

Edmonton Research Park What We Heard Report Phase 1

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Public Engagement Summary and Results

Project Overview

Background Information

The Edmonton Research Park (the Research Park) was approved by City Council in 1982. The Edmonton Research Park Authority (Park Authority) was created to develop, market and manage research parks in Edmonton and to engage in activities intended to promote research and advanced technology enterprise in Edmonton.

In 1996 Edmonton City Council appointed the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation as Park Authority to manage and operate the Research Park. In December 2020, the City of Edmonton assumed the role of the Park Authority.

A restrictive covenant is registered against each property located within the Research Park. The covenant sets out development standards and design guidelines to guide land development with the aim of achieving Council's vision for the Research Park. The general purpose of Research Park restrictive covenant is:

- To engage in activities intended to promote research and advance technology enterprise in the City.
- Provisions are similar to or more restrictive than the Industrial Business zone.
- Development is focused on research initiatives, advanced technology and related light manufacturing.

Project Overview

On March 23, 2022, the Executive Committee of City Council passed a motion that directs City Administration to “engage businesses in the Edmonton Research Park and City-funded economic development partners to provide options and actions to advance economic development opportunities including, but not limited to, life sciences, research and development in the Edmonton Research Park in alignment with the principles in the Economic Action Plan and return to the committee.”

Over the years, the Research Park has contributed to advanced research in medicine, biotechnology, software, engineering, nanotechnology, business incubation and clean energy.

The objectives of this engagement are to:

- Identify options and actions the City, businesses operating in the park and/or economic development partners could take to advance economic and research outcomes of the Research Park.
- Ensure the Research Park is a diverse, inclusive and equitable place to do business.

The engagement project is broken into three phases. During phase one of engagement, stakeholders were invited to share their feedback and perspectives on the current economic and research outputs, awareness of the park's purpose, options and actions to advance economic development opportunities and diversity and equity within the Research Park community. This What We Heard Report covers the phase one survey responses.

Phase 1 Survey Response Rate:

82%

What We Heard

The feedback we received through our phase one survey, from 46 of the 56 identified stakeholders operating within the Research Park (land owners, business tenants and land lease holders), generally fell into one of the following themes:

On **Research** We Heard:

- 83 percent of the survey respondents are currently conducting research within the Edmonton Research Park. Those who indicated they are not include property owners who primarily hold and lease land within the park and support businesses who provide services such as manufacturing or real estate.
- The most common research focuses reported were life sciences, health care, manufacturing and renewable energy.
- 57 percent of respondents are collaborating with post secondary associations around the globe. Nearly all of the respondents who collaborate with post-secondaries indicated they are collaborating with University of Alberta. Other local post-secondaries the stakeholders are collaborating with include King's University, MacEwan University, NAIT and Norquest.
- The work of current businesses in the Edmonton Research Park has led to at least 108 patents.

The restrictive covenant identifies three development areas (Research, Complementary and Core) with differing permitted and discretionary uses assigned to each area:

1. *Research Requirement Areas - Must exceed 15 percent of R&D on premises in relation to total business activity.*
2. *Research Complimentary Areas - Light industrial and industrial activities which support development in the Research Requirement Areas. Do not require a research component on premises.*
3. *Core Areas - Common services and facilities for all park users such as conference or education facilities, banks or trusts, professional services, restaurants, etc.*

On **Logistics** We Heard:

- Access to specialized lab space, an easy commute, free parking, close proximity to highways and the airport and rental rates are reasons why some businesses choose to locate in the Research Park.
- Better transportation or bus service could be beneficial to increasing accessibility in the park.
- Suggested incentives to attract new businesses and development to the park could include lowering property taxes or providing grants for innovation.
- The restrictive covenant could be reviewed to determine if revisions are possible and if they may advance economic development opportunities.

On **Community** We Heard:

- Close proximity and access to like-minded entrepreneurs and Innovate Alberta (located within the research park) was a contributor for some business to locate in the Research Park.
- There is an opportunity for more collaborative events and networking opportunities for businesses within the Research Park.
- Identifying a common shared use space would be beneficial for collaboration and relationship building.
- Allowing more businesses that provide professional or auxiliary services (e.g. services from patent lawyers to restaurants) to locate within the Research Park would create a more vibrant business community.

