Downtown Public Places Plan

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT PHASE 2 VISUALIZE

August 2018

Edmonton

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Edmonton's Downtown is transforming. New investments, including the refurbished Legislature Grounds, Ice District, and LRT Valley Line, are attracting new development and people. This new development includes high-density residential, mixed-use buildings, and office towers. Despite this recent investment and development, the number of public places within the Downtown remains limited. As the public and private sector investment in the Downtown continues, the coordination of investment in public places is needed to support existing and new residents, workers and visitors.

The amount of people living in the Downtown is expected to more than double by 2030. As this population grows, the amount, quality, functionality and accessibility of public places become more important. New strategies to improve public places within the Downtown are required to meet the needs of a growing population, attract families, and support a vibrant Downtown.

The existing Downtown public places offer limited opportunities for recreation, exercise, relaxation, and socialization. Though each individual public place need not offer everything, it is important that all public places within the Downtown work together to provide a range of amenities. In the past, Downtown public place projects focused on one place at a time, concentrating on the immediate area instead of examining each place's role in the broader network. This has resulted in spatial and functional gaps in this network. This is why a Downtown Public Places Plan is needed.

Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy (2017) and the Capital City Downtown Plan (2010) both identify the need to develop the Downtown Public Places Plan. **This Plan will provide clear direction for the programming, design, development and acquisition of Downtown public places.** This direction will inform Council decisions, direct Administration priorities, and guide community partnerships, engagement, and collaboration.

Investing in the Downtown benefits all Edmontonians. Public place improvements are necessary to meet the needs of a growing population, to support families, stimulate business and tourism, support employment and help create a vibrant Downtown. Exceptional Downtown public places help attract new residents, businesses, festivals and events while contributing to civic pride, improving safety, and creating a positive impression of Edmonton. A functional and attractive public place network will support and enhance the health and vitality of Downtown Edmonton. Downtown public places provide respite, relief, and room to socialize, celebrate, and recharge. Specifically, Downtown public places support Edmonton's civic life, cultural expression, economic development, community wellness, and ecology while functioning as important local parks for residents and workers.

These different interests, functions, and users require a comprehensive engagement program to ensure the Downtown Public Places Plan meets community needs and desires to realize a sustainable, vibrant, welldesigned, and accessible Downtown through its public places.

STUDY AREA

The study area includes the parks and other public spaces in the neighbourhoods of Downtown Edmonton and the Quarters Downtown, plus a 400-metre buffer into adjacent communities.



DOWNTOWN VISION STATEMENT

Downtown Edmonton is aiming to become...

Sustainable Environmentally

- > Sustainable and a regional hub for green innovation.
- Known for its distinct neighbourhoods and the strong sense of community, diversity, social interaction and engagement that they offer.

Vibrant

- > The economic driver for the region and provide a range of housing options for all Edmontonians.
- > A regional, national and international centre for arts, culture, festivals, and entertainment.

Well-designed

- > Well-designed in all areas of the public and private realm and include a comprehensive network of public places.
- Celebrated in its role as the Capital City of Alberta and as a winter city.

Accessible

 Pedestrian-oriented and will provide transportation options that are multi-modal and accessible to all.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Downtown Public Places Plan objectives are to...

- Create comfortable, memorable, attractive destinations and spaces
- Improve connections between the Downtown and the River Valley
- Guide open space development, design and programming in Downtown
- Focus on the quality, functionality, connectivity and supply of open spaces
- Provide design recommendations for developments impacting open spaces
- > Inform and align current and future Downtown projects



ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

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ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The City of Edmonton is committed to excellence in public engagement. Building on Edmonton's shift towards an "Open City" system of public participation, the engagement process for Downtown Public Places Plan aims to make the most of stakeholders' and citizens' problem–solving potential, build community, and create advocates for Downtown public places.

NEW PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY

The City of Edmonton's policy on public engagement (C593) is a guiding document for The City's approach to public engagement. The Council Initiative on Public Engagement was launched in 2014 with a goal of strengthening The City's public engagement. For more information visit *edmonton.ca/ programs_services/public_engagement/council-initiative-on-public-engagement.aspx*

THE STAGES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The City will be engaging with the public to *Advise* and *Refine* the project three times over the span of the project.

- > Phase 1: Conceptualize
- > Phase 2: Visualize
- > Phase 3: Finalize

This What We Heard Report summarizes the results from Phase 2: Visualize, of the public engagement, which took place over the month of July 2018.

