgary, Alberta: The City of Calgary, 2006), 20.
[10] Ibid., 22-23.
[11] Beverly Sandalac and Andrew Nicolai, *The Calgary Project: Urban Form/Urban Life,* (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2006), 27.
[12] Ibid.
[13] The City, *Calgary Celebrating*, 25.
[14] The City of Calgary, *Open Space Plan*, (Calgary, Alberta: The City of Calgary, 2002),16.

with a "population boom, huge surge in car ownership, and a big demand for housing for families,"[15] and The City responded by providing large parks and athletic facilities oriented to families and children, according to Sandalac and Uribe.[16] By the 1940s and 1950s, "the general public, community groups and organized sporting leagues jostled for facility space and priority scheduling."[17] To help meet the growing demand for sports fields, The City and the local school boards negotiated an agreement in 1950 that made schoolyards "available for public playfields after-hours and on weekends." This would become "standard practice" in Calgary.

The City developed its first long-range plan for recreation and park development in 1976, based on input provided by Calgarians through a public survey. The survey found that "The shortage of parks and park amenities in the downtown core and inner city communities was identified as a problem that would need to be addressed. Calgary's oldest neighbourhoods had not had the benefit of municipal reserves. As apartments and multi-family units replaced individual homes there, higher densities amplified an already troublesome shortfall."[18] The practice of engaging the public in parks' planning continued, and was reflected in the Urban Parks Master Plan approved by Council in 1994 and the Open Space Plan in 2002.[19] Parks' Director Anne Charlton speaks to the value of Calgary's parkland:[20]

> Whether enjoyed as a place to walk, sit, play or socialize, parks have considerable bearing on the quality of life enjoyed by the population of any urban community. Parks provide a much-needed respite from the unnatural pace of an urban lifestyle. But competing interests and high land values can challenge priorities, and the natural environment is always and by definition, vulnerable. Putting useful land to

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[15] The City, *Calgary Celebrating*, 90, 122.
[16] Beverly Sandalac and Francisco Alanis Uribe, "Calgary's Middle Ring Neighbourhoods: Transitioning Post-World War 2 Form to Greater Sustainability." 18th International Seminar on Urban Form. Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary, 2011, 7-8.
[17] The City, *Calgary Celebrating*.
[18] Ibid., 74-76.
[19] Ibid., 81-91.
[20] Ibid., 2006.

the side for public enjoyment before private interests consume it is at best expensive, and at worst, cost-prohibitive. The City of Calgary has benefited immensely from the foresight and generosity of individuals, families and corporations that recognize the intrinsic value of public open space by making it a priority, for now and for the future.

Charlton's views about the value of parks to Calgarians are supported by the findings of The City's annual Citizen Satisfaction Survey 2014, which found that 97 per cent of Calgarians say that parks and other open spaces are important and 97 per cent say that The City should maintain or increase investment in parks.[21]

While these survey findings clearly show strong support for parkland, it exists in tension with nearly equal support for social services and affordable housing. That tension has come to the fore particularly with respect to the surplus school reserve sites issue. On the one hand, these sites represent desirable neighbourhood parks, but on the other hand, as Sandalac notes, any "underutilized" recreational fields could be better used for community amenities or private development, including affordable housing.[22] This perspective was embraced by the Affordable Housing Task Force in 2007 and led to provincial and municipal legislative and policy changes that would allow affordable housing to be built more quickly and easily on public lands, as described in the next section.

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[21] The City of Calgary, *Citizen Satisfaction Survey*, (Calgary, Alberta: The City of Calgary, 2014), 27, 18, 28, 44.
[22] Beverly Sandalac and Francisco Alanis Uribe, "Calgary's Middle Ring Neighbourhoods: Transitioning Post-World War 2 Form to Greater Sustainability," 18th International Seminar on Urban Form, (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary, 2011), 33.

Legislative and Policy Context

In Alberta, the provision of land for municipal and school purposes is regulated through a number of statutes and regulations. The primary laws that apply to the issue of vacant surplus school sites are the *Municipal Government Act, RSA 2000, c M-26,* which includes provisions for the dedication and use of Municipal and School Reserve lands, and the *School Act, RSA 2000, c S-3,*[23] with its *Disposition of Property Regulation, Alta Reg 181/2010,*[24] which includes provisions for school boards wishing to declare school sites surplus to their needs*.*

Proclaimed by Alberta in 1995 and amended numerous times since then, the *MGA* is the enabling statute governing municipalities in the province. The *MGA* includes provisions for the dedication of various types of reserve land by developers for municipal and school purposes.[25] The *MGA* enables up to 10 per cent of the developable area of subdivided lands to be dedicated as municipal reserve (MR), school reserve (SR), or municipal and school reserve (MSR), or a greater percentage in high density developments.[26]

The *MGA* allows MR land to be used only for parks and recreation purposes and SR land to be used only for school board purposes. By contrast, the MSR lands on which this study focuses, may be used for parks, recreation *and* school purposes, with one exception – if the school boards and Minister of Education, operating under the *School Act,* deem an SR site or the SR portion of an MSR site surplus to school needs, the land is transferred to the municipality and can either be redesignated MR and retained as parkland or, since the *MGA*

[23] Alberta School Act, RSA 2000, c S-3. 2015, (Edmonton, Alberta: Queen's Printer).

[24] Alberta Disposition of Property Regulation, Alta Reg 181/2010. (Edmonton, Alberta: Queen's Printer).

[25] The MGA also requires dedication of other types of land for Environmental Reserve and for transportation and utility use; however, these dedications are beyond the scope of this paper.

[26] Alberta Municipal Government Act 1995 Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000, Chapter M-26, S.668(2): Subject to section 663, when in the opinion of the subdivision authority a proposed subdivision would result in a density of 30 dwelling units or more per hectare of developable land, the subdivision authority may require municipal reserve, school reserve or municipal and school reserve in addition to that required to be provided under section 666.

was amended in 2010, it may be redesignated as Community Services Reserve (CSR) and used for affordable housing or other public uses, instead of being used for parks.[27] The municipality does not need to give notice or hold a public hearing for plans to provide for the "broader range of public uses allowed for CSR" now allowed under MGA S671(2.1).[28]

The municipality can similarly transfer municipal reserve or its interest in municipal and school reserve to a school board without holding a public hearing. Municipalities also have the option to sell or lease surplus CSR lands, so long as they use the proceeds for CSR purposes, again including affordable housing, but this can occur only following an advertised public hearing, with notices posted near the site. As one might expect, these provisions for the repurposing of MSR lands have become centres of conflict as the tensions between park space and affordable housing intensified in Alberta.

