

DESTINATION MARKETING AND ATTRACTION ACTIVITIES BY CITY-FUNDED ENTITIES

Recommendation

That the April 10, 2024, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE02247, 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.	Regional Prosperity		
City Plan Values	BELONG. LIVE. THRIVE.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Catalyze and Converge	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Economic Growth
Corporate Business Plan	Transforming for the Future		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Edmonton Economic Action Plan Explore Edmonton Tourism Master Plan 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> November 21/22/27/28/29, 2023, FCS02052, Fall 2023 Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment - 2023-2026 Operating Budget 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the November 21/22/27/28/29, 2023, City Council Budget meeting, the following motion was made:

That Administration provide a report outlining an assessment of all Destination Marketing and Attraction activities in the City of Edmonton which are administered by Explore Edmonton, Edmonton Events, Fort Edmonton Management Company, TELUS World of

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Science and other City-funded entities, and propose options for funding these activities, including a shared funding model.

Executive Summary

- Destination marketing, led by Explore Edmonton for the City of Edmonton, comprises the planning and actions taken to promote Edmonton as a place to visit by travellers who live outside the city and region. Included in these activities are the promotion of various experiences and attractions, piquing visitors' interest and helping them to build itineraries for their time in Edmonton.
- In marketing the city as a destination for visitors, Explore Edmonton features and promotes more than 150 of the city's and region's attractions and experiences, including City-funded entities such as Fort Edmonton Park, the Muttart Conservatory, TELUS World of Science and Edmