

CENTRE CITY OPTIMIZATION PILOT PROJECT UPDATE

Recommendation

That the April 8, 2024, City Operations report CO02325, 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		
City Plan Values	LIVE. THRIVE.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	A rebuildable city Catalyze and converge	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Economic growth
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Downtown Vibrancy Strategy 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 15, 2024, City Operations report CO02130, Aligning Turf and Horticulture Resources and Service Levels 		

Executive Summary

- The Centre City Pilot launched in June 2023, focusing on proactive service, cleanliness and safety in the downtown core and adjacent neighbourhoods.
- The Centre City team inspected and prioritized more than 10,000 notifications, resulting in substantially improved program area service, including enhancements for turf and horticulture and targeted pressure washing of civic infrastructure.
- From June 2023 to January 2024, the pilot was funded through tax levy and provincial grant funding. Council approved one-time funding to continue the program until July 31, 2024. Through the 2024 Provincial Budget, the City of Edmonton requested additional provincial grant funding for the remainder of 2024. However, these applications were unsuccessful.

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- Rather than halt the program after July 31, 2024, Administration intends to reduce enhancements and extend operations until October 31, 2024 to maintain consistency of service throughout the spring, summer and fall.

REPORT

The City Plan describes Centre City as Edmonton's cultural, economic, institutional and mobility hub with the highest density and mix of land uses. The area is home to City Hall, major attractions, festivals and events that attract thousands of local visitors and tourists every year. Centre City is also Edmonton's principal employment and residential node, and a key driver to the region's economic prosperity.

In June 2023, Administration launched the Centre City Optimization pilot project to improve cleanliness, maintenance service levels, public safety and vibrancy in the downtown core (Attachment 1). Centre City crews proactively addressed or reported graffiti, trip hazards, road sweeping, street light outages and more. They also supported preparation of key public spaces for events such as Taste of Edmonton, Mid-Summer Festival in Chinatown, the NHL Heritage Classic and New Year's Eve. These and upcoming events, such as the Canadian Hydrogen Convention, Rendez Vous Canada and Game Con Canada represent critical opportunities for Edmonton to present itself as clean, safe and well managed, in the interest of attracting further events, conventions and economic investment.

The initial pilot project was funded through tax levy and provincial grant funding, and was planned for the period of June 2023 to January 2024. Administration received additional tax-levy funding through the Fall 2023 Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment to continue the program until July 31, 2024, but provincial grant applications to continue the program until the end of 2024 were unsuccessful. If the pilot program ends at the end of July, service levels will return to pre-pilot levels. Impacts would include seasonal staff lay-offs mid-season, inconsistent service levels (changing mid-summer) and inconsistent support during the summer event/festival season.

To avoid these impacts and ensure consistency through the spring, summer and fall, crews will continue to provide base service and some enhanced service for the Centre City area until October 31, 2024 (Attachment 2). This approach allows Administration to gather a second year of data for the Centre City pilot to inform service planning.

Centre City Operations

The Centre City team operates seven days a week and includes 50 employees across three sub-units:

- The *Clean City team* performs maintenance at routed hot spots to help support and respond to symptoms of social disorder. Examples include needle collection, biohazard cleaning, graffiti removal, power washing and the removal of loose waste, debris or any other cleanliness concerns.
- The *Parks Landscape team* coordinates and completes green space maintenance above the City's base service levels to improve safety and aesthetics. This includes mowing and trimming grass, pruning shrubs and trees, planting and weeding horticulture beds.

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- The *Inspection team* identifies issues with City-owned assets and sends requests for services to the Clean City team, Parks Landscape team or other City teams to address.

This working model has improved both proactive identification of issues and median response time from 17 days at program launch to five days at the end of January 2024. To ensure that emerging issues are addressed and that operations align with community needs, the team is connected with other City departments and external organizations, such as the Business Improvement Areas and social agencies.

Pilot Progress

The Centre City team received 10,612 notifications¹ between June 2023 and January 2024. Of these notifications, 92 per cent (9,781) were issues proactively identified by the inspection team and eight per cent (831) were submitted to 311 by residents and downtown stakeholders. Issues were addressed by a combination of the Centre City team and other operational teams, either through immediate rectification, closing duplicate notifications or inspecting and prioritizing issues for future work. A summary of program accomplishments is outlined in Attachment 3.

Key achievements between June 2023 and January 2024 include:

- 3,180 graffiti tags removed
- 15,140 needles picked up
- 1,631 garbage and litter notifications addressed
- 160 traffic control materials repaired, replaced or repositioned
- 156 damaged light poles and electrical boxes, street light outages and exposed wires addressed
- 233 potholes and subsidence notifications reported resulting in 115 repairs completed
- 760 sidewalk tripping hazard notifications reported resulting in 165 repairs completed

The Centre City pilot substantially enhanced service in the program area compared to standard operations. The team renovated the majority of the horticultural beds, including extensive pruning, shrub replacement, edging around the beds and mulching. Turf maintenance frequency was increased from twice a month to weekly, doubling the City's base service levels for mowing. Trim cycles were increased from twice per season to align with the weekly mowing frequency. Targeted pressure washing was added to address waste and improve the visual appearance of sidewalks and plazas such as Churchill Square and the entrance to Stanley A. Milner Library.

