

The logo for the City of Edmonton, featuring the word "Edmonton" in white text on a blue rectangular background.

Edmonton

A low-angle, close-up photograph of several hands reaching up to support a baby's head. The scene is brightly lit from above, creating a warm, golden glow. The hands are of various skin tones, and the baby's head is visible at the top of the frame. The image is partially overlaid by a large orange rectangle on the right side.

2023 to 2026 Approach to Problem Properties

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of Edmonton acknowledges the traditional land on which we reside is in Treaty Six Territory. We would like to thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, such as nêhiyaw (Nay-hee-yow) / Cree, Dené (Deh-neyh), Anishinaabe (Ah-nish-in-ah-bay) / Sauteaux (So-toe), Nakota Isga (Na-koh-tah ee-ska) / Nakota Sioux (Na-koh-tah sue), and Niitsitapi (Nit-si-tahp-ee) / Blackfoot peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis' (May-tee) homeland and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel. It is a welcoming place for all peoples who come from around the world to share Edmonton as a home. Together we call upon all of our collective, honoured traditions and spirits to work in building a great city for today and future generations.

INTRODUCTION

Problem properties have been a long-standing challenge in Edmonton. For years, concerned Edmontonians, Council, City staff and other community agencies and organizations have all sought solutions to address the risks these properties pose to Edmonton's neighbourhoods.

In October 2019, Council provided the direction for City administration to work collaboratively with partners at Alberta Health Services, the Edmonton Police Service, community groups and other stakeholders to identify short-term, high-impact actions that address the complex factors associated with problem properties. These actions, set out in the Problem Properties Initiative 2020 - 2022 Action Plan, were designed to be practical, impactful, and sustainable and included the development of a longer-term strategy for addressing these issues. The 2023 - 2026 Approach to Problem Properties (APP or "The Approach") is intended to replace the 2020 - 2022 Action Plan.

The Approach provides a framework for an inter-jurisdictional approach to effectively deal with these properties and their impacts on the surrounding community. The Approach reflects the collaborative efforts of multiple City departments, Alberta Health Services, Edmonton Police Service and the Government of Alberta as well as the direction provided by Edmonton City Council. While the Approach is a City of Edmonton plan, its success is dependent on ongoing collaboration with the City's stakeholders and partners as well as the communities affected by problem properties. The Approach sets out the initial steps for the journey ahead, but it is expected that this will be a live and agile approach where actions are set out annually based on the progress made within each of the pillars of the strategy.

Defining Problem Properties

Problem properties in Edmonton are defined as:

Occupied or derelict unsecured properties that have a significant detrimental impact on the health and safety of those living in and/or working on the property as well as the surrounding community. These properties have a history of recurring violations relating to development permits, safety codes, nuisance conditions, public health, fire risk, or other illegal activity/criminal offences. These properties are complex in nature, often requiring the coordination of multiple agencies and social supports to address the above-noted challenges. These properties generate extraordinary demand on services and represent ongoing risk to the vibrancy of the neighbourhood. (Revised March 2, 2022)

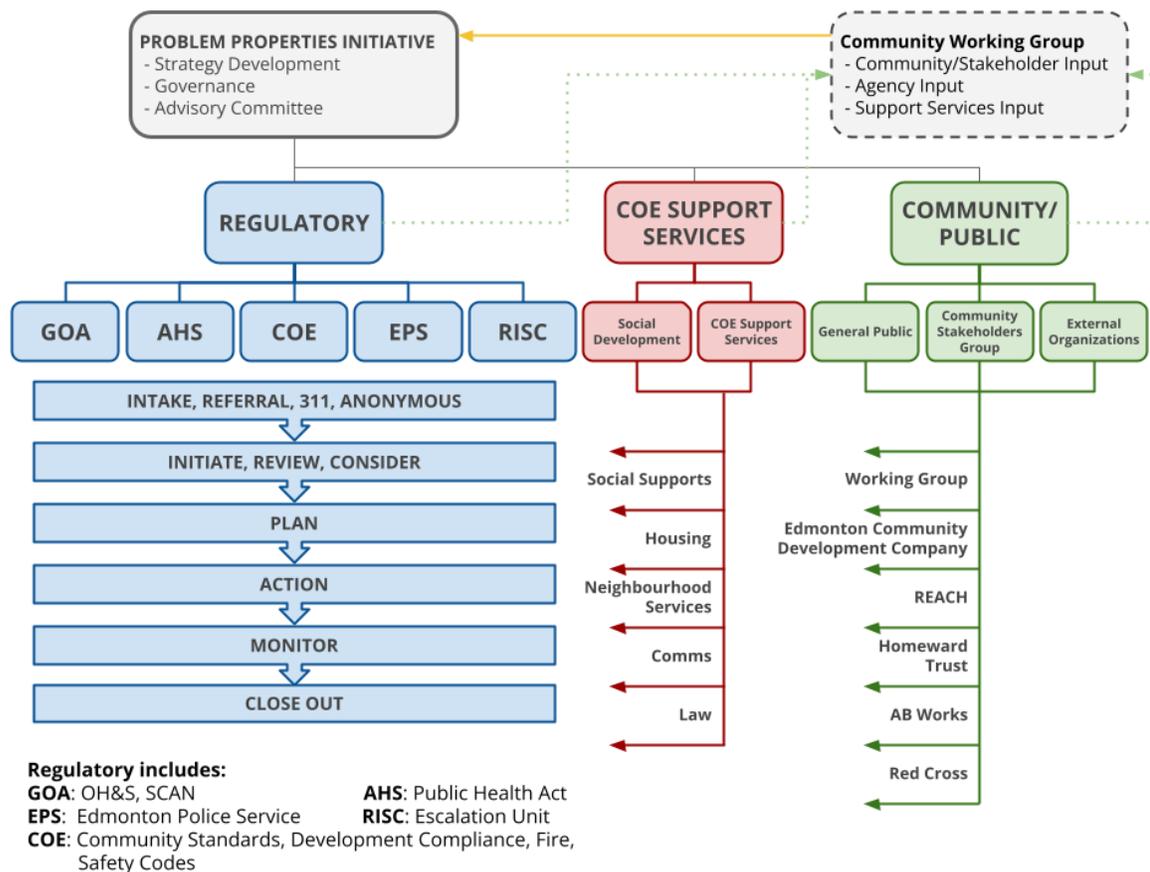
Partners in Addressing Problem Properties

Addressing the complex issues associated with problem properties requires a collaborative, inter-jurisdictional effort with each stakeholder holding a unique role that is enabled and empowered by various municipal, provincial and federal strategies and legislation.

Regulatory stakeholders are responsible for compliance with various safety codes, acts and bylaws. City of Edmonton support services provide the social support necessary when dealing with those closely associated with these properties such as tenants and landlords. Community stakeholders also form an essential element in addressing problem properties. These individuals and organizations work closely with the regulatory and support areas to ensure the general health and safety of the community.

The Problem Properties Initiative (PPI) is composed of members from both the regulatory and support services groups. In addition, a standing working group is envisioned that will formally bring together members from all three groups to provide their unique perspectives and valuable input into how to co-create impactful solutions with the community.

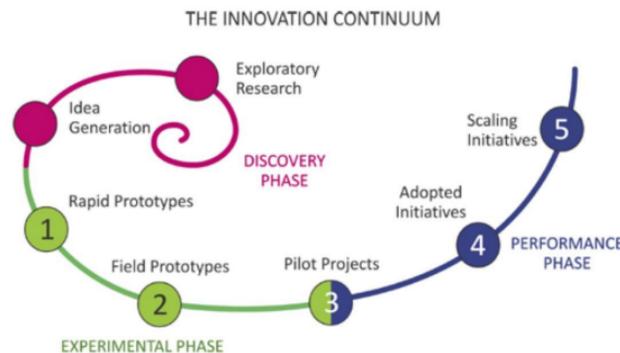
Figure 1



Developing the Approach to Problem Properties

The 2023 - 2026 Approach to Problem Properties was developed using a human-centred design process (HCD) that took different stakeholder perspectives into consideration, including the tenants, landlords, enforcement partners, and community members in tackling the issues associated with problem properties. The process was intentionally designed to help build further trust, strengthen relationships and ensure more accountability across all involved stakeholders to address this complex issue.

Figure 2¹



To establish a comprehensive picture of the current state of problem properties in Edmonton and other municipalities, community and stakeholder engagement, policy review, observational field visits, economic analysis of associated costs and a jurisdictional review of best practices was completed. The development of a desired future state helped to ground the HCD process. The findings from all of the research informed the development of the definition of problem properties and prototype development which form the basis for the Approach to Problem Properties.

