

Affordable Housing
Strategy Update

Edmonton

**What We Heard Report
2023**

Purpose of This Document:

The City of Edmonton is updating its 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy, which will guide the City's involvement in the affordable housing sector from 2023 - 2026. Work on the project began in January 2022 and will be completed in 2023. Stakeholder engagement is a critical component of this project. Between May and August 2022, Administration used multiple methods to engage stakeholders and members of the public on the 2016-2025 Affordable housing strategy, the updated Affordable housing strategy and on general affordable housing priorities. This document includes a summary of the approach and feedback gathered during the course of engagement. Note, before being organised into themes, feedback was anonymized and edited for clarity and brevity.

Summary of Engagement Approach

Purpose of Engagement	Method of Engagement	Time Period ¹	Total Invites	Total Participants	Engagement Tool
Review of 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy to (1) assess progress made on the goals of the Strategy, and (2) assess the strategies to further the objectives and goals.	Online Questionnaire	May-June 2022	35 organisations and groups in Edmonton's Housing Sector	19 organisations and groups	Appendix A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions for Online Questionnaire • Questions for One-on-one conversations and multi-stakeholder workshop
	One-on-one conversations				
	Multi stakeholder workshop				
Review and provide feedback on the draft foundational elements of the Updated Affordable Housing Strategy	Engaged Edmonton (Online engagement space)	July 2022	66 organisations and groups in Edmonton's Housing and Social Services Sectors	24 organisations and groups	Appendix B <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions for Engaged Edmonton
Gather feedback from Edmontonians on their priorities surrounding Affordable Housing	Online Questionnaire	August 2022	Edmonton Insight panel	3700 Insight panel members	Appendix C <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions for Online Questionnaire

¹Each round of engagement also included periodic reminder invites using multiple approaches (such as, email and telephone)

The feedback reported below is a combination of the feedback received during both the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy review and the foundational elements of the Updated Affordable Housing Strategy review.

In reviewing the City's 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy, in your opinion, what has worked well? (open ended)

Most frequently occurring ideas:

- Direct investment to improve supply of affordable and supportive housing;
- Acquisition of financial resources by leveraging relationships with other orders of government to improve supply of affordable housing;
- Investments in housing supports through the Community Bridge program and support to homeless-serving sector during the pandemic;
- Collaboration with partners and stakeholders in Edmonton's housing sector and willingness to engage in conversations to respond to homelessness;
- Collaboration with other government agencies to address problem properties and with affordable housing providers to construct permanent supportive and affordable housing;
- Improving public awareness on importance of affordable housing;
- Leveraging City-owned land to improve supply of affordable housing.

Reflecting on the past five years, to what extent would you agree that the City has met the goals included in the Strategy?

Total responses: 17

- 5 Strongly agree
- 4 Somewhat agree
- 3 Neither agree nor disagree
- 2 Somewhat disagree
- 1 Strongly disagree

Goal 1: Increase the supply of affordable housing in all areas of the city



Goal 2: Maintain the supply of affordable and market rental housing



Goal 3: Enable stable residential tenancies and transition people out of homelessness



Goal 4: Anticipate, recognize and coordinate actions to respond to housing and homeless needs



Are the four goals in the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy still relevant and responsive to the affordable housing needs of Edmontonians? (See Appendix A for the list of goals).

Response: Of 17 responses a majority (94%) agreed that goal 1 and 2 are still relevant and 100% of participants agreed goal 3 and 4 were still relevant.

The following two questions were asked for each of the four goals in the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy. Responses have been thematically organised.

In your opinion, are there areas of the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy where the City could have performed better? If so, please explain? (open ended) Are there any other objectives and strategies that should have been considered to achieve the goal _____? Please explain.

Most frequently occurring responses

- Improve supply of affordable housing
 - Explore new planning tools and regulations to support and accelerate development of affordable housing
 - Explore creative financing solutions and leverage new funding opportunities
 - Increase the City's contribution to capital grants to support non-profit developers to improve supply of affordable housing
 - Diversify the supply of affordable housing and focus on priority populations
 - Incorporate more universal design into affordable housing developments
 - Establish an independent funding stream for Indigenous affordable housing developers and/or developments
- Maintain and renew affordable housing
 - Improve the supply of affordable rentals
 - Support non-profit affordable housing operators with capital contribution to renew projects and to prevent erosion of affordability post-renovation
 - Partner with utility providers to lower operating costs for non-profit affordable housing providers, including the City's own affordable units
 - Invest in the repair of inhabitable units to address supply issues
- Enable stable residential tenancies, prevent evictions and homelessness
 - Create tenant emergency support fund/provide rental supplements
 - Provide person-based financial subsidies and reduce wait lists
 - Provide eviction prevention information, system navigation and support service referrals
 - Work with non-profit landlords to support tenant education