On **Equity** We Heard:

- Raising awareness of the Research Park amongst diverse groups of people could increase the diversity of business ownership at Research Park. Stakeholders suggested this could be accomplished by the City attending events organized by cultural organizations to publicize what the Research Park has to offer.
- 76 percent of respondents said they felt people of all cultures and backgrounds could succeed at the park and valued at Research Park (indicated they agree or strongly agree with these statements).
- Stakeholder demographics:
 - 65 percent of respondents identified as men and 13 percent identified as women.
 - 24 percent of respondents are aged 25 - 44 years old and 46 percent are 45 years or older.
 - No respondents identified as people with disabilities.

- 85 percent of respondents have lived in Canada for greater than five years.
- Note - not all respondents provided answers to these questions.

Summary of Options and Actions to Advance Economic Development Opportunities

Below is a summary of the options and actions to advance economic development opportunities as suggested by Research Park stakeholders in phase one. These are organized according to the City Plan's four levers of change, which indicate the City's sphere of influence and what the Research Park stakeholders could influence.

Policy

- Consider revisions/updates to the restrictive covenant that advance economic development opportunities.
- Clearly communicate the vision for the Research Park.

Advocacy and Partnerships

- Improve the understanding of barriers to access to the Research Park from those not currently operating within it.
- Improve the awareness and understanding of the restrictive covenant and what the Park Authority is responsible for.
- Increase the awareness of the Research Park with more diverse groups of people and entrepreneurs.

Pricing and Subsidies

- Lowering property taxes to incentivize Edmonton businesses to locate within the park.
- Offer grants or other business support programs specific to the Edmonton Research Park.

Infrastructure Investment

- None identified

Research Park Stakeholder Influence

- Creating events and networking opportunities for businesses within the park.

The restrictive covenant governs:

- *Business activities in the park.*
- *Research activity requirements.*
- *Design standards for development.*

What We Did

Administration sought to establish communication with all business owners, land owners and stakeholders located within the Research Park. An online survey was created to collect feedback on the current status of the park and to generate an initial list of options and actions to advance economic development and research opportunities in the Research Park.

Administration undertook several communications activities to ensure adequate survey participation and awareness of the engagement project:

- **Mail-out:** Letters were sent to each property and business providing information on the public engagement opportunity, in addition to a request to identify a point of contact for engagement.
- **Phone calls:** Following the mail-out, all stakeholders were individually contacted to identify the best point of contact for the survey from each individual business.
- **Engaged Edmonton Project Page:** All information is housed on the Engaged Edmonton website under the vanity URL engaged.edmonton.ca/erp. This webpage includes background information for the engagement, the engagement timeline, a link to the survey, contact information for the project team, as well as key messages regarding the engagement.
- **Street Signs:** Large street signs were posted at two entrances to the Research Park, calling attention to the survey, its deadline and the Engaged Edmonton website and project team.
- **Posters:** Posters with details of the survey, survey deadline, contact information and a QR code to access the survey were posted in the RC1, ATC and BBDC buildings in the Edmonton Research Park.
- **Survey:** A survey link was emailed to all key points of contact gathered through the mail-outs and phone calls.
- **Tenant Updates:** Tenants in City-owned properties were advised by email of the survey opportunity prior to the survey opening and again prior to the survey closing.

Public Engagement Approach

How We Engaged

Research Park property owners and tenants were specifically targeted during phase one of engagement to gain their insight on the current state of the park and tenants/owners' experiences. This included gaining more understanding about if the Edmonton Research Park is a diverse, inclusive and equitable place to do business.

Administration also looked to understand tenant/owner identified opportunities or barriers in the Research Park to determine solutions for better alignment with the City's innovation goals, as described in the Economic Action Plan.

The role of the stakeholders in phase one was to advise. The stakeholders were invited to share their feedback and perspective on the current economic development and research outputs, awareness of the park's purpose, current involvement of our economic development partners in the park and diversity within the Research Park via a survey hosted on Engaged Edmonton.

Feedback from all three phases of the project will be delivered back to Edmonton City Council on November 30, 2022 as a list of options and actions the City or Research Park businesses could take to advance economic development and research outcomes of the Research Park.

The total number of survey participants in phase one of engagement was 46 of a potential 56 identified stakeholders.

Who Was Engaged

Phase one engagement included engagement of property owners, business tenants and land lease holders within the Research Park.

What We Asked

Phase one included the following survey questions.

