



# Case Study.

Transforming Housing

**Partnering with the City  
of Edmonton's First Place  
Program | Building Home Ownership**



# Case Study

## Transforming Housing: Partnering with the City of Edmonton's First Place Program

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The First Place Program, initiated by the City of Edmonton in 2006, is an innovative response to the rising challenge of housing affordability. By converting surplus school lands into starter-level townhouse developments, the program makes homeownership accessible for first-time buyers through a five-year land cost deferral model. Rohit Group, through its divisions Rohit Homes and Rohit Communities, played a foundational role in its successful execution—delivering 489 homes across multiple sites. The initiative exemplifies how public-private collaboration can transform communities. Rohit Infrastructure now leads such partnerships, applying the lessons learned to future public sector engagements.*

## Introduction

The First Place Program is a municipal initiative launched by the City of Edmonton in 2006 with the goal of making homeownership more accessible for first-time buyers. By repurposing surplus public school sites into affordable townhouse communities, the program delivers strategic urban infill while reducing the initial financial burden for qualified buyers through a five-year land cost deferral. Rohit Group, through its homebuilding and community development divisions, joined the program early on through a competitive RFP process and quickly became a cornerstone delivery partner. Rohit collaborated closely with senior City administrators, including key staff from the Integrated Infrastructure Services department, to ensure that the developments were both contextually appropriate and financially viable.

Recognizing the sensitive nature of converting school reserve lands, often perceived as parkland—into residential developments, the City and Rohit co-developed a uniquely transparent and participatory engagement process. This included establishing small, local working groups and holding multiple interactive design sessions with architects, engineers, and community members. From the outset, the program integrated public feedback into planning while maintaining clearly defined, city-mandated project parameters. This early collaboration-built trust, allowed for real-time design responsiveness, and established a strong foundation for a replicable model of affordable, sustainable infill housing that benefits both municipalities and residents alike.

*“First Place proved what’s possible when public and private sectors align. Rohit Infrastructure was shaped to keep that momentum; helping governments deliver smarter, more community-focused outcomes.”*

**— Russell Dauk, Rohit Infrastructure**





## Challenge

The City of Edmonton faced a confluence of pressures that made the delivery of affordable, accessible housing in mature neighborhoods both necessary and complex. Demographic shifts led to declining school enrollments and aging populations in these communities, creating gaps in neighborhood vitality and putting long-term urban sustainability at risk. Simultaneously, a housing affordability crisis, driven by rising land and construction costs, high interest rates, and limited entry-level product, pushed many first-time buyers out of the market or out of established communities altogether.

Further complicating the challenge was the sensitive nature of repurposing surplus school lands. Although designated for educational use, many of these sites had been informally adopted by residents as green spaces or parks, leading to a perception of loss when redevelopment was proposed. Public resistance to what was seen as the conversion of public amenity into private housing created a potential flashpoint.

In response, the City and Rohit co-designed a new approach to planning and community engagement—one that prioritized transparency, early involvement, and education about the long-term social and economic benefits of the program. This approach became as much about building trust and shared understanding as it was about delivering housing, setting a precedent for how municipalities and private developers could collaboratively address pressing urban issues.





## **Rohit's Strategic Contribution**

### **Technical Expertise, Product Quality, and Real-time Design Adaptability**

Rohit Homes brought an integrated, high-caliber approach to the First Place Program, drawing on deep experience in multifamily construction, urban design, and municipal planning. Known for consistently delivering architecturally thoughtful and technically sound developments, Rohit ensured that each First Place site met the City's expectations for quality, durability, and contextual alignment. In-house design and consulting teams allowed Rohit to efficiently navigate permitting processes, optimize site layout, and coordinate across engineering disciplines—streamlining delivery timelines without compromising standards.

The company's strength in planning also enabled adaptability. From modifying road alignments to refining landscaping details, Rohit used technical flexibility to respond effectively to site constraints and community feedback, ensuring developments integrated seamlessly into established neighborhoods.