- Create Landlord Information System
- Partner with utility providers to improve affordability
- Create and provide trauma-informed supports to reduce housing instability and prevent homelessness
- Planning and Coordinating Responses to Affordable Housing Needs
 - Monitor and provide periodic housing needs snapshot, including supply improvements
 - Engage individuals with living and lived experience
 - Engage and collaborate with non-profit housing providers and operators
 - Provide periodic progress reports and outcomes assessment on the affordable housing strategy
 - Improve public awareness of affordable housing need and its importance
 - Build capacity in partners around development, system coordination, and leadership

The feedback below describes key themes emerging from the engagement of Edmontonians who are members of the Insight panel.

Attitudes towards affordable housing

- Majority of Edmontonians (74.5%) agreed that affordable housing makes Edmonton a better place to live and nearly 70% said it would make it a safer city. Additionally, nearly 85% of Edmontonians believed that some families could not find affordable housing that was suitable for their size and needs.
- Approximately 60% of participants believed that the addition of affordable housing improves diversity of housing options in that neighbourhood.
- The top two anticipated concerns regarding presence of affordable housing in a neighbourhood were increased crime/violence (80%) and poorly maintained homes and buildings (60%).

Attitudes toward public investment in affordable housing for low-income families

- Slightly more than half of Edmontonians (53.3%) believed that the City of Edmonton should invest more in affordable housing whereas approximately one-third indicated that City's investment in affordable housing should remain the same.
 - Renters were more likely (79%) to support greater investment in affordable housing but nearly 50% of home owners also supported increases.
- Additionally, the top three priorities for municipal investment in affordable housing according to Edmontonians were (participants were allowed multiple choices):

- Increasing support services (e.g. mental health and addictions support, disability, financial empowerment, parenting, life skills, system navigation) for people once housing has been obtained (59%)
- Increasing supply of new affordable and supportive housing units (35%)
- Increasing services to stabilise tenancies and prevent homelessness (33%)

Perceptions of jurisdictional responsibility for affordable housing

- Nearly a quarter of Edmontonians (23%) believe that all three orders of governments (municipal, provincial and federal) are responsible for affordable housing whereas one-fifth do not know or are uncertain about the order of government responsible for affordable housing.
 - 22% of Edmontonians think affordable housing is solely provincial responsibility. In comparison, 15% and 7% respectively consider it a solely municipal and exclusively a federal responsibility.

Additional insights from summary comments

- Edmontonians deserve a safe place to live and building more affordable housing should be a priority for the City using a range of needed solutions, policies, regulatory tools and investments.
- Affordable and supportive housing is a complex issue and it is key to fund support services to improve better outcomes and minimise disruptive client behaviour.
- Affordable housing should be located throughout the City and not concentrated in particular neighbourhoods.
- Unused buildings should be repurposed to build more affordable housing.
- Unconventional strategies such as tiny homes, problem properties, low-end rentals, unused parking lots, empty departmental stores, City-owned land, and unused hotels should be used to create more affordable housing units.

Conclusion:

Similar themes arose across all three engagement phases. The importance of increasing affordable housing supply, maintaining existing affordable housing, enabling stable residential tenancies, preventing evictions, preventing homelessness and planning and coordinating responses to affordable housing needs were all reaffirmed through the engagement. Furthermore, a general positive attitude towards affordable housing and investment in affordable housing was observed. Lastly, the need for coordination across governments and between the private and public sector was brought forward, along with other strategies to increase and maintain the supply of affordable housing in Edmonton.

Appendix A: Engagement tools used to review the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy

Online Questionnaire

The City of Edmonton is currently reviewing the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy (the Strategy) originally developed in 2015. This review is the first step in our efforts to refresh the Strategy to respond to current realities of the affordable housing landscape of Edmonton. There are two objectives to this initial step: (1) to assess progress made on the goals of the Strategy, and (2) to assess the effectiveness of the specific approaches established in the Strategy to further the goals. At this stage, we would like to invite your input into this review through the following questionnaire.

