

### INTRODUCTION

A first time initiative by the City of Edmonton is the preparation of a long-term strategic plan that will guide delivery of services to support people's lives and ensure that Edmonton is a safe, healthy and vibrant city. An important component in the development of this plan is engaging the people of Edmonton in discussions about the people services important to them – now and into the future.

On October 3, 2009, approximately 70 interested Edmontonians came together for a Community Conversation, the first forum in the public engagement process for *The Way We Live: Edmonton's People Plan*.

The aim of the Community Conversation was to bring together a wide range of participants and, by building on learnings from earlier consultations, engage them in a conversation about a vision for the future. As part of the conversation, participants were asked to consider topics identified in prior consultations, and to discuss which topics are most important to them now and into the future, as well as which ones need to be considered in the future plan. In addition, participants were asked for their thoughts, ideas and suggestions about how to achieve the kind of city that is important to them, which resulted in an initial list of strategies and actions to be considered in the development of the people services plan.

A vast amount of information was collected from the participants who were clearly energized and engaged throughout the forum, sharing their thoughts, dreams and hopes, very openly and honestly. Facilitator for the Community Conversation, Stephani Roy McCallum, CPF, reviewed the raw data that has been compiled into a verbatim report and prepared this Summary Report and Issues Analysis which provides a snap shot of the event and identifies the themes that emerged.

This analysis report reflects a summary and theming by the facilitator of the discussions at the Community Conversation. It is based on what participants contributed, but the interpretation of that input in this summary lies solely with the facilitator.

Abiding by the Code of Ethics of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) and the International Association of Facilitators (IAF), I have tried to reflect participant input from the conversation in a way that captures the essence of what was shared. Any mistakes or errors in this interpretation are based solely on my interpretation of that input.

*Stephani Roy McCallum,  
Certified Professional Facilitator*

## BACKGROUND

As a basis for the discussion, participants were presented with background information on what has been learned from public consultations conducted over the past two years, along with information collected from surveys and census data.

A 2009 City report entitled *Who We Are – A Snapshot of Edmontonians: Setting the Stage for Consultations and Planning*, summarizes information about the characteristics and values of people living in Edmonton. Highlights of this report were shared with the participants. The report shows that Edmonton has an aging population, almost one-third live alone, and a majority of residents own their own homes and live in the suburbs. Edmonton is proud to celebrate a very rich heritage and cultural diversity. More than half of Edmontonians like to be active, and they utilize not only the indoor facilities, but also the many natural areas and parks. Essentially, the people of Edmonton share such values as a desire for personal and community safety, affordable living, active lifestyle, access to good public health and leisure, and a need for green space, a vibrant arts and culture scene, and overall attractiveness of the city.

A second document, entitled *What We Heard*, summarizes the information gathered through earlier public consultations. The overarching goal of the Community Conversation was to take the priorities identified in the earlier consultations and have the participants generate ideas for future strategic direction.

## OVERALL FOCUS OF THE CONVERSATION

**FOCUS STATEMENT:** *Creating a Healthy, Safe and Liveable Community for all Edmontonians: Bringing the City Vision to Life*

Prior to the first round of discussion, participants were introduced to the overall focus statement – a statement used as a guide for maintaining the focus of the conversation throughout the event. The forum promised participants the following:

- An opportunity to engage in a positive conversation that will set the tone for engagement.
- To have a conversation about what is important to each participant and space to provide suggestions and ideas for a healthy, safe and liveable community.
- To have fun!

The objectives of the forum included:

- Confirm the input that has been heard to date, confirm principles and themes identified in the previous consultations.
- Understand additional perspectives and welcome additions, amendments and suggestions.
- Develop a list of ideas and strategies about how to make the participants' vision a reality in each theme area to be used for further discussion at subsequent events.

The half day Community Conversation was structured as a mix of small and large group discussions in three rounds of conversation.

#### **SESSION 1: WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO US?**

Several themes that emerged during prior consultations were shared with participants. They included:

- ❖ Connectedness
- ❖ Safety
- ❖ Affordability
- ❖ Active Lifestyle, Public Health and Leisure
- ❖ Parks and Open Space
- ❖ Arts, Culture and Heritage
- ❖ Attractiveness

In this session, discussions were focused on these seven themes. Participants could discuss any of the themes, or initiate a conversation for a new theme. During this session, discussions revolved around the following questions:

- How is this topic important to me?
- What might need to be considered so that this topic reflects what is most important to me?
- Other comments or ideas that came up in the discussion?

