

EDMONTON NORTHERN PARTNERSHIP

RECOMMENDATION

That the April 13, 2022, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE00735, be received for information.

Report Purpose

Information only.

This report presents a future state approach to the City's participation in the Edmonton Northern Partnership. This work was undertaken in collaboration with partner organizations, and considers the impacts of COVID-19 and alignment to the City's Economic Action Plan and The City Plan.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the July 5, 2021, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration review the current scope of Edmonton Northern Partnership in consultation with partners (Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, Edmonton International Airport, the University of Alberta and Edmonton Global), as well as options to revitalize work related to economic, social, and cultural connections with northern Canada, and report back to Committee. This should also include review of current and future potential alignment to the Edmonton Economic Action Plan, potential future resource requirements, as well as the context of COVID-19 recovery for the Edmonton region and northern communities.

Executive Summary

- Edmonton shares a deep social, economic and cultural connection to Northern Canada.
- Recognizing this connection, the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, Edmonton Global, Edmonton International Airport, the University of Alberta and the City of Edmonton have worked together through the Edmonton Northern Partnership (and previously through the Northern/circumpolar Initiatives Secretariat) to foster and deepen relationships and advance shared agendas between each other and with stakeholders in Northern Canada.

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- First contemplated more than 10 years ago, and having gone through various iterations, today the Edmonton Northern Partnership represents a common and consistent voice with respect to advancing mutually-beneficial connections with Northern Canada.
- There is opportunity in relationships between the Edmonton Northern Partnership members, and with northern and Indigenous stakeholders, in advancing social, economic and cultural connectivity.
- This report summarizes work to date and describes an approach to revitalize the Edmonton Northern Partnership in alignment with the Economic Action Plan and COVID-19 recovery.

REPORT

The Edmonton Northern Partnership represents shared interests of a formalized membership of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, Edmonton Global, Edmonton International Airport, the University of Alberta, and the City of Edmonton to advance social, economic, and cultural connection with Northern Canada. Over time, the Edmonton Northern Partnership has interpreted its geographical interests in different ways, ranging from an early focus that included Northern Alberta, the Yukon and Northwest Territories, to then a broader focus that included the global circumpolar region, and more recently a focus on the Northwest Territories and to a lesser extent the Yukon Territories. Attachment 1 contains an overview of this history.

Historical Context and Current Scope

For the last five years, Edmonton Northern Partnership members have been primarily focused on advancing a common agenda of stronger relationships and connections in Northern Canada, which in the context of this report includes the Northwest and Yukon Territories. Each member has focused on their specific and sector-specific relationships, while also supporting the common brand of the Edmonton Northern Partnership where possible. Specific partner activities have included:

- Attending the annual Opportunities North Conference in Yellowknife twice, Whitehorse once, and supporting the conference in Edmonton twice.
- Organizing a trade mission to Yellowknife and Whitehorse in 2016 that included the Mayor, City Councillors and a number of representatives from the post-secondary and business communities.
- Hosting five government and trade delegations from Yellowknife and Whitehorse in Edmonton.
- Supporting and attending events such as the Banff Forum held in Yellowknife in 2019 and the annual Yellowknife trade show in 2018 and 2019.

The Edmonton Northern Partnership is currently governed through rotating bi-annual chairpersonship, and a Terms of Reference that was agreed to and signed by all partners in 2015. From 2015 to 2017, members each contributed to a budget that totalled \$150,000 in 2015, and \$132,000 each year from 2016-2018. In 2019, the total budget was reduced to \$60,000 and in 2020 a decision was made to pause new contributions while a reserve was depleted. From 2016

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to 2017, a part-time employee was hired by the Edmonton Northern Partnership and managed through the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce and in 2019 a part-time employee was hired by the Edmonton Northern Partnership and managed through Edmonton International Airport. Additionally, Edmonton Global assumed the membership of Edmonton Economic Development Corporation (EEDC) in 2019.

Over the years, the Edmonton Northern Partnership has attempted to grow presence and value in different ways. From 2016-2018, members developed specific sectors of interest and attempted to focus on areas that would grow economic opportunity in these sectors. At other times, focus was on growing relationships and building an Edmonton Northern Partnership brand in Northern Canada.

COVID-19 has had dramatic impacts on the work of Edmonton Northern Partnership members. As a result, activities advanced through Edmonton Northern Partnership since the pandemic began have been minimal. Partners have focused instead on the most immediate needs of their organizations. It is anticipated that as recovery from the pandemic continues, there will be an increased opportunity to advance this work, as identified in the future state section of this report.

