

What We Heard Report

Heritage Places Strategy

Phase One
Spring-Summer
2025

Full Version

| **SHARE** YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

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Acknowledgements

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 (Cree), Dené, Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Isga (Nakota Sioux), and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis' 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.

The place we call Edmonton is known to many as amiskwaciwâskahikan (ᐱᓄᓴᑦᕈᕐᕋᓴᑦᕐᕋᓴᑦᕐᕋᓴᑦ or Beaver Hills House) before the area was colonized in the nineteenth century. Indigenous Peoples have looked to the meaning of space (referring to location, physical space and/or physical geography) as a means of establishing a sense of place (referencing meaning within space) long before Edmonton's built form developed. A new heritage strategy will help to broaden what heritage can be, beyond our colonial and settler history, to reflect a more holistic representation of the histories and stories for those who call this place home.

Thank You

The City would like to thank those participants who contributed their thoughts and perspectives through facilitated conversations, completing the survey, meeting with the project team and providing written submissions. Your contributions will help shape the Heritage Places Strategy.

Project Overview

The City of Edmonton is reimagining how to identify, commemorate, and preserve the places that matter most to Edmontonians. This isn't just about historic buildings, it's about the natural spaces, cultural landscapes, and community landmarks that tell our collective story. Drawing on UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape approach¹, the City is moving beyond individual structures to embrace a more holistic understanding of heritage. The Heritage Places Strategy will help to contribute to [The City Plan](#) such as its Guiding Value to “Preserve” and various policy directions specific to heritage (i.e., “1.2.3.3 Facilitate programs and services that preserve, document and celebrate the city’s heritage”). The strategy will be guided by the [City’s Indigenous Framework](#) to foster stronger relationships with Indigenous Peoples around heritage planning. It will also look at how heritage can support Council priorities such as affordable housing and Edmonton’s (2019) declaration of a climate emergency.

Overall Project Goals

The goals of the new Heritage Places Strategy are to:

- Build on the City's heritage program to create a strategy that includes diverse histories, voices and places
- Widen the lens of the heritage program to:
 - recognize the contributions of underrepresented people, places, and cultures, including Indigenous Peoples
 - recognize places of cultural heritage, natural heritage in addition to built heritage
 - consider how heritage contributes to our climate resiliency objectives
- Replace the Historic Resource Management Plan (2009) and update Policy C450B (2008)

Project Phases and Timeline



¹ For more information on the [Historic Urban Landscape Approach](#)

Engagement Approach

Phase 1 engagement (the first of three phases) was held in the spring and summer of 2025 and invited people to share their familiarity with the heritage program and initial ideas on what to consider for the new strategy. City Council directed that the project take a targeted approach to engagement, as outlined in the March 19, 2024, Urban Planning and Economy report [UPE02240](#). For Phase 1 engagement, this targeted approach involved focusing on conversations with partners and underrepresented communities while providing online methods for the general public to provide feedback. Within the targeted approach, multiple activities were used to generate awareness and encourage participation that included in person, online, interactive and self-directed options.

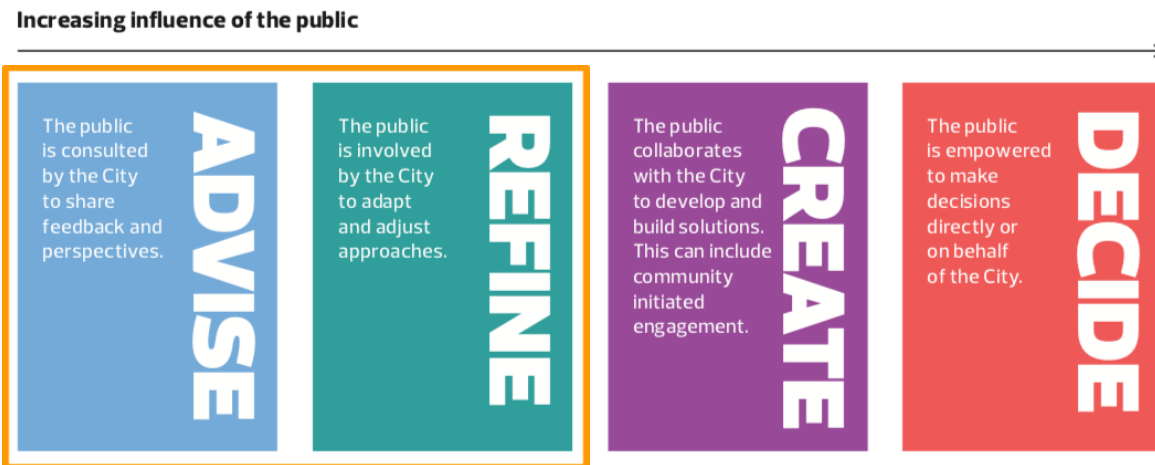
This What We Heard Report summarizes the feedback collected during Phase 1.

Engagement Goals

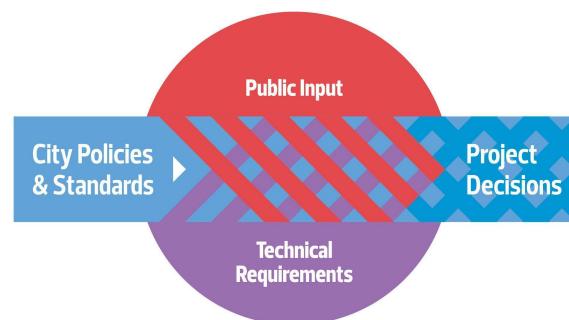
The City of Edmonton's [Public Engagement Spectrum](#) explains the four roles the public can have when they participate in City of Edmonton engagement activities. Moving within the spectrum, there is an increasing level of influence and commitment from the City and the public.

The current phase of engagement for the new strategy falls within the ADVISE and REFINE levels of the spectrum. Members of the public, who may have a variety of views on heritage matters, were invited to participate at the ADVISE level, meaning they were asked to share their feedback and perspectives on developing a new Heritage Places Strategy. The partners, such as heritage and historic organizations, Indigenous partners, developers, and community organizations were invited to participate at the REFINE level, meaning they were asked to provide more in-depth insights on what the strategy should consider. Underrepresented groups were invited to participate at the REFINE level.

The visual below illustrates the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum:



Engagement feedback is one very important factor that the City considers when making decisions. In addition to engagement feedback, the project team also considers City policies and guidelines and research from other cities. This full suite of information ensures that the decisions are consistent with policies and standards, align with best practices, and result in the best outcomes for our city.



How We Engaged

During Phase 1, the project team engaged with partners and the public through a variety of activities, as described below.

Activities	Description	Audience	Format	Statistics
Engagement				
Conversations with Heritage Partners	Hosted three sessions to share about the project and gather input.	Heritage Partners	In-person	53 attendees
Conversations with Indigenous Partners	Hosted two sessions to share about the project and gather input.	Indigenous Partners	In-person	9 attendees
Engaged Edmonton Webpage	Included “Ask the Question” & “Heritage Places Map” tools.	Public	Online	640 visitors 28 contributions
Online Survey	Distributed a survey open to anyone to complete.	Public	Online	2,675 responses
Additional Conversations with Underrepresented Perspectives	Met different groups to share about the project and gather input.	Public & Under-represented Groups	In-person & online	51 people
Written Submissions	Received input via the project email heritagestrategy@edmonton.ca	Partners	Online	9 emails
Communications				
Social Media & Project Webpage	Project awareness and updates were posted on the City of Edmonton’s website, Facebook, and X (Twitter) accounts.			
Postcards	Postcards were mailed to properties on the Inventory of Historic Resources and Register of Historic Resources to inform owners and/or residents of the project and engagement opportunities (975 were sent).			
Emails & invitations	Emails were sent to partners, organizations, the community leagues and members of the public who had signed up for project updates to inform them about the input opportunities and encourage them to spread the word through their networks.			
Public Service Announcement (PSA)	The Heritage Places Strategy’s engagement opportunities were included in the City’s weekly PSA.			

Activity: Conversations with Heritage Partners

There were three in-person sessions (~90 minutes each) with heritage/historical organizations, community organizations, and builders/developers. Each session was designed in an interactive workshop format to foster meaningful conversation.

Activity: Conversations with Indigenous Partners

Invitations were extended to all three of the City's Indigenous Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) partners and meetings were held with the Otipemisiwak Métis Government and the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations. These meetings were introductory conversations focused on the City's existing heritage program, the new strategy and opportunities for collaboration.

Activity: Engaged Edmonton

Engaged Edmonton is the City's digital engagement platform and the project's Engaged Edmonton page acted as an interactive hub for engagement opportunities for the general public. It provided an overview of the project (e.g., purpose, goals, timeline and alignment with City policies), allowed people to ask and receive answers to questions they had about the project, and identify heritage places on an interactive map.

Activity: Survey

The online survey served as the 'entry' option to invite people, whether familiar or not with the City's heritage program, to provide input. The survey was open to the public and partners and was provided to the Edmonton Insight Community. The Edmonton Insight Community is an online panel of over 23,000 Edmontonians who regularly receive surveys on various projects led by the City.