These tensions and conflicts are replicated in, and shaped by, the planning documents that the provincial *MGA* requires municipalities with a population of 3,500 or more to enact. These Municipal Development Plans (MDPs) must address future land uses and growth patterns, the transportation system, the provision of municipal services and facilities, policies respecting the provision of municipal and school reserves, and a variety of other matters.[29] Calgary's MDP, enacted in 2009, builds on The City's earlier non-statutory planning document, the Open Space Plan, adopted by City Council in 2002. This plan was intended to provide "the guidance needed to resolve conflicting or competing demands for park space," and, as noted above, maintains the Mawson-plan principle of easy access to parks. Indeed, the Open Space plan specifies that all Calgary homes should be

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[27] Government of Alberta, "Bill 41 Municipal Government Amendment Act," *Municipal Affairs Information Bulletin Number 09/10*, (Edmonton, Alberta: Government of Alberta, 2010), 1. MGA S.672(3) now allows the municipality to redesignate the school building envelope portion of the land as Community Services Reserve (CSR), which can be used for a broader range of public purposes that benefit the community. The remainder of the site must be redesignated as MR and used only for parks and recreation purposes.
[28] Alberta, "Bill 41 Information Bulletin," 2.
[29] Alberta Municipal Government Act, S.632.

within a five-minute walk or 450 metres of open space.[30] Of particular relevance to this study, moreover, the plan notes that "school sites play an important role in the provision of open space."[31]

Calgary's MDP addresses a more detailed 60-year strategy to provide "a more sustainable city form," to support decisions on "growth and change," and to direct coordination between departments.[32] This MDP is built on seven inter-related, overarching goals: a prosperous economy, a compact city, great communities, good urban design, connecting the city, greening the city, and managing growth and change. Of these, "a compact city" and "great communities" are of greatest relevance to the policy debates regarding surplus school sites.[33]

The goal of a compact city seeks to develop a "more compact, efficient use of land," with growth balanced between new suburbs and existing communities that "provide a broad range of housing choices and services."[34] This, in isolation, would encourage the development of vacant land in order to increase density and housing choice in existing neighbourhoods. However, the goal of a compact city is balanced by the great-communities goal, which emphasizes the need for housing options, parks and outdoor recreation, community services and facilities, and reserve lands. This latter goal includes objectives designed to help government decision-makers, both bureaucratic and political, strike an acceptable balance between the policy of "increased opportunities for affordable housing" and policies to "protect the basic function of city parks and public open spaces, and prevent parkland conversion to other uses" and to "prioritize the location and allocation of

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[30] The City, *Open Space Plan*, 16.
[31] Ibid.,5, 24.
[32] The City of Calgary *Municipal Development Plan*. Calgary, Alberta: The City of Calgary, 2009, 1-2; 1-7.
[33] The City of Calgary, "Seven Goals of the Municipal Development Plan," (The City of Calgary, 2015), http://www.calgary.ca/PDA/PD/Pages/Municipal-Development-Plan/Seven-goals.aspx#top.
[34] The City, *Municipal Development Plan, 2*-8.

municipal reserve, school reserve, municipal/school reserve land as follows:"[35]

     i. Neighbourhood needs – elementary schools, elementary/junior high schools and neighbourhood parks.
    ii. Community needs – junior high schools, community associations, open space linkages and priority environmentally significant lands.
   iii. Regional needs – high schools, pools, arenas, athletic parks and other recreational facilities."

The location and allocation of MSR lands is further prioritized by The City and the two largest school boards, which jointly manage the MSR sites and related reserve fund through the Joint Use Coordinating Committee (JUCC), "a tri-party committee with representation from The City, the Calgary Board of Education and the Catholic Separate School Board."[36] The organizations have established a Joint Use Agreement, "a legal agreement pertaining to the acquisition, use, operations and management of reserve lands," which is updated approximately every five years.[37] The JUCC oversees most aspects relating to the planning and dedication of land designated as MSR in accordance with the *MGA*.

In 2009, The City of Calgary report, LAS2009-66 Re-Use of Surplus School Reserve Sites, described the typical MSR site, provided a map of the school reserve sites declared surplus at that time, and recommended a decision-process, which was approved by Council.[38] According to the report, "Joint Use Sites typically include a school building envelope portion, to accommodate the actual school building and parking lot, as well as an open space area for park and playfields to serve both the school and the local community."[39]

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[35] The City, *Municipal Development Plan*, 2-26.
[36] The City, *Open Space Plan*, 76.
[37] Ibid.
[38] The City of Calgary, *LAS2009-66 Re-Use of Surplus School Reserve Sites,* Calgary, Alberta: 2009, 2.
[39] The City, *LAS2009-66 Attachment 1*, 2.

Joint use sites, designated as MSR, are generally in the order of 10 to 12 acres in size, of which the school building envelope portion is typically three to four acres. Chart 4 shows a typical joint use site.[40]