Engagement Values

The following values will guide the engagement process: Respect Honesty Openness Inclusion Cooperation

Engagement Principles

Learning

These principles will anchor our actions and thinking as we engage with the public and stakeholders: Be open, timely and responsive. Listen and share stories to understand. Support informed engagement. Follow through on commitments.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

A robust public engagement process results in stronger, more locally relevant projects. The following goals ensure that the public engagement process is transparent, focused and accessible.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GOALS

- Understand the strengths, weaknesses, gaps, issues and opportunities in the Downtown public place network to validate and refine the supply and needs assessment from BREATHE.
- > Collect feedback on proposed public-place improvements, recommendations, and their alternatives.
- Hear public and private development perspectives on creatively developing privately-owned public places.
- > Develop priorities for public-place improvements to inform the implementation plan.
- > Build relationships with stakeholders who will advocate for this Plan.
- Have conversations with a range of stakeholders, including residents, communities of interest, workers, visitors, institutions, organizations, and others.
- Provide opportunities throughout the project for participants to provide meaningful, appropriate, and actionable input that will be used to create the Downtown Public Places Plan.
- > Implement an engagement process that is open, transparent, and respectful.
- > Provide opportunities for involvement that are convenient and accessible.
- Provide opportunities to engage communities of interest and under-represented communities that may find it difficult to access or participate in engagement processes.
- > Creatively engage and communicate with the general public, residents, workers and visitors.
- Clearly communicate the project goals, what the engagement process can and cannot influence, and how public input was used to help shape the Plan.
- > Combine engagement events with other projects when possible.
- > Implement innovative and place-based tactics.
- > Understand the needs of residents and the requirements for public places.
- > Support community-led/created initiatives for Downtown Public Places.



THE BIG QUESTIONS

- How can we make a vibrant, well-designed, accessible, and environmentally sustainable Downtown through its public places?
- What investments in the public realm are needed to support new residents, workers, and visitors in the Downtown and Quarters neighbourhoods?
- > How can The City strategically coordinate these investments?

AUDIENCE

Effective engagement begins with considering the needs of different audiences and the engagement and communications tactics most appropriate for each group. The engagement streams included placebased, strategic interviews, online surveys, and in-person interactions. The communications tactics were to spread the word and the engagement tactics focused on collecting feedback. This audience ensured that the project offers the variety required to generate broad interest and feedback. These different groups were engaged at various times throughout the engagement process.



	TARGET AUDIENCE	ENGAGEMENT TACTICS	COMMUNICATION TACTICS
STREAM 1: Place-based	 Downtown Residents Downtown Workers Downtown Institutions Downtown Visitors Communities of Interest 	► Pop-Ups	Lobby DisplaysPosters
STREAM 2: Strategic Interviews	 Development Industry Downtown Institutions Communities of Interest Downtown Organizations City-wide Organizations 	 Interviews 	
STREAM 3: Online	 Edmontonians Downtown Residents Downtown Workers Downtown Visitors 	 Online Questionnaire Insight Survey Online Interactive Map 	 Project Website Project Email Social Media Advertisements (print + online) Press Releases
STREAM 4: In-person	 Downtown Residents Downtown Workers Downtown Visitors Communities of Interest 	 Event Attendance Interviews Pop-Up Events 	Direct Contact311

PHASE 2: VISUALIZE

Objectives:

Gather input about major projects recommended through the Downtown Public Places Plan within each of the five focus areas.

Information Presented:

- > Downtown Public Places Concept Plan
- > Fact and figures to describe Downtown public places
- > Downtown Public Places themes
- > Determined focus areas and their distinct features
- > Site-specific recommendations

Questions Asked:

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the site-specific recommendations?
- Do you have any comments on the distinct features within each of the focus areas?



Share your thoughts on how we can create great Downtown open spaces, parks, and plazas!

Drop-in Engagement Events

July 14 | 10am to 2pm Michael Phair Park

July 16 | 5pm to 8pm Downtown Edmonton Community League

July 31 | 11am to 2pm Edmonton Tower

Online Survey

Starting July 14 | Complete the online survey and find our more by going to: edmonton.ca/downtownpublicplaces

ART A

ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

ONLINE

Online Survey + Interactive Map

The online survey link was posted on the Downtown Public Places project website and provided residents with an opportunity to answer questions and pin points of significance onto the project's online interactive map.

Insight Community Survey

The Insight Community is an online platform that allows residents to engage on City issues. Insight Community members were sent the online survey to provide feedback.



