

# DIFFERENT IS GOOD.

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



**EDMONTON  
DOWNTOWN  
BUSINESS  
ASSOCIATION**

The Edmonton Downtown Business Association (EDBA) is an independent body from the City of Edmonton and is responsible for the Edmonton Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA).

As the lead convener, activator, and advocate shaping Downtown Edmonton's future, the EDBA works to support an evolving, inclusive, prosperous, and resilient Downtown economy rooted in a vibrant and remarkable Downtown experience.

## STRATEGIC GOALS

From 2021-2023, the EDBA will focus and prioritize its work based on the following strategic priorities:

### 1 SERVING AS THE LEADING VOICE AND CONVENING FORCE IN DOWNTOWN RECOVERY

### 2 ENSURING THE DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY IS ACTIVE IN SOLUTIONS TO SYSTEMIC SOCIAL ISSUES

### 3 GENERATING CONTINUOUS SERVICE VALUE TO FOR MEMBERS

### 4 CREATING AND PROMOTING A REMARKABLE, ATTRACTIVE DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE

The EDBA respectfully acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, a traditional gathering place for diverse Indigenous peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/ Sauteaux/ Anishinaabe and many others whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

# DOWNTOWN



**The past two years have underlined the value the Edmonton Downtown Business Association brings to its members and to the broader community.**

Downtown Edmonton is the primary commercial hub where investment, entrepreneurial innovation and job creation happens. It is the centre of diverse arts and cultural programming, it's a place where social change and transformation happens, and it's our city's economic engine. What happens here has ripple effects across the entire city. And so in 2021, we took unprecedented steps to aid economic and social recovery in our downtown community.

The significant expansion of the EDBA's events and programs in 2021 showcases the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of our management team, and the vital role that partnerships play in magnifying our impact. We launched Downtown Spark, a new festival aimed at drawing people back downtown, bringing art to public spaces, and supporting job creation. Over the six weeks, 48,000 Edmontonians visited the six installations and activations located across the core.

Through the Holiday Light Up in Churchill Square, the Root 107 pop-up park located at the site of the future Warehouse Park, and Downtown Live we created safe and welcoming community spaces, helped drive foot traffic to downtown businesses, and directly supported the work of nearly 150 artists and not-profits.

These successes were made possible through the support and collaboration of many partners, including the City of Edmonton, Government of Canada, Explore Edmonton and Edmonton Arts Council.

The EDBA continues to focus on creating and promoting a remarkable, attractive downtown experience, and on generating value for our member businesses through our marketing and events programs. We've also broadened our strategic focus to better reflect our vision of an inclusive and vibrant downtown. Today, the EDBA is committed to serving as a leading voice and convening force in Downtown recovery, and to ensuring that the downtown

community is active in solutions to systemic social issues.

Within our own sphere of influence, the Association made and kept measurable commitments to the advancement of diversity, equity and inclusion, through two BIPOC mentorship programs and increased investment in Boyle Street Community Services and its social enterprise venture.

In our strategic vision, we are well aligned with the Edmonton Action Plan and the Downtown Vibrancy Strategy - initiatives that are focused on accelerating recovery in the downtown community, and building a solid foundation for a healthy future. At the same time, the pandemic spotlighted and exacerbated many serious issues in our community. We continue to be concerned that the increase in safety and security incidents reported by businesses, workers and residents risks undoing the progress made over the last decade to revitalize downtown.

These challenges require both immediate action, and investment in long-term solutions. Creating a safe and inclusive community for all requires that every partner to be at the table, working together. At the EDBA, we are committed to doing our part.

While the challenges are real, our enthusiasm for build a thriving, equitable, inclusive and vibrant downtown is undiminished. The Board is focused on driving the execution of our strategic plan, and grateful for the ongoing support of our member businesses and the City of Edmonton.

The achievements documented in this annual report would not have been possible without the dedicated work of our remarkable EDBA staff team - and in particular, the work of Puneeta, Mary and Tracy throughout 2021. It's thanks to their creativity and effort that we were able to do so much to support the success of downtown in 2021.

Martin Kennedy  
Chair  
Downtown Business Association





MESSAGE  
FROM THE  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR

# DOWNTOWN



**While 2021 was another incredibly challenging year for our Downtown Edmonton community, it was also a year of inspiring innovation, resilience, and opportunity.** It has been an absolute honour for all of us on the Edmonton Downtown Business Association team to serve this community through these unprecedented times.