CHART 4

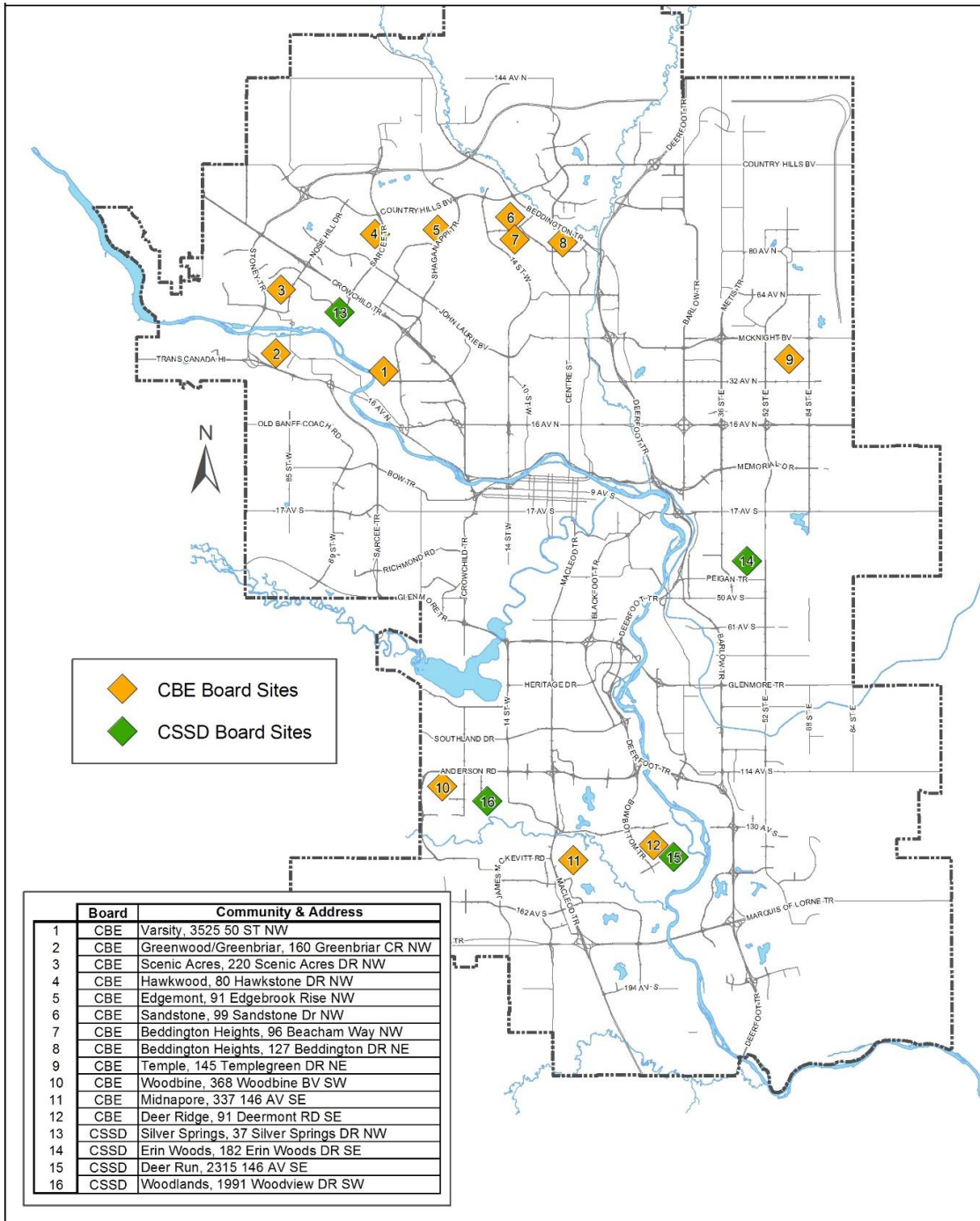**Example of Joint Use Site Layout**

FIGURE 1: Example of Joint Use Site Layout
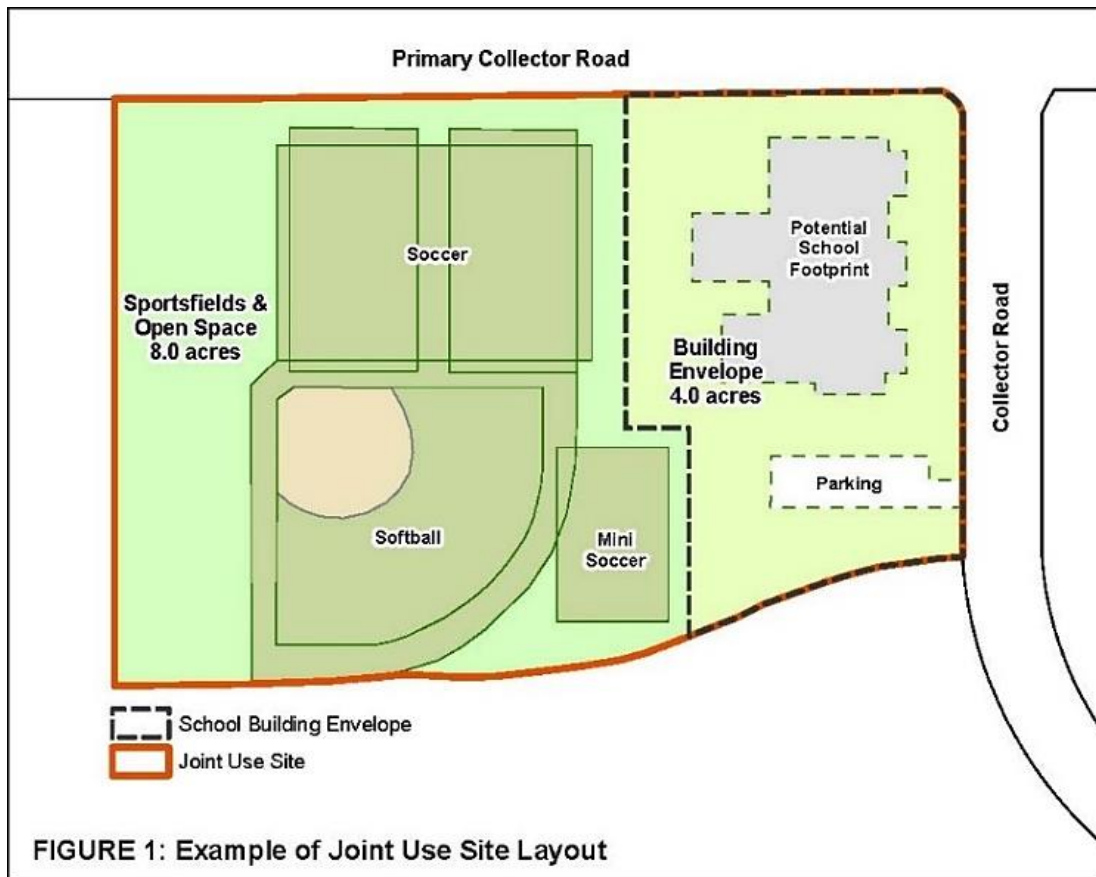
[40] The City, *LAS2009-66 Attachment 1*, Appendix 2.