Activity: Written Submissions

Some partners provided written submissions as further input. These submissions delved deeper into topics discussed during the conversations that the Heritage Places Strategy should consider.

Activity: Additional Conversations with Underrepresented Perspectives on Heritage

Several groups, while not identified as partners, expressed a deep interest in the Heritage Places Strategy and met with the project team to share their perspectives. Other groups who were traditionally underrepresented in heritage planning were also invited to share their input.

Who We Engaged

There were three groups that were engaged:

Heritage Partners

Heritage Partners are those who have a strong affinity to heritage, have heritage as a significant part of their mandate, or are interested in exploring their role in heritage planning. This included the Edmonton Heritage Council, Edmonton Historical Board, Edmonton Confederation of Community Leagues (EFCL) and several individual community leagues (Calder, Garneau, Glenora, Highlands, Parkallen, Strathcona, and Westmount). Representatives from Infill Development in Edmonton Association (IDEA) and BILD Edmonton -- builders and developers with heritage experience -- participated to explore ways to preserve heritage places in the context of urban redevelopment.

Indigenous Partners

Indigenous engagement is critical for this project to ensure that Edmonton's approach to heritage management is inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and supports meaningful reconciliation. For this first phase of engagement, Indigenous partners included the City's Indigenous MOU partners and engagement took place with representatives of the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government.

Underrepresented Groups

This included groups and organizations with an affinity for heritage but who may be underrepresented in traditional heritage planning. In this first phase of engagement, we heard from representatives from the City's Historian Laureate office, 2SLGBTQIA+ community, Edmonton's Queer History Project, Pride Corner, the City's Accessibility Advisory Committee and proponents for South Asian heritage and Francophone heritage.

Public

Public refers to residents, property owners, individual members of a heritage/historical organization or community league, or Edmontonians at large. They may or may not be familiar with heritage or the City's heritage program but are interested Edmontonians who want to offer their insights.

Engagement GBA+ Analysis

The Heritage Places Strategy called for incorporating a wider lens of Edmonton's history that recognizes the contributions of currently underrepresented people, places, and cultures. With this goal in mind, the project team took a Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) approach to better understand how equity can be embedded in the engagement process, in recognizing heritage places, and in updating the heritage program's traditional heritage management approaches.

Through this analysis, the team identified that it was important to engage with groups whose contributions to Edmonton's history are underrepresented. With the help of the City's Indigenous Relations Office, engagement was also planned with the City's Indigenous MOU partners.

The project team also sought input from cultural groups with longstanding historical connections in Edmonton who may or may not be familiar with the existing heritage program or other underrepresented groups who may not have participated in the past but whose insight will help to inform the strategy's development. The project team heard from some of these underrepresented groups, including the 2SLGBTQIA+, Black and African diaspora, South Asian, Francophone, and disability communities during this first phase of engagement and looks forward to building on these conversations in subsequent phases. The team also sought to better understand the perspectives of different demographic groups through cross-tabulation analysis of the survey results, which are noted in the What We Heard section of this report.

Throughout the process, the project team worked to identify, reduce and mitigate barriers to participation. For example, this included asking partners to generate awareness through their networks or recommending groups to reach out to; meeting people or groups at their convenience; and providing a variety of ways for people to participate, including one-to-one conversations.

What We Asked

Conversations

Across the in-person sessions, overarching questions that were asked included:

- How do you personally connect with and value heritage in Edmonton/amiskwaciwâskahikan (Beaver Hills House)?
- How can Indigenous perspectives about place be celebrated or commemorated within a heritage program?
- What should a more inclusive and expansive definition of heritage encompass?
- How might your familiarity or experience with Edmonton's current heritage program or plan inform improvements?
- How can the new Heritage Places Strategy help strengthen relationships in collaboration with communities?
- What meaningful benefits could a reimagined Heritage Places Strategy bring to you, those you serve, and your community?

- What key opportunities and potential challenges do you foresee in expanding our heritage approach?
- What core elements must be included for the Heritage Places Strategy to be truly comprehensive?
- How should we prioritize heritage efforts given limited resources?

Engaged Edmonton

On the Engaged Edmonton webpage, people were asked to provide feedback through two tools:

- **Heritage Places Map** - asked people to pin built, cultural or natural heritage places
- **Ask a Question** - invited people to pose questions to the City's project team for an answer and see what others had posed.

Survey

The Phase 1 survey questions touched on the following:

- Whether survey respondents live, work in and/or own a heritage property
- What heritage means to them in the context of Edmonton
- How familiar they are with the City's heritage program
- How important various elements were to consider in the new Heritage Places Strategy
- If there was anything else they wanted to share about the Heritage Places Strategy project

What We Heard

This section highlights what was heard through each engagement activity. Under each activity, that feedback is summarized and categorized into themes. Similar themes arose across all activities and those themes are highlighted throughout this section.

Activity: Conversations with Heritage Partners

Conversations were held with three different groups that included heritage/historical organizations, builders/developers, and community organizations. These conversations revealed both shared values and different perspectives on how heritage should be defined, preserved, and integrated into Edmonton's evolving urban landscape. The discussions took place shortly after City Council discussed the [Priority Growth Area \(PGA\) project](#) which highlighted the tension between heritage preservation and growth goals. The PGA project involved City-driven rezonings to encourage more housing and business development in select nodes and corridors such as Wihkwêntôwin Node and 124 Street Corridor, 156 Street and Stony Plain Road Corridors, and the University-Garneau Node.

Below, the different perspectives each group brought is presented first followed by the common themes heard across the conversations.

The Different Perspectives

Each group brought their own perspective to the conversations, creating rich and varied discussions.

Heritage/historical organizations called for an inclusive strategy that extends beyond buildings to encompass community spaces, public art, and cultural practices. They emphasized relationship-building with diverse communities and wanted to understand the strategy's scope, timeline, and resource allocation.

Builders/Developers approached heritage through the lens of building a vibrant city, financial viability and regulatory processes. They value authenticity and unique storytelling as market advantages, but emphasize the need for flexible policies, clear processes, and economic incentives to make heritage projects work financially.

Community organizations expressed frustration with recent Council decisions that seemed to prioritize density over heritage character. They advocated strongly for expanded heritage designations covering entire neighborhoods and streetscapes, and they shared the community-led initiatives they are actively involved in like plaque programs and walking tours.

The Common Themes

Heritage is About More Than Just Buildings

This theme emerged across all conversations. People want heritage to go beyond building-focused approaches to encompass broader place-based narratives and community experiences.

Thinking Neighbourhood-Scale: Community organizations advocated strongly for this approach, emphasizing that heritage places were about complete communities and should not be limited to one or two houses.

The Intangible: All participants embraced the new direction the City was taking regarding defining heritage with greater depth and breadth. They emphasized that it's not just about physical things, it's also about intangible heritage which includes things like cultural practices and community connections. Heritage practitioners wanted the broadest understanding of preservation - social traditions, community spaces, artistic expression, and intangible practices alongside buildings. They shared that heritage work was fundamentally about investing in relationships with a range of communities that would open conversations about discovering new sources and interpretations.

"One thing I notice, underestimation of the story as a selling point on its own. I hate that we KPI (key performance indicator) everything, it's a profound misunderstanding. So, the city, history, it's thorny, like, asking, "whose history?" There has to be a role of the City telling developers and citizens why the story of the city is important."

Developers agreed with this broader approach and stressed the importance of being authentic, such as by incorporating the history of the landscape into new developments and researching the background of the area to integrate it into plaques or street names.

"As an area we are looking at, it's not just buildings, it's the history before the building. We look at the area, look what was done over the past 200 years. We try to tie the history into a modern-day sense of place."

Don't Forget Nature: Multiple groups talked about natural heritage, and what role the river valley, plains and flora and fauna played in Edmonton's heritage. Different neighbourhoods had special community trees which provided connections to children and families.

"How can we recognize the river valley and all the activity within that? And the natural features like Tufa Springs, and rock formations in the suburbs. How can heritage program evolve into that?"

Preparing a Heritage Places Strategy amidst Urban Growth

The conversations revealed tensions between heritage preservation goals and urban densification pressures, particularly following recent City Council rezoning decisions related to the PGA project. People were frustrated and questioned how much heritage mattered to the City given the promotion of PGAs in mature neighbourhoods that have significant heritage assets.

Community Organizations Express Concerns: Community representatives were direct about feeling that heritage is losing ground to development. Although the organizations were trying to continue to champion the value of heritage, it was clear that they were discouraged by zoning that identified mature neighbourhoods as PGAs. They want policy reform to enable area-wide protection of neighbourhood patterns and streetscapes. A few are passionate about maintaining the rare and iconic "Garden City" principles that characterize neighbourhoods like Parkallen.

"It was a big loss yesterday. The areas are zoned priority growth. Those houses were identified by the City, and Council voted to put those into high rise high density. Nothing will save that."

