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APPROACH 3
Equality:
Create a great place to live for all citizens



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Urban designers ensure that residences, shops, and workplaces are close together. As a result, people can move within and among these spaces without a car.

Build on a strong foundation

This approach is based on the idea that we should identify the barriers to making Edmonton a more livable city. We should then remove these barriers. Livability is measured by such factors as safety in neighbourhoods, downtown, and on public transit. It is measured by how easy it is to get to and pay for recreational activities. It is also measured by how attractive and well-maintained we keep the city. And it is measured by our economic prosperity, whether we have affordable housing, the sustainability of natural and urban environment, and the extent to which citizens are involved in the decisions that affect them.

We are already doing many things to create a sustainable, dynamic, clean, safe, creative, energetic, and welcoming city. We have the Capital City Clean Up, which is a year-round anti-litter and graffiti-management program. Programs of this kind are successful because they are designed to involve citizens.

According to a recent survey, the vast majority of respondents felt that the quality of life in Edmonton was good, very good, or excellent. Among the main reasons for their satisfaction were the parks and green spaces, art and culture opportunities, and good entertainment. Crime was identified as contributing to a low quality of life. People also said that the availability and quality of housing influences our quality of life.

What can be done?

- Identify and reduce barriers to livability, such as suburban sprawl.
- Carry out a cleanliness audit and develop a sustainable year-round strategy in concert with educational partners.
- Promote the image of our city. Create an “Edmonton Image” campaign.
- Have an improvement plan for each neighbourhood.
- Improve the availability and quality of housing.

Reduce suburban sprawl

Our city is growing quickly. Suburban sprawl has been one of the consequences. Many argue that Edmonton’s growth is not sustainable, that we cannot continue to live as we have in the past. They say that suburban sprawl is therefore a barrier to making our city more livable.

Living in suburbs has advantages, such as lower priced housing compared to older neighbourhoods. But it also creates problems that can affect our quality of life. Suburban living is associated with increased car-dependency. Residents need to drive more each day to get to work, do their shopping, visit the doctor, and visit recreational and entertainment facilities. It has been estimated that Edmontonians travel 10 million kilometres each day. The suburban lifestyle has been associated with poor air quality. It can increase obesity and blood pressure rates. It can use up our green spaces. This is because we cover over more land and forests when we create a new suburb. Suburbs are more expensive because it costs more money to bring services to the suburbs. An alternative is to refurbish older neighbourhoods in established areas or those near transit routes.

People who support this approach argue that we should develop more compact and high-density communities. We would do this by creating “urban villages” through urban design. Urban design brings together buildings, public spaces, and streets. Urban designers ensure that residential, commercial, and appropriate industrial uses are close to one another. As a result, people can move within and among these spaces without relying on a car.



Evidence clearly shows that people who live in spread-out, car-dependent neighbourhoods are likely to walk less, weigh more, and suffer from obesity and high blood pressure and consequent diabetes, cardio-vascular and other diseases, as compared to people who live in more efficient, higher density communities.

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We can encourage and sponsor urban design through competitions or through programs such as revitalizing the downtown area. This could result in designs that are compatible with the surrounding natural space and community. Reducing urban sprawl can also benefit the natural environment. These spaces can be environmentally sustainable and help to limit suburban growth. Conserving natural spaces can ensure that future generations can appreciate and enjoy the unique aspects of our natural heritage.

Experts say that an added benefit of urban design is that it reduces the negative impacts of our car-dependency on human health. This is because it can promote more active lifestyles. In addition, urban designs promote livability by improving the appearance of buildings and providing better access to a diverse range of commercial services, cultural opportunities and venues, and community-based services.

Any effort reducing suburban sprawl should be in concert with efforts to educate the public. Citizens need to understand the alternatives to suburban development before they will support such a change. They need to become more aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each choice made about urban design.

Support crime prevention

The overall satisfaction with police services in 2007 in Edmonton has remained at a high level, about 74 per cent. But some people surveyed recently felt that police services needed more funds. This is explained by the fact that about a third of respondents mentioned the crime rate as an issue affecting their quality of life.

Some argue that we should continue to support crime-prevention programs such as “Safedmonton.” The mandate of this program is to encourage local efforts to reduce crime. Examples of similar programs include “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design” and “Walkable Edmonton.” These programs seek to discourage crime by creating a safe environment, advocating changes to bylaws, and bringing together citizens, communities, and the police.

Some concerns

- Quality of life is subjective and therefore difficult to define in a diverse community. Certain programs and strategies could prove divisive. Dense urban areas dependent on public transit, for example, might be more appealing to people from European cities, for example. They might be inconsistent with the North American value of enjoying lots of living space.
- This strategy could backfire by making housing less affordable. Restricting the development of single-family residential homes could end up increasing prices if the demand for them continues to rise.
- This approach can be seen as either too abstract or too concrete. It can be viewed as a “vision” without details. Or it can become a “shopping list” that is never achieved because of cost and disagreements about what is important.

Other ideas for reducing crime are to spend money for targeted actions to reduce repeat offences. We could fund more community-based programs that emphasize crime prevention and safety. One of the goals would be to involve citizens and youth groups in crime prevention.

Think about shelter

Many argue that we should continue to support affordable housing, as well as low-income and special-needs housing. They say that we should make it easier for developers to consider building affordable housing. We should encourage projects that concentrate housing within established neighbourhoods. Examples include residential infill, commercial and industrial conversion projects, and remediation programs. We could also encourage people to construct green buildings that are affordable and environmentally friendly. This could be done by giving incentives for green technology and by encouraging green builders.

Welcome newcomers and visitors

Attractive and well-maintained cities are inviting and welcoming. Some commentators have said that programs to improve the appearance and function of buildings in areas such as the downtown can contribute to our city’s livability. This could also increase our positive reputation nationally and internationally. We should offer more financial incentives for downtown business owners to improve the appearance of their storefronts. These incentives would have the added benefit of encouraging business owners to become involved in increasing civic pride. We could also try to attract and maintain more business head offices in the downtown area. Efforts at increasing the welcoming climate in Edmonton could be carried out in connection to promoting the image of our city more actively. For example, we could create an “Edmonton Image” campaign.

A possible trade-off

This approach depends on the willingness of citizens to pay more taxes. The benefits of this approach may be intended for all citizens. In practice they may be enjoyed by only some. Not everyone would view this as a fair arrangement.