All of Edmonton relies on our downtown to attract economic investment, talent, tourism, and to ultimately function as the heart of our regional prosperity and the soul of our city's culture. As the lead convener, activator, and advocate shaping Downtown Edmonton's future, the work that the EDBA is doing today will impact our city for years to come, and the stakes are perhaps higher than they've ever been. To guide this work, we developed a new two-year strategic plan in 2021, anchored by four strategic priorities: [1] Serving as the leading voice & convening force in Downtown recovery; [2] Ensuring the Downtown community is active in solutions to systemic social issues; [3] Generating continuous service value for members; and [4] Creating and promoting a remarkable, attractive Downtown experience.

From the essential services we deliver for our members like our Downtown Proud litter reduction program, to the unconventional and innovative new initiatives we took on like our Root 107 pop-up park, the EDBA team left no stone unturned in our mission to enable the successful recovery of Downtown. We

created a new position on our team to allow us to better lead, support and attract events & festivals, and we added over 90% to our 2021 operating budget through federal and municipal grant funding - allowing us to double our impact and service value for Downtown businesses. We built strong and productive relationships with all three levels of government, positioned Downtown issues at the centre of the public conversation through the 2021 Municipal election, and made meaningful progress on matters of community safety and social justice with our partners in law enforcement and social agencies. In a year of so many ups and downs - we led and supported some incredibly powerful work.

It was a year that almost broke us. But it didn't - it made us closer, stronger, and more fired up than ever. Thanks to the tireless work of our partners at the City of Edmonton, the tenacity of our business community, and the support and commitment of our many other partners, we've laid the foundation for a powerful resurgence of Downtown Edmonton in 2022, and we can't wait for you all to feel it.

Thank you for being a part of this community. We'll see you downtown!

**Puneeta McBryan**  
Executive Director

Edmonton Downtown Business Association

# DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY





# THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR



### LAUNCHED A DOWNTOWN PLACE BRAND

It's hard to believe that prior to 2021, there has never been a place brand for Edmonton Downtown. For far too long, Downtown's image, reputation and stories were being told by others. The EDBA had its own brand as an organization, but no single organization was charged with telling the story of this place - "what is Edmonton Downtown and what happens here?" Throw in a pandemic and, well, the timing was right to launch an Edmonton Downtown brand that could drive Downtown recovery. After five-months and in-depth interviews with 70+ people from across Downtown and the Edmonton region, including partners, business members and residents, the Downtown place brand was completed in the fall of 2021. Our brand promise "Different is Good" is an authentic reflection of what the Downtown experience is and what to expect if you live, work or play here.

### PUT DOWNTOWN AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE ELECTION CONVERSATION

Edmonton chose a new mayor in 2021 and Downtown recovery was a much-debated topic of the mayoral race. The top six candidates were invited to share their vision and plan for Downtown recovery at an EDBA-hosted mayoral forum at Rogers Place in September. More than 1,900 people watched the debate in-person and online as the candidates answered questions about community safety, public asset maintenance, minimizing construction impacts and responsiveness of city services for the business community.

### LED DOWNTOWN WALKABOUTS

Throughout 2021, the EDBA hosted a series of Downtown Walkabouts in partnership with Edmonton's City Manager, Andre Corbould, and Downtown business owners. These tours were a critical part of allowing our members to identify success and challenges of operating their businesses, and improve services provided by the City and the EDBA.

### PARTNERED ON THE DOWNTOWN VIBRANCY STRATEGY

In partnership with the EDBA and other stakeholders from across the Downtown ecosystem, the City of Edmonton developed a Downtown Vibrancy Strategy to support the recovery and resurgence of Downtown. Launched in May 2021, the strategy is deploying \$5 million to partner-led projects over two years, and the EDBA is a member of the Core Partners Committee that is stewarding the funding.

### ENGAGED ON A NATIONAL STAGE

Participating in speaking engagements was integral to building relationships with diverse organizations and stakeholders, and raising awareness about Downtown Edmonton's specific challenges. The Association represented Downtown Edmonton on several national and international panels hosted by organizations such as the International Downtown Association and the Canadian Urban Institute. In May, Executive Director Puneeta McBryan, was selected by the International Downtown Association for its 2021 Emerging Leader Fellowship program, recognizing her as one North America's brightest placemaking professionals.