"I asked people, what defines our neighbourhood, what defines us that we can't lose, they said, without the large front yards and the treed boulevard, we'd lose the streetscape, we want the streetscape."

Developer Considerations: Developers were interested in exploring how heritage themes could be incorporated into new developments, and redevelopment of heritage buildings. Businesses existing in heritage buildings and becoming community gathering places were important in creating unique and desirable spaces. While agreeing that developing heritage buildings resulted in attractive products, they expressed that projects needed to make financial sense.

"We would love to restore old buildings for new uses. It has to make financial sense. It also requires creativity from the end user, if they are going to come into a building that isn't specifically made for them."

They also pointed out some practical challenges and discussed ways to streamline processes, shorten timelines, and other measures that would relieve some of the uncertainty when developing heritage projects. Other practical barriers included updating windows, getting rid of asbestos, and end users wanting features like air conditioning or sustainable heating options.

"People think about AC or whatever. But with old buildings you can't get that unless you basically <reconstruct> the building."

Policies May Be at Odds with Other Policies: People shared that some of the City's policies compete with each other.

"There's friction between heritage and economic development. The river valley, for example, we want people to appreciate it but also have places for people to come explore and socialize. We need to get out of the tension that says because it's heritage, we can't get people to get in and use it."

Heritage Can't Work in Policy Silos

Closely related to the topic of City policies, was the recognition that heritage can be a central force that unites separate or different entities. City initiatives that work with industry were highlighted as areas that could provide win-win opportunities. Developers and builders identified that lengthy approval processes and turn around time (e.g. for development permits) created a lack of certainty and presented a barrier in tackling heritage projects. Participants suggested a "concierge service" that helps navigate heritage designations and grants together with City processes to resolve issues in a timely manner allowing them to make decisions.

"Establish a working group to make sure policy is aligning, so if a policy has support from multiple departments, it would have less resistance when it goes to council."

"Develop a 'concierge service' to guide builders and developers through the approval process. Have a fast track to support those developers willing to take a risk and invest in heritage"

Heritage Includes Everyone's Stories

All groups were clear that heritage can't just be about settler history; it needs to reflect and celebrate Edmonton's deep diversity. Participants suggested flipping the perspective, so that Edmonton was only one element in the heritage landscape.

"The history of Edmonton, maybe it's less about the historical significance to Edmonton, but look at the heritage over time of the space on which Edmonton resides... Edmonton is part of the history of this place."

Indigenous Stories First: All groups acknowledged that Indigenous stories and sense of place need to be elevated to and prominent in the Heritage Places Strategy. Participants also recognized the multifaceted Indigenous histories and the need to have a thoughtful and meaningful approach.

"Indigenous peoples have been here thousands of years, some Indigenous structures are undocumented, and are significant, so I think there's opportunities there... but there's also a concern about letting non-Indigenous people know where those sacred spaces are."

"Indigenous stories and heritage have been underrepresented, and we are now acknowledging that there needs to be a concerted effort to include this in the Strategy. It will represent a big step towards Reconciliation."

Newcomer Communities Matter: Participants pointed out the richness of Edmonton's newcomer and immigrant communities. While there are events like Heritage Days that celebrate a wide array of cultures, participants felt that some groups, who have been residents for decades, deserve other ways to recognize their history and contributions to the fabric of the city.

"What was important to the Chilean community when they came in the 70s? The Chilean coup. They were using spaces that were not specifically driven by their function. They established co-op living systems that became a model for other initiatives."

"The third largest language in Edmonton is Tagalog, but most people don't know that. The Filipino contribution to our community can't be underestimated."

Participants frequently mentioned the importance of updating, managing and having accessible archives to capture stories and track relationships.

Financially Feasible: Heritage as an Investment

Economic feasibility came up in every conversation. There needs to be a financial commitment to preservation and systems in place that incentivize heritage-based projects. Heritage needs to be viewed as enriching our city and as an investment in creating a vibrant city that has a story to tell.

Understanding the Market: While developers are interested and in some cases committed to incorporating heritage buildings into their portfolios, they acknowledged they had to consider heritage through the lens of investment analysis and project feasibility. Developers emphasized that success depends on finding the right tenants who value heritage and will pay for unique spaces. Smaller, local businesses often appreciate heritage features more than big corporate tenants; these tap into the 'shop local' trend and add to a city's character.

"It's the end users that make this viable. If it's a cool building, but it's \$1,000.00 extra a month, maybe they go somewhere else."

While recognizing the City provides heritage incentives and grants, community groups pointed out how expensive designation can be and indicated that tends to favour wealthy communities.

"It's a lot of work to designate and demands time. Lots of work that has to be done that doesn't add economic value."

"Let's talk about equity. How many community designations are in vulnerable communities that also have heritage significance?"

People thought that studies demonstrating economic viability should be explored. Some wondered if a strong Heritage Places Strategy could be linked to increasing economic development.

"It may be a myth that heritage costs too much. It might have upfront costs, but those costs can be considered as investments that have proven economic viability. Cities with great heritage areas tend to attract business, visitors, and tourists. They create spaces where people want to gather."

People also saw linkages between heritage and the “green” or “circular” economy which promotes adapting and reusing materials to reduce waste, minimize environmental impact and support resiliency alongside economic growth.

"One of our portfolios is green economy, so when heritage work does happen, for reconstruction for new tenants, perhaps it needs to be done with the green economy in mind."

"Industry and business often have a green economy initiative; some even have it as a bottom line. Can we link heritage to a green economy?"

Authentic and Visible

All groups expressed aspirations for heritage visibility throughout the city.

"I want heritage to smack us in the face!! Be the first thing you see when you visit our city."

Everyone talked about the importance of authenticity and visibility in making heritage meaningful and valuable. People felt that Edmonton’s struggle for identity could be answered through aligning with Edmonton’s history and heritage. Identifying things that are unique to Edmonton, such as rock formations, the river valley, Indigenous travel routes, and trading posts, could be incorporated and celebrated. Discovering the authentic stories and preserving them was seen as important.

"Look to who we were to discover who we are."

"And one thing that feels important to me, <is> that what we do is honest... Being honest to what's intrinsically local."

"But picking up on honest things, Austin is small compared to its neighbours in Texas... then they leaned into it, that history. Now it's very desirable. And the story was first, and that brought in people and attracted business."

Support for Community Programs Linked to the authenticity in promoting heritage was the sense that communities should be empowered to tell their own stories. ‘Let communities lead’ was a

sentiment expressed by participants. Groups wanted more grassroots approaches that instilled interest and pride and welcomed City support in discovering the stories that made a community unique. Groups are doing volunteer work creating commemorative plaques and walking tour booklets in neighborhoods like Highlands, Westmount, and Glenora. Heritage organizations mentioned the need to support volunteers through technical help with documentation, archival management, and organizational sustainability. They want the City to promote and support more of these resident-led efforts. They mentioned whether EFCL had a role to play in these local initiatives.

"Plaques on homes outlining the history of the home creates interest in the neighbourhood. You should promote that you have that plaque program."

"I want a more proactive form of storytelling in local communities. I would like to see more of that and interpretations of that. And more information on what is going on here with plaques and walking tours. "

"It's back to creating relationships between the communities and the City."

Art as Heritage: Heritage organizations saw public art as essential for cultural storytelling, especially where there may be a lack of built heritage. They viewed art as creating destinations and emotional connections, and 'Art as Storytelling' was encouraged. Participants acknowledged that a piece of art, well placed, could tell Edmonton's story at a glance, while also adding to the beauty and interest of the community. They felt that art could express what Edmonton was to those who were choosing Edmonton as a home.

"Public art, yes. If we are that city with 2 million people, we have to preserve some of our history; new Edmontonians, they'll need to know why to come here. Art is a good way to preserve things."

Streamlining the Systems

Information Systems: People had high praise for the archives and urged the City to continue to enrich and expand them, making them available to groups. Others suggested that the City could facilitate the development of heritage buildings by providing assessments of buildings that would lessen developer uncertainty by providing tangible answers in a timely fashion.

"Like a Carfax report. Get a report from the City that says we assessed this for this building, here's the maintenance records and what needs to be done."

"If we are looking at buying a site, there is a 90-day due diligence period... if the City has a development liaison, that's a huge benefit to the development community especially for challenging rebuilds. They'll steer you through the City administration."

More Flexibility, Fewer Rules: Although participants knew that the City was often restricted by provincial requirements, they urged them to examine their current policies impacting all things heritage and wherever possible reduce or eliminate them. Community organizations wanted more adaptable criteria and emphasized removing barriers that got in the way of heritage initiatives.

"I know in Glenora I think the most we can get is just three <designations> in a row, something happens like someone changed the windows and it's preventing us from designating them all in a row. Maybe redesign the rules?"

"There are so many barriers to preserving heritage. Eliminate what is in the City's purview to eliminate."

Strategic Focus: Heritage organizations were curious about the strategy's scope and resources, warning against trying to do too much at once. They urged laser-like focus when approaching the strategy and encouraged prioritization of what would have the most impact on heritage.

"Consider the scope, the timeline, and what you can actually accomplish, and just be focused on it. If it's just one thing, then do it. Just be focused and keep heritage at the forefront."

Heritage Should Be Living and Breathing

People were clear that heritage shouldn't be about freezing things in time. It needs to adapt and look to the past, present and future, with an eye to what tomorrow's heritage elements will be.

"Heritage isn't just a static thing; we look at a building from 1910 and look at how we can use it today. Buildings and history change over time. To preserve places, to make

them relevant, we need to give them the opportunity to change and be relevant for today while maintaining their historical significance."

Heritage organizations want forward thinking and keeping an eye on the horizon.

"To what degree should strategy reflect what's emerging in terms of Edmonton's demographic reality... think about demographics in 25 years, be anticipatory."

"Heritage is a living tapestry, it's all interconnected. It's not just the past; it's how it will be viewed in the future. The past is a living thing as we move into the future."

Activity: Conversations with Indigenous Partners

In conversations with representatives from the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, the project team shared about the City's heritage program and invited thoughts on how cultural landscapes, natural and intangible heritage could be added.

Representatives highlighted important themes and suggestions on how to engage with their communities. Collaboration with Indigenous partners is important for understanding the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and learning how storytelling is woven into their history and culture.

The Different Perspectives

The **Otipemisiwak Métis Government** invited representatives from the Fort Edmonton and the Edmonton Whitemud Métis Districts to the conversation. They emphasized that there is a lack of acknowledgement of Métis contribution and representation in the existing Historic Resource Management Plan. More effort is required to appropriately include Métis history and culture in the project scope and final strategy.

The **Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations** suggested future conversations with Elders to understand how Indigenous perspectives can influence the strategy work and how collaboration is essential to capture Indigenous perspectives and create meaningful and empowering policy.

Important Themes

Place the Indigenous Heritage Directions and Actions First

First and foremost, both groups called for a change to acknowledge and present information about Indigenous heritage early in the Heritage Places Strategy before information for built heritage.

Indigenous First: The Otipemisiwak Métis Government noted that the single Indigenous policy in the Historic Resource Management Plan (Policy 24 - First Nations, Métis and Inuit) was placed last and read like an afterthought. In addition to more thoughtful and empowering policy levers, representatives suggested that moving Indigenous policy and actions forward would be an appropriate act to emphasize importance.

"I don't mean to be negative, but, having First Nations, Métis, Inuit, having that as the 24th policy, the last policy, I'd like to see that as the first policy. 2009, that's a long time ago, Reconciliation, that wasn't talked about a lot then."

Accurate Representation: The Otipemisiwak Métis Government questioned why the Historic Resource Management Plan identified only Edmonton's pre-contact history, which inherently excludes Métis peoples and culture. The Métis were created as a result of contact and this truth needs to be reflected in the Heritage Places Strategy to accurately share their collective story.

Collaborating with Indigenous Peoples, Governments, and Organizations

Both groups emphasized the importance of collaboration. Decisions for Indigenous Peoples must be made by Indigenous Peoples, and materials generated throughout the project and implemented with the Heritage Places Strategy must include Indigenous Peoples, governments, and organizations.

*"...we are experts in engaging our citizens,
so the best way to engage them is have us engage them."*

Connecting with Elders: The Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations emphasized the importance of connecting with their Elders Advisory Council and the Indigenous Knowledge & Wisdom Centre (IKWC) throughout the engagement phases. These two groups were recommended as important sources to inform how Indigenous heritage perspectives and places may be sensitively represented in the Heritage Places Strategy.

*"...if you are looking for what heritage places actually are, the Elders have that
information and how we respect that as well"*

Community-led Stewardship with Heritage Resources: Representatives agreed that inclusion and collaboration are essential for the strategy. Indigenous Peoples need to be included and implement the strategy to appropriately recognize Indigenous stories, places and histories.

Listen and Ensure Actions are Meaningful: Representatives from the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations emphasized that conscious efforts are required to avoid tokenism and to meaningfully implement the strategy. Relationship building is more than engagement, and we need to ensure that everyone is actively included and contributes to the project, as well as its implementation.

"It comes with conversations like this. It's being engaged and keeping that relationship, so that we don't just have this one meeting and not hearing anything for six months or a year, not just tokenism, not just checking off a box"

Focus More on Storytelling

Similar to what was heard in the other conversations, Indigenous partners highlighted the need to break from the strictly built heritage approach in the City of Edmonton. Amiskwaciwâskahikan has a rich history of many people traveling through, working, living and celebrating this land. The Heritage Places Strategy needs to develop an approach to share the stories, intangible heritages and traditions and places in addition to buildings.

Commemorating Intangible Heritage: Participants believe that heritage should be reflected in more than just architecture. Intangible heritage focused on stories, places and people should be central for the Heritage Places Strategy.

"I love the old buildings and architecture, but I'm always curious to who lived there, who was it named after, what happened in that building, so when you mentioned, built on stories, so are we as Métis, that story is just as important as the architecture."

Sharing Additional Languages: All representatives mentioned that translating information to other languages, including both Indigenous languages and non-Indigenous languages, is important to share history and knowledge. The Otipemisiwak Métis Government recommended Michif translations, while other representatives also recommended translations into other commonly spoken languages to improve accessibility to Edmonton's various cultural communities and visitors. The City of Edmonton's heritage program materials are currently only printed in English.

"As Edmonton grows - more visitors, immigrants, tourists - are there translations for people? Some newcomers may not have understood or known about certain things. I've heard stories of newcomers needing their kids to translate a plaque."

Accessible Technologies: Representatives agreed that using technology could be an efficient way to share information. Online materials and QR codes increase accessibility for historical information and translations, pictures and additional resources. Technology would also have a role in supporting tourism by informing those visiting our heritage places.

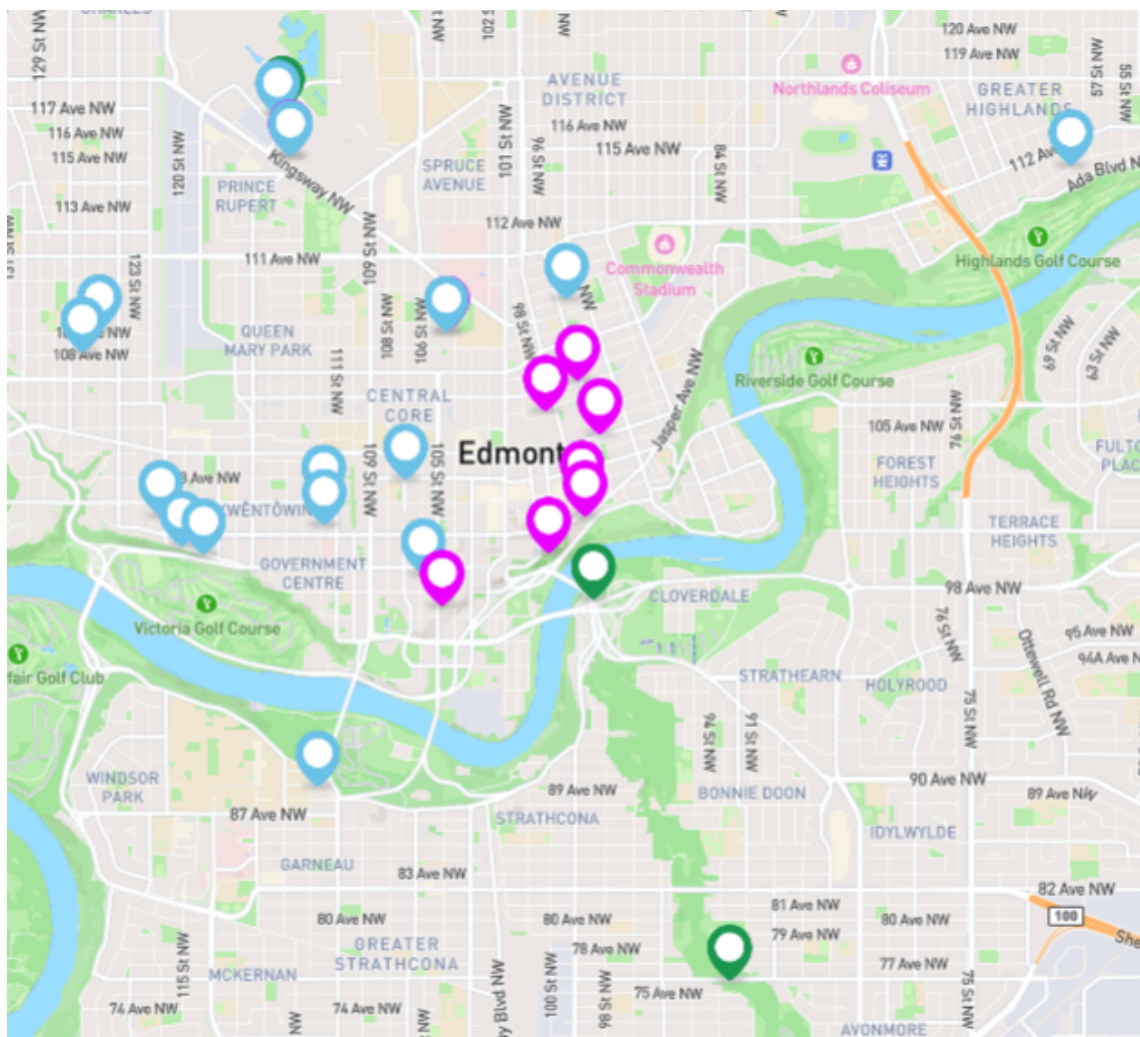
Activity: Engaged Edmonton

The Engaged Edmonton webpage received 640 unique visitors and 28 contributions across the two feedback tools (“Heritage Places Map” and “Ask a Question”) from five participants.