Chart 5 shows the map of 16 surplus school sites in 2009, of which nine remain vacant in 2015.[41]

CHART 5

School Reserve Sites Identified as Surplus by School Boards (2009)

	Board	Community & Address
1	CBE	Varsity, 3525 50 ST NW
2	CBE	Greenwood/Greenbriar, 160 Greenbriar CR NW
3	CBE	Scenic Acres, 220 Scenic Acres DR NW
4	CBE	Hawkwood, 80 Hawkstone DR NW
5	CBE	Edgemont, 91 Edgebrook Rise NW
6	CBE	Sandstone, 99 Sandstone Dr NW
7	CBE	Beddington Heights, 96 Beacham Way NW
8	CBE	Beddington Heights, 127 Beddington DR NE
9	CBE	Temple, 145 Templegreen DR NE
10	CBE	Woodbine, 368 Woodbine BV SW
11	CBE	Midnapore, 337 146 AV SE
12	CBE	Deer Ridge, 91 Deermont RD SE
13	CSSD	Silver Springs, 37 Silver Springs DR NW
14	CSSD	Erin Woods, 182 Erin Woods DR SE
15	CSSD	Deer Run, 2315 146 AV SE
16	CSSD	Woodlands, 1991 Woodview DR SW

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[41] The City, *LAS2009-66 Attachment 1*, Appendix 2.

In order to prioritize competing demands for the surplus lands, the LAS2009-66 report includes a decision process requiring staff to first determine whether the land is needed to meet the open space standards approved by Council.[42] If the land is not needed for open space, it will then be evaluated for use for CSR purposes.[43] If The City does not need the land for CSR purposes, staff will then seek proposals from third-party organizations that provide CSR services.[44] If no third party use is identified, staff will recommend whether the site should be kept as CSR land for future use or be sold.[45]

The most pertinent principles approved by Council through this report include: ensuring that approved standards for open space are met before other uses are considered; giving priority to municipal uses and services that meet both current local community needs and broader city-wide needs; where possible, including a multi-use facility or partnership; "retaining reserve sites as a long term land base" to meet citizens' evolving needs; and supporting the MDP's goals of sustainable development and complete communities.[46] The idea of "complete communities," of course, is generally understood to include affordable housing, meaning that the tension between housing and recreational goals that we have seen in the previously discussed planning documents also appears in this report. Council agreed that new developments should be compatible with the location, adjacent uses and the character of the adjacent open space and park use.

Council also agreed with staff recommendations to consult with the adjacent residents, communities and social-service providers regarding proposals, and to follow normal City processes for land use and development approvals. The latter recommendation

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[42] The City. *LAS2009-66 Attachment 1*, 7.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 6.
[46] Ibid., 4.

is a major departure from the approach taken by The City of Edmonton in 2006, which exploited a ministerial exemption from the requirement for advertising, consulting citizens and holding a public hearing that the *MGA* provided.[47]

Report LAS2009-66 further recommended that the Joint Use Agreement between The City and the large school boards be updated to "Establish mechanisms for determining the allocation of moneys received from the disposition of surplus school building envelopes in the event they are not used for MR or CSR purposes."[48] The Agreement requires reserve land and moneys to be held in trust by the three parties and to make decisions "in the best interest of all Calgarians."[49]

In sum, the overarching intent of the legal, policy and procedural context discussed in this section is to guide decisions that are made in the public interest, by balancing conflicting demands and competing values. But precisely how to strike the balance remains an open question. Because the various stakeholders who have an interest in the use of public lands have different visions about what the issues are, and how to resolve them, the decision process is inherently political. The next section describes the political process through which these decisions are made by government bodies on behalf of citizens.

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[47] City of Edmonton, November 17, 2006, *Special City Council Meeting (Surplus School Sites),* Office of the City Clerk Memorandum. (Edmonton, Alberta: City of Edmonton, 2006).
[48] The City, *LAS2009-66 Attachment 1*, 9.
[49] Ibid.

The Political Process

The political process ultimately determines how scarce public resources, such as land, are allocated amongst competing demands from citizens. Political analysis is the study of how these policy choices are made, who benefits from them, and who is disadvantaged.[50] Lightbody distils the political process into five stages: demand initiation, political supports, the conversion arena, and results and consequences.[51]

The political process begins with "demand initiation," which occurs when individuals or groups "challenge political authorities to adapt the status quo to conform more closely with their expectations," says Lightbody.[52] Mintz notes that government decisions will likely reflect the demands of the most politically active stakeholders.[53] But only those demands that are "salient, worthy and observable" will gain the attention of political decision-makers, argues Lightbody.[54] These demands must also have significant support, whether individual resources, the power of a group, or a shared interest in a policy issue, such as living in the same neighbourhood. [55]

When a demand for policy change has sufficient political support and has been honed so that political leaders can consider public policy choices on the issue, it has reached the "conversion arena."[56] While ad hoc stakeholder groups such as citizen groups may focus their efforts on their local political representatives, others focus on influencing the bureaucracy, with whom they have built relationships.[57] The next stage in the policy making process is the formal decision-making by political authorities, often a legislative

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[50] James Lightbody, *City Politics, Canada,* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006), 69.
[51] Ibid., 70.
[52] Ibid., 70-71.
[53] Eric Mintz, David Close and Osvaldo Croci, *Politics, Power and the Common Good: An Introduction to Political Science (Second ed.),* (Toronto, Ontario: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 168.
[54] Lightbody, *City Politics,* 74-75.
[55] Ibid., 8.
[56] Ibid., 78.
[57] Ibid., 92.

body at the federal, provincial or local level.[58] The final stage in the political process

concerns the results and consequences of policy choices. The public sector has become

more aware of the need to engage citizens and other stakeholders before recommending

policy choices that may directly impact them, or be perceived as impacting them.[59] In some

cases, the "neighbourhood becomes the last line of defence for individuals," says

Lightbody.[60] He says that "the NIMBY experience is a local community's reactive objection

to a city's or private developer's plans which the neighbours see as damaging to the quality

of life in their immediate world."[61]

Acting effectively in the political process, according to Yaffee and Chadwick, involves

"disaggregating the key players in a community or policy environment, identifying how

they influence progress toward your goals, and developing strategies to interact with them

to advance your goals." They describe the key elements in the political analysis framework

as: stakeholders or actors, motivations and interests, participation and resources,

strategies and influence, and action channels. The political analysis in the following section

is based on this framework, which is closely related to the political process described by

Lightbody. Stakeholders, or actors, include anyone who is impacted by or can impact a

policy issue and has a motivation or interest in the outcome.[62] Stakeholders' ability to

participate in a policy issue depends on the likelihood of success, visibility of the issue, cost

of participating and opportunity to do so. [63] Stakeholders can expand their political

resources and influence through strategies such as building coalitions, linking their

