

Edmonton Research Park What We Heard Report Phase 2

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Public Engagement Summary and Results	
a. Project Overview	PG 3
b. What We Heard	PG 3
c. What We Did	PG 8
2. Public Engagement Approach	
a. How We Engaged	PG 9
b. Who Was Engaged	PG 10
c. What We Asked	PG 10
3. What Happens Next?	PG 11

Public Engagement Summary and Results

Project Overview

Project Overview

On March 23, 2022, the Executive Committee of Edmonton's City Council passed a motion that directed City Administration to "engage businesses in the Edmonton Research Park (ERP) 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 ERP in alignment with the principles in the Economic Action Plan and return to the committee."

The objectives of this engagement are to:

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

The engagement process is broken into three phases. Phase two of engagement included one-on-one interviews with stakeholders and the project team to share feedback and perspectives on options and actions to advance economic development opportunities and diversity and equity within the ERP community.

This What We Heard Report covers the phase two interview responses and includes options and actions gleaned in phase one ([See the Phase One What We Heard report](#)).

What We Heard

Phase two consisted of 27 one-on-one interviews with stakeholders operating within the ERP (landowners, business tenants and land lease holders). The following is a summary of what we heard and are organized in accordance with the four levers of change outlined in [The City Plan](#). The suggested actions under each lever of change were suggested by ERP stakeholders and have not been analyzed or recommended by City Administration.

Over the years, companies and organizations operating in the Edmonton Research Park have contributed to advanced research in medicine, biotechnology, software, engineering, nanotechnology, business incubation and clean energy.

Phase Two # of Interviews
Conducted:

27

Advocacy & Partnership

Awareness Building: We heard from many Edmonton Research Park (ERP) stakeholders on the need for the City of Edmonton to better communicate the ERP externally as an economic engine, as there is a perceived lack of awareness both locally and internationally.

Suggested Action:

- Create a communication strategy that raises the profile of the Edmonton Research Park locally and globally. The strategy could leverage the City's Place Brand strategy by profiling entrepreneurs in the ERP and could support investment attraction by advertising the strengths and investment opportunities of the ERP.

Community Development: Stakeholders noted there is an opportunity to grow and strengthen the community and culture in the ERP by reducing the vacancy rate in ERP buildings and increasing networking opportunities between tenants.

Suggested Actions:

- Create a banquet or event room/space at the ERP for stakeholders to use for events and networking sessions to create a meeting place for life sciences and tech in the City.
- Create events and networking opportunities for businesses within the ERP to support community development and innovation.
- Create opportunities for economic development organizations to have an onsite presence in the ERP to provide services directly to businesses.
- Invest in outdoor amenities such as gathering spaces.

Improve Equity in the ERP: Stakeholders feel the ERP is very culturally diverse but lacks gender diversity as very few women work within the ERP.

Suggested Actions:

- Establish an equity, diversity and inclusion committee which could help to improve the understanding of equity in the ERP, receive

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 per cent of R&D on premises in relation to total business activity.*
2. *Research Complementary 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.*

concerns related to inclusion in the ERP and advise on the vision, strategy and program development in the ERP.

- Increase awareness of the ERP with more diverse groups of people, specifically women, by engaging with economic development organizations or industry groups who work with entrepreneurs from equity deserving groups.

Improve Edmonton Research Park (ERP) Governance: The ERP could benefit from an operating partner whose role is understood by stakeholders and who works to maintain the vision for the ERP.

Suggested Action:

- Designate an ERP steward who expands programs and supports in the ERP and is guided by a multi-stakeholder advisory group. The advisory group should include members of post-secondaries, ERP stakeholders and economic development organizations.

Unlock undeveloped land for development: One major restriction in the ERP is the lack of developable space. Unlocking undeveloped land on the south side of the ERP would create more opportunities for economic development.

Suggested Action:

- Work with landowners to create more opportunities for development on the land they own, in alignment with the ERP's vision.

Infrastructure

Improve Transportation: The relationship between the University of Alberta and ERP is instrumental in the development of new ideas and developing personnel. Many startups in the ERP frequently travel to the U of A to access equipment that is not currently available in the ERP.

Suggested Action:

- Create a transit route between the University of Alberta and the ERP.