Heritage Places Map

Participants were invited to pin examples of built (blue), cultural (pink) or natural (green) heritage places. While the places pinned would not be automatically added to the City’s inventory of Historic Resources², the examples showed what is top of mind when people think of heritage. The places and people’s rationale help to inform what the new strategy may need to consider.

Map 1: Locations of Heritage Places Identified through Engaged Edmonton



Concentrated in the central part of Edmonton, 27 examples were provided:

² *Inventory of Historic Resources* refers to properties determined to merit conservation, but are not legally protected. *Register of Historic Resources* refers to properties that are legally designated as Municipal Historic Resources and are thus protected from demolition or inappropriate alteration.

- **Built heritage (15)** - examples included buildings such as houses of prominent Edmontonians (e.g., a former mayor, an athlete from the early 1900s), buildings designed by notable architects (e.g., Rule, Wynn and Rule), buildings of significance for their role in a specific historical events (e.g., WWII hangar/Aviation Museum, the armoury) or buildings that served a cultural community (e.g., a Ukrainian church). Some of the buildings referenced are already listed on the City's Inventory or Register of Historic Resources. Streets like 89 Avenue in Garneau or Victoria Promenade were also mentioned.
- **Cultural heritage (9)** - examples included sites of significance to the Ukrainian community such as a bookstore, offices, student residences, a market or labourers' housing from the 1900s; a school house and events such as round dances or markets that occur at the hangar.
- **Natural heritage (3)** - examples included Mill Creek Ravine, a park in Blatchford and the Holowach Tree planted by Ukrainian tailor and dyer Sam Holowach.

Some cultural sites no longer exist, highlighting the importance of commemorating places for how they served a community and the meaning that continues to exist.

Ask a Question

Only one question was submitted using the Ask a Question tool on the Engaged Edmonton page. The contributor shared their concern about infill, its impact on historic homes in the Highlands neighbourhood and asked what the city was doing to address this. The project team's response referenced the City's Heritage unit's eagerness to work with property owners, that the best tool to legally protect historic buildings is for individual property owners to designate, and financial grants available to owners to protect, rehabilitate, and maintain heritage properties.

Both the question and the response were visible to visitors of the project's Engaged Edmonton page.

Activity: Survey Results

The Phase 1 online survey was made available on the project webpage, the Engaged Edmonton page, shared directly with partners and distributed to the Edmonton Insight Community. It was also advertised via the City's social media channels and a PSA. Five questions were asked and included a range of rating scale or multiple choice type questions (i.e., closed-ended questions) as well as open responses (i.e., open-ended questions). In addition, common demographic questions were asked at the end. A total of **2,675** responses were received (this includes 2,496 Edmonton Insight Community members who responded and 179 respondents who accessed the survey through another channel). While the survey results include very rich information, the project team recognizes the survey's limitations (i.e., respondents had to be aware of the survey, have an interest to respond). The themes below provide a snapshot from the survey's closed-ended questions. In some instances, responses were cross-tabulated with the demographic data to see how different groups responded.

Familiarity with the City's Heritage Program

Survey question one asked respondents if they live, work in and/or own a heritage property while question three asked for their level of familiarity with the City's heritage program. Only 10 per cent of respondents said they live in or own a heritage property (Figure 1). Survey respondents showed a nearly even split in their familiarity with the City's heritage program (Figure 2). Around 40 per cent reported being very to somewhat familiar, while a similar proportion, 41 per cent, were very to somewhat unfamiliar, suggesting an opportunity to increase public awareness and understanding of the program.

Figure 1. To start, we'd like to understand if you live, work in and/or own a heritage property. By heritage property, we mean a property on the City of Edmonton's Inventory of Historic Resources (properties determined to merit conservation, but are not legally protected) or Register of Historic Resources (properties that have been legally designated as Municipal Historic Resources and are thus protected from demolition or inappropriate alteration).

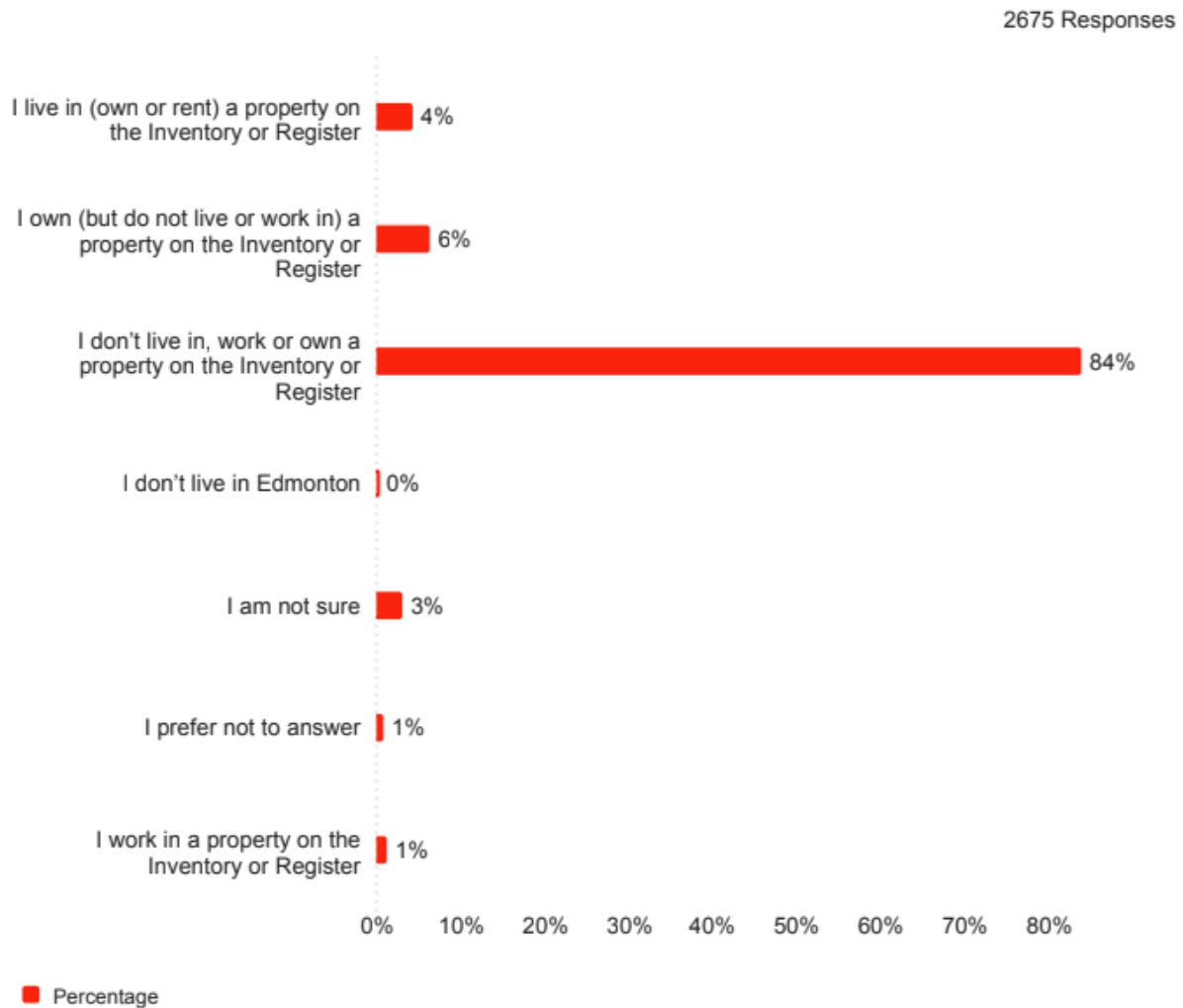
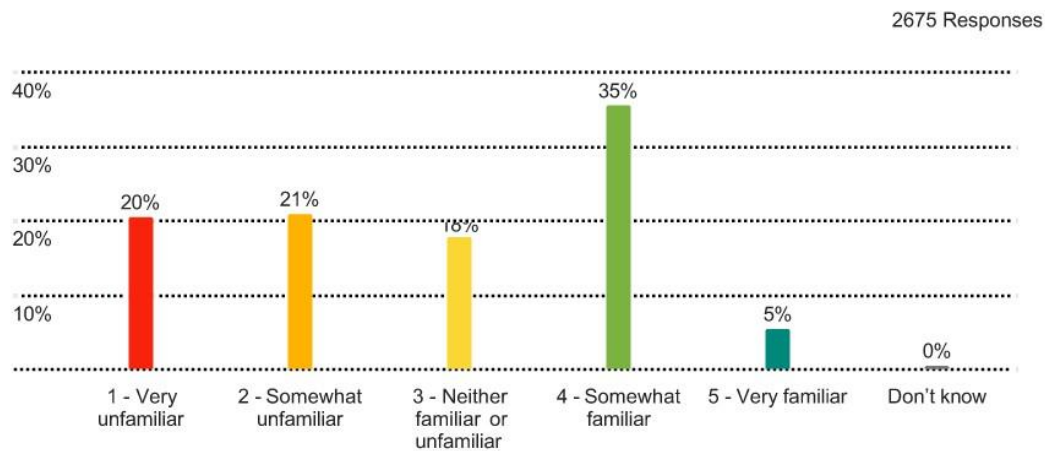


Figure 2. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is Not Very familiar and 5 is Very familiar, how familiar are you with the City's heritage program?