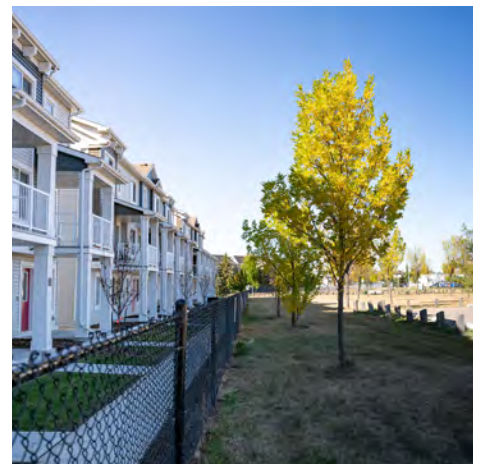
### **Community Engagement Excellence**

What distinguished the First Place Program was not just the product, but the process, particularly its elevated standard for community consultation. Recognizing the sensitivities surrounding redevelopment of former school reserve lands, the City of Edmonton and Rohit co-developed an engagement framework that was proactive, transparent, and genuinely collaborative. Rohit's land development team helped structure community input sessions that went well beyond traditional open houses.

Using a phased approach, the City and Rohit convened volunteer-led working groups that participated in several detailed design charrettes. These sessions invited residents to voice concerns and co-create solutions related to traffic, green space, and site layout. Initial planning exercises used physical models; later phases adopted 3D digital modeling to vividly depict design concepts and site impact. This shift was critical to improving accessibility, allowing participants to visualize outcomes and engage in deeper, more constructive feedback loops.

The result was not just improved site designs but enhanced public trust. By empowering residents to shape outcomes and then delivering visible, responsive changes, Rohit transformed skepticism into support. Many community participants became vocal advocates, reinforcing municipal confidence in the program's public legitimacy and long-term viability.

The City and Rohit co-developed a participatory consultation structure designed to go beyond basic information sessions. This included forming volunteer-based community working groups that met regularly with planners, architects, and engineers to co-develop site-specific plans. Each session tackled concerns such as traffic, walkability, and green space, using hands-on tools, including physical models and later 3D visualization, to spark discussion and build alignment. This small-group approach proved highly effective, with many participants becoming advocates for the project once they saw their feedback reflected in final plans. Rohit further contributed by coaching municipal staff on consultation best practices, enhancing facilitation and outcome clarity over time.







## Financial Innovation for Buyers

The First Place Program's most impactful innovation was its deferral-based financing model. By eliminating the upfront land cost—ranging between \$30,000 to \$50,000 per unit—the program substantially reduced the total price of a new home. This structure enabled qualified first-time buyers to enter the housing market with lower mortgage amounts and reduced payment requirements, increasing accessibility at a time of high interest rates and rising real estate prices.

Rohit played a critical role in operationalizing this model. Working closely with lenders and City representatives, Rohit helped develop financing guidelines that clearly articulated the terms of land deferral and eligibility restrictions. Detailed materials were prepared to ensure that homebuyers—and their financial institutions—fully understood the conditions of ownership and future obligations. This transparency allowed buyers to make informed decisions and reduced friction during mortgage approvals.

For many buyers, this model provided a vital bridge toward long-term financial mobility. Homeowners were able to build equity over five years and often leveraged that equity to transition into larger homes that met their evolving family needs. In doing so, the program not only enabled housing access but also supported upward progression on the housing ladder, a critical outcome for municipal affordability strategies.

## Public Value Through Economic Resilience

While the First Place Program was not designed to maximize private-sector profits, it supported local economic activity in ways that also benefited community continuity and municipal planning objectives. The consistent flow of development across multiple sites enabled ongoing work for trades and suppliers, fostering steady employment and reducing some of the cyclical volatility common in the construction industry.