### WORKED WITH THE DOWNTOWN RECOVERY TASK FORCE

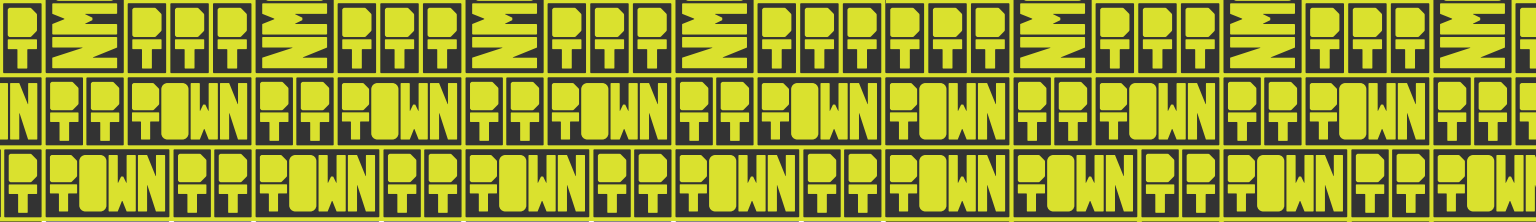
In the summer of 2020, members of the EDBA formed the Downtown Recovery Task Force, a collective of Downtown community and business leaders working together on important issues affecting Downtown, with active participation from our Executive Director. The Task Force meets monthly and enables key Downtown organizations to consistently share information and updates with each other on matters of economic development, community safety, and arts and culture. Throughout the year, the group hosts guests such as the Mayor, City Manager, and the Chief of Police to ensure the Downtown community's goals and priorities are aligned with, and well-understood by decision-makers and to identify opportunities for collaboration and collective advocacy. The Task Force includes representation from post-secondary institutions, major real estate developers, large employers, and the nonprofit sector.



EDB  
FOR  
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# CLOSING THE GAP

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

### COMMUNITY OUTREACH SUPPORT

In 2021, the Downtown Business Association continued its support of a #YEGAmbassador Community Safety Outreach Prototype launched in 2020 by the EDBA, North Edge Business Association, Boyle Street Community Services, REACH and the City's Neighbourhood Empowerment Team. The prototype had an Outreach Team comprised of an outreach worker and peer support worker that interacted with community members and businesses.

The aim of the program was for the Outreach Team to build relationships with community and business members and intervene in social disorder to prevent victimization of vulnerable community members. From May to July, the Outreach Team had 207 interactions with businesses with 44% of them being within the borders of Downtown. The most common type of interaction from Jasper Avenue businesses

resulted from caring and checking on someone's well-being.

Many important lessons were learned through the prototype about the complex needs of community members and businesses in our downtown during the pandemic, and about many of the gaps that it exposed in the supports and services that community members rely on.

We also learned that businesses need consistent, uninterrupted, coordinated help to manage priority issues related to their lack of perceived safety and drug related activity that create fear for staff and customers. Establishing these relationships requires time and continuity. A difficult learning was that the safety priorities of businesses often do not align with the role or scope of a traditional outreach model. Directly addressing businesses urgent priorities requires involvement from other systems, specifically enforcement and mental health.





# DOWNTOWN

## **BREAKING CYCLES. SUPPORTING PATHWAYS OUT OF POVERTY**

While the social and economic challenges facing Edmonton's core neighbourhoods have been challenging during the pandemic, it has created welcome opportunities to provide more support to social agencies that serve Downtown's vulnerable populations. Boyle Street Ventures is the social enterprise arm of Boyle Street Ventures (hiregood), offering meaningful employment opportunities and a living wage for their clients and community members who otherwise face barriers to joining the workforce. During 2021, the Association increased its annual investment to Downtown Proud, the street cleanup program operated by hiregood. Downtown cleanup routes were expanded, along with the number of days per week. Thanks to COVID-recovery grants, the Association was also able to employ hiregood throughout the year to provide security and washroom attendant services for several public events across Downtown, including Root 107 and our expanded Holiday Light Up.