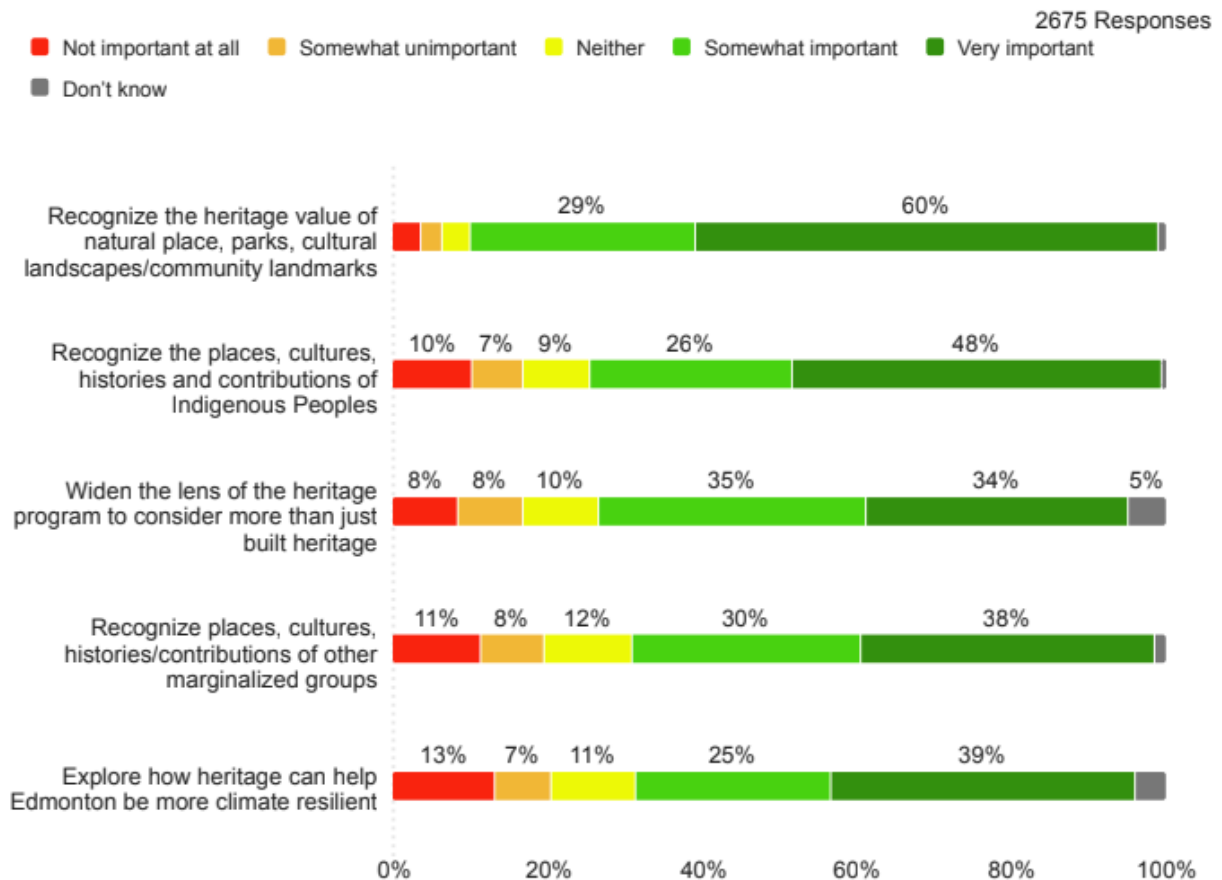
Cross-tabulation analysis shows that

- Respondents from racialized minority groups are more likely to be unfamiliar with the program (53% vs. 42% overall).
- Individuals who have a direct connection to heritage properties (living in, owning, or working in one) demonstrate greater familiarity (50% vs. 41% overall).

Perceived Importance of Heritage Places Strategy Elements

Three-quarters or more survey respondents indicated it is important to recognize the heritage value of natural places (89%) and Indigenous Peoples' heritage (74%). Two-thirds also supported widening the heritage program beyond built heritage (69%), recognizing other underrepresented groups (68%), and exploring heritage's role in climate resilience (64%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. In your opinion, how important are the following to consider in the Heritage Places Strategy?



Cross-tabulation analysis shows that

- Overall, younger respondents (35 years and under), women, and individuals self-identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+ are generally more inclined to find all listed considerations important.

Survey Results: Open-Ended Questions Analysis

The Phase 1 survey's open-ended questions invited respondents to share additional thoughts about the Heritage Places Strategy project. The themes below provide a snapshot of key findings from these qualitative responses, revealing both shared values and diverse perspectives on how heritage should be defined, preserved, and integrated into Edmonton's evolving urban landscape.

The summary reflects that:

1. Natural heritage was a top non-building priority
2. Financial support was a major practical concern

3. Indigenous recognition was a priority
4. Development pressures were a significant worry
5. Even when asked to think beyond buildings, many people still emphasized built heritage

"There are many ways to honour Edmonton's history that don't include retaining entire buildings and expending significant city resources on buildings that are literally falling apart e.g. if a building is demolished, I think it is perfectly legitimate to incorporate materials into landscape design or honor it in a different way."

What Heritage Means to Edmontonians

The first open-ended question asked respondents "What does heritage mean to you in the context of Edmonton?" Of the 2,675 respondents, there were 2,366 who responded to this question. The responses reveal that heritage is understood as both Edmonton's built heritage and its broader cultural narratives. Respondents view heritage as requiring preservation of historic structures and protection of community stories, cultural traditions, and natural environments.

Built Heritage Remains Important

Support for Building Preservation: Respondents emphasized the importance of preserving historic buildings, structures, and architectural heritage. These responses stressed that built heritage forms the foundation of Edmonton's heritage identity.

"Recognizing and preserving historically significant buildings and structures"

"Architecturally important; home or business of an important Edmontonian"

Development Pressure Concerns: Many building-focused responses expressed frustration with demolition of heritage structures and emphasized the need for stronger protection mechanisms to prevent loss of historic buildings to development pressures.

Heritage Also Means More Than Buildings

While affirming the importance of built heritage, respondents also advocated for expanding heritage recognition to broaden place-based narratives and community experiences. Similar to what was heard in conversations with partners, survey respondents emphasized the need to recognize intangible and natural heritage and to consider neighborhood-scale thinking for preservation.

Heritage Must Include Everyone's Stories

Survey responses emphasized that heritage cannot focus solely on settler history but needs to reflect and celebrate Edmonton's diversity. Similar to other feedback, respondents articulated that Indigenous history needs to be prominent and Edmonton's newcomer and immigrant communities' contributions deserve further recognition. Authentic storytelling was also important, with nations and communities empowered to tell their own rather than having narratives imposed externally.

"In addition to Indigenous presence, include the waves of immigration that characterized Edmonton's growth - for example, the German presence in Old Strathcona."

Widening the Heritage Program

The next open-ended question was a follow up provided to respondents based on how they rated the importance of widening the lens of the heritage program. For respondents who said it was 'very important' or 'somewhat important', they were asked what should be included to widen the lens. (1,553 responses). Similar to the first open-ended question, respondents supported expanding recognition beyond built heritage but mentioned the importance of buildings and architecture.

"Whyte Ave especially near the theatre district is considered a heritage area and many buildings are protected. But loose zoning [regulations] allow for buildings that are huge (6 floors and greater) to supposedly densify the area - yes more people, more taxes, but the character of the heritage area is greatly diminished."

Natural Heritage as Priority: Natural heritage emerged as a strong theme with interest in preserving Edmonton's environmental heritage, including mature trees, park systems, and river

valley areas. Respondents viewed natural areas, urban forests, and environmental features as essential components of heritage that provide continuity and community connection.

"I think natural features are obviously important to the historical context of the region. It's silly to think that those would be any less important than a building or bridge. Especially if we're trying to better understand Indigenous heritage, which has been largely ignored or even erased."