Infrastructure Investment: Several stakeholders highlighted the declining physical shape of buildings, dated signage and damaged sidewalks. They suggested these are signs the ERP is being neglected. The look and feel of the ERP should reflect its innovative community and should differentiate it from

a typical industrial area. Outdoor amenities and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure will support community development and the marketing of the ERP.

Suggested Action:

- Invest in physical assets of the Edmonton Research Park (ERP) such as walking paths, bike paths, roads, signage, landscaping and outdoor amenities such as gathering spaces and natural areas.

Policy

Establish an Updated ERP Vision: Stakeholders felt that the initial vision of the Edmonton Research Park has been lost, and those operating out of the ERP feel abandoned as they perceive that the City is focusing only on businesses in the downtown core.

Suggested Action:

- Re-evaluate and clearly communicate the vision for the ERP.

Restrictive Covenant: Opinions regarding the restrictive covenant were mixed. Some stakeholders suggested the restrictive covenant is essential for supporting the original vision of the ERP while others suggested it is too restrictive and is hampering development. Stakeholders identified multiple paths forward, which include keeping, updating or removing the restrictive covenant.

Phase two interviews also identified an opportunity to educate stakeholders on the restrictive covenant as the stakeholders are not interpreting it consistently and awareness of the regulation is relatively low.

Suggested Actions:

- Keep the restrictive covenant and create a communications plan to ensure stakeholders and prospective investors clearly understand its regulations and how they are enforced. Specifically, the City needs to clarify:
 - what is meant by the 15 per cent research requirement and how it is validated,
 - what happens if a company stops doing research and moves into product commercialization or manufacturing, and

- the role of the Park Authority.
- Keep the restrictive covenant and enhance the enforcement of the regulations.
- Don't take any further action and keep the restrictive covenant as is. This is essential for supporting the original vision of the area as a research park.
- Update restrictive covenant to increase the developable land within the ERP. Some key considerations include reducing the building setbacks and enabling higher-density development. These changes would support more businesses in the ERP and would provide for sufficient manufacturing space.
- Other options to update the restrictive covenant include:
 - Reducing the ambiguity of the language so it is more investment friendly. Property owners noted the current document provides too much ambiguity and this impacts their ability to attract tenants or secure financing.
 - Promote unique or innovative building designs to make the ERP more of a destination.
 - Revisit the language around research so it more closely aligns with innovation. This would then capture practical research that is product or service oriented, scientific research, market research and innovative product design.
 - Increase the research requirement from 15 to 50 per cent.
- Remove the restrictive covenant and ensure the area is zoned to achieve the highest and best land use.
- Remove the restrictive covenant and replace it with incentives that attract businesses and entrepreneurs to the ERP in alignment with the ERP's vision. Incentives could include reduced property taxes, reduced rents, deferred tax payments, grants, business support programs, etc.

Pricing & Subsidies

Incentivise Business Development: Accessing affordable, flexible space for startups, life-science and tech companies is crucial for economic development. Many companies in the Edmonton Research Park are stretched for capital and would benefit by subsidized lab space. This is especially true

for life-science companies who may not generate revenue for 10 to 20 years after starting research.

Suggested Action:

- The City (or a park steward) should incentivise business development in the ERP by:
 - Lowering property taxes in the ERP,
 - Offering grants to attract Research and Development (R&D) businesses to the ERP,
 - Offering business support programs to attract R&D businesses to the ERP,
 - Increasing the inventory of wet lab space in the ERP,
 - Attracting food and beverage vendors to the ERP; and/or,
 - Creating affordable, flexible space for startups and life-science companies.

What We Did

Phase two of engagement consisted of 27 one-on-one interviews with property owners, business tenants, land lease holders and stakeholders in the Edmonton Research Park. Interviews were conducted with the intention of compiling a list of options and actions that could advance economic development opportunities in alignment with the City's Economic Action plan along with identifying social inequalities that may exist and potential equity measures to address them.

