

CLOSED AND SHARED STREETS IN DOWNTOWN

Recommendation

That the December 5, 2023, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE01333, be received for information.

Requested Action	Information Only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Urban Places, Regional Prosperity		
City Plan Values	ACCESS, THRIVE		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Catalyze and converge Rebuildable City	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Mobility Network Economic Growth
Corporate Business Plan	Transforming for the Future		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bylaw 19518 - Amendment to Traffic Bylaw 5590- Shared Street, Road Ban, Weight Tolerances and Tow Truck Updates Bylaw 20345 - To close a portion of road, Downtown (102 Avenue) 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May 31, 2022, Integrated Infrastructure Services report, IIS00889 102 Avenue LRT Pedestrian Crosswalk Recommendation. 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the May 31, 2022 Urban Planning Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration engage with local stakeholders to develop an approach regarding closed, car-free, and shared streets in Downtown to enhance vibrancy, active modes, safety and business activity and return with a report including a streamlined process for setting up temporary road closures to accommodate pedestrian and active modes.

CLOSED AND SHARED STREETS IN DOWNTOWN

Executive Summary

- Car-free (closed) streets and shared streets make it possible to use roadway for alternative uses that may enhance vibrancy in the downtown with dedicated space for active users, festivals, markets and other special events. These operational changes may be implemented temporarily or permanently.
- Certain conditions with respect to design, adjacent uses of the street, and considerations of the mobility system can help car-free and shared streets successfully contribute to vibrancy, active modes, safety and business activity.
- The City has processes in place to implement both temporary and permanent car-free and shared streets, but there are opportunities that could further support these types of changes downtown.
- Several City-led capital projects and initiatives to support redevelopment and vibrancy downtown will improve conditions to help support the development of car-free and shared streets.
- There are potential opportunities to advance the implementation of shared streets downtown in locations with supportive conditions like Rice Howard Way and 104 Street (Jasper Avenue to 102 Avenue).

REPORT

The City Plan identifies the Centre City district, which includes downtown, as Edmonton's distinct cultural, economic, institutional and mobility hub. Alternative uses for existing roadway space on a temporary or permanent basis is one of the ways that the City can leverage public land to support vibrancy, active modes (walking, cycling and rolling), safety and business activity in the downtown.

Edmonton has a history of supporting alternative uses of roadway space for a variety of festivals, markets, parades and special events. Temporary road closures provide additional gathering and programmable space for these events which draw visitors downtown, supporting vibrancy and business activity. These temporary events can also result in disruptions to Edmonton's mobility system, with impacts to travel routes causing challenges for downtown residents, visitors and businesses.

This report identifies opportunities for improvement of City processes and ongoing planning work to better support options for closed (car-free) and shared streets downtown on both a temporary and permanent basis.

Car-Free and Shared Streets

Car-free streets and shared streets are alternative uses for roadway space. A short description of each will clarify the main distinctions between the two, including challenges and opportunities.

Car-free streets are locations where no general motor vehicle access is permitted. In some situations, limited vehicle access is restricted to specific times to permit deliveries or services such as waste collection. The public street space is used to support programmed activities,

CLOSED AND SHARED STREETS IN DOWNTOWN

extensions of business uses into the roadway and/or to provide additional space for people walking, wheeling, cycling and micro mobility such as scooters. Edmonton's event, market and festival closures typically operate as temporary car-free streets. For example, 104 Street between Jasper Avenue and 102 Avenue currently functions as a car-free street on Saturdays during the summer for the Al Fresco program. When conditions are supportive (as described below), car-free streets can also be implemented on a permanent basis, such as 102A Avenue in front of City Hall.

Shared Streets are locations where the street is open to all mobility users, including motor vehicles, but is designed to prioritize vulnerable road users like pedestrians and people cycling. These streets include traffic calming elements such as narrow lanes, landscaping and street furniture to manage vehicle speeds. The design of these streets needs to be context-sensitive, taking into account the surrounding land uses and the complementary street functions. The inclusion of streetscaping or placemaking installations provide amenities and enhance the street's role as public space and not just a travel route. Shared streets are typically implemented permanently or on a seasonal basis since they often require physical alterations to the roadway space. Rice Howard Way is an Edmonton example that has many characteristics of a shared street including enhanced streetscaping and design elements that discourage fast-moving vehicles.

What Makes a Good Car-Free and Shared Street

Through research and engagement with stakeholders, Administration identified conditions with respect to street design and what is happening on property adjacent to the street that make some locations more likely to succeed as car-free or shared streets. These conditions include:

- Street-fronting retail: The presence of street fronting retail or other types of development that encourage high levels of street-level activity helps support activation for both car-free and shared streets.
- Limited vehicular access points: Because there is no general vehicle access to car-free streets, they are successful in locations where vehicle access to buildings and parkades is available on adjacent streets or alleys. Shared streets may still have some vehicular access points, but function best if both access and on-street parking are limited to reduce the number of vehicles in the space.
- Aesthetics and amenities: Streetscaping and amenities such as benches, lighting and landscaping assist in making spaces attractive for public use and/or programming. Intentional design cues at the entrance to the space can also assist by making it clear to all road users through signage and design that the car-free or shared street operates differently than the adjacent roadway network.
- Proximity to programmable space: Car-free and shared streets adjacent to indoor or outdoor gathering spaces like parks or entertainment venues can provide opportunities to extend programming or support an overflow of activity.