"We should also look at having old trees in areas included as heritage. They should not be knocked down so quickly."

Stories and Oral History: Responses emphasized the importance of preserving stories, oral histories, and narratives as heritage. This included personal memories, community stories, and documentation of lived experiences that contribute to Edmonton's heritage understanding.

Cultural Sites and Practices: Survey participants advocated for expanded recognition of cultural sites, traditions, and practices. This included spaces that foster connection and cultural practice, as well as sites of significance to specific communities that may not have formal heritage recognition.

Community Spaces and Gathering Places: Responses emphasized the importance of recognizing gathering places and social spaces that contribute to neighbourhood identity and connection.

Industrial and Working-Class Heritage: Other respondents highlighted the importance of recognizing industrial heritage and working-class history as part of Edmonton's story. This included vernacular architecture and neighborhood character buildings that may not meet traditional heritage criteria but contribute to community identity.

Recognizing the Places, Cultures, Histories and Contributions of Others

The next open-ended question (similar to the one above) was a follow up provided to respondents based on how they rated the importance of recognizing the places, cultures, histories and contributions of other underrepresented and/or marginalized groups. (1,458 responses). For respondents who said it was 'very important' or 'somewhat important', they were then asked what should be included to widen the lens. Their responses echoed what we heard in the conversations with partners: survey respondents think the new strategy should prioritize Indigenous Peoples, immigrant communities and the ongoing contributions of diverse cultural groups.

The communities that respondents highlighted include:

- Indigenous communities as foundational to Edmonton's heritage
- Immigrant and newcomer communities, including recent refugees and new Canadians
- Black and African communities
- Chinese community
- 2SLGBTQIA+ community and related heritage sites
- Ukrainian and Eastern European communities
- Women's contributions to Edmonton's development
- Disabled communities and accessibility considerations
- Religious and ethnic minority communities
- Working-class and labour history

"Artifacts of heritage are not just built facilities. They would include documents, maps, photos and videos of people and their remembrances."

Additional Considerations

The final survey question provided respondents a chance to share any remaining thoughts about the Heritage Places Strategy project. Of the 2,675 survey respondents, 1,133 provided answers to this question. Additional feedback revealed ongoing concerns about balancing development pressures with heritage preservation, the need for stronger regulatory frameworks, more financial support and incentives and the importance of engagement and community-led heritage initiatives.

Implementation Considerations: Responses highlighted the need for:

- Clearer criteria for heritage designation and protection
- Stronger enforcement mechanisms to prevent heritage building demolition
- Streamlined processes that reduce barriers to heritage conservation
- Ensuring heritage strategy implementation includes diverse community voices
- Education and awareness programs to build public support for heritage

The survey feedback reveals that Edmontonians understand heritage as requiring both protection of Edmonton's historic built environment and recognition of broader cultural and natural heritage. Rather than seeing these as competing priorities, respondents view comprehensive heritage

protection as essential. The strategy's success will depend on its ability to translate this inclusive yet protective vision into practical policies and programs that strengthen community identity while supporting the needs of a growing, changing city.

"This is important work, so please don't be discouraged by the inevitable criticism you'll get while trying to broaden the project and make it more equitable."

Activity: Written Submissions

During the first phase of engagement, the City received nine written submissions from partners representing both heritage expertise and community perspectives. These submissions provide valuable insights into how the City's approach could evolve to serve all residents while preserving Edmonton's rich cultural legacy.

Common Themes from Written Submissions

Redefining Heritage Beyond Buildings

Partners advocated for expanding definitions beyond architectural preservation. They characterized heritage as "anything that reflects the culture of a place" and "the essence of place, the people who have called it home, and the connections they have forged over time."

Indigenous Inclusion as Fundamental

Indigenous perspectives are essential to any comprehensive heritage strategy. There is strong consensus that meaningful partnerships must be established with the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, Enoch Cree Nation, and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government and other Indigenous partners. This inclusion is positioned not as an add-on, but as a foundational element that must inform all aspects of heritage planning and decision-making.

Community-Centered Storytelling

There are stories that "were either never told or hidden from view." The strategy is seen as an opportunity for previously underrepresented voices to share their narratives and contribute to Edmontonians' understanding of heritage.

Tiered and Multi-Layered Protection

Partners proposed multi-level approaches to heritage, that operate across different scales:

- **Neighbourhood Scale:** Heritage character areas and blocks that maintain the historic atmosphere of communities ensuring structures don't become disconnected.
- **Individual Property Scale:** Enhanced protection for properties on the Inventory, not just designated sites, preventing meaningful structures from disappearing.
- **Natural Heritage Integration:** Recognition of trees, parks, and natural elements, providing continuity and anchoring neighborhoods in their historical roots.
- **Commercial Heritage:** Preservation of buildings and spaces that maintain Edmonton's economic and architectural history, ensuring legacy businesses remain parts of city identity.

Development Integration Rather Than Opposition

Rather than viewing development and heritage as opposing forces, contributors advocate for "heritage-informed approaches to development." They envision thoughtful infill that enhances rather than erodes heritage character by incorporating design elements that respect the scale, materials, and stylistic themes of historical buildings. This approach fosters continuity while allowing modern living to coexist harmoniously with historical neighbourhoods.

Guidelines should encourage sensitive development that strengthens the sense of place, including provisions for family housing where appropriate, demonstrating that heritage conservation can support diverse housing needs.

Strengthening Existing Foundations

Written submissions acknowledged that Edmonton's current heritage program has been successful in saving significant built heritage and provides a strong foundation for expansion. However, they identify critical needs for program enhancement, particularly growing the Inventory through systematic neighbourhood surveys to reverse recent declines where demolitions have exceeded additions.

The existing designation process and financial incentives are viewed positively, with recognition that recent zoning changes may create additional motivation for heritage protection among residents concerned about rapid neighbourhood change.

Collaborative Partnership Models

Contributors emphasized the need for enhanced collaboration among Edmonton's heritage organizations, such as the Edmonton Historical Board, Edmonton Heritage Council, and Northern Alberta Pioneers and Descendants Association, while establishing meaningful connections with Indigenous partners. This collaborative approach should extend to community leagues and neighbourhood organizations that serve as vital links between residents and heritage planning processes.

Evidence-Based Decision Making

They support using established frameworks like the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada as guiding documents for built heritage decisions, while ensuring that intangible heritage decisions are informed by meaningful community input from affected groups. However, others noted the challenges to commemorate intangible heritage or for a flexible approach in what is funded with the prescriptive nature of standards and guidelines.

Activity: Additional Conversations with Underrepresented Perspectives on Heritage

Phase 1 engagement deliberately sought out voices that have historically been underrepresented in heritage planning processes. The project team met with community leaders and advocates representing 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, Black and African diaspora communities, South Asian communities, Francophone communities and accessibility communities. These discussions reveal how traditional heritage approaches have often overlooked the places, stories, and experiences that matter to diverse communities, while highlighting opportunities for inclusive and representative heritage frameworks.

Common Themes Across Underrepresented Voices

The conversations demonstrate that heritage extends far beyond buildings to encompass the complex geographies of belonging, exclusion, resistance, and community-building that have shaped Edmonton's social landscape. The participants bring perspectives grounded in lived experience of marginalization, community advocacy, and the ongoing work of creating space for communities whose histories have been rendered invisible or actively suppressed.

Heritage as Recognition and Validation

For communities that have faced historical marginalization, heritage recognition serves as more than preservation—it functions as validation of community existence and contributions. Whether through digital queer history maps, Black business commemorations, or educational heritage, these communities seek recognition that counters historical invisibility.

Creative and Flexible Commemoration

Traditional building-focused heritage approaches often fail to capture the significance of underrepresented community experiences. Communities are pioneering innovative approaches including digital storytelling, artistic collaborations, walking tours, and educational programming that make invisible histories accessible and meaningful.

Community Agency in Heritage Processes

Across all conversations, there was emphasis on communities determining their own heritage priorities rather than having significance imposed externally. This includes providing tools and support for community-led research, documentation, and advocacy while ensuring transparency about how input will be used.

Intersectionality and Multiple Belonging

Community leaders navigate multiple identity connections and heritage relationships simultaneously. Heritage approaches must recognize that individuals and places can be significant to multiple communities and serve diverse cultural functions.

Urgency and Documentation

The conversations revealed urgent needs for heritage documentation as knowledge holders age, communities face displacement pressures, and institutional memory is lost through retirements and policy changes.

Implications for Inclusive Heritage Places Strategy

These underrepresented voices collectively argue for heritage frameworks that centre community agency, embrace multiple forms of heritage expression, address historical exclusion through active recognition efforts, and provide flexible tools for community-led heritage work. Their perspectives position heritage not as constraint but as empowerment—a tool for building more inclusive, connected communities where all residents can see their stories and contributions reflected in the city's ongoing narrative.