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[58] Lightbody, *City Politics,* 82.
[59] Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), *Generating Community Support*, (Ottawa, Ontario: Government of Canada, 2009), 2.
[60] Lightbody, *City Politics,* 92.
[61] Ibid., 300-301.
[62] Robert Nash, Alan Hudson, Cecilia Luttrell, *Mapping Political Context: A Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations,* (London, U.K.: Overseas Development Institute, 2006), 26.
[63] Steven Yaffee and David Chadwick, *Ecosystem Management Initiative,* (Ann Arbor MI: School of Natural Resources & Environment, University of Michigan, 2004), 1-4.

proposals to other issues, changing the site of a dispute, or seeking to develop broader

support through media connections. [64] Action channels – the formal and informal places

where public policy decisions are made, such as legislatures, courts, administrative

processes, community organizations, and social and professional connections – also

determine who may participate in decision-making, how they may participate, and which

parties have an advantage or disadvantage based on the process.[65]

       The key political stakeholders who hold an interest in the surplus school site policy

issue are: citizens and community organizations, school boards, the development industry,

affordable housing providers and advocates, and municipalities. An analysis of each of

these stakeholders is presented on the following pages, guided by the approach and

categories of Yaffee and Chadwick.

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[64] Yaffee and Chadwick, *Ecosystem Management Initiative*, 1-4.
[65] Ibid.

Stakeholder Analysis

1. Community Associations and Citizens

Community associations and citizens have a number of *motivations and interests* in the use of vacant surplus school sites. Many community associations have a direct interest in providing recreational services such as sports fields on MSR lands, some of which may be eliminated when school sites are re-purposed. In addition, community associations may be asked to represent the interests of residents who have concerns about re-use of the sites, such as increased traffic and noise, and loss of park space, sports fields and other amenities that have been located on the vacant school land. Citizens may feel a sense of loss if they feel a strong emotional attachment to the site.[66] The City has identified resident concerns as a risk in redeveloping vacant school sites: "Communities and adjacent residents may perceive the re-use of the school building envelopes as a loss of community open space and be concerned about the potential impacts of new CSR facilities on the neighbourhood."[67]

Residents closest to the sites may have additional interests in preserving the site as a green space; for example, their home-buying decisions may have been influenced by a park view, a location near a future school or distance from a perceived undesirable land use. While several studies have claimed that houses near a park have an average value higher than homes further away from green space, other studies have found that the impact on property values depends on a number of factors. For example, property values may not be affected as much by repurposing a particular park in a neighbourhood with otherwise abundant park space or large residential yards. Moreover, large, flat parks and

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[66] L.C. Manzo, L. C., & P. Devine-Wright (Eds.), *Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods and Applications*, (Florence, KY: Taylor and Francis, 2013).
[67] The City, *LAS2009-66*, 3.

sports fields may sometimes actually reduce property values, finds Crompton.[68] Some

parks may create nuisances such as congestion, parking, litter, noise, or public behavior

problems that can impact nearby residents and their home values. Even in the case of a

well-maintained sports field, Compton says "there is a positive impact on the value of

properties abutting the park, but it is lower than that on properties a block or two away

which are not subjected to the nuisance costs associated with access and egress to the

park."[69] In other words, the interests and motivations of citizens and community

associations regarding the repurposing of any particular piece of surplus school land may

not be simple or homogenous. Conflicting interests may well come into play.

As regards *participation and resources,* individual residents and organized

community associations may engage in formal citizen consultations and by speaking for or

against a policy item during City Council public hearings or School Board of Trustee public

meetings. While the provincial *MGA*, as noted above, gives municipalities the right to waive

public hearings for redesignation of reserve land to CSR, The City's current policy is to

consult with the public and hold a public hearing. This is one of the action channels

available to citizens and community organizations. Within this action channel, a large

group represented by a community association may have a stronger voice than a small

number of residents.[70]

While existing community associations are obvious *resources* for *participation* in the

politics of repurposing surplus school sites, forming new, special purpose associations can

be an important *strategy* for *influencing* such politics. For example, in Edmonton, the Ridge

Community League formed the "Your Vision, Your Neighbourhood" initiative to influence

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[68] John L. Crompton, J, "The Proximate Principle: The Impact of Parks, Open Space and Water Features on Residential Property Values and the Property Tax Base," (Ashburn, Virginia: National Recreation and Park Association, 2004), 35.
[69] Ibid, 38.
[70] Ibid.

the political decision-making regarding that city's surplus school sites, and ultimately preserve green space in the league's communities.[71] In Calgary, Scenic Acres community members similarly formed the Save Our Park Committee to challenge a particular decision regarding an SR site that had been declared surplus several years earlier.[72]

Legal action in in court – another available *action channel* – is sometimes also an important *strategy*.[73] Thus the just mentioned Scenic Acres Save Our Park Committee launched a lawsuit to try to stop construction of a regional francophone school on SR lands that had been declared surplus.[74] Members of the Varsity community brought a similar legal challenge to a proposed school for children with disabilities.[75] However, a judge denied the claim by the Scenic Acres residents, despite finding that The City had violated the provisions of the *MGA*. The residents of Varsity then dropped their legal action against the Calgary Board of Education, with their lawyer saying that the Scenic Acres decision had reduced the likelihood of success for the Varsity community.[76] Although these examples involved the use of surplus SR for *schools*, rather than CSR uses, the cases may provide insight into potential community reaction should any surplus sites be redesignated as CSR and used for affordable housing or other community services.

A significant challenge faced by community associations and residents is an imbalance of information about plans for school reserve sites currently used as green

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[71] "Surplus School Sites Resources." The Ridge Community League, The Ridge Online, 2012, http://www.theridgeonline.ca/SSS_resourcePage.php

[72] "Save Our Park – Legal Fund Information," Scenic Acres Community Association, ScenicAcres.ca, 2015, http://scenicacresca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Save-Our-Park-Legal-Fund-Info.pdf

[73] "Updates by Date," Scenic Acres Community Association, ScenicAcres.ca, 2015, http://scenicacresca.ca/initiatives/save-our-park/updates/

[74] "Save Our Park – Legal Fund Information," Scenic Acres Community Association, ScenicAcres.ca, 2015, http://scenicacresca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Save-Our-Park-Legal-Fund-Info.pdf

[75] Jeremy Nolais, "Calgary Board of Education Presses on with Christine Meikle School Construction Despite Lawsuit," *Calgary Metro,* (September 14, 2014), http://www.metronews.ca/news/calgary/2014/09/14/calgary-board-of-education-presses-on-with-christine-meikle-construction-despite-lawsuit.html.