As part of the human-centred design approach, ideation workshops were held to identify ideas to test potential new solutions to address issues with problem properties. From these potential solutions, eight prototypes were selected to be advanced. Four have been developed and tested, while another four prototypes are being initiated. Over 200 ideas were generated as part of the process, but not advanced. These have been captured in an “Idea Bank” and provide a readily available source to be mined for future opportunities.

Supporting this work, a socio-economic impact analysis of problem properties was also conducted in collaboration with the Edmonton Community Development Company (ECDC). This analysis helped provide further evidence for consideration in using stronger measures to address problem properties and provides the foundation for future exploration of topics such as the use of predictive analytics and options for land development.

Strategic Alignment

The City Plan provides the intentions and direction for how Edmonton will grow to welcome one million more people while still preserving the things most valued today. It asks the question: “what choices do we need to make to be a healthy, urban and climate-resilient city of

¹ Mark Cabaj. *Here to There Consulting. Evaluating “Innovations” in Social Innovation Labs. From Probes to Scaling. May 2019.*

two million people that supports a prosperous region?” In support of the policies set out in The City Plan, the Approach to Problem Properties provides a framework and process for making the decisions and choices needed to return a sense of safety and vibrancy to neighbourhoods negatively impacted by these properties.

The Approach will help move the city towards increasing community and personal wellness, allowing people and businesses to thrive in the places they live, work and play. The Approach will advance the city in becoming a more vibrant, safe and inclusive Edmonton where affordable and supportive housing needs are being met. It promotes a healthy and connected city through working with residents and other community stakeholders to improve personal, community and neighbourhood safety.

Supported City Plan Policies

1.2.2 Ensure vibrant and inclusive communities where children, youth and families can live, learn and grow together. 4.1.2.5 Improve personal, community and neighbourhood safety by working with residents to develop community-based solutions. 6.1.1 Promote city building solutions with communities through prototyping, partnerships and piloting.

APPROACH TO PROBLEM PROPERTIES

The Approach to Problem Properties is grounded in its vision of the future for the communities and agencies who deal with these properties. The Approach is centred around four strategic pillars and will create prototypes that may be implemented or piloted in pursuit of the vision. New ideas aligned to the pillars will move through the human-centred design process providing agile, strategic direction. The pilot and prototypes (both developed and in-development) are summarized in the sections that follow.

Vision for the Future

The vision defines the desired problem properties' future for all communities, stakeholders, and City staff, and is meant to serve as the guidepost to advance all work in addressing Edmonton's problem properties.

Day-to-Day Life in 2040

- *The day-to-day life in Edmonton neighbourhoods is largely safe, vibrant and communities are clean and healthy places to live.*
- *There is a high degree of community pride in all neighbourhoods and people have a broad understanding of the diversity of housing needs.*
- *A variety of affordable housing options exist that are well utilized and cared for.*
- *For the most vulnerable, houselessness is a one-time, temporary, and short-lived experience as people have the required support to meet their needs.*
- *Sectors and agencies are well-coordinated and integrated into effectively dealing with identified problem properties guided by a clear process to address issues at properties.*
- *Edmontonians are supported in being partners in utilizing proactive approaches that limit the chances of properties turning into resource-intensive problems.*

Four Pillars

The foundation of the Approach to Problem Properties is based on four interdependent pillars where progress in one pillar will positively impact actions in the others. Success will be

achieved through intentional, collaborative action integrated across each of these four areas of focus.

Governance & Decision-Making	Enhanced Enforcement & Inspections
Clear lines of authority and governance to ensure accountability and coordination for issues resolution.	Stronger, more innovative enforcement measures for dealing with problem properties and their owners proactively.
Partnerships & Collaboration	Community Engagement & Communication
Stakeholders working together to leverage their enforcement capacity to address challenges faced by tenants, communities and those impacted.	Lean into the rich, lived experiences of communities and develop co-created, community-centric solutions.

Governance & Decision-Making

With many stakeholders involved, clear lines of authority and governance are required for accountability and coordination for issue resolution. Each organization or agency has its specific roles and applications of legislation, but no agency is responsible for the necessary overall oversight.

PROTOTYPE: A CENTRALIZED ENTITY

Successfully addressing the complex nature of problem properties requires a collaborative and integrated effort given the capacity constraints, resource restrictions and other challenges experienced by each organization.