Section 1: Economic Impacts of the Edmonton Research Park

- Including yourself, how many of your company's employees work at the Edmonton Research Park?
- What industry/industries are you involved in?
- What does your business do in the Edmonton Research Park?
- Are you currently conducting research within the Edmonton Research Park? If yes, please indicate the research focus.
- Does your research include collaborations with any post secondary institutions?
- Has your research resulted in any patents being secured?
- Are you open to providing the City with a brief summary of your research activities on an annual basis? This information will be used to communicate successes of the Park to the City Council, and may be used as a tool to attract investment and talent to Edmonton.
- In Canadian Dollars, what was the annual revenue of your business activities within the park in 2021?
- There can be many reasons why companies choose to locate their businesses in certain areas, such as business opportunity, rental rates, business support programming and vicinity to other similar businesses. Why did you choose to locate your business in the Edmonton Research Park?
- Using a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), please answer the following questions about the Edmonton Research Park (ERP).
 - The ERP is a hub for research and development in the City of Edmonton.
 - The ERP has helped my company grow.
 - The ERP attracts new jobs to the City of Edmonton.
 - There is a strong sense of community within the ERP.
 - I would recommend the ERP to other business owners.
 - The restrictive covenant sets a clear vision for the future.
- Do you have any suggestions on actions or options that can be taken in order to advance economic opportunities in the Edmonton Research Park?

- Do you have any other comments you would like to add in regard to your experience as an owner or tenant in the Edmonton Research Park?

Section 2: Contact Information

- In order to provide a thorough report back to City Council on the options and action to advance economic development opportunities in the research park, Administration will be conducting engagement activities with businesses in the park from now through to September 2022. Would you be interested in staying informed and engaged through the process? This may include engagement activities like workshops or one-on-one interviews.
- Please identify who is the best point(s) of contact for future engagement communications.
- What best describes you?
 - Owners of property in the research park
 - Tenant in one of the buildings
 - Land lease holder
 - Other
- Which buildings do you own / operate out of?

Section 3: Equality and Inclusion in the Edmonton Research Park

- Using a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), please answer the following questions.
 - People from all cultures and backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed at the Research Park.
 - People of all cultures and backgrounds are respected and valued at the Research Park.
 - I feel that my unique attributes, characteristics, skills, experience and background are valued at the Research Park.
 - I have felt pressure to hide or change things about myself in order to fit in at the Research Park.
- Do you agree or disagree with the following statement (5 point scale) I have faced obstacles that are not experienced by others due to my race, religion, gender or sexual orientation at the Research Park.
 - If you agree, what is the reason for your rating?
 - Are there any measures that the City of Edmonton could take to encourage greater equity for all business owners in the Edmonton Research Park?

Section 4: Demographics of the Edmonton Research Park

- What is your gender?
- What is your age group?
- Are you a member of a racialized group, previously referred to as a visible minority?
- What language do you speak at home?
- Are you a person with a disability?
- If you are a person with a disability, if you are comfortable sharing, please tell us the nature of your disability.
- What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- How long have you lived in Canada?

What Happens Next?

Insights gathered from phase one of the Edmonton Research Park engagement will be used to:

- inform the creation of phase two and phase three of engagement;
- inform the GBA+ portion of Administration's report on the Research Park to Council;
- inform how we may communicate economic development outputs of the park; and,
- help identify options and actions the City, its partners or Research Park businesses could take to advance economic development and research outcomes of the Research Park.

City of Edmonton's Administration is currently seeking external consultants to design phase two and three of the Edmonton Research Park engagement. A summary of the engagement findings along with a list of recommended options and actions will be brought to Edmonton City Council on November 30, 2022.

Expected timeline for engagement is as follows:Phase two: July 4 - August 19, 2022

- Compile options and actions that could advance economic development opportunities of Research Park.
- Identify social inequalities that may exist and develop equity measures to address them.

Phase three: August 22 - September 30, 2022

- Gather final input to tweak the options and actions developed from what we heard in phases one and two.
- This phase enables all stakeholders to review and provide feedback, finalize or add missing options/actions to the fulsome list generated in phases one and two.

You can keep up to date on the Edmonton Research Park engagement project by going to engaged.edmonton.ca/erp. Alternatively, you can email nolan.carter@edmonton.ca or alexandra.carson@edmonton.ca for more information.