

Summary of Qualitative Interview Results Community Centered Design

University of Saskatchewan

Prepared by Wanda Martin and Shannon Hyslop

March 2022

What is Community Centered Design About

Developing of new housing in First Nations communities has typically been the lowest cost alternative, regardless of health or sustainability considerations. The purpose of this project was to explore planning considerations that effect health and sustainability in an effort to develop healthier, vibrant communities. Each community is unique, but the principles are similar across all areas – equal weight should be given for cost, health, and sustainability in planning decisions. We held conversations with people in Muskeg Lake and Muskoday First Nations to explore how community subdivisions could be designed to incorporate traditions, values and needs for wellbeing, and what information would be useful for local decision-making groups, Indigenous Services Canada, and engineering and construction firms in future subdivision design.

Who Participated

There were 35 people in total with an age range of 18 to 83 and 12 who were over 60 years of age. There were 21 female, 12 male, one 2SLGBTQ+ and one non-binary. Most people (26) had lived in the community for more than 20 years. Eight people reported having respiratory illness and eight reported physical challenges (four had both). Nine people indicated they had mental health concerns and eight reported a disability or developmental disorder (four had both). Two people reported having all health concerns listed.

What were the Findings

There were many concerns about health and wellbeing regarding the house, more than the community layout. The house size for the number of people meant strained family dynamics, more cooking and showering resulted in damp indoor conditions leading to mold. Participants cited air quality and temperature control in summer and winter as unhealthy conditions. Damp basements, and the need for makeshift bedrooms in basements was also mentioned as being detrimental to health.

Family connections were strong, for many participants. Living in family units allowed for “extended family discipline” where children were guided as family deemed necessary.

I think what we could do though is... I think we have to build the reserve as a family again.

Remember that each of us are, well, God's children, for sure, creator's children, but also that in some way, whether it be third cousins or 20th cousins, we're all related somehow, some way.

And treat each other with that respect. And I think that's one big thing in the housing area, is we have to do that, we have to bring it outright that we're all family.

Space between houses had different viewpoints. On the one hand, some people recommended more wide-open spaces that would lead to living healthier lives. Others expressed that if the houses are spaced out, it is harder to get help and elders, particularly, needed to be close enough to be assisted by neighbours. With houses closer together, there was more of a sense of community and places to walk. However, and one person noted, “it would be nice to see something planned out a little bit more spaced

out, to give people a little bit more privacy, to be able to live comfortably and quietly so that they didn't have to worry about all the other things that come along with living in a dense subdivision area”.

Privacy was a big concern, and fencing was offered as a potential solution. Fencing between properties also provided protection from dogs digging up gardens, and for keeping dogs and children on their home property, protected “in case there's a cougar or bear running around that no one has spotted yet.” As one person noted:

I think a lot of it has to do with privacy. And I've got plans for my garden, I had to put up a fence to keep the dogs out, I put that fence up last year after I planted the garden and after the dogs dug up, and did their damage, so I've got a fence there. Now, I've got to paint it. There's a lot of cost and maintenance that goes into privacy. It would be a lot better if that was pre-planned, and again, involving people in whatever, surveys and, to get their input.

Walkable designs were noted, particularly for people with limited income:

Well, the heavier set population is on welfare and a lot of those people are without vehicles and I think it's easier and more convenient for people to be able to get to different places like the Elder's Lodge, or the Band Office or the clinic. If they are in the village, they can just walk. Whereas, if they're placed elsewhere, it's inconvenient and sometimes hard to find rides to get to those places.

Pedestrian friendly pathways leading to the Band Office and school was encouraged, along with having naturalized trails for recreational walking. Green infrastructure and recreation were important considerations in design for health and safety:

I would try to spread things out a little bit further so that you don't have a smaller cluster of housing units. It would serve as purpose a little bit better. I think having things spread out with a little bit more green space, a park for kids and also other people to enjoy as well. That would go a long way for planning to ensure that you have a healthy community and also everything else that goes along with planning, having a good infrastructure is important, good roads, good water and sewer, all the other services that come along with it. Streetlights are a big thing, especially in an area where you're living in, not crowded, but you're living close to other people. You want to have that safety with streetlights and housing with proper lighting, outside and make things bright and it just gives a person more sense of security that way.

Key Results

- Housing design needs to pay particular attention to family growth and change, anticipating that a greater number of people may occupy the space than originally intended.
- Reproducing urban style neighbourhoods with high density contributes to the potential for poorer health outcomes. Privacy is an important consideration, and while houses should be in view of each other, lot sizes need to allow for a level of seclusion. Fences would address a number of challenges regarding privacy and safety.
- Walkability and recreation is needed to be included in the design process.