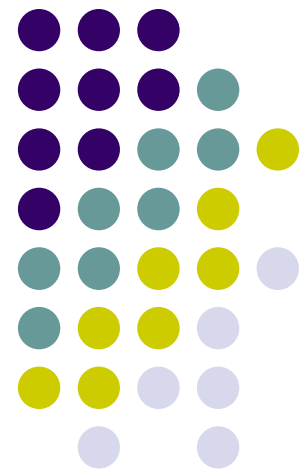


# THE CENTRE for PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

## PROSPECTUS



July 2009



### 1. The Proposal

The University of Alberta and the City of Edmonton propose to establish a **Centre for Public Involvement** as described in this Prospectus.

The timing is right for establishing the proposed Centre. In reality, the timing is probably late by ten years.

- The NIMBY syndrome – “not in my backyard” – is evidence of that.
- This is not new; it has been growing for some years.
- Globally and locally, citizens and students demand to be engaged in a meaningful way in decisions that impact them.
- The current economic downturn is not relevant; in fact, as citizens expect public bodies and institutions to take measures to alleviate the impacts of the downturn, or reverse it, they also look to opportunities to provide their input to considerations of which measures will have the greatest positive results with the least negative outcomes.

The two partners – the University and the City – have a background and a track-record in public involvement. The Centre will provide an organizational and governance framework through which the partners can employ and realize the synergies of working together, jointly, putting that background and track-record together to achieve public involvement results which are better than by each of them working separately.

The Centre is an intentional bringing together of scholarship, policy and practice, in a leadership role that can and will attract expertise from government, community and scholarship that can explore and test the possibilities of “doing things differently”. Doing things differently in public involvement is not an “add-on” or a “frill”. It is a new and different way of doing “the basic business”, integrated into and a part of the business itself. It is based on best practices and research available from around the world.

The Centre will deepen and broaden – expand – the concept of “citizenry” by:

- better research;
- better identification of different methodologies;
- better practices and application; and
- better evaluation.

**“Synergy between university and city is what it takes to build great universities and great cities.”**

The synergy between University and City results from the intersection of the mandates of the two partners: the City of Edmonton brings experience, and the application of improved process and methodology, and the University of Alberta brings action research and community outreach. Faculty and students will use experience gained, in their research and learning.



## 2. The Context

**There is a demonstrated and recognized need for decision-makers and the public to intentionally search out, consider and apply the most effective means for public involvement.**

### A Philosophical Overview

Public involvement provides opportunities for individuals and stakeholders to make meaningful contributions to decision-making. Fostering public involvement increases the opportunities available, and broadens the range of people who have access to the opportunities.

Democratic communities and societies are experiencing a sense of frustration on the part of citizens in citizens' perception of their lack of ability to influence decision-making in both the public and private sectors. Decision-makers, whether political leaders or leaders of organizations in the private sector, are aware of this. Decision-makers are looking for ways to respond to that sense of frustration in measured and effective ways – measured in that public involvement opportunities are well-researched and tested, effective in that citizens perceive they are heard and their views taken into account, and ultimately effective in that decision-making is facilitated and enhanced.

Problems and difficulties of public involvement and citizen participation, and the sometime absence of effective implementation, are well-researched and tested. There are many examples. Perhaps the most current and discussed is the decreasing levels of voting in election processes. This is evidence of citizen disengagement and disenchantment with current opportunities, and of ineffective decision-maker responses.

Continued citizen frustration and disenchantment will lead to decision-making processes becoming increasingly dysfunctional, and to decisions either not accepted or only grudgingly accepted by those who are affected. There is a need to re-engage citizens, to expand their opportunities to be involved, and to prevent poor decision-making. It is preventive; it is simply a matter of “pay now or pay later” – either take steps to reverse these trends, or suffer the consequences of further deterioration.

Any learning with respect to public involvement, irrespective of its form, must by definition be grounded in “the public.” It must be community-based.

### Examples of Recent Critical Thinking

- The Canadian Policy Research Networks states:
  - *There is now broad acknowledgement that the public wants a voice in how government policy is shaped. CPRN's Public Involvement Network has fine-tuned the process that brings citizens and government officials together to make policy-making a transparent and accountable process.*



- ...that to make governments more responsive to the needs and expectations of citizens, it must improve the way it collaborates with them in policy development through deliberation and policy implementation.<sup>1</sup>
- The Health Council of Canada states:

*There is no agreement on a single model of democratic governance. Indeed, the spectrum of ideal-type democracies goes from an elitist democracy (i.e. elites are selected to represent and make decisions on behalf of the citizenry) to a direct democracy (i.e. political power is exercised by citizens without representatives acting on their behalf)... There has always been a relative tension between the role of elites or elected representatives versus the role of citizens in democratic governance. However, recent trends in modern democracies have contributed to a renewed interest in a more participatory democracy, i.e. a democracy in which citizens are more actively involved in decision-making processes.*<sup>2</sup>
- The University of Alberta states:<sup>3</sup>

as a Value:  
*Excellence in teaching that promotes learning, outstanding research and creative activity that fuel discovery and advance knowledge, and enlightened service that builds citizenship;*

as its Mission:  
*Within a vibrant and supportive learning environment, the University of Alberta discovers, disseminates, and applies new knowledge through teaching and learning, research and creative activity, community involvement, and partnerships....*

as elements of a Cornerstone in “learning discovery and citizenship”:  
*DEMONSTRATE the contribution of university discovery and scholarship to public policy...*  
*REWARD and recognize the excellence of individuals in teaching, ground-breaking scholarship, and contributions to community and nation-building...*  
*INSPIRE students, faculty, and staff alike to engage in activities that develop leadership, foster social and moral responsibility, and contribute to the further development of our society and its institutions.*

as an element of a Cornerstone in “connecting communities”:  
*BUILD strong partnerships with the capital region, the cities of Edmonton and Camrose, and other urban and rural Alberta communities, and all levels of government in order to fulfill our responsibility as Alberta’s university, a leader on the national stage with global connections.*

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Policy Research Network, CPRN’s Public Involvement Network on the Road – Meeting High Demand for More Public Engagement; July 28, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Health Council of Canada, Primer on Public Involvement; July 2006

<sup>3</sup> Excerpts from University of Alberta, Dare to Discover; 2008



- The City of Edmonton's Policy C513<sup>4</sup>, approved by Edmonton's City Council, states three City of Edmonton commitments that:
  1. A key element of representative democracy is people have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them;
  2. The process design for public involvement will ensure people are treated with respect; and
  3. The City will ensure public involvement processes are accessible to the public.

### **3. What is a Centre for Public Involvement?**

#### **Concept**

A Centre for Public Involvement as described in this Prospectus can address the issues presented above. The Centre, similar to and drawing on the experiences and learning of other functioning and successful centres of excellence, will be a partnership led and supported by the City of Edmonton and the University of Alberta. It is **established to intentionally consider and apply the most effective means to undertake public involvement.**

The Centre will be an independent and non-aligned third-party framework within which issues of public involvement can be researched, tested, and put into practice. This can be done in a “hothouse”, where concepts and ideas can be developed and tested without risk to the partners. There is reduced risk for decision-makers in working through and with the Centre as a third-party organization, where the Centre as an organization itself does not have a direct stake in the decisions which are the subject of public involvement.

In addition to being the beneficiaries of the work of the Centre for Public Involvement, the two partners, the City of Edmonton and the University of Alberta, bring significant contributions to the Centre:

- The University of Alberta brings research and expertise; it brings knowledge and learning, research and research ability, academic rigour, teaching, and evaluation. There is new research and learning on public involvement, and on communication and technology. There are scholars, whether local or attracted from elsewhere. The University has a commitment to meaningful public involvement in its decision-making processes.
- The City of Edmonton as a local government operates in an environment which is very “close” to its citizens, where people are often directly aware of and impacted by decisions. The City as a municipal corporation brings a commitment to public involvement expressed in Policy C513. At the political and administrative levels it brings experience and knowledge in many areas of public involvement in decision-making. And the City provides a ready and available arena within which to research, practice and learn, bringing experience and “real needs” to the research and learning.

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<sup>4</sup> City of Edmonton, Policy C513, City of Edmonton Public Involvement; January 17, 2006



This partnership is not a consultant approach. It is more than academics and technocrats and bureaucrats – it is action research, a “living lab”, with the synergistic benefits that result.

### **Value of the Centre for the Partners: City of Edmonton Perspective**

- Policy C513 “City of Edmonton Public Involvement” provides the opportunity for expanding public involvement. Expanding public involvement involves consideration of the Policy’s statement respecting “Our Commitment to Citizen Engagement”, that:

*The City of Edmonton believes that a key element of representative democracy is that people have a right to be involved in the decisions that affect them.*

- The “Public Involvement Handbook” referenced in Policy C513 provides guidance to City Council and Administration in implementing the Policy. It describes the process tools and methods which can be used for public involvement. The “Handbook” lists and discusses:
  - “key considerations about planning and conducting public involvement processes”;
  - guidance in “the selection of public involvement methods”, i.e. the tools or methods; and
  - a “step-by-step guide to creating a strategic public involvement plan”.
- Policy C513 states:
  - Public involvement processes will be designed to involve the appropriate people at the appropriate time in the appropriate way through the completion and communication of a public involvement plan for all processes.
  - The continuum of public involvement will be used to ensure involvement processes align with the scope, complexity, and outcomes of the decision being made.
  - A balance and range of public perspectives will be provided to decision makers for consideration in the decision process.
  - Processes will be appropriately resourced to ensure effective implementation.
- The Centre will be a resource for use in the development and refining of public consultation processes and tools envisaged as described above. It will assist in the further development and implementation of public involvement processes, and their incorporation within the City’s standard practices.

