



BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT  
AREAS TOOLKIT



**1** BIA Overview

May 2021

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## WHAT IS A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA?

A Business Improvement Area (BIA) is a specific geographic area of the city in which businesses combine resources and work together, through a formal association, to enhance the economic development of their area.

They do this, with the support of the City of Edmonton, through a variety of activities that provide value to member businesses and that create interesting and attractive places for people to visit, shop, and do business.

A BIA is a *statutory corporation* created under the authority of Alberta's Municipal Government Act (MGA). Each BIA operates with a model for success and capacity to provide the services and programs that support economic development to the area and the vibrancy of Edmonton's mainstreets. They are guided by the following:

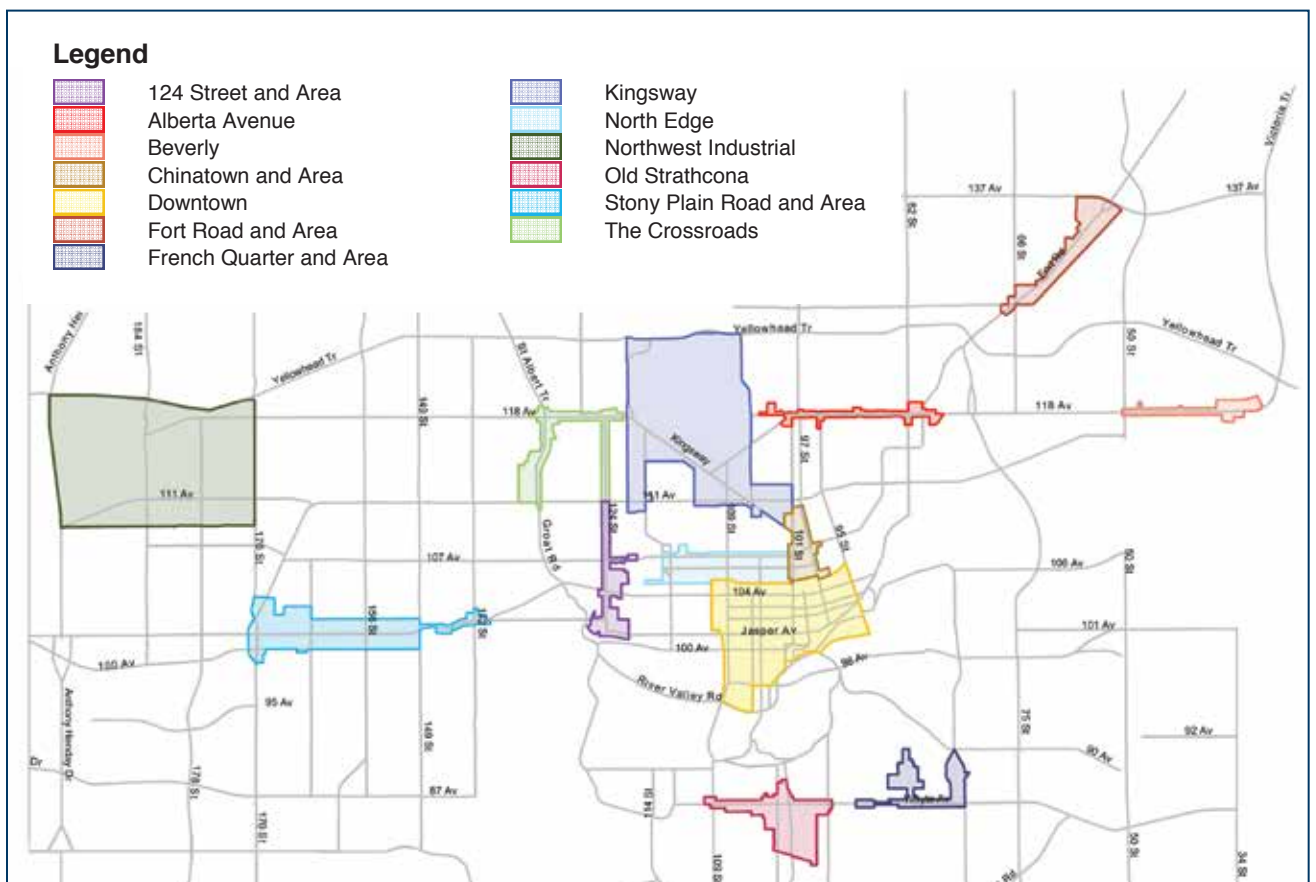
- The **MGA and BIA Regulations**
- City of Edmonton Bylaws that are adopted to create individual BIAs
- City of Edmonton **City Policy C462B – BIA Establishment and Operation**
- Day-to-day operating guidelines of each BIA
- The needs and goals of the area and member businesses.



# EDMONTON'S BIAs

Edmonton has 13 **Business Improvement Areas** dedicated to advancing the economic development and vitality of specific commercial districts. Each of these BIAs has a diverse local economy and offers unique programs and services to its members.