Perspectives from Community Voices

2SLGBTQIA+ Community Perspectives

The Edmonton Queer History Project representative emphasized how the queer community has historically been "not visible in the same way as other communities," requiring different approaches to documenting and commemorating places of significance. A community leader involved in multiple queer initiatives, including creating pride centres for seniors and developing queer maps of Downtown and Strathcona areas, highlighted the challenge of preserving heritage when significant places no longer exist.

The conversation revealed how buildings like the Phillips Lofts (formerly warehouses) housed organizations like Gay Alliance and Equality, but their historic value wasn't initially recognized due to vinyl siding covering the original brick. Community advocacy led to preservation efforts and the creation of heritage-informed development guidelines for the area.

Technology emerged as a crucial tool for queer heritage, with phone apps and digital markers making invisible histories accessible. The community emphasized that people are "interested in stories, the buildings, what it was like, memories that are cherished" and that highlighting history

through physical elements and visible events like pride parades remains important for community identity and comfort.

Heritage provides "a sense of comfort for what existed" and helps people "realize a sense of identity," particularly when communities have faced historical invisibility. The importance of visible community spaces has been highlighted in the City's recent 2SLGBTQIA+ Safe Spaces Action Plan.

Black and African Diaspora Community Perspective

Edmonton's Historian Laureate shared their perspective and experience from the Black community as well as two decades of work with CariWest, the Alberta Labour History Institute, and community storytelling projects. Their insights revealed the complexity of Black heritage in Edmonton, describing "multiple footprints" spanning from original settlers from the southern United States to Caribbean immigrants in the 1960s-70s to more recent African immigration in the 1990s.

The conversation highlighted specific heritage sites and stories, including Amber Valley's early Black communities, the systemic exclusion faced by Black people (exemplified by the Gibson Block's "whites only" signs), and the significance of places like Hattie's Chicken Inn as one of the few establishments serving Black customers. The discussion also covered the "West Indies house" at the University of Alberta campus (now the Timms Centre location) that housed Caribbean students and contributed to Edmonton's Black community having strong Caribbean influences.

Current community organizing includes working with artists on banners for 118 Avenue to acknowledge Black businesses, representing an approach that "combines history with art" to "give us life and visibility." This emphasized the importance of "galvanizing the community to speak as one voice at the table" to articulate needs and desired heritage representations.

The need for "drawing a map of where people were allowed to exist" in past decades, acknowledged how spatial exclusion shaped community formation and the places that became significant for survival and belonging.

South Asian Heritage Perspective

The project team met with a community member and researcher active in the promotion of South Asian history and heritage in Edmonton. They shared their interest in breaking down silos and tapping into various resources to incorporate diverse narratives in Edmonton's heritage stories. They talked about areas such as Mill Woods, which is an area of great diversity with an interesting urban planning history, but which also carries the legacy of having been land that the Papaschase people were removed from. They also spoke to the importance of capturing the inequities in heritage

commemoration thus far, and being honest about it. Everyone's voice needs to be considered. They mentioned arts organizations and other non-profit organizations that have been around for decades, and are part of Edmonton's heritage and history in their own right.

Francophone Heritage Perspective

The Société historique francophone de l'Alberta (SHFA) representative referenced places in Edmonton that are significant to the beginnings of the Francophone community in Edmonton. They shared how they have used different ways (beyond a museum or an archives) to preserve and promote their history such as podcasts, art installations and 3D visualizations. The Francophone community has evolved over 100+ years. Finding ways to ensure that the histories and heritage of the full range of French speakers, from 19th century Voyageurs to 21st century emigrants from Africa and Caribbean, are acknowledged and promoted is important.

Accessibility Advisory Committee Perspective

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) provides advice and recommendations to Edmonton City Council about facilities, infrastructure, programs, services, activities and policies with the aim to improve the City's livability, inclusiveness and accessibility for individuals with disabilities. The AAC invited the project team to present at their July online meeting to introduce the project and gather initial insight.

They discussed how the strategy needs to think beyond traditional models of accessibility (e.g., in addition to physical) and to consider various accommodations (e.g., incorporating Braille in plaques and on signage). The committee members also suggested complementary ways people -- who may not be able to visit specific places -- can still experience heritage (e.g., taking a multimedia approach to heritage information, creating virtual tours, providing sign language translation). The City's Accessibility for People with Disabilities Policy (C602) could inform the strategy and support its implementation.

Other Conversations

The project team also hosted individual sessions with the Edmonton Historical Board and the Edmonton Heritage Council as both organizations are important partners within Edmonton's heritage ecosystem. A dedicated session for each allowed more of their board members and staff to share input in a facilitated conversation setting. The project team attended a meeting of the City's Energy Transition Leadership Network (ETLN) to discuss the heritage and climate connections. The project team also met with representatives from Edmonton Public School Board.

Edmonton Historical Board

The Edmonton Historical Board (EHB) identified the Inventory of Historic Resources as an important element of the program. The EHB discussed how the current practice of applicant-driven additions to the Inventory means there are few additions, while increasing demolitions results in a net decrease to the list. They want to see this trend reversed.

The EHB also talked about the importance of diversifying what is commemorated and how, for example through interpretive plaques, artwork, or other means.

The EHB identified that the City needs to be a leader in preservation, such as through adding City-owned resources to the Inventory and Registry, exploring deconstruction bylaws to reduce waste, and finding ways to support further research into heritage places for Inventory applications.

Edmonton Heritage Council

The Edmonton Heritage Council (EHC) spoke about how heritage goes beyond the built form, and how all Edmontonians need to see themselves in heritage through storytelling and partnerships. They commented that heritage designation should be more flexible, through adaptation of spaces, commemorating newer buildings, and reframing heritage as something to consider in conjunction with urban growth, versus against it. There was an interest in supporting new ways of storytelling, such as through digital signage and online initiatives. The EHC also spoke about natural landscapes and the challenges associated with commemorating them, as some places of significance should not be publicized. The EHC placed a high level of importance on engagement with as many communities and people as possible, and to consider current and future uses of places when looking at heritage. They commented on the importance of cultural landscapes, and recognizing areas versus individual buildings.

Energy Transition Leadership Network (ETLN)

The ETLN is a network of external professionals and advocates convened by the City's Environment and Climate Resilience team that meet quarterly to share and discuss climate resilience initiatives. The Heritage Places Strategy team presented the project and hosted a round table at the ETLN's June 2025 meeting. Table participants talked about the possibilities and mutual benefits to preserving and retrofitting buildings (e.g., preserving its heritage qualities or significance while considering its energy efficiency). This could support building longevity (reducing demolitions), livability and contribute to sense of place within neighbourhoods. Windows, roofing materials, solar panels and Photovoltaic (PV) modules that are designed to look like other materials such as

brick were examples of specific building elements that could support both heritage and energy efficiency objectives. However, there was acknowledgement that more research is needed. One participant shared, while discussing embodied carbon, not to be too focused on the energy costs that went into a building's construction but more on how retrofits could save future energy.

Exploring ways building owners can access both heritage and retrofit grants was also mentioned.

Participants recognized the importance of natural heritage. This could include commemorating Indigenous harvesting areas or urban agriculture areas, protecting individual historic trees, highlighting areas like Mill Creek Ravine and the people who fought to protect it (i.e., from an expressway). Natural heritage is part of the fabric of place and can become even more important when commemorated and celebrated.

Educational Institution Perspective

Edmonton Public School Board planning staff highlighted unique challenges facing heritage in educational contexts. With 53 per cent of EPSB buildings constructed before 1969, the school board is facing significant deferred maintenance costs. EPSB representatives identified opportunities to "celebrate our mid-century modern architectural heritage" while noting the "education donut effect" where families are returning to central neighborhoods, creating new pressures on heritage school buildings in mature areas. Heritage decisions within schools happen without community consultation due to funding and policy pressures, yet these institutions represent significant community gathering places with heritage value.

Conclusion

Engagement revealed a shared vision for Edmonton's heritage future that is both ambitious and grounded in practical experience. Contributors see heritage not as a constraint on City development but as a foundation for creating more vibrant, inclusive, and connected communities.

The feedback demonstrates an understanding that successful heritage conservation requires moving beyond single-building preservation to embrace neighbourhood character, community stories, natural elements, and Indigenous perspectives as interconnected parts of a living cultural landscape. This approach positions heritage planning as a tool for strengthening community identity while accommodating growth and change.

The feedback reflects a desire for heritage planning to serve all by creating opportunities for previously unheard voices to contribute their stories while maintaining tangible connections to place that help residents understand their role in the City's continuing story. The strategy's success will depend on balancing this inclusive vision with practical implementation that provides meaningful protection while supporting the diverse needs of a growing city.

The path forward requires sustained collaboration to create a framework that honours Edmonton's past while building toward a more inclusive and culturally rich future. The project team looks forward to further engagement as part of phase 2.

Next Steps

The feedback received in Phase 1, together with the best practice research and alignment with the City's policy objectives, will help to inform the draft themes and elements that will be included in the strategy and shared as part of Phase 2 engagement. Phase 2 engagement is targeted for fall 2025.

To stay up-to-date with the project and engagement opportunities, visit

edmonton.ca/historicresources.