It should be noted that no new theme areas were identified during this session, and if participants wanted to address different topics or elements of a theme, they did so as part of the themed conversations. In addition, no one specifically addressed "Attractiveness."

#### **SESSION 2: CREATING CONNECTIONS**

This session was divided into two components: two rounds of talking to one another in pairs, followed by small group discussions to reflect on what had been said in the pairs' discussions. In both rounds, pairs were asked to address the question:

- How do we incorporate what is important about these themes in order to achieve a healthy, safe and liveable city?

Small table discussions focused on:

- What really stood out in the pairs' discussions?
- What were the best, most innovative and interesting ideas?

#### **SESSION 3: AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE DAY**

Individuals were invited to share what they learned during the forum and any thoughts that they wished to have included in the record of the conversation.

It was clear from the individuals who chose to share information with the large group that some extremely meaningful and passionate conversations took place. Participants said they were grateful for an opportunity to be heard in this early stage of the planning process, and were excited to be involved in discussions about the possibilities of what would be considered in the People Plan. A few reflected that they wished there had been more time.

#### **WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO PEOPLE?**

As the discussions continued throughout the Community Conversation, overlaps between themes were becoming more and more evident, and the conversation slowly began to merge into six broad themes, under an overarching theme of Creating a Creative, Caring and Connected City.

##### ***Creating a Creative, Caring Connected City***

The topic of *Connectedness* was mentioned time and time again over the course of the conversation and clearly emerged as an over-arching theme for what is important to people. In the end, it seems that participants' vision for the way we live is grounded in this one word: "Connectedness" as it embodies a vision of people talking together, working and living together, moving and celebrating together, supporting and caring for each other, in a rich, vibrant, green City. This one word embodies a vision of all parts of the City that Edmontonians believe it can be.

The six broad themes that emerged within this framework reflect what participants consider important, and how they see these priorities as links to achieving the larger City Vision. Possible strategies were suggested by the participants for how the People Plan might achieve the vision within each of the six categories.

##### ***Bringing People Together***

Participants spoke extensively about the importance of holding community hosted events and activities that would create opportunities for people to get to know their neighbors. The need was expressed for community gathering places where people would be brought together formally and informally to connect, talk to each other, celebrate, and learn. The importance of inclusion and engagement with all members of the community was stressed.

Participants also placed high priority on issues related to decision-making, leadership, addressing complex issues, operating holistically rather than in silos, and best practices in municipal governance. Reference was made to the challenges of bureaucracy, red tape, and an existing disconnect between City departments, as well as between levels of government in working together to make decisions in the long-term best interests of the community. One

participant summarized this theme by saying a new “just say yes” mentality is needed by the City.

#### Identified Strategies

- Create and implement planning policies for development that considers a whole systems view and that maximizes place-making that encourages community interaction, diversification and integration within communities.
- Develop and improve public involvement approaches and activities that are inclusive of all perspectives and parts of society and that build capacity for people to talk to each other about what is important, in both formal and informal ways.
- Review and enhance decision-making and problem solving approaches at the City so that all parts of the organization work together in a coordinated, harmonized way in the best interests of all residents.
- Reduce “red tape” and initiate an approach to decision making and community services that reflects a “just say yes” approach.
- Partner with organizations, associations, other levels of government and residents to implement a new approach that clusters services and programs together where people need them.
- Consider alternative, creative approaches for service and program delivery.

#### ***Caring for Each Other***

Participants reflected on the importance of compassion for all residents, and in the words of one participant, working to “humanize community”. Homelessness, social services and support, community health programs, services and programs for the more vulnerable among us, volunteerism and neighborhood services were discussed. More than just focusing on the issues we face today, the idea of investing for the future by engaging and connecting with youth to support them in learning about and participating in the civic process may be a good way to help instill community values.