### **Value of the Centre for the Partners: University of Alberta Perspective**

- The University of Alberta’s commitment is to a vision of university-community engagement through the cornerstone of Connecting Communities. That commitment is demonstrated in a number of ways.
- The University’s External Relations Office exemplifies the University’s commitment to engaging the public in its planning and activities. The Centre will assist the University in its involving of the public.



- The Faculty of Extension exemplifies the University's commitment to studying public involvement. The Faculty wishes to pursue its strategic goal of enhancing its leadership and capacities in the scholarship of community engagement. The Faculty of Extension intends to demonstrate how its Strategic Academic Plan will achieve the academic and scholarly goals of university-community engagement. The Faculty of Extension's plan requires concrete initiatives within which faculty members may shape their research and teaching agendas. The Centre's initiatives will make the Faculty of Extension an attractive destination for faculty members.
- The Centre will be a resource for use in the development and refining of public consultation processes and tools. It will assist in the further development and implementation of public involvement processes, and their incorporation within the University's standard practices.
- The Centre will be an opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students of urban ecology, as a resource for development and learning.

### **Value of the Centre: A Perspective from Other Decision-Making Bodies**

Other levels of government and public bodies, national organizations, and other communities will be prospective beneficiaries of the Centre's program of research and practice. The Centre will be available for a variety of other organizations and institutions which have a need for good public involvement processes.

## **4. Operation of the Centre for Public Involvement**

### **Mandate**

The Mission of the Centre for Public Involvement is:

**to provide leadership in understanding and applying innovative practices and new technologies for citizen participation, engagement, and deliberation.**

### **Function**

- The Centre's main areas of activity:
  - researching leading edge public participation and involvement;
  - delivering consultative and advisory services and expertise to organizations and institutions respecting state-of-the-art practices of public deliberation and public communication;
  - providing operational support to organizations and agencies engaged in public participation activities and exercises;
  - managing public participation events addressing issues of broad public interest, on occasion as required; and
  - providing national and international leadership through research, development, and innovation in the theory and practice of public communication.



- intentionally and continuously seek to provide a balance among best practices, research and consulting.
- The Centre will contract with stakeholders for the provision of specified public involvement services.
- Other than the management and administrative staff employed by the Centre, the Centre will:
  - identify research and operational staff from its stakeholder organizations appropriate for secondment to the Centre to engage in contracted work either for the stakeholders or other purchasers of services;
  - identify research and operational staff from non-stakeholder purchasers of contracted services appropriate for secondment to the Centre to engage in the work contracted for the respective non-stakeholder organizations and agencies; and
  - invite applications from the staff of its stakeholder organizations for either secondment or for temporary or part-time employment by the Centre.

### **Stakeholders – Who Are Involved?**

- At the time of establishment:
  - the City of Edmonton through the Office of Public Involvement, and
  - the University of Alberta through the Faculty of Extension.
- Subsequently, other institutions and agencies in both the public and private sectors which subscribe to and wish to be involved in the Centre, “sign on” to its Mission and its structure, and financially support the Centre.

### **Organizational Structure**

- a governing board appointed by the subscribing stakeholders, with membership proportional to their financial support;
- management and administrative staff employed by the Centre;
- staff seconded to the Centre by the subscribing stakeholders from time-to-time and for varying lengths of time, and managed by the Centre;
- staff seconded to the Centre by non-stakeholder organizations and agencies which purchase specific contracted services from the Centre; and
- temporary and/or part-time staff employed from time-to-time by the Centre.

### **How Will the Centre be Established?**

- Approval in principle of the concept of the Centre for Public Involvement, with approval to proceed with further development, by Edmonton City Council and the Board of Governors of the University of Alberta representing the two initial partners:



- The City has established processes by which the Centre will be approved, involving and including the Office of Public Involvement, the Senior Management Team and City Council.
- The University has established criteria and processes by which it considers the establishment of such a centre, involving and including the Faculty of Extension, various institutes and faculties/departments, the General Faculties Council and the Board of Governors.
- Allocation of appropriate staff from the administrations of each of the two partners, to further develop and refine the concept and to develop the constituting documents and decisions, the legal instruments required, financial requirements, and the specifics of the governing structure and operation of the Centre.
- Agreement and decisions by the Edmonton City Council and the Board of Governors of the University to incorporate and establish the Centre for Public Involvement.
- Hiring an “implementation manager” who will undertake incorporation, formation of the governing board, and establishment of the Centre’s offices.

### **When Would the Centre be Established?**

- Anticipated 2010.

### **5. Cost and Funding**

- First-year core cost \$300,000, for fulltime staff and support infrastructure;
- Subsequent annual and decreasing funding from the stakeholders;
- Financial support from foundations and institutes which are interested in issues of democracy, government and public involvement; and
- Fee-for-service revenues from services provided:
  - to stakeholders, and
  - to other purchasers of services.