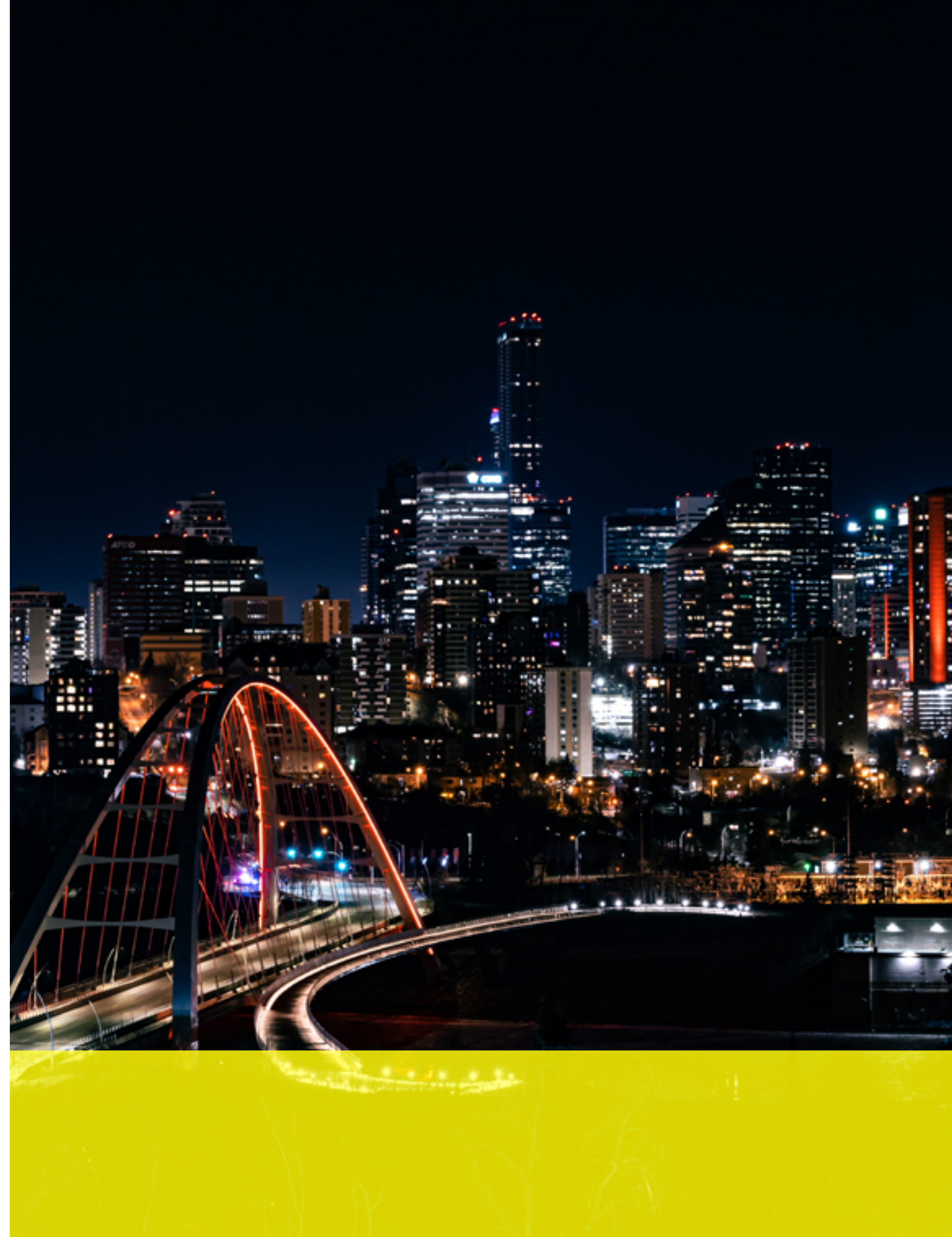
## **LAUNCHED A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM**

In the fall of 2021, the EBDA and MacEwan University partnered to launch The BIPOC Mentorship Program. This program focused on the experiences of Black,

Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) business professionals and students as they navigated their careers. Thirteen post-secondary students applied to be paired with 11 mentors from different Downtown businesses. Pairings were encouraged to meet for a minimum of two hours per month and three facilitated group sessions were held over the course of the seven-month program. Participants built skills, networked and formed community support for the purpose of growing inclusive and intercultural awareness. This collaborative process allowed participants to create their own definition of success while challenging systemic barriers.

## **ADVOCATED FOR AND SUPPORTED PUBLIC WASHROOMS**

Over the course of the pandemic, lack of access to public washrooms was exacerbated, as public facilities and businesses closed their doors. The Association became one of the leading advocates for a long-term public washroom strategy and spoke to City Council twice on the topic. To help alleviate the immediate pressure for a solution, the Association provided funding for the Summer Mobile Washroom Pilot, which saw three porta-potty locations in operation from May to October at several Downtown locations.





# A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR



## MET DOWNTOWN'S NEED FOR OUTDOOR COMMUNITY SPACE

Root 107 was a safe, welcoming and inclusive public amenity space for the Downtown community and the surrounding areas during the second challenging spring and summer of COVID-19. Located on 107 Street at the side of the future home of the Warehouse Park, Root 107 featured sustainable and upcycled physical infrastructure elements like modular seating, trees and shrubs in crates, picnic tables, lighting, a stage, public washrooms, and public art. Several days a week the pop-up park hosted arts programming in partnership with local artists and festivals. Commerce opportunities in the form of food trucks, new takeout traffic for nearby restaurants and pop-up retail, supported local businesses. From May to September, Root 107 welcomed 10,500 visitors, hosted 231 artists and was a safe outdoor venue for 13 Edmonton festivals.



