



LOCATION
14540 72 Street, NW Edmonton, Alberta

OWNER/DEVELOPER
Capital Region Housing

ARCHITECT
GEC Architecture

GENERAL CONTRACTOR
Stuart Olson

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT
RJC Engineers

MECHANICAL CONSULTANT
Reinbold Engineering Group

ELECTRICAL CONSULTANT
Nemetz (S/A) & Associates

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Design North Landscape

TOTAL SIZE
137,000 square feet

TOTAL COST
\$74 million

LONDONDERRY AFFORDABLE HOUSING REDEVELOPMENT

by ROBIN BRUNET

The Londonderry Affordable Housing Redevelopment in north Edmonton is a potential game-changer with regards to the way affordable housing projects are developed. It is also a visually striking solution to the outdated residences that once occupied the City of Edmonton-owned site.

Londonderry consists of four buildings made up of 19 one-storey and 37 two-storey townhomes on the ground floor and 184 two- and three-bedroom apartments above for a total of 240 units. The X formation of the four buildings creates two separate courtyards that are designed to encourage community gatherings. One courtyard is open to the public for spontaneous gatherings or on-site services; the other is reserved for tenants and includes a community garden.

From the outset, Capital Region Housing (CRH) and the City of Edmonton intended Londonderry to be sustainable so that tenants paying market rate would allow CRH to create a financially sustainable model to help offset operating costs and subsidies.

Also, “We wanted all of the suites to be uniform in quality, with market-level finishes,” says John Murphy, project manager, asset management and capital development, Capital Region Housing. “These basic concepts were decided back in 2014, and what followed was a series of four in-depth community engagement meetings to present, ask for feedback, and refine design concepts.”

Murphy credits these community engagement meetings for Londonderry’s success. “During the first meeting we introduced ourselves and asked community members what

they wanted to see on the site,” he says. “For the second meeting we brought in GEC Architecture, presented five different massing options based on the input from the first meeting, and sought input for each one.

“During the third meeting, we presented two of the five options based on the preferences of community members, and discussed them in depth. This set the stage for the final meeting in which we unveiled the single remaining design. From there, we were able to move ahead with rezoning.”

Peter Osborne, partner at GEC Architecture, says of the final design, “We stepped back the apartments above the townhomes to reduce massing, and the buildings were augmented by a red brick base transitioning to dark grey brick and then lime green composite panel on the upper levels – all high-quality materials.” The buildings were also designed to be energy efficient, with double-pane glazing, increased wall and roof insulation, central heat recovery systems, low-light fixtures, and LED lighting.

Osborne adds, “While the X-shape design gave us courtyard space, it also provided the opportunity to create a central interior gathering area with community spaces and a single point of access to an underground parkade. We designed this atrium to be double height to match the townhomes and gave it wood accents for warmth and vibrancy.” Wayfinding for the four buildings was developed by assigning a specific colour to each building and incorporating the colours in the atrium.

Allmar consulted with the end-user and architect and are supplying and installing the doors, frames, hardware, access control, and cameras.

Given that 240 families would live at Londonderry, potential crowding issues on the property had to be reduced, so each main floor unit was designed with walkouts directly onto the street, and a one-way perimeter lane was created for residents to reduce potential congestion in an alley behind the complex.

Construction of the new cast-in-place concrete buildings began in November of 2018, and Je Hanz Daza, project manager at Stuart Olson, notes that Londonderry benefitted from Stuart Olson, GEC, and CRH having worked together prior on a smaller housing project in Edmonton. “We had established a terrific working relationship, and we decided that the most efficient way of construction was to build one residence after the other, with trades going immediately to the next building after finishing work in another. This created a flow and minimized interruption.”

Because upwards of 200 workers were on site daily, minimizing disturbance to the surrounding neighbourhood was a priority. “So

once the parkade was built we used it for storage and created heated lunchrooms instead of cluttering the site with trailers,” says Daza.

Thanks to the synergy between the owners, architects, and builders, Londonderry was brought to fruition without any significant challenges. “The only oddity that comes to mind, was striking a coal vein during construction, which we were able to mitigate through over excavating,” says Daza.

Londonderry is the city’s first social housing regeneration project, and Murphy hopes that it will set a precedent for how future regeneration projects can be developed. He says, “We developed a system that worked, which resulted in safe and affordable homes where people can make connections and live comfortably and securely.”

Murphy concludes, “This mixed-income housing model ensures that tenants never have to worry about moving out due to their economic situation. As their economic circumstances change, this model accommodates their needs.” **A**