This continuity created conditions under which project planning and coordination could be more predictable. For participating partners, this allowed better alignment between housing delivery timelines and local servicing considerations. The stability introduced by the program model also enabled broader conversations about replicability, affordability, and how future city-building initiatives could benefit from early, sustained collaboration with trusted development partners.

By creating a repeatable framework for delivering entry-level homeownership opportunities in established neighborhoods, the First Place Program helped advance broader urban planning goals, including promoting diversity and reinvestment in mature communities.

# Key Outcomes

## Affordability and Accessibility

- Lowered barriers to entry by deferring land costs, significantly reducing mortgage amounts and monthly payments for first-time buyers.
- Enabled buyers to build equity early, offering a path toward long-term financial security and upward mobility.

## Urban Revitalization

- Brought renewed energy and demographic diversity to mature neighborhoods experiencing population decline.
- Promoted more efficient land use through infill development, reducing urban sprawl and leveraging existing infrastructure.
- Positioned affordable homes near transit, schools, and amenities, supporting complete and connected communities.

## Community Trust and Satisfaction

- Elevated community voice through structured, transparent consultation processes tailored to each neighborhood.
- Incorporated resident feedback into site planning and design, strengthening neighborhood support and cohesion.

## Durable Partnership Model

- Demonstrated the potential of long-term, values-aligned public-private collaboration in tackling complex housing challenges.
- Informed Rohit Infrastructure's continued approach to municipal partnerships, grounded in responsiveness, transparency, and alignment with civic objectives.





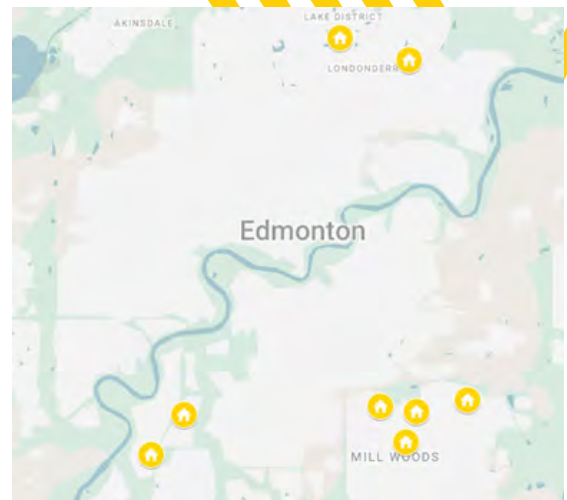
## Program Success and Expansion

Rohit Group delivered 489 homes across eight community sites as part of the First Place Program: Greenview (43), Casselman (49), Tawa (39), Belle Rive (88), Bulyea Heights (76), Haddow (38), Larkspur (66), and Michaels Park (90). Each project was uniquely tailored to its surrounding neighborhood, balancing design sensitivity, public feedback, and site-specific conditions.

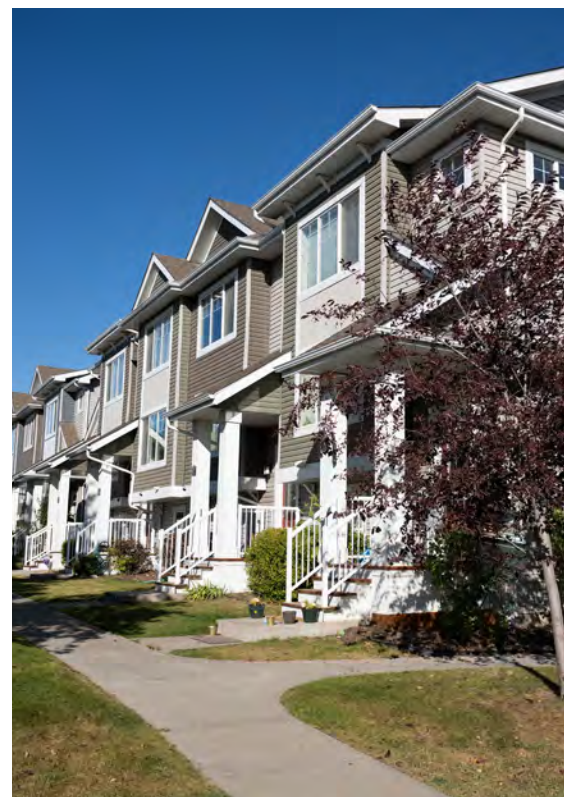
The successful delivery of these projects demonstrated the viability of the First Place model as both a city-building tool and a housing affordability strategy. The program achieved its goal of helping first-time homebuyers enter the housing market while simultaneously contributing to the revitalization of aging neighborhoods. These developments introduced demographic diversity, preserved local school enrollment, and made effective use of underutilized land, all without the need for direct municipal subsidy.