PLACE-BASED

Pop-up Events

information and speak to the public in person. These events pop-ups were held at:

- > National Indigenous Peoples Day at Victoria Park
- > Canada Day Chinatown Market at 96th Street
- > City Market at 104th Street
- Edmonton Tower Lobby

- Nine pop-up events were held to share > 100th Street Funicular during the FISE World Series at Louise McKinney Park
 - > Taste of Edmonton Festival at Capital Plaza
 - Downtown Edmonton Community League
 - > Ezio Faraone Park
 - Churchill Square





Stakeholder Interviews

One-on-one interviews with representatives from a selection of organizations were conducted.









PUBLIC INSIGHTS

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LEVELS OF SUPPORT

For each project within the five focus areas, participants were requested to indicate their level of support in the online survey. They placed their vote one of the following: Strongly Support, Somewhat Support, Neither Support nor Oppose, Somewhat Oppose, Strongly Oppose and Don't Know. Overall, all of the projects were at least 60% supported.



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Strongly Support

Somewhat Support

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY



In addition to ranking their level of support for the recommendations, people were asked to comment on what they would add to or remove from the recommendations for each space. The following provides a summary of these comments.

WEST SIDE

Generally people agree with the recommendations, though there are some concerns about traffic flow here and perceived negative impact of bike lanes. People would like to see a continuation of the bike and pedestrian corridor through an increased amount of green space with safer crossings over Jasper Avenue, and connections to the 105th Avenue and 111th Avenue bike paths. It was suggested that pedestrian paths should be paved, have more wayfinding signage, and be kept clear in the winter. There is a desire to keep the streetcars and a preference for quiet green spaces over busy commercial or tourist-oriented areas. Some respondents called for the removal of plazas and privatelyowned public spaces along Jasper Avenue because they believe that these spaces will be hardscaped and not as available for public use.

Ezio Faraone Park

The comments indicated a desire to pave pathways and widen sidewalks, without destroying the green space. A connection to the Legislature grounds over 109th Avenue and a more accessible connection to River Valley Road were also supported. Connecting the park to the River Valley trail system is less of a priority for some who feel that the current staircase is sufficient; however, others expressed that it is only accessible for able bodied citizens and therefore improvements should focus on making it accessible and barrier free. People enjoy the viewpoints from this park and support its preservation, while maintaining its current use. Some want to see the addition of an off leash dog area to the park.



Connecting Railtown and Ribbon of Steel Greenway across Jasper Avenue

People agree that there is a need for a safe bike and pedestrian crossing over Jasper Avenue to connect the Ribbon of Steel to Railtown Park. While many are in support of a bridge that is well designed and aesthetically pleasing over Jasper Avenue, others have suggested an enhanced at grade intersection crossing. Those who support an at grade crossing believe it would be more accessible compared to stairs up to a pedestrian bridge would make crossing difficult for those with mobility challenges.

New or Expanded Open Spaces along Railtown Park

There was support for enhancing abilities for both walking and staying in the park, such as increasing the amount of seating and shade provided. There are some conflicting opinions about providing child-friendly spaces due to safety concerns from the high traffic active transportation corridor. Some have mentioned that child play spaces should be incorporated as a part of the green corridor and continue along the space rather than being in segregated spaces. This would enable children to climb, jump, and balance along the corridor as others walk along. Some suggested that a dog park be included along the corridor. Others believe that this space is already well used and do not see a need to improve on what is already in place.

Queen Mary Park

People generally support the recommendations to add more greenspace and improve bike connectivity with the existing city network, particularly to MacEwan University.



CENTRAL WEST

Most people are supportive of more green space and trees here and would not remove anything from the recommendations. People are supportive of increasing walkability, lighting, and street improvements to make the 104th Avenue friendlier or pedestrian only. There were a large variety of opinions on parking; people want to be able to easily access the area but not have surface parking interfere with activity on the street. There is some disagreement with featuring the brick warehouses and concerns about commercial patios taking up walking space on the sidewalks. People are not overly supportive of privately owned public spaces, as it is perceived that they are less inclusive and accessible than public spaces.

Warehouse Campus Park

There is strong support for the incorporation of greenery in the area that is welcoming and multi-functional. While green space is supported on this parking lot, losing a large number of parking spots is concerning for many that drive to Downtown. Some have suggested building a multi-level underground parking lot beneath the park. People support having retail as an activator, play and congregation spaces, special events programming. Some also suggested incorporating winter features, good lighting, and recreation facilities like outdoor gym or tennis courts. One person saw this as an opportunity to incorporate unique rainfall capture infrastructure into the park.

Beaver Hills House Park

There is support for connecting Beaver Hills House Park and Michael Phair Park and the farmers market on 104th Street. People feel unsafe here and would like the park to be redesigned with better sight lines and lighting. Overall people were supportive of the suggested improvements and recognize that there is potential to enhance this park as a safe area for respite during the day and night.















CENTRAL CORE

There are many comments around ensuring the spaces are free to use and accessible to everyone, with appropriate amenities such as water and washrooms. People expressed differing feelings about parking: some think additional, lower cost parking is needed while others want to reduce parking. There was also a desire for secure bike parking. People feel that Churchill Square needs more greenery and public art. Ensuring safety is a primary concern in this area. There are some concerns about creative lighting, as some people think that lighting should match the rest of downtown. Additionally, there are concerns about the spillover of commercial space.

Ice District

The focus of many comments was on creating a better pedestrian experience connecting to the Civic Precinct, particularly through increased greenery in currently a hardscaped places. Some people also commented on how any added greenery must be capable of surviving long term. Those who did not support the recommendation were concerned about the cost to taxpayers to improve an area that does not feel entirely like a public space.

North of Civic Precinct

People want a more welcoming pedestrian connection to Chinatown. Several comments identified safety issues with the living bridge. Overall, green space here was desired.

Centennial Plaza

Support increased pedestrian connectivity, addition of greenspace to break up the concrete. People called for greater animation and programming of centennial plaza, integration of the plaza with the library, and a better connection to Churchill Square. Some suggested incorporation of child play structures.



THE QUARTERS

Most people were supportive of the recommendations. There were a few concerns about the safety of developing alley ways as public spaces and that there is not enough demand to support community gardens in this area. This area was noted as an area for those experiencing homelessness. People commented that there is a need for solutions that involve consideration for those experiencing homelessness, including making public washrooms and drinking fountains available for all people in the area and improving safety for everyone.

Mary Burlie Park and 97th Street Bridge

Many comments called for a connection to the LRT multi–use trail to west of 97th Street. People expressed concern that improvements displace those experiencing homelessness who currently make use of the area. There was an identified need to address the current condition of the bridge to accommodate cyclists and create a safer space.

Quarters Linkage to Louise McKinney Park

People suggested improving walkability and connections across Jasper Avenue and 101st Avenue. Many suggested a pedestrian bridge. People also supported an accessible connection to the River Valley and connection to the Quarters.

Quarters Linkage to Alex Taylor School Park

Some people believe the area is already connected well enough while some believe there need to be safer routes for kids to access the school and playground. There were a few comments expressing that there needs to be more activity in order to make the area feel safer, such as increased retail in the area.

Boyle Renaissance Phase III

There is support for child play spaces, but there are also concerns about ensuring the safety of those spaces. Some thought that the surrounding area needs to be more developed to support the suggested improvements here. Most people support the food component and community gardens.



SOUTHERN EDGE

Most people supported the recommendations and would not remove any of them. There was some disagreement with east-west corridor connecting Ezio Faraone Park to Dawson Park. Many comments called for increasing bike and pedestrian connectivity, ideally through a separated pathway. There is also desire for a better connection to the river with amenities for enjoying the river valley. Opinions were conflicting on parking and whether it should be removed or if more should be added.



104th Street Stairs

People suggest having more signage about the stairs, as many did not know they exist. There are some ideas to make stairs easier for bikes to go up and down and some suggestions to make a more accessible route. Those who use the stairs mostly want to see them maintained and functional. People expressed a desire for the addition of benches along the way for people to catch their breath. Overall, it was suggested that there be improvements to make the area feel safer.

Connecting 100th Street Crossing to MacDonald Drive

There is general agreement that a safer pedestrian crossing is needed. Opinions differ on how this crossing should be completed: either as an underground, bridge, or integrated street level crossing. Some people feel that this recommendation would be expensive and that the funding would be better used for other priority projects.

100th Street Boardwalk

There is some support for improved connectivity and access to the River Valley, though several comments indicate that not everyone thinks that this connection is necessary. Comments supporting the connection emphasize the importance of creating viewpoints overlooking the river. Those not in favour of the connection state that it would be expensive and the funds would be better used elsewhere.

Veterans Park

There was some support for developing child friendly spaces. Opinions differed about removing parking. There was a lot of support for the community gardens components of the recommendations.



MAPPING OUR PUBLIC PLACES

ONLINE INTERACTIVE MAP + POP-UP EVENTS

Participants were asked to place a post-it note (in-person at the Pop-Ups) or mark a dot on the interactive map (online survey) on the concept plan to comment on the recommended projects within the study area. Participants were encouraged to highlight proposed open space opportunities that they like or agree with, spaces that they would change, and any additional open space opportunities. This feedback will be used to further develop the concept plan for Downtown Public Places.