We strongly recommend that you use a computer to access this questionnaire. For your reference, see the DRAFT Progress Update attached in the email (or here) summarising the work thus far completed by the City on the current Strategy. Please review it before completing the questionnaire. We anticipate that this questionnaire will take approximately 15-25 minutes to complete. The questionnaire is available until Sunday, May 22nd. At the end of the questionnaire you will have the option of scheduling a follow-up discussion on this strategy review with staff from the Affordable Housing and Homeless Section.

1. Please provide the name of your organisation: _____

Overall feedback on the Strategy

2. In reviewing the City's 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy, in your opinion, what has worked well? (open ended)

3. In your opinion, are there areas of the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy where the City could have performed better? (open ended)

Overall feedback on Goals

4. The following questions pertain to the four goals in the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy. Reflecting on the past five years, to what extent would you agree that the City has met the goals included in the Strategy?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Goal 1: Increase the supply of affordable housing in all areas of the city					
Goal 2: Maintain the supply of affordable & market rental housing					
Goal 3: Enable stable residential tenancies & transition people out of homelessness					
Goal 4: Anticipate, recognize and coordinate actions to respond to housing and homeless needs					

5. Are the four goals in the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy still relevant and responsive to the affordable housing needs of Edmontonians?

- Goal 1: Increase the supply of affordable housing in all areas of the city (Yes/No.)
- Goal 2: Maintain the supply of affordable & market rental housing (Yes/No.)
- Goal 3: Enable stable residential tenancies & transition people out of homelessness (Yes/No.)
- Goal 4: Anticipate, recognize and coordinate actions to respond to housing and homeless needs(Yes/No.)

6. [If any of Q5=No] Please explain why the goals are no longer relevant.

7. Are there any additional goals that should be considered to address affordable housing needs of Edmontonians in the 2016-25 Affordable Housing Strategy? (open ended)

8. Each goal in the City's 2016-25 Affordable Housing Strategy has an associated set of objectives and strategies (listed in the DRAFT Progress Update attached in the email or here). We would like to get specific feedback on these objectives and strategies through more in-depth questions. Which of these goals would you like to comment on? (Select all that apply)

- A. Goal 1: Increase the supply of affordable housing in all areas of the city (Go to Q.9)
- B. Goal 2: Maintain the supply of affordable & market rental housing (Go to Q.12)
- C. Goal 3: Enable stable residential tenancies & transition people out of homelessness (Go to Q. 15)
- D. Goal 4: Anticipate, recognize and coordinate actions to respond to housing and homeless needs (Go to Q. 18)
- E. All the above (Go to Q.9) f. None of the above. (Go to Q.21)

QUESTIONS ON GOAL 1

9. The following question pertains to the objectives and strategies (listed in the image below) used by the City to implement Goal 1: increase the supply of affordable housing in all areas of Edmonton. To what extent would you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The strategies under Objective 1.1 have helped the City to play a direct role in increasing the supply of affordable housing in Edmonton.					
The strategies under Objective 1.2 have helped the City to enable external organisations to increase the supply of affordable housing in Edmonton.					

The strategies under Objective 1.3 have helped the City to acquire, leverage, and provide the financial resources and tools to increase the supply of affordable housing in Edmonton.					
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10. Please elaborate on your responses in the previous question. (open ended)

11. Are there any other objectives and strategies that should have been considered to achieve the goal of increasing the supply of affordable housing in all areas of the City? (open ended)

QUESTIONS ON GOAL 2

12. The following questions pertain to the objectives and strategies (listed in the image below) used by the City to implement Goal 2: Maintain the supply of affordable and market rental housing. To what extent would you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The strategies under Objective 2.1 have helped the City to maintain the supply of affordable & market rental housing.					
The strategies under Objective 2.2 have helped the City to maintain the supply of affordable & market rental housing.					