For the last three years, the Edmonton Northern Partnership has focused attention on leveraging the shared and consistent Edmonton Northern Partnership brand - a common identity, values and messages. No specific initiatives or projects have been undertaken since before the pandemic.

A key learning of the Edmonton Northern Partnership work to date is that dedicated time and energy is required to advance the work of the partnership in a meaningful and deliberate way. Representatives from each partner organization have limited ability to drive collective Edmonton Northern Partnership outcomes without dedicated resources in place to action specific work on behalf of the partnership.

Future State

In 2021, the Edmonton Northern Partnership members took time to collaboratively review and reflect on the work done to date in considering how to revitalize its future. This includes organization changes members have experienced since Edmonton Northern Partnership was first envisioned, impacts of COVID-19 and potential opportunities in recovery, and alignment with the Edmonton Economic Action Plan which was launched in April 2021.

The Economic Action Plan consists of tangible, specific actions that advance the direction provided in The City Plan and ConnectEdmonton. The Economic Action Plan details priority actions to be carried out by the City and by economic development and community partners. In particular, the Edmonton Northern Partnership can contribute to Action 16 (develop Edmonton's competitive advantage as an international logistics hub and hub to Northern Alberta, the Northwest Territories and beyond) and Action 21 (expand on existing relationships with the City's Indigenous memoranda partners by improving supports for economic development opportunities), which will consider the City's Indigenous Framework.

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The partners have confirmed that the Edmonton Northern Partnership brand is useful in demonstrating Edmonton's collaborative commitment to northern issues, needs and opportunities. For example, this can be demonstrated in the partners' participation in past Opportunities North conferences. With Edmonton Northern Partnership partners already contributing to the Economic Action Plan (the partners are all members of the Action 2 Executive Steering Committee and Working Group), future Edmonton Northern Partnership objectives can contribute to continued Economic Action Plan implementation.

Recognizing the limited progress made without dedicated and sustainable human resources in place to advance the work of Edmonton Northern Partnership, the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of Edmonton Northern Partnership, has applied to Prairies Economic Development Canada for \$250,000 that would go towards building the longer term capacity of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce to be the Edmonton Northern Partnership secretariat, and completing much of the day-to-day work required. Administration is supportive of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce hiring a dedicated permanent full-time employee, to lead and coordinate the work that advances a renewed mandate and formalized work program to be determined by the partners.

Immediate needs include updating and maintaining the Edmonton Northern Partnership website, coordinating partner and stakeholder meetings, and leading the drafting of new Terms of Reference to be developed and agreed to by existing member partners. This approach would see Edmonton Northern Partnership members jointly develop strategic priorities and a corresponding annual work plan that would be executed by the dedicated full time employee at the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce and in collaboration with partners. As part of this work, measurable targets and indicators would be developed and reported on in a manner consistent with the Economic Action Plan.

This approach would eventually require member partners to resume annual contributions (amount to be determined), to fund agreed initiatives within the work plan (this could include regular travel, events, marketing and communications, etc.). Under this enhanced Chamber-led arrangement, the Edmonton Northern Partnership would explore other partnership opportunities, as well as funding sources. It is further anticipated that there could be opportunities to integrate and work with other local and northern-focused entities, including Indigenous communities and organizations.

Budget/Financial Implications

The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of the Edmonton Northern Partnership partners, may request additional financial support from the City and all partners, based on an updated Memorandum of Understanding, new priority identification and associated strategic and operational planning.

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COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Through the Edmonton Northern Partnership members and their associated memberships, insights related to the future state model have been solicited. There is interest from collaborators in Yellowknife and Whitehorse, as well as with other Edmonton-based organizations, to work with the Edmonton Northern Partnership. To minimize expectation setting and given that the future state model has not been confirmed through an updated Terms of Reference, detailed conversations related to next steps have not yet been scheduled. It is anticipated, pending Council agreement, that conversations with community partners and Indigenous communities would take place related to operationalizing the future state.

GBA+

The Edmonton Northern Partnership needs to address barriers to equity and to support equality of outcomes. Edmonton Northern Partnership partners recognize the criticality of this work and are committed to building a strong GBA+ lens into future terms of reference and work plan. This includes how Indigenous communities are being engaged as partners in this work, how owners of businesses and members of organizations in Edmonton and northern Canada who have faced barriers to equity can be supported through this work, and how Edmonton Northern Partnership can serve as a catalyst for deeper awareness and understanding of unique socio-political opportunities and challenges facing northern communities.

ATTACHMENT

1. Edmonton Northern Partnership History