[76] Jeremy Nolais, "Resident outcry may force Francophone school out of NW Calgary community," *Calgary Metro,* (2014, June 10), http://www.metronews.ca/news/calgary/2014/06/11/resident-outcry-may-force-francophone-school-out-of-nw-calgary-community.html.

space, sports fields or other recreational facilities. The decision process regarding use of school sites is generally well underway by the time the information becomes public, which limits citizens' opportunity to influence decisions and constrains the time available to provide input into the process. As a result, the strategies and action channels available to citizen groups may be limited to direct advocacy with political representatives or legal action, both of which can be costly and time-consuming approaches, and not always successful in achieving the desired outcome.[77]

2. School Boards

The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) and the Calgary Separate School District (CSSD) are partners with The City on the Joint Use Coordinating Committee and make decisions on use of MSR sites. In the past, school boards had a *motivation and interest* in declaring school reserve sites surplus if not required, because the proceeds would be used for future higher school sites or for regional parks. However, under the current legislative and policy framework, school boards in Calgary no longer have an incentive to declare vacant school sites surplus to their needs. Since the 2010 *MGA* amendments, if school reserve sites are declared surplus and later sold, school boards are no longer assured that a share of the proceeds will be used for high school sites. Indeed, the process approved by City Council in 2009 in anticipation of the *MGA* amendments requires surplus sites which are not needed for open space to be redesignated as CSR before being evaluated for community services uses and sold if not required. The proceeds can then be used for only CSR purposes, which exclude schools.[78] As a result, declaring SR sites surplus provides the school boards with no immediate benefit, but poses a risk of releasing a site in a

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[77] Nolais, "Resident Outcry."
[78] The City of Calgary, *IGA2012-10, Joint Use Coordinating Committee: 2011,* (Calgary, Alberta: The City of Calgary, 2012), 4.

community that subsequently changes demographically and requires a school in the future.

The legislative and policy changes have thus narrowed the school boards' *participation* in decision-making on use of the proceeds of surplus school land sales. As partners on the JUCC, The City and the two school boards make decisions through consensus, as per the terms of the Joint Use Agreement.[79] However, the agreement does not yet include provisions regarding use of the proceeds from the sale of CSR lands, and so the school boards have no ability to participate in decisions on how such funding will be used.[80]

Regarding *resources for participation* in joint use decision-making, the JUCC is made up of an administrative member of each of the two main school boards and two administrative members of The City – one representing Parks' interests and one representing the planning department. These members negotiate with one another, and with developers, to *influence* how the 10 per cent reserve allocation in new communities will be divided amongst City parks, recreational space and school building envelopes. While it may seem to be in the best interests of the school boards to request a maximum amount of school reserve land, this *strategy* can create public-perception challenges and political pressure from citizens years later if a school is not required. The boards, therefore, do not always demand their full share of reserve lands.

Because school boards are governed by boards of trustees elected during provincial elections, they are responsive to the demands of constituents. When a board is deciding whether to declare an SR site surplus, citizens may present their views at a board meeting, which provides an important *action channel*.[81] However, citizens face far more restrictions

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[79] The City, *IGA2012-10*, 2.
[80] The City, *LAS2009-66*, 3.
[81] *Alberta School Act,* S.70(1).

when speaking at a school board meeting than at a Council Public Hearing, the primary

action channel for political decisions on how surplus sites will be used.[82]

3. Development Industry

Calgary's developers and home builders have several *motivations and interests* in

relation to reserve lands and affordable housing. Since 2006, the housing industry has

advocated a decrease in the amount of reserve lands required from developers, after

municipalities proposed using vacant school reserve sites for affordable housing. The

article, "School sites spark dispute," quotes Bravin Goldade, then president of the UDI

Alberta chapter, who said that "any sale of the lands should go back to the homeowners":[83]

> Besides such concerns, "the sites were paid for initially by the developer, who
> passed on the costs to homeowners who built homes in the neighbourhood," says
> Goldade. "In essence, these surplus sites were paid for by the neighbouring
> residents who never received the schools for which these sites were intended." ...
> "The proceeds should be reinvested in the neighbourhood in which they are located,
> either in improvements to neighbourhood amenities or by reducing the tax
> assessments of homes in the area," says Goldade's letter. UDI-Alberta is asking that
> the province look at the whole issue of providing affordable housing for Albertans,
> rather than the stopgap disposition of surplus school sites."

The provincial *MGA* review consultations in 2014 provided a formal *action channel*

for the housing industry to *influence* policy decisions on the requirement for and use of

school lands. In its *MGA* submission, the Urban Development Institute (UDI) Calgary branch

advocated for changes in the *MGA* which would cap the amount of MR land a municipality

can require at five per cent, unless a needs test proved that the full 10 per cent was

required.[84] Further, UDI Calgary's submission to the province states:

> Municipalities should not be able to sell surplus reserves to raise revenue. We
> further recommend a "sunset" provision – that the land has to be used for a

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[82] Calgary Board of Education, *Board of Trustees Board Meeting Procedures,* (Calgary, Alberta: CBE, 2014), 13.
[83] "School Sites Spark Dispute," *Calgary Herald*, (December 23, 2006), http://www.canada.com/story_print.html?id=7ef1ef92-961d-469f-811c-4a2e70d6e2bc&sponsor=.
[84] Urban Development Institute (UDI)-Calgary, "MGA Issues & Recommendations Presented to: The Government of Alberta," (Calgary, Alberta: UDI-Calgary, 2014), 7.

municipal purpose (naturalized or programmed park space or a school) within 10 years, or revert back to the developer or – should a developer no longer exist at such time – then a developer-directed benevolent program. … Taking land without compensation increases costs to homeowners, and makes municipalities unaffordable and non-competitive in attracting new residents and investments.

In a more recent *strategy to influence* political decisions on use of SR sites and development of affordable housing, industry representative Charron Ungar proposed that municipalities partner with the housing industry to build "social housing" both on surplus school reserve sites and on other "designated" land that is "already allocated away from market housing" and that is located "throughout urban centres in inner city and suburbs."[85]

In terms of *participation and resources*, the housing industry's advocacy function is performed both by its members (developers and home builders) and by the organizations' professional staff. The organizations collaborate in order to strengthen their ability to *influence* public policy. For example, UDI Calgary and the Canadian Home Builders Association (CHBA) Calgary chapter are exploring joining forces to provide "Strength in Numbers"[86]:

> Stakeholders feel that an organization with greater human and financial resources could be more effective in advocating for their interests. An organization with greater resource capacity and a greater membership base could develop a 'critical mass', which could draw in other associations, increasing the strength of the organization.