When the pilot program concludes, service in the Centre City area will return to the base service levels, which include mowing twice per month, trimming twice per season, inspections upon request and standard maintenance service levels.

Budget/Financial Implications

Through Budget 2024, the City of Edmonton requested provincial funding to continue the enhanced services in the Centre City area and beyond for 2024 to 2026 including:

- expanding Centre City (\$10 million per year),
- continuing the enhanced vacant encampment clean-up response (\$2 million per year) and

¹ Notification data is tracked and assigned using ArcGIS Field Maps and Systems Applications and Products (SAP)

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- continuing to provide the hygiene hub near the Mustard Seed Church (\$1 million per year).

These grant applications were unsuccessful and no additional funding has been provided by the province.

The total budget to operate the Centre City Pilot from June to December 2023 was \$2.5 million, which included the existing budget (\$1.3 million tax-levy funding) that was dedicated to completing base service levels, and a grant from the province (\$1.2 million) for Downtown Vibrancy. Total costs for 2023 were approximately \$3 million.

Administration will continue to use the existing budget for base service levels, along with the one-time funding (\$1.5 million) that was approved in the 2023 Fall Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment to extend services to July 31, 2024. To avoid the negative impacts of changing service mid-season, Administration plans to stretch the one-time enhancement funding to October 31, 2024. However, stretching this funding to 10 months instead of six will result in fewer enhancements.

The cost to deliver the Centre City Program on an annual basis is \$4.3 million. This includes the \$1.3 million existing tax levy funding and \$3 million net new funding, which was submitted as an unfunded service package in the Fall 2023 Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment. Of that unfunded service package, Council approved \$1.5 million one-time funding to extend the pilot until July 31, 2024.

To fund the program until the end of 2024 with enhanced service levels, an additional \$1.5 million would be required. To fund the program on an ongoing basis at a cost of \$4.3 million, an additional \$3 million in ongoing operating funding would be required. If the program were to be funded ongoing, Administration would also consider submitting a capital adjustment for purchasing equipment instead of leasing.

Community Insight

Administration used feedback from residents and the business community to inform program planning and delivery:

Public Surveys

Administration conducted surveys in March 2023 (2,871 respondents) and September 2023 (4,764 respondents) through the Edmonton Insight Community², as well as via an open link on the City's website, to understand Edmontonians' experiences and perceptions of visiting or living in the Centre City area and to identify areas for service improvement.

Despite increased service after the first survey, the perception of cleanliness remained relatively stable between March and September 2023 (Attachment 4), and the perception of safety was lower in September. The lower perceived safety may be influenced by a number of outside factors, including the time of year impacting the visibility of litter, increased response rate, and the habits of outdoor-space users and several high profile news stories highlighting ongoing social disorder and crime in the downtown core. However, results from the September 2023

² March 2023 and September 2023 Mixed Topic survey results are available at edmonton.ca/programs_services/public_engagement/results-reports

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survey continue to indicate cleanliness is a critical factor in determining perceptions of safety and willingness to spend time in the area.

Business Community Engagement

Administration engaged business communities and stakeholders throughout the Centre City pilot and received encouraging feedback in support of the proactive approach to addressing issues on roads and in area parks. Participants included the Edmonton Downtown Business Association, Chinatown & Area Business Association, North Edge Business Association, Downtown Recovery Coalition and the Edmonton Downtown Community League.

The 2023 Patron & Business Survey conducted through the Edmonton Insight Community as well as with the broader public via open survey links in November and December 2023 provides intelligence specific to the Business Improvement Areas. The 2023 results showed improvements in aesthetics and feelings of safety compared to the 2022 survey, especially in the downtown area.

311 Notifications

From June 2023 to January 2024 the Centre City team addressed 831 notifications generated by the public through 311. With the increased staff support, the median time to respond to a notification also improved over the year, from 17 days at program launch to five days at the end of January 2024.

GBA+

Generally speaking, equity principles indicate that enhanced resources should be prioritized towards people and areas that have the highest need. Given that concerns around social disorder, crime, hazardous waste, infrastructure damage and other concerns have steadily increased in the Centre City area since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to other areas in the city, the coordinated efforts of the City Centre Optimization Pilot Project are aligned with corporate efforts to ensure equitable outcomes for all Edmontonians. In alignment with the City Plan goal of a healthy city, well-maintained, clean and safe outdoor spaces and parks play a vital role in providing space for Edmontonians to engage in community-building, socialization and physical activity. All Edmontonians deserve equitable opportunities to enjoy these spaces regardless of what area of the city they live, work or visit.

Providing enhanced maintenance services, including focused sanitation, to the Centre City area helps ensure outdoor spaces in the downtown core are clean, safe and inviting for the large number of Edmontonians who work, live, visit and attend post-secondary institutions in the area. This includes equity-deserving populations who come to the area to access the high number of critical social services that operate in the core. Proactive identification of concerns and the use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles have improved usability, safety and accessibility of outdoor spaces and infrastructure in the Centre City area. This includes activities such as tagging and repairing sidewalk tripping hazards, trimming trees or vegetation to provide clear sight lines, addressing street light outages, repairing damaged assets and responding to other potential hazards.

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Attachments

1. Centre City Map as Defined in The City Plan
2. Centre City Service Levels
3. Centre City Key Accomplishments
4. Community Insight