CLOSED AND SHARED STREETS IN DOWNTOWN

- Consideration of the broader mobility system: Car-free and shared streets function best when connected to the active transportation network and alternative connections for vehicles and transit are provided.

Not all car-free and shared streets are the same, and the specific conditions vary depending on how the space is intended to be used. Additional detail regarding the most common types of car-free and shared streets is provided in Attachment 1.

Existing Processes

City processes are in place for the following types of car-free and shared streets:

Temporary Car-Free Streets

- Individual festivals and on-street events: Applications for individual events, including annually recurring festivals. Administration forms a single intake point for these applications and coordinates internally to review and facilitate the proposed closure. Decisions regarding festivals and street events are reviewed and approved by the Civic Events Implementation Team, which is made up of operational representatives from Traffic Operations, Edmonton Transit Service, Edmonton Police Service, Emergency Medical Services, and Edmonton Fire Rescue Services and guided by The Festivals and Events Delivery Action Plan.
- Recurring on-street markets on public space: These closures are managed through a separate intake and approval process within Parks and Roads Services. This type of closure is available to market organizers to operate recurring seasonal markets on public roads, sidewalks and alleyways.
- Block parties: Local residents can apply for a block party through their Neighbourhood Resource Coordinator. Block Parties allow for a closure of one block of a residential street to support community driven events. Because of the definition of residential streets for this program, block parties are not currently supported downtown.

Permanent Car-Free Streets

- Road closure bylaw: Where a permanent car-free street is proposed, a road closure bylaw must be approved by City Council at a public hearing. The City's practice is that any closure greater than 6 months in duration is considered permanent. The closure of 102A Avenue between City Hall and Sir Winston Churchill Square, as well as the anticipated closure of a portion of 107 Street as part of Warehouse Park, are examples of permanent road closures to support alternative uses of space.

Permanent Shared Streets

- Traffic Bylaw Changes: Revisions to Bylaw 5590 - Traffic Bylaw were approved in 2021 to permit pedestrians to cross the street at any location on designated streets including Rice Howard Way and The Armature (96 Street from Jasper Avenue to 103A Avenue). These streets incorporate some design elements of shared streets including enhanced streetscaping and design that encourages only local vehicle traffic. These bylaw revisions provide more flexibility of use within street space; however, pedestrians are still legally required to yield right of way to vehicles.

Seasonal Operational Changes

CLOSED AND SHARED STREETS IN DOWNTOWN

- **Summer streets:** This is a City-managed program that uses adaptable measures to implement seasonal operational changes in the mobility network. For 2023, the program focused on the reallocation of a portion of roadways for active transportation, maintaining a separation of active transportation users from vehicles. An example of a Summer Street is the closure of a vehicle lane on Victoria Park Road to provide additional space for active transportation. The program does not currently include streetscaping or placemaking elements that develop shared spaces between all users, including motor vehicles.

Creating Supporting Conditions

In addition to processes specifically aimed at facilitating car-free and shared streets, the City can also support the development of conditions downtown to increase opportunities for alternative use of roadway space. This work is ongoing through a number of policies, plans and initiatives aimed at supporting redevelopment and increased vibrancy downtown. These initiatives include both existing policy and updates that support more pedestrian friendly design, incorporated into both private developments and capital projects in the downtown. Other ongoing work also includes funding support for downtown safety and vibrancy initiatives. A summary of the existing and ongoing work related to this topic is provided in Attachment 2.

Opportunities to Better Support Car-Free and Shared Streets

As a result of engagement and feedback from stakeholders, Administration has identified the following opportunities for the City to streamline and improve processes and planning support for car-free and shared streets downtown.

Advancing work on these opportunities may require additional resources or re-prioritization of existing resources:

1. Exploration of an event permitting software / program to help manage festival and event applications and permitting processes. This system could help streamline document submission, tracking, communications and coordination with the various City services and applicants and may provide an opportunity to provide one intake point for all types of road closure/event applications.
2. A review of the current traffic control materials used for temporary closures to identify opportunities for the development of more aesthetically pleasing traffic control, while continuing to adhere to Transportation Association of Canada's (TAC) and Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) requirements.
3. Consideration of City-led active transportation focused closures similar to "Ciclovias" or "Weekend Bikedays" in other cities. The resources required to manage these closures are beyond the current capacity of external stakeholders. If they are to occur they would likely need to be led and resourced by the City of Edmonton.
4. A review of the City of Edmonton's existing bylaws to identify what changes would be required to establish shared streets where vehicles would yield the right of way to pedestrians. This would create opportunities to apply these bylaw changes at appropriate locations within downtown. This work would include a safety review to identify any

CLOSED AND SHARED STREETS IN DOWNTOWN

additional infrastructure interventions required to safely support shared streets. These interventions could potentially be applied in alignment with renewal or using adaptable measures.