UDI Calgary and the CHBA Calgary chapter have also collaborated on the Smarter Growth Initiative, a strategy which "was established to educate and engage Calgarians in dialogue around trends and issues in urban planning and development."[87] The UDI-CHBA booklet, "How to Build a Great City," states that "Our goal is simple: raise awareness among Calgarians about growth and development challenges." The organizations also urge all

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[85] Myke Thomas, Myke, "Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning Is Not the Answer," *Calgary Sun*, (August 22, 2015), http://www.calgarysun.com/2015/08/21/mandatory-inclusionary-zoning-is-not-the-answer.
[86] Urban Development Institute (UDI)-Calgary, "Merger Design Project," 2015, http://www.udicalgary.com/.
[87] Urban Development Institute (UDI)-Calgary, "Understanding Key Issues Around Growth and Development in Calgary," 2014, 3.

Calgarians to "get involved."[88] With these strategies, UDI Calgary and its partners aim to influence public policy on compact growth, suburban development and housing affordability.

In addition to its *MGA* submission to the province, UDI Calgary's *action channels* also include formal and information meetings with The City on a range of development industry issues.[89] UDI Calgary has long been consulted on major planning and policy projects, such as the Joint Use Agreement Review, conducted in 2006, and provides input on documents, including the "Principles and Criteria for Determining the Number of School Sites Required for Children Ages 5 to 14 within the Public and Separate School System in Newly Developing Areas of Calgary."[90]

4. Affordable Housing Providers and Advocates

Lack of affordable housing has been identified by the province and cities of Calgary and Edmonton as a serious problem, with social and economic consequences for all Albertans.[91] The housing advocacy sector in Alberta spans a wide range of disciplines, with varying *motivations and interests*. Many of these housing stakeholders participated in the Alberta Housing Task Force, an influential *action channel* initiated by the province in 2007 after housing prices in many municipalities doubled in three years, during the economic boom.[92]

The *strategies* recommended by the task force included ensuring "quick release of suitable crown land" such as surplus school sites and called for municipalities to "Release

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[88] Ibid., 30.

[89] Jack K. Masson and Edward C. LeSage, *Alberta's Local Governments: Politics and Democracy,* (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1994), 251.

[90] Urban Development Institute (UDI)-Calgary, "2006 Year in Review," (Calgary, Alberta: UDI Calgary, 2006), 9.

[91] Trevor Howell, "Calgary Faces Affordable Housing Crisis, Nearly 6,000 Units Risk Closure, says Councillor," *Calgary Herald,* (July 17, 2015).

[92] Affordable Housing Task Force, *The Report of the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force,* (Edmonton, Alberta: Government of Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2007), 2.

available surplus lands from municipal reserves for affordable housing." The task force recommended that the province amend the *MGA* and any regulations to:

- Expand the definition of municipal reserve to include community amenities (for example, seniors' lodges, affordable housing or recreational facilities), and
- Enable the release of crown land, surplus provincial lands and surplus school sites that are suitable for affordable housing at a nominal cost where appropriate.

Also in 2007, the Poverty Reduction Coalition, another *resource for participation* in affordable housing policy, issued its report, "Surviving not Thriving: The untold story of struggling Calgarians," which made a similar but more extensive recommendation that the *MGA* be amended to allow *both* municipal reserve and surplus reserve school lands to be used for "perpetual affordable housing."[93] Similar strategies were included in the Poverty Reduction Coalition's September 2007 report on "Housing Issues of Immigrants and Refugees in Calgary," which recommended that the province amend the *MGA* to allow municipalities to use municipal and surplus school reserve lands for perpetually affordable, appropriate and supported housing initiatives."[94] This recommendation was partially satisfied through the subsequent *MGA* amendments; however, the province did not include municipal reserve sites in its provisions to allow affordable housing on surplus school reserve sites.

Strategies and action channels available to housing advocates are largely uncoordinated, except when specific task forces or coalitions such as the above examples are in place, as affordable housing is currently funded, provided and managed by non-profit organizations and by governments at the local, provincial and federal level. Each

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[93] Poverty Reduction Coalition, *Surviving Not Thriving: The Untold Story of Struggling Calgarians,* (Calgary, Alberta: United Way of Calgary and Area, 2007), 16.
[94] Poverty Reduction Coalition, *Housing Issues of Immigrants and Refugees in Calgary,* (Calgary, Alberta: Poverty Reduction Coalition, 2007), 18.

government body has legislation governing how housing grants may be used and who may benefit from the funding. The grants are provided through formal agreements, such as the operating agreements between the federal Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and the Government of Alberta that provide funding for subsidized housing for lower-income households.[95] However, these agreements are not permanent and are subject to renewal or renegotiation, generally every five years. Even though the CMHC-Alberta agreement was recently extended, the political nature of the agreements creates a situation of financial uncertainty for social housing agencies and local governments.

5. **Municipalities (The City of Calgary)**

While The City has many competing *motivations and interests* in the use of public lands, the two most pertinent to this issue are the need to preserve green space in established communities and the need to provide more affordable housing for families with low to moderate incomes. As discussed previously, *strategies* supporting these competing demands for public lands are reflected in several City of Calgary plans, including the long-range MDP and the current Council's Priorities, Action Plan for 2015-2018, as well as non-statutory plans and policies, such as the surplus school sites evaluation process, which requires surplus SR sites to be kept as parkland if needed to meet The City's open space standard.

The City controls or strongly influences many of the *action channels* involved in this policy issue. City Council makes policy decisions on the form and application of the Land Use Bylaw, the MDP, community plans, Parks plans, affordable housing strategies, the four-year business plans and budgets, the Joint Use Agreement and other related policies and

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[95] Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), *Supplementary Agreement No. 1: Federal Funding for 2014-2019 Extension of the Investment in Affordable Housing.*

plans. As both stakeholder and regulator, The City has greater *resources for participation* in

SR policy decisions, and the ability to define and limit the *participation* of others. As

mentioned, The City consulted the development industry on the Joint Use Agreement

Review in 2006, but the school boards were not on the list of consulted stakeholders in The

City's development of the Re-use of Surplus School Reserve Sites Implementation Plan,

which effectively excludes school boards from using the proceeds from surplus SR sales.