## BIAs



# HOW BIAs CREATE VIBRANT COMMERCIAL AREAS

BIAs can take a variety of steps to support improvements, beautification, investment, and economic development in their areas. Here is just a snapshot of potential BIA activities and programs:

## **Branding, marketing, and communication**

- Creating business directories
- Marketing campaigns

## **Incentives for businesses and partner organizations**

- Providing grants for hosting events
- Area wide customer appreciation programs

## **Market and economic trend analysis**

- Undertaking comparative studies on the local economy
- Conducting retail mix and market research

## **Learning and business development for members**

- Hosting workshops
- Holding member mixers

## **Visitor attraction and outreach**

- Developing destination maps
- Hiring area ambassadors

## **Working with other organizations and local institutions**

- Building relationships with social service agencies, Edmonton Police Service, and community associations
- Forming district committees to address specific issues

## **Member advocacy on private and public projects**

- Participating in and providing feedback
- Connecting with developers of new or proposed buildings

## **Business retention and attraction**

- Developing business recruitment strategies
- Outreach to commercial real estate brokers

## **Place-making and activation**

- Installing decorative lighting along streets and in parks
- Coordinating area-wide clean-up and maintenance

## **Supporting business and property owner participation in City programs**

- Providing information on programs and support through related processes

# HOW BIAs BENEFIT THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY

## Benefits of a BIA for businesses

- Ability to accomplish more for the area by working together
- Increased vibrancy and shared marketing helps attract more customers and businesses
- Provides a unified voice working for with the City and other orders of government
- Receive support and programs delivered by the BIA and the City

## Benefits of a BIA for local residents and the community

- More vibrant local commercial area
- Builds community pride and interest in the business area
- Local events and initiatives that make the area a more interesting place to visit
- Provides places for residents and visitors to "shop local"

## Benefits of a BIA for the City of Edmonton

- Promotes a positive perception of the commercial area
- Improvements made in the area help increase the tax base and property values, and support a strong local economy
- BIAs can help to enhance local tourism opportunities and private sector interest, attracting visitors and investment



## HOW BIAs OPERATE

While each BIA is unique and will offer services and programs tailored to the needs of their area, all BIAs are formed and operate under some basic parameters:

- BIAs are created when business owners formally join together, with the support of the City of Edmonton, to promote the economic development of their specific geographic area.
- BIAs accomplish their goals by organizing, financing, and implementing services, programs, and improvements that support local businesses, and that increase the area's attractiveness and vibrancy.
- Businesses located within a BIA pay a **business improvement area tax** to fund BIA initiatives and operations. The City collects the funds annually on behalf of the BIA and distributes quarterly installments to the BIA. (See **A Step-by-Step Guide to BIA Taxes**.)
- BIAs are run by a board of directors that are nominated each year by members of the BIA and approved by City Council. A board hires an executive director to manage the daily operation of the BIA.
- According to provincial legislation, BIAs are 'non-profit statutory corporations'. They are subject to different rules and legislation than other non-profit and not-for-profit organizations and societies in Alberta.



## KEY PLAYERS IN BIAs

### BIA Association

The non-profit organization that works to support a vibrant local commercial area and to meet the needs of its members.

### Business Owners

Each business owner in the BIA's geographic area is a member of the BIA association. Members nominate individuals to the board of directors, review the BIA annual budget, and may volunteer to support BIA activities.

### Board of Directors

Sets the direction for the BIA and oversees work to support economic development and BIA members. Directors are unpaid volunteers, are nominated by the BIA membership, and appointed by City Council. They may or may not be business owners in the BIA.

### Executive Director

Hired by the board of directors to oversee the daily operations of the association and to provide programs and services in support of BIA members.

### City of Edmonton

A key partner in the success of BIAs, City Administration works with BIA associations to support operating and infrastructure needs.

### City of Edmonton City Council

Approves the establishment (and disestablishment) of BIAs, and each year approves proposed BIA annual budgets and appoints the Board of Directors.

### BIA Council

Alliance of all Edmonton BIA executive directors that meets on a regular basis to address common issues, propose collective solutions, and plan unified advocacy efforts.



## HOW BIAs AND THE CITY WORK TOGETHER

The City and BIAs share a commitment to a vibrant local economy that adds to the attractiveness of Edmonton as a place to live, work, and visit.

Various areas within the City Administration support BIAs in advancing the economic development of the area and help BIAs with meeting their operating requirements. Connecting with key City staff or the City's 311 service helps BIAs get in touch with the correct person to address specific needs (see Part 4 of the BIA toolkit: Working With the City).

## HOW A BIA IS CREATED

**STEP 1** Interested businesses work together to determine if a BIA is the right tool to help them realize shared goals for their local commercial area.

**STEP 2** Interested businesses talk to others to gather the support they'll need to petition City Council to create a BIA.

**STEP 3** Interested businesses formally apply to the City to create a BIA. Their application must include the signatures of at least 25% of taxable businesses in the area and proposed boundaries for the BIA. If more than 50% of taxable businesses in the area petition against creating a BIA City Council cannot consider the application.

**STEP 4** If City Council supports the application it will pass a bylaw that creates the new BIA as a non-profit statutory corporation. The bylaw will also outline basic operating requirements (see part 3 of BIA toolkit).

**STEP 5** Founding members of the BIA work with City staff to propose an annual budget and board of directors to guide the BIA through its first year. City Council must approve the annual budget and board of directors (see part 3 of BIA toolkit).

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**1** **BIA Overview**

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