The importance of ease of access to, and affordability of, services and programs for all Edmontonians was also discussed, with specific focus on housing and transit. In addition, participants discussed how important it is that any resident, regardless of level of income or location should be able to readily and easily participate in City programs, facilities and services.

#### Identified Strategies

- Support and expand volunteer programs, activities and opportunities.
- Enhance and expand programs and services for vulnerable and marginalized residents so that all members of the community have access to the support they need.
- Provide funding or review cost of existing services to improve access to, and affordability of, programs, facilities and services.

#### *Protecting our Natural City*

Participants stressed the critical importance of a responsible and sustainable long-term approach to decision-making and implementation that focuses on environmental stewardship and long-term outcomes. Reference was made to local food, community gardens, and urban forest programs, using “dead space” as green or gathering spaces. The importance of open and natural spaces, preservation of wildlife and natural areas, all with accompanying education programs that would support understanding and appreciation of these important spaces, were also referenced. “Build up instead of out,” as one participant stated.

#### Identified Strategies

- Implement a long-term outcomes focused approach to environmental stewardship that includes community based initiatives like community gardens, urban forestry and greening of urban spaces.
- Protect and enhance natural open spaces as vital to a sustainable city
- Develop and implement education and awareness programs to increase understanding and appreciation of natural spaces, plants and wildlife.

#### *Living and Moving Together*

Participants talked about the importance of the form and nature of neighborhoods, referencing mixed uses and varied types of housing, crime prevention design, supporting and energizing inner city neighborhoods, and making a commitment to design that supports connections between people with friendly streetscapes and gathering spaces.

Participants also discussed the importance of efficient, accessible, affordable transit, walkability and cycling as part of the City they want to be a part of where there are fewer cars and more focus on an environmentally friendly way of moving between places.

#### Identified Strategies

- Consider innovative approaches to community development such as community design, crime prevention design and enhance friendly streetscapes and gathering places
- Focus on alternative transportation approaches that are efficient, environmentally friendly, accessible and affordable.
- Increase access to and affordability of transit for all residents.

#### ***Celebrating a Rich and Vibrant City***

Participants reflected that arts and culture are not a luxury, but an essential part of being human, and are critical for the creation of any great City. Festivals, sculptures, fountains, murals and a rich arts scene were referenced. The critical importance of connecting with Edmonton's diverse cultural communities through education, events and story telling was also considered important. It was suggested that Edmonton is a blank slate with so much potential to display our proud heritage and culture through our arts.

#### Identified Strategies

- Develop and deliver arts programs, partnerships and services that result in a vibrant and rich visual dance and music scene.
- Partner and work with the city's diverse cultural and ethnic communities to educate and celebrate the city's richness.
- Incorporate the arts into the fabric of everyday life through visual installations, story-telling, festivals and events.

#### ***Supporting a Healthy, Active and Safe City***

Of critical importance to participants were the issues of safety and security, with emphasis on both prevention and enforcement. People talked about lights, cleanliness, neighborly connections and relationships as elements of prevention, as well as peace officers, community policing and response time as important enforcement priorities.

Participants also talked about their enjoyment of recreation and leisure services, year round (not just in the summer) and prioritized local community based recreation facilities with easy access and that could serve a dual purpose as community gathering places. Combined with well-placed regional recreational facilities, this would help all Edmontonians increase their participation in these activities – for wellbeing and as a preventive approach to optimizing health. Education, promotion and communication about recreation and an active lifestyle were also discussed.

#### Identified Strategies

- Create safe communities through prevention with lighting, cleanliness, neighborhood safety programs.
- Enhance and expand community policing response times and the presence of peace officers in communities.
- Create a balanced approach to placement and development of recreational facilities that ensure access to facilities, programs and services through locally placed buildings, as well as more regional facilities.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive education and awareness program to increase understanding of and participation in healthy, active lifestyle choices.

# The Way We Live: Edmonton's People Plan

Community Conversation – October 3, 2009

## **SUMMARY REPORT & ISSUES ANALYSIS**

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**8**

### **SUMMARY**

This report summarizes the information gathered at the Community Conversation on October 3, 2009, the first public event held for Edmonton's People Plan Project. This report will be included in the Public Involvement Report along with similar reports from other public involvement activities for this project.