However, the one aspect of the MSR policy issue that is outside of The City's *influence* is the

process for declaring an SR site surplus to school needs, which rests with the school boards

and Minister of Education.

     In terms of *resources for participation* in the affordable housing aspect of this issue,

The City works with a range of stakeholders, including citizens, government agencies, non-

profit organizations and the private sector to "create affordable housing solutions."[96] In

addition to providing and supporting affordable housing programs, The City's *strategies*

include advocating for homelessness and affordable housing funding, policy solutions and

legislative change.[97]

     The City has expanded its *influence* and *resources* in federal policy-making by

participating in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)'s advocacy efforts for "a

National Forum on Housing and the Economy."[98] Although The City's Calgary Housing

Company subsidiary manages 10,000 government-owned housing units with 24,000

residents, The City's affordable housing strategy focuses on "affordable and entry-level"

rental and home ownership programs. The latter are potentially suited to locations on

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[96] "Frequently Asked Questions," The City of Calgary, 2010,
http://www.calgary.ca/_layouts/cocis/DirectDownload.aspx?target=http%3a%2f%2fwww.calgary.ca%2fCS%2fOLSH%2fDocuments%2fAffordable-housing%2fAffordable-housing-faq.pdf&noredirect=1&sf=1.
[97] The City of Calgary, *Affordable Housing Update 2010,* (Calgary, Alberta: The City of Calgary Office of Land Servicing & Housing. 2010), 7. http://www.calgary.ca/CS/OLSH/Pages/Affordable-housing/Role-of-The-City/Creating-affordable-housing-option.aspx.
[98] "Housing," Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2015, http://www.fcm.ca/home/issues/housing.htm.

surplus school reserve sites and other public lands and do not require operating support

from federal and provincial grants.[99] On a broader scale, The City continues to *influence* and

collaborate with the provincial government on the issue of reserve lands, largely through

negotiations on a future City Charter.

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[99] "Learn about affordable housing," The City of Calgary, 2015, http://www.calgary.ca/CS/OLSH/Pages/Affordable-housing/Learn-about-affordable-housing/Learn-about-affordable-housing.aspx.

Discussion and Key Findings

While The City's MDP and Open Space Plan acknowledge the inherent conflict amongst competing interests in public lands and provide policies to balance the demands, tension between the competing uses of green space and affordable housing has been mounting since *MGA* amendments were enacted. The challenge for The City in addressing the tension between housing and parks will be in applying a broad perspective to determine the optimal use of these lands, so that shifting resources to address one public policy problem (insufficient supply of affordable housing) does not create another problem (insufficient green space for a higher density community). The City will also be challenged to make policy decisions that best balance the current and future needs of citizens, as decisions made now will have implications for future citizens and will shape, and potentially narrow, the policy choices available to future city councils. The key findings of this capstone project can be summarized as follows:

1. Calgary citizens may be unaware of whether their neighbourhood park is Municipal Reserve or Municipal and School Reserve. Although Calgary has an estimated 70 to 80 vacant school reserve sites, no comprehensive list is publicly available. While government bodies may know which sites will likely be declared surplus and what they may be used for, this information is not readily available to the public.

2. Developers contributed 10 per cent of their developable land to the municipality to provide public benefits including parks, recreation and schools. This cost would have been incorporated into the original house prices and capitalized into the current prices, particularly for homes closest to the sites. If houses are built on school lands, the adjacent homes may be devalued, if the site has been functioning as a park.

3. Under the current City of Calgary policy, local school boards no longer have an incentive to declare SR sites surplus in order to raise funds for high school land through the Joint Use Reserve Fund. No SR sites have been declared surplus in Calgary since 2009, and without a change in policy to retain the MR designation prior to the land being sold, the reserve fund will be depleted, leaving insufficient funds for future land purchases.

4. The City's planning documents do not indicate an urgent need to use SR lands for housing, mainly because, however important they may be to affected communities, they seem dwarfed by other lands available for development. For example, an estimated 53,000 more homes could be built on vacant or underutilized land in the established communities without any rezoning or any resort to surplus school lands.[100] It will take 17 years before a further 24,000 housing units will be needed in the established area, some of which will be added through redevelopment of existing properties.[101] As noted earlier, even if the SR component of all of Calgary's vacant MSR sites which could potentially be declared surplus were developed, only an estimated 3,000 townhouse units would be added, enough to absorb a single year of the desired growth.

5. While Calgarians value their green space, the open space standards have been established through a political decision process and can be revised through the same process, if the current or a future City Council chooses to shift priorities to more entry-level home ownership instead of the current standard for open space. However, as a political body, City Council is influenced by the preferences and priorities of citizens, and is therefore likely to make incremental changes rather than dramatically reduce the open space standards.

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[100] The City of Calgary, *Developed Areas Growth & Change 2014 (Draft),* Monitoring Growth and Change Series, (Calgary, Alberta: The City of Calgary Planning, Development & Assessment, 2014), 3-7.
[101] Ibid, 3-9.

Conclusion: Policy Implications and Options

The City can address the aforementioned policy gaps and political challenges by improving transparency in decision-making and responding to stakeholder concerns regarding future use of vacant school reserve sites. Key recommendations include:

1. Inform and consult citizens by providing information about potential surplus SR sites, listening to citizen concerns, identifying underlying issues and proposing solutions to address concerns. This could include consultation on local needs and preferences, a principle contained in the Open Space Plan.[102]

2. Mitigate impacts on adjacent homeowners by re-purposing sites which are less accessible to residents, create negative impacts, or where re-use would have less impact. Enhance the remaining park space, to offset the decrease in size.

3. Encourage school boards to declare unwanted SR sites surplus, by amending the Joint Use Agreement and the Re-use of Surplus School Reserve Sites Implementation Plan to enable proceeds from site sales to be used for high school sites, sports fields and regional parks. This could be accomplished by retaining the MR designation on the surplus land until it is sold, unless a CSR use has been identified.

4. Before repurposing vacant school reserve sites, build affordable housing on other available municipal non-reserve land and encourage the development of housing on the identified vacant and underutilized land in established communities.

5. Minimize future political uncertainty over land use by continuing to modify the methodology for determining elementary school requirements so that fewer school reserve sites remain vacant in new communities.

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[102] The City, *Open Space Plan*, 15.

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