From a systems perspective, the consistency of the model allowed lessons learned from early pilot sites to inform future ones, improving efficiency, streamlining engagement, and enhancing design quality. This iterative approach also positioned Rohit as a reliable and responsive development partner, capable of scaling public-purpose projects with discipline and care.

The experience gained through this program continues to inform Rohit Infrastructure's approach to working with municipalities, demonstrating how long-term, trust-based partnerships can create repeatable frameworks for addressing complex public challenges through practical, community-focused solutions.



*Rohit Locations: First Place Program Map*





## Strategic Insights and Future Opportunities

Rohit's proactive and collaborative approach, now formalized under the Rohit Alliance Model, offers a powerful blueprint for municipalities seeking to address housing and infrastructure challenges through strategic partnerships. This model is rooted in early-stage alignment, where project goals, design intent, and community impact are clarified upfront. By emphasizing transparency, flexibility, and systems thinking, the Alliance Model helps public partners unlock greater long-term value.

Key components of the model include integrated project design, meticulous cost planning, and opportunities to capture residual value through adjacent or complementary land use. Rohit's experience demonstrates how embedding private sector expertise into public sector priorities can streamline project delivery and elevate outcomes.



As communities across Canada and North America face increasingly complex demands on housing and infrastructure, Rohit Infrastructure is positioned to serve as a trusted partner, bringing forward tested frameworks, proven engagement strategies, and a shared commitment to enriching the communities it serves.



## Risk Management and Adaptability

Rohit's approach to delivery under the First Place Program was marked by proactive risk identification and flexible response strategies that maintained affordability while ensuring build quality and schedule integrity. Several development sites presented unexpected geotechnical challenges—such as soil instability and drainage complexity—that required on-the-fly engineering solutions. Leveraging its experienced technical team, Rohit was able to adjust construction methods and budgets while maintaining transparency with stakeholders and upholding the core affordability commitments to buyers.

Another critical area of adaptability was the financial structuring of the program itself. The deferred land cost model was unconventional and initially unfamiliar to many mortgage lenders. Rohit worked closely with financial institutions to clarify buyer obligations and ensure mortgage approval processes could accommodate the unique ownership structure. This included preparing clear documentation, engaging in direct lender communications, and supporting buyers with educational materials to minimize confusion and delays.

This combination of construction adaptability and financial coordination helped protect project timelines, maintain buyer confidence, and preserve trust with municipal partners. Rohit's capacity to manage complexity without derailing project objectives became a hallmark of its value as a public sector delivery partner.







## Conclusion

The First Place Program was more than a housing policy—it was a blueprint for responsible, responsive, and replicable urban development. Rohit Group's contributions reflect the power of partnership, innovation, and community-led planning. Rohit Infrastructure now carries this legacy forward, committed to helping governments build housing solutions that are financially sound, socially inclusive, and publicly trusted.

*For further exploration of how Rohit Infrastructure can support your public sector initiatives, contact us at [Infrastructure@RohitGroup.com](mailto:Infrastructure@RohitGroup.com).*