In phase one of engagement, an online survey was conducted that identified stakeholders in the Edmonton Research Park who were interested in providing further feedback to the project team. In addition to contacting interested stakeholders, the following communications activities were conducted to recruit interviewees:

- **Emails:** An interview sign-up link was emailed to all key points of contact gathered through the phase one engagement.
- **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

sign up for an interview, 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 ERP, calling attention to the Engaged Edmonton website and project team.
- **Posters:** Posters highlighting the engagement, including a QR code to sign up for interviews, were posted in the RC1, ATC and BBDC buildings in the Edmonton Research Park.

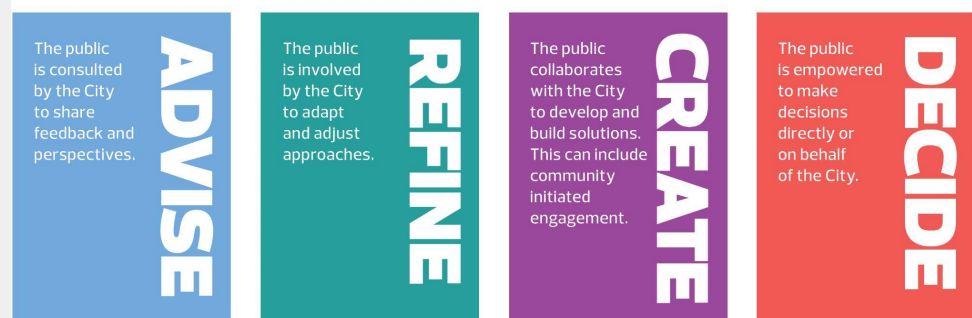
Public Engagement Approach

How We Engaged

Virtual one-on-one interviews were facilitated through Google Meets from July 18 to August 31, 2022. Each interview was conducted by a City of Edmonton facilitator.

Notes taken during the interview were either shared on the virtual screen throughout the meeting or after the meeting to ensure full transparency.

The level of influence for this project was at the ADVISE level of the City's [Public Engagement Spectrum](#).



Interviews focused on gathering feedback about:

- Proposed options and actions to advance economic development opportunities in the Edmonton Research Park and how these could be implemented in alignment with the Economic Action plan;
- Stakeholders' experience with the ERP as it relates to diversity, equality and inclusion along with suggestions for how this could be improved; and,

- Insights into the lived experiences of business owners operating within the ERP.

Feedback from all three phases of the project will be delivered back to Edmonton City Council in early 2023 as a list of options and actions the City or ERP businesses could take to advance economic development and research outcomes of the ERP.

A total of 27 stakeholders participated in interviews for phase two of engagement.

Who Was Engaged

Phase two of engagement consisted of one-on-one interviews with property owners, business tenants, land lease holders and stakeholders in the Edmonton Research Park.

What We Asked

The phase two interviews consisted of the following questions:

Q1. When I mention the Edmonton Research Park, what first comes to mind?

Q2. Do you plan to stay in the ERP long term (i.e. 5+ years)?

Q3. A restrictive covenant is a document registered against a title of a property at the Alberta Land Titles Office that includes an agreement between the owners of two or more properties about how a property may be used and developed. The agreement is binding on all future owners of the subject properties that are referenced in the document. Typically a restrictive covenant places some limitation on future use and/or creates obligations about how the development of the property will be undertaken.

A restrictive covenant (RC) is registered against property located within the ERP. The RC supports City Council's original goal to promote research and advanced technology development and deployment within the ERP. The RC also contains specific development standards for land in the ERP. What are your current thoughts on the current restrictive covenant in the Edmonton Research Park?

Q4. How could the City of Edmonton bring the most value to owners/tenants of the Edmonton Research Park?

Q5. Do you have any suggestions on how the City of Edmonton could make the Edmonton Research Park more inclusive and diverse?

What Happens Next?

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

- identify options and actions the City, its partners or the Edmonton Research Park businesses could take to advance economic development and research outcomes of the ERP;
- inform the creation of phase three of engagement; and,
- inform the GBA+ portion of Administration's report on the ERP to Council.

Expected timeline for further engagement is as follows:

Phase three: October 3, 2022 - November 11, 2022

- Gather final input to tweak the options and actions developed from what we heard in phases one and two.
- Enable stakeholders to review and provide feedback, finalize or add missing options/actions to the fulsome list generated in phases one and two.
- Establish which options and actions captured would bring the most value to Edmonton Research Park stakeholders.

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.