

## April 2021 Downtown Vibrancy Roundtable - Summary of What We Learned

### Participating Organizations

AKSIS  
Alberta Enterprise Group  
Art Gallery of Alberta  
Arts Habitat  
CBRE  
Citadel Theatre  
Downtown Business Association  
Downtown Edmonton Community League  
Dynalife  
Edmonton Arts Council  
Edmonton Downtown Farmers Market  
Edmonton Police Service  
Explore Edmonton Corporation  
Government of Alberta  
Innovate Edmonton  
Invest Alberta  
MacEwan University  
NAOIP  
Norquest College  
Nova Hotel Group  
Stantec  
Telus  
UDI - Core Committee  
University of Alberta  
Western Economic Diversification Canada  
Winspear  
WORKS

## What We Heard

### Action 1: Use existing, and create more, public spaces

- Continuation of regular road closures, expanded patios, pop-up events (Downtown Spark) and food trucks, and look at activating small spaces through the Summer — these events provide employment for young people and keep businesses open.
- Put resources into actual arts and culture programming to employ artists.
- Enhance quiet spaces, corners and alleys with art and light.
- Activate busy areas like McEwan campus: Encourage more uses like book stores, coffee houses etc., through cheap and affordable rentals. Access to 1,000 staff and 20,000 students.
- Festival retention; for example, A Taste of Edmonton is our most popular festival downtown.
- Focus on 2-3 core spaces vs focus on micro spaces, vacant spaces, and activating different creative spaces.

### Action 2: Four season experience

- Four season accessibility to attract families and further incent people to want to live downtown, further encourage mixed use and provide the balance.
- Prioritize the four season experience over creating more public spaces.

### Action 3: Make it easier to live downtown

- Look at demographics and offer mid range housing options
- Market the core to the suburbs.
- Make it easy to get around downtown (parking accessibility, get around construction).
- The largest growing demographic is double income with no kids — conscious and deliberate adult amenities.
- Attract regional visitors — access the broader 1.5 million that live on the periphery.

### Action 4: Promote downtown

- Partnerships are key — be strategic working together as opposed to duplicating.
- Better coordinated and aligned marketing campaign of all activities and actions and offerings about downtown — website, similarly branded communication pieces;
  - Singular message on Edmonton's downtown between partners.
  - Partner openness to collective marketing - Utilize existing businesses to promote downtown benefits and break down negative perceptions.

- Cross-market culturally-specific offerings.
- Use Social Media for story telling and notifying people of new openings.

**Action 5: Customized business retention and expansion support**

- More information sharing between businesses in downtown about what is happening, eg. openings and closing.
- Send a 'Thank You' to businesses — a phone call, email or letter signed by the Mayor, or City leadership; include a contact so they feel supported.

**Action 6: Make downtown more fun**

- Vibrancy is 24/7 — be more intentional about night and day economic support.
- Encourage and support homemade innovation to bring back Edmonton pride.
- Happy Hour Park — bringing Churchill square to life after work and before the start of events. Showcase local performers to help activate the space;
  - Look at how large Cities activate these spaces, eg. Leicester Square.
- More festivals and food trucks — give people a reason to come downtown.
- Focus on medium and small scale events instead of all big ones.
- Economic Recovery Grant — expedite processing of grants.

**Action 7: Entrench vibrancy as an ongoing project through engagement**

- Create life — integrate construction hoardings into downtown; activate with lighting
- Reactivate the Edmonton Convention Centre and conferences
- Increase greenery and animate park space

**Action 8: Make it easy to get around**

- Make sure downtown is accessible and inclusive for all
  - Consider the addition of this language for the action
- Flexible Options — easy connections and access to the River Valley (RV)
  - Electric bike operators were denied licensing due to restrictions in the RV
- Welcome people — the actions lean more on safety than on welcoming
- Connected safety — downtown is a walkable island. You walk from a well-lit pedway with lots of people and activity to a dark scary section of an underground pedway.
- Safety has to be focused on all of downtown, in particular connecting hubs, like Grant MacEwan to 104 avenue; well-lit paths and parks to create pedestrian friendly travel
- **PROPOSED NEW ACTION:** Inclusive, connected, walkable downtown

**Action 9: Enhance safety**

- The provincial and municipal government need to work together to provide proper direction as it relates to safety legislation and COVID/health protocols.
- Safety as a support pillar.
- Feeling of unsafe vs actually unsafe — one person’s bad experience spreads quickly, people will be encouraged to visit downtown if tangible safety measures are in place.
- Look at deploying law enforcement on foot as a deterrent, as well as increasing security presence in dark secluded places, like parking lots.
- We need people back downtown to help shift the feeling of safety — looking for support from the City of Edmonton as the messaging was for everyone to stay home.
- Prioritize downtown BIAs for maintenance and cleanliness all the time.

**Action 10: Expand urban wellness support**

- Engage service providers — safety issues are caused by a select group of individuals.
- Create a critical mass of people to make it feel clean and safe — crime and perceptions will decrease once foot traffic from commuters and visitors increases.
- Adoption of minimum shelter standards.

**Action 11: Show more care for public spaces**

- Create connected corridors with enhanced lighting and security until all pedestrian walkways can be deemed safe and accessible.
- Collective cleaning — volunteer programs/challenges to collect garbage regularly.

**Communication**

- Change perceptions of safety and activity through deliberate campaigns.
- Collate and amplify — broadcast downtown events through one stream. Look at supplemental physical wayfinding with technology, like an App.
- Need refined communications from the City letting people knowing about going downtown safely (COVID), promoting permanent locales, like the farmers market.
- Construction sites - aesthetically improve sites while providing information and hype around the improvement area, tell the story about our progressive city.

### **General Comments and Funding**

- Consider the Urban Reserve initiative and how we bring it in and incorporate it.
- We need to be intentional with the funding required to activate this plan identifying what we intend to undertake right now and what is deemed aspirational.
- Short term vs long term makes it hard to commit to investment, no one knows what downtown will look like in two years.
- Receiving calls from private developers/industry to activate their spaces with arts and culture — how can we find the resources to fund this type of work?

### **Return to Work**

- NAIOP is available if there was interest to support a 'big company forum' for 'return to work' (i.e. COE, EPCOR, Stantec, Qualico, etc).
- Big companies are doing employee surveys but none are asking the same questions.
- Introduction of bi-weekly or monthly discussions on different topics (what does return to work look like, flexible work, employee welcome, office changes, etc). NAIOP has a COVID response grant they could potentially use for this.
- Let tenants know about what is going in advance of events and re-openings.
- Once safe to do-so we need a campaign to encourage people to come back.