13. Please elaborate on your responses in the previous question.

14. Are there any other objectives and strategies that should have been considered to maintain the supply of affordable & market rental housing in Edmonton? (open ended)

QUESTIONS ON GOAL 3

15. The following questions pertain to the objectives and strategies (listed in the image below) used by the City to implement Goal 3: Enable stable residential tenancies and transition people out of homelessness. To what extent would you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The strategies under Objective 3.1 have helped the City to enable stable residential tenancies and transition people out of homelessness.					
The strategies under Objective 3.2 have helped the City to enable stable residential tenancies and transition people out of homelessness					

16. Please elaborate on your responses in the previous question. (open ended)

17. Are there any other objectives that should have been considered to enable stable residential tenancies and transition people out of homelessness? (open ended)

QUESTIONS ON GOAL 4

18. The following question pertains to the objectives and strategies (listed in the image below) used by the City to implement Goal 4: Anticipate, recognize, and coordinate action to respond to housing and homeless needs. To what extent would you agree/disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The strategies under Objective 4.1 have helped the City to anticipate, recognize and coordinate action to respond to housing and homelessness needs.					
The strategies under Objective 4.2 have helped the City to anticipate, recognize and coordinate action to respond to housing and homelessness needs.					

19. Please elaborate on your responses in the previous question. (open ended)

20. Are there any other objectives that should have been considered to anticipate, recognize and coordinate action to respond to housing and homelessness needs?

- A. Yes
- B. No

Q20b if Q20=Yes: Which other objectives should have been considered?

21. Do you have any additional comments? _____

22. Is there anyone else who should be engaged on the review of the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy?

- A. Yes
- B. No

Q22b. Who should also be engaged on the review? _____

23. Would you like to schedule a follow-up conversation with us to provide additional feedback on the review of the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy? Yes/No.

Questions for one-on-one conversations

1. Can you please briefly highlight the role your organisation plays in Edmonton's Affordable Housing sector?
2. Were you familiar with the COE 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy prior to participating in the Strategy review?
3. Ask only if the participant completed the online questionnaire
 - : a. Would you like to comment on the DRAFT Progress Update we shared with you or expand on anything you indicated in the online questionnaire at this point?
 - b. Additionally, may we follow up with you on some of your responses to ensure we have understood your perspective clearly?
4. The current Strategy has 4 goals. Which one of these would you like to discuss today?
5. Why is this goal important to you/your organisation? What external factors have shaped progress on this Goal?
6. Do you feel the objectives and strategies have helped the City to achieve the goal? How?
7. Are there any other objectives and strategies that could have been considered to pursue the Goal? What do you suggest?
8. Do you have any comments on these roles? How do you assess City's performance, thus far, in these various roles?
9. Is there any other role the City could have pursued? How could the City have better supported affordable housing outcomes in Edmonton?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share with us today?

Appendix B: Engagement tool used to review Foundational Elements of the Updated Affordable Housing Strategy

Q1. Are there any gaps in these principles? If so, what are they?

The foundational elements of the updated strategy are guided by the following updated principles to achieve its goals and objectives:

Fundamental - Affordable housing is fundamental to human dignity; the physical, economic and social well being of individuals, families and communities.

Collaborative - Housing needs are a complex, multi-faceted problem that requires consistent effort from all levels of government, partners and stakeholders. The City leads and values innovative solutions that require collaboration and working in partnerships.

Evidence-based - Our programs and projects are informed by research, engagement and the voices of those who we serve. We make evidence-based decisions and recommendations based on ongoing monitoring and evaluation of local housing needs and context.

Accessible - The City supports affordable housing that is universally accessible for those individuals living with a range of disabilities including physical, sensory, developmental and cognitive.

Diverse - The City encourages the design and construction of diverse types of housing to expand affordable housing choices for those in core housing need and who belong to multiple population groups with intersecting identities.

Sustainable - The City encourages the development and retrofitting of affordable housing that is aligned with its vision of building an efficient, sustainable and resilient community.

Integrated - The City promotes compact, mixed use developments within districts that support equitable access to transportation and amenities.

Reconciliation - In the spirit of reconciliation the City will partner with organisations, businesses and citizens to respond to the systematic racism and discrimination that indigenous people disproportionately face in accessing affordable housing

Q2. What, if anything, is missing from these objectives that could help the City achieve Goal 1?

- Goal 1: People have access to affordable housing in all areas of the city
 - Objective 1: Enable the development of affordable housing
 - Objective 2: Diversify the affordable housing supply
 - Objective 3: Support the sustainability of affordable housing

Q3. What, if anything, is missing from these objectives that could help the City achieve Goal 2?

Goal 2: People have the housing supports they need

Objective 1: Improve programs and services related to homelessness prevention

Objective 2: Enable improvements in housing supports and service delivery partnerships

Q4. What, if anything, is missing from these objectives that could help the City achieve Goal 2?