## EXPANDED HOLIDAY PROGRAMMING

Downtown Light Up activities on the Square were expanded again for a second year. In addition to the tree, Churchill Square was activated for three weekends over six weeks with programming partners, including Edmonton Arts Council, The Flying Canoe Festival and the Art Gallery of Alberta, The Works Art + Design Festival, The Citadel Theatre, Edmonton Short Film Festival, Kepler Academy, City of Edmonton, Explore Edmonton, and Boyle Street Community Ventures. Two art installations by Indigenous artists were also added to the Square - 'Buffalo Sage' by mixed-media artist Rebecca Pickard and 'Winter Solstice' by Jason Carter.



## CONTINUED SUPPORTING ARTISTS + LIVE MUSIC THROUGH DOWNTOWN LIVE

To support the arts and cultural industries crippled by COVID restrictions, EDBA brought back Downtown Live for a second year. The summer-long series of micro-gigs and performances took place primarily on Downtown patios, encouraging people to return to restaurants and bars. Downtown Live was supported in part by EPCOR's Heart and Soul Fund which was created to provide financial support for arts organizations, festivals and attractions to develop new and creative ways to deliver community-based programming.





### LAUNCHED DOWNTOWN SPARK

In partnership with the City of Edmonton, Explore Edmonton, and the Edmonton Arts Council, the Association launched the six-week long Downtown Spark, a COVID recovery initiative aimed at drawing people back Downtown, bringing art to public spaces and supporting job creation. wāpos by Indigenous artist Jason Carter and storyteller Bridget Ryan was the first Downtown Spark installation. In 10 days during COVID restrictions, 4,600 attendees toured the exhibition located in Beaver Hills House Park. Over six weeks, 48,000 Edmontonians visited the six installations and activations located across the core. Funding for this new festival was through Prairies Economic Development Canada (PrairiesCan) and delivered via the City of Edmonton.

### INCREASED INVESTMENT IN DOWNTOWN CLEANLINESS

The Association continued its work with the City of Edmonton and other Downtown and area stakeholders to address litter and needle pickup in the core. A significantly increased investment went to Downtown Proud, a Boyle Street Ventures social enterprise initiative that provides work to members of the Boyle community, to clean up the streets. In 2021, Downtown Proud picked up 996 bags of garbage and 1,102 needles from Downtown streets.

### DINE OUT TO HELP OUT

In April 2021, Downtown's hospitality industry was faced with a devastating blow when the Province shut down in-person dining and outdoor dining in an effort to reduce Alberta's growing COVID cases. The announcement came days before Downtown Dining Week was to be launched and immense spotlight on the 52 participating restaurants and the annual program, turned out to be a win. Edmontonians overwhelmingly supported Downtown eateries and the program pulled in \$150,000 in reported sales revenues. As an added boost during Downtown Spark, the Association was given permission by AHS to close down 104 Street for street activations which brought even more business to surrounding Dining Week restaurants.



### SUPPORTED AND ENABLED MORE DOWNTOWN EVENTS THAN EVER

Through our revised Downtown Edmonton Festivals and Small Events Grant, the Association was able to financially support 10 large-scale festivals and 17 smaller events, including Al Fresco on 104, and Black Owned Market Edmonton.

### WORKED WITH THE CITY ON THE EXTENDED PATIO PROGRAM

Edmonton's extended patio program was first launched by the City in 2020 to help Downtown businesses create extra space needed for physical distancing. Again in 2021, the EDDBA

Espoke to the City's senior planners in support of the program, indicating how extended patios can generate more revenue and enliven public spaces. In 2021, an additional 22 cafes, bars and restaurants were able to operate outdoor spaces in the Downtown core under the new patio rules.

### BROUGHT BEAUTIFICATION TO OUR STREETS

The EDDBA plans, funds, and manages Blooming Boulevards, Downtown's summer beautification program. May through to September, our investment sees 146 planters and hanging baskets placed on Downtown sidewalks and also watered and maintained by the EDDBA.



# 2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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# 2021

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Communications  
Manager

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University of Alberta

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**Richard Thorley**  
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**Pam Brown**  
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**Staff Sgt. Shawn Bulas**  
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Aspen Properties

**Andrew Jabs**  
Capital City Clean-Up

**Amos Kajner-Nonnekes**  
Design Group

**Sheldon Magnes**  
Imperial Parking

**Nicole Nunes**  
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**Jaya Panwar**  
TELUS Communications

**Jodi Phelan**  
Boyle Street Community  
Ventures

**James Robinson**  
City of Edmonton

**Kevin Thomas**  
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