What a Centralized Entity Will Look Like:

A dedicated entity responsible for administering the Problem Properties Initiative (PPI) will be formed where members are collectively mandated by a Memorandum of Understanding. The entity will oversee strategic direction and ensure consistency through cross-organizational collaboration and information sharing.

Action:

- As supported by City Council in April 2022, a central entity with additional resources will be created for addressing problem properties with one-time funding of \$915,000.
- Once established, this centralized entity will be the key liaison for the community and Council regarding problem properties and govern the completion of the remaining prototypes.

FUTURE PROTOTYPE: FORMALIZED ENGAGEMENT OF FRONT-LINE WORKERS

Develop formalized processes for engaging and sharing insights from front-line workers of PPI partner organizations to identify risks to effectiveness and opportunities for improving service.

Will Seek to Answer the Question...

How might we ensure the knowledge and experience of those in the organizations working closest to the challenges posed by problem properties is integrated into planning and decision-making?

Enhanced Enforcement & Inspections

There is a spectrum of problem properties in Edmonton requiring different levels of response, enforcement, inspections and re-inspections with the goal of bringing properties into compliance. In addition, there is a need to move to proactively inspect or re-inspect properties before they become more acutely problematic or chronic in nature.

PILOT: COMMUNITY PROPERTY SAFETY TEAM (CPST)

This escalating enforcement model pilot program specific to vacant properties was developed in response to increased fires in vacant properties that resulted in citizen fatalities and extreme risks to firefighters and the community at large. It is modeled after the City of Surrey's highly successful Distressed Properties community risk reduction program.

What the Community Property Safety Team Looks Like

Based on the authority under the Fire Code and Municipal Government Act, this innovative program holds owners accountable for securing their property. The program utilizes enhanced board-up and security procedures, along with escalating punitive measures to gain immediate compliance. If the property owners are not compliant, remedial action will be pursued to make these properties safe at the property owner's cost. The program is expected to demonstrate a strong cost recovery model from escalating enforcement penalties.

Action:

- Extend pilot from 90 days to up to 18 months (October 11, 2023) as approved by City Council in April 2022, with one-time funding of \$850,000.
- Evaluate the efficacy of the program in addressing problem properties and determine the ongoing operating costs to administer the program.

PROTOTYPE: STREAMLINED ENFORCEMENT & ESCALATING CONSEQUENCES

Significant time and resources are required to deal with problem properties in Edmonton. Given the increasing pressure from these constraints on all organizations, a streamlined and coordinated approach is necessary to address problem properties early and effectively.

What a Streamlined Enforcement Process Will Look Like:

Enforcement is calibrated to the condition of the property and escalating measures are coordinated across organizations to gain compliance and deter repeat offences. Compliance is achieved through letters, orders, tickets, and charges, which may include remedial actions such as clean up, board up or even demolition, if deemed necessary.

Action:

- Continued exploration and testing of enforcement enhancements through the project team.
- Leverage learnings and review outcomes from the CPST pilot to adapt relevant policies and procedures to other aspects of enforcement.

FUTURE PROTOTYPE: DEMOLITION AND/OR DISPOSITION OF PROBLEM PROPERTIES

Develop an approach for increasing the demolition and/or disposition of problem properties, including but not limited to increased acquisition of properties through tax forfeiture.

Will Seek to Answer the Question...

How might we develop and apply the policy and procedures necessary to improve the City of Edmonton's ability to demolish and/or dispose of serious problem properties?

COUNCIL DIRECTION: NEW WAYS OF DEALING WITH DERELICT PROPERTIES

Look at options for definitions of "derelict" residential and non-residential properties for the purposes of creating tax subclasses, including:

- tax rate differentials for a "derelict properties" subclasses, including the maximum allowable rate ratio associated with a derelict non-residential tax subclass;
- details of an off-setting grant program, along with a draft policy, that could further incentivize redevelopment of "derelict properties";
- methodology for monitoring and proving derelict non-residential property is unoccupied for at least one year to ensure compliance with the Edmonton City Charter, 2018 Regulation.

Partnerships & Collaboration

There is a need to extend collaborations to include ways to address the challenges faced by the tenants, the community, and others impacted by problem properties. How stakeholders work together to leverage the enforcement capacity of each other to address a problem property file is essential. The complexity of problem properties challenges the scope and mandate of all of the organizations and agencies involved and there are some elements of the issues that lead to problem properties that fall between or outside of the mandates of the enforcement agencies involved.

PROTOTYPE: TENANCY TOOLKIT

There are often a number of challenging issues with tenants and landlords at problem properties. Tenants and landlords may not know how to resolve their issues, or get help if they need it. At the same time, staff of supporting partners who interact with landlords and tenants may be unaware what resources are available to help in certain situations, or what tools they need in order to help.

What a Tenancy Toolkit Will Look Like:

Tenants have ready access to information about how to build positive relationships with landlords, their rights and options for dealing with difficult landlords including access to advocacy groups. For landlords they have examples of lease and rental agreements, tips for building good relationships and dealing with challenging ones and clearly defined rules and regulations for landlords and tenants. Frontline staff have access to information that allows them to support both tenants and landlords including how to support those in crisis and how to engage with the variety of agencies that can be involved.

Action:

- Prepare and implement the toolkits ensuring the resources meet the needs of stakeholders to support positive relationships.
- Explore the optimal channels for tenants, landowners and frontline workers to access tools.

FUTURE PROTOTYPE: PUBLIC INFORMATION & RESOURCES

Develop information and resources for the public that are easily accessible, in plain language and enable an understanding of the key legislation, policies and processes related to problem properties.

Will Seek to Answer the Question...

How might we ensure the complex nature of problem properties is communicated in a way that is easily understood and allows all those interested to be part of the solution?

Community Engagement & Communication

Problem properties negatively impact the community around them. Those that live in proximity to problem properties experience the many spillover effects of these properties, motivating many to be involved in finding opportunities to make improvements in their neighbourhoods. Through engagement and open dialogue, these individuals play a vital role in co-creating the solutions that address the problem properties and issues unique to their community.

PROTOTYPE: OUTCOMES, MEASURES & DATA

To make meaningful progress in addressing problem properties, performance must be monitored and decisions guided by the data and evidence collected across all partner organizations.

What Outcomes, Measures and Data Will Look Like:

A logic model was developed that illustrates the connection between the actions taken and the short and long-term outcomes desired from the Approach to Problem Properties (the full logic model can be found in Appendix A). The Public Safety Analytics Program provides a platform that brings together data from partners to inform resourcing and priority setting and provide reporting that shows the impact of resulting interventions.

Action:

- The logic model will be adopted and used by the centralized entity to guide strategic and tactical actions.
- Identify and address gaps in data collection and availability. As new data and measures are introduced and tracked, they will be added to the Public Safety Analytics Program.
- Incorporate qualitative research will be included as part of the Approach.
- Dashboards will be created and measures will be used to accurately report progress to Council, organizational partners and the public.

FUTURE PROTOTYPE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Develop an approach to involve community members, community leagues and Business Improvement Areas as neighbourhood-level support for problem property and housing initiatives.

Will Seek to Answer the Question...

How might we integrate the resources and lived experiences of the community to identify and implement solutions that enhance the safety and vibrancy of their neighbourhoods?

THE ROAD AHEAD

The Approach to Problem Properties provides a pathway outlining a number of well-researched and evidence-based approaches to address and reduce problem properties in Edmonton. The prototypes selected address key near-term opportunities and provide an ongoing process for exploring, experimenting and developing long-term, community solutions. The pillars, outcomes and the wealth of ideas generated in developing the Approach are intended as resources to be referred to ensuring that the strategic and tactical responses to problem properties are aligned with the ultimate vision for problem properties in the future.

2022-23 18-Month Outlook

Timeline	2022		2023			
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Governance & Decision-Making						
Establish centralized entity with dedicated resourcing	Setup		Implementation			
Development and testing of front-line workers engagement prototype						
Year-end review and opportunity analysis, develop annual plan						
Enhanced Enforcement & Inspections						
Implementation and evaluation of Community Property Safety Team (CPST) pilot						
Continued development and testing of streamlined enforcement process and procedures						
Development and testing of demolition and disposition prototype						
Partnerships & Collaboration						
Develop toolkits for tenants, landlords and front-line workers based on prototypes						
Development and testing of integrated public information prototype						
Community Engagement & Communication						
Integrate EPS & City of Edmonton data into Public Safety Analytics Program						
Development and testing of community engagement prototype						

APPENDIX A: LOGIC MODEL

APPROACH TO PROBLEM PROPERTIES LOGIC MODEL as of June 2022