GEOGRAPHIC WORD CLOUD MAP

The map below shows a general visual summary of what we heard from the online survey map as well as the post-it note mapping exercises at the pop-up events. The words that appear larger represent comments that were made more frequently. Green words reflect areas where people want to see or keep green space, blue represents connections, red represents safety and inclusivity concerns, and yellow represents programming and public space improvements.



STAKEHOLDER INSIGHTS

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STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The City of Edmonton has met with several stakeholder groups since the Phase 1: Conceptualize public engagement. The City will continue to have meetings with other stakeholder groups as interest arises. Representatives from diverse organizations were invited to discuss issues and opportunities in Downtown Public Places. Organizations approached included community organizations, businesses, communities of interest, developers, service agencies, institutions, and the government. Each group focuses on different areas of interest including: festivals, events, homelessness, art, heritage, education and accessibility. While much of the information gathered supports the perspectives gained from the public, some additional key points that emerged from the conversations are noted below.

Naming Parks

Parks should be named so that they are not offensive or controversial. Stakeholders have suggested that there be more Indigenous narratives and representation in the Downtown.

Cultural Activities

Urban Indigenous peoples would like to have more opportunities to practice cultural activities and ceremonies in the downtown. This presence can be an important part of public life for all Edmontonians. Currently, the permitting and planning processes for these activities can be unclear or a barrier for some. The City should be more accommodating for these uses in public spaces, particularly by the River Valley.

Landscaping and Vegetation

Stakeholders suggested more native plantings in green spaces, and allowing people to harvest for use. Where appropriate, plants could be selected by Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers.

While there is a high demand for more community green spaces, having fewer, high quality green spaces is more valuable than a larger number of low quality spaces. The timing of street tree plantings should ensure that there are no large gaps in the neighbourhood's canopy as other trees die and get replaced. New landscaping should only be added if there is a plan in place to maintain it.

Programming

Often during programmed events, people experiencing homelessness are not allowed or are excluded from the event despite not being an interruption. There need to be solutions for increasing inclusivity and overcoming discrimination.

Amenities

Washrooms and water fountains are extremely important for all people, including those experiencing homelessness. Washrooms should be accessible from the exterior and be wheelchair accessible. They should be distributed throughout the community and be clearly visible. Garbage containers should also be well distributed.

Design

The architecture and design of public places should be inclusive of all people. Hostile design should be discouraged. For example, benches often exclude and criminalize the homeless by having armrests placed so that people cannot sleep comforably on them.

Parking

Stakeholders suggested beautifying parking lots with luscious trees, nice fences, and flowers. They also mentioned that The City should consider working with other community organizations such as iHuman to improve such spaces. Additionally, The City should consider animating such flux spaces temporarily. While there is some interest in beautifying parking lots, others have also identified the parking challenges experienced during festivals and events. Additionally, there should be sufficient amount of secure bike parking throughout Downtown to ensure that cyclists are able to park at nearby locations.

Events

Stakeholders mentioned that the City should ensure that accessible information is available for the public to understand the policies and practices about programming opportunities in public places. This would include

information such as:

- What permissions are needed?
- > Who is the right person to speak to?
- > What is the process?
- > Which parks are appropriate for certain activities and uses?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of festival organizers?

Obtaining security during events is expensive and can be challenging for event and festival organizers. Therefore, this plan should consider how to design spaces with safety and security in mind.

Market

The Downtown City Market is extremely popular and requires careful consideration in its planning and expansion. Some key issues to consider include electrical access, water access, tent sizes and space needed, washrooms, surrounding businesses and parking.

Schools

In developing the Downtown Public Places Plan, stakeholders recognized that residential growth of the Downtown will bolster attendance of existing schools in the core neighbourhoods. The demand in a future school site nearby or adjacent to public places may increase due to population growth. Similarly, some stakeholders emphasized the need for a school in the study area to attract families to new residential developments.



NEXT STEPS

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NEXT STEPS

The feedback from Phase 2: Visualize will inform the third phase of the project during which the Downtown Public Places Plan will be developed.

The input will shape the concept of the plan, define the future state of public places in the Downtown and highlight areas for improvement that the Plan needs to address.

The draft Plan will be shared with stakeholders and the public in November 2018 for review and feedback in Phase 3: Finalize, the results of which will be incorporated into the final Plan.

Stay up to date with the project and future opportunities for engagement at: *edmonton.ca/downtownpublicplaces*