5. Expansion of the Summer Streets program to include the development of seasonal shared streets at strategic locations. Adaptable infrastructure similar to those used for Summer Streets along with streetscaping elements could support low vehicle speeds and volumes while creating an inviting space for people walking, wheeling and cycling.

Location Specific Opportunities

To support further discussions, engagement and planning, Administration completed a review of corridors identified in stakeholder conversations to determine how each corridor aligns with the conditions for successful both temporary and permanent car-free or shared streets. The results of this review are provided in Attachment 4. This review, combined with input from stakeholders, suggests that Rice Howard Way and 104 Street (Jasper Avenue to 102 Avenue) would be good candidates for further review. These locations were highlighted because they are adjacent to developments that support pedestrian activity, have enhanced streetscaping elements and are not primary travel routes for transit or general vehicle traffic.

Next Steps

Administration will continue to advance the implementation of ongoing initiatives in Attachment 2 to foster the conditions for car-free and shared streets downtown. Through downtown vibrancy initiatives, Administration is investigating opportunities for additional temporary City-supported closures in priority areas such as Rice Howard Way and 104 Street. The City will continue to engage with stakeholders in consideration of implementation in 2024.

Advancing the other opportunities identified may require additional resources or reprioritization of current resources. The findings of this work will be used to inform updates to downtown plans and strategies, to be initiated in 2024, by integrating planning considerations for car-free and shared streets into plans guiding land development and capital projects.

Community Insight

Administration reached out directly to downtown stakeholders including business representatives, building owners, major cultural institutions, festival/event organizers and the Downtown Edmonton Community League. Engagement included facilitated discussions regarding car-free and shared streets downtown to understand challenges with the existing process for downtown street closures. Input from these conversations was used to identify the conditions that make a street a good candidate to be car-free or shared, and to guide the development of the opportunities that could help mitigate existing challenges. Additional engagement with the general public, including downtown residents would also be important to further understand the impacts of any specific changes to the downtown mobility system

CLOSED AND SHARED STREETS IN DOWNTOWN

that may be advanced. Additional detail on the input from stakeholders is included in Attachment 3.

Conversations with downtown stakeholders also identified examples of successes and challenges within the existing processes. Stakeholders highlighted that having one point of intake for festivals and on-street events was helpful, but also identified there may be opportunities to expand this system to improve communication, collaboration and transparency. Stakeholders also expressed the importance of amenities that support activity within car-free and shared streets and the value of aesthetically pleasing spaces and traffic control materials. While stakeholders expressed interest in potential shared roadways downtown, they were also clear that they did not see an opportunity for full closure in the near term at any locations and that any operational changes would require additional location-specific engagement. Other recurring themes raised by stakeholders included concern over the cost of temporary road closures to event organizers, and the ongoing need to ensure consideration of vehicle access for downtown buildings and businesses. Additional information regarding the stakeholders engaged and their feedback is included in Attachment 3.

GBA+

Car-free and shared streets limit vehicular access and circulation, while typically improving access and circulation for vulnerable road users including people walking, wheeling, cycling, and micro mobility users. These changes can support safety and accessibility for the Edmontonians that live or visit downtown that do not have access to a vehicle, and support movement within downtown for visitors that come downtown using transit. Limitations to vehicular access may create challenges for service workers and delivery drivers. The design and implementation of temporary and permanent car-free or shared streets can include considerations to mitigate these concerns.

Shared streets without delineation of space for pedestrians can also create accessibility challenges for communities that rely on physical cues to navigate space safely. To effectively provide for the visually impaired, mobility impaired and other vulnerable road users (including young and old), a safe, accessible vehicle-free zone on either side of the street, clear of obstacles and street furniture should be included in the design of all shared streets.

Environment and Climate Review

This report was selected as part of the phased implementation of a process change to provide environmental reviews of the City of Edmonton's plans and projects.

- Car-free and shared streets may encourage mobility choices such as walking, wheeling and cycling. Shifts towards active transportation support Edmontonians' transition to a low-carbon future.
- Vehicle exhaust and other particles such as road dust, evaporation of fuels and tire and brake wear can contribute to poor air quality. A localized improvement in air quality and reduced noise pollution may be observed with fewer vehicles on the road.

CLOSED AND SHARED STREETS IN DOWNTOWN

Attachments

1. Types and Conditions for Car-Free and Shared Streets
2. Existing Initiatives and Ongoing Work
3. What We Heard Report
4. Considerations for Select Downtown Corridors