Goal 3: People have increased awareness of housing needs and affordable housing

Objective 1: Collect and share insights from research and engagement

Objective 2: Inform the public about housing needs and affordable housing

Objective 3: Coordinate with sector partners to identify shared objectives, improve information sharing, and convene to enhance the housing ecosystem

Q5. These are the roles the City as a whole has identified for itself in the updated Affordable Housing Strategy. Is there any role missing? If so, what is it?

- Plan, Research and Develop Policies
- Acquire and make financial resources available
- Generate Awareness
- Convene
- Establish and enforce regulations
- Develop, deliver, monitor and evaluate programs
- Support homelessness prevention
- Steward land and assets
- Catalyze affordable housing developments

Q6. Further Comments: Please share any other comments about the draft updated Affordable Housing Strategy _____

Appendix C: Insight Community Survey Questionnaire

Questions

1. Do you own or rent your current residence?
 - a. Own
 - b. Rent
2. Which of the following categories best describes your total household income in 2021 before taxes?
 - Under \$30,000
 - \$30,000 to \$59,999
 - \$60,000 to \$99,999
 - \$100,000 to \$149,999
 - \$150,000 and over
 - Prefer not to answer

The survey uses the terms 'affordable housing' and 'supportive housing' that are defined as:

Affordable housing is rental or ownership housing that requires government investment to build or operate. Affordable housing has rents or payments below average market cost. It is meant for households that earn less than median income (for their household size) and is intended for long-term occupancy.

Supportive housing is long-term housing where residents sign a lease and pay subsidized rent while receiving the 24/7 health, wellness, and life skills support they need to maintain their housing. It was a key priority of the City's Affordable Housing Investment Plan (2019-2022) and the 2016-2025 Affordable Housing Strategy .

3. Does your neighbourhood have any Affordable or Supportive Housing?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (On 5-point agreement scale+ 'Don't Know')-----
 - Some jobs in Edmonton do not pay enough to afford appropriate housing
 - Affordable housing makes Edmonton a better place to live
 - Some families in Edmonton cannot afford housing that is suitable for the size or needs of their family.
 - Providing more affordable housing creates a safer city
 - Average, hard-working Edmontonians may need affordable housing
 - Having a diversity of people with different incomes makes my neighbourhood better.
 - Affordable housing adds more housing choices to my neighbourhood

- I trust the City of Edmonton to work with partners to properly plan and develop affordable and supportive housing in Edmonton
 - With hard work, anyone can afford suitable housing in Edmonton
 - Most affordable housing is unattractive and would not fit well in my neighbourhood
 - Municipal tax dollars would be better spent on other public services besides affordable housing
 - Those in need of affordable housing are mostly individuals with mental health and/or addiction issues
5. In your opinion, should the City of Edmonton invest more, less, or the same amount on Affordable Housing for low-income families?
- a. More
 - b. The same
 - c. Less
6. To the best of your knowledge, which order of government is responsible for funding affordable housing? (Select all that apply)
- a. Federal
 - b. Provincial
 - c. Municipal
 - d. Don't know
7. City Council will consider affordable housing and homelessness funding priorities for the 2023-2026 Budget Cycle. In your opinion, which of the following should they prioritize? (Allow selection of only top 3)
- a. Increase supply of new affordable and supportive housing units
 - b. Convert existing housing into affordable units
 - c. Donate city-owned land to build more units
 - d. Increase support services (e.g. mental health and addictions support, disability, financial empowerment, parenting, life skills, system navigation) for people once housing has been obtained
 - e. Increase services to stabilize tenancies and prevent homelessness
 - f. Provide rental supplements to people in need to help maintain their housing
 - g. Improve services at emergency shelters to meet the different needs of those experiencing homelessness
 - h. Provide property-tax exemptions to non-profit affordable housing operators to sustain affordability
 - i. I don't know

- j. None of the above
8. In the past people have indicated the following concerns with affordable and supportive housing in their neighbourhoods. Which of these are you most concerned about when it comes to affordable and supportive housing in your neighbourhood? (Multiple choice)
- Poorly maintained homes/buildings
 - Increased crime and/or violence
 - Increased taxes to fund initiatives
 - Lower property values
 - Declining character of neighbourhoods/communities
 - Additional population or density
 - Increased drug use
 - None of the above
9. Are there any other thoughts or feedback you would like to share with the City of Edmonton regarding Affordable Housing in the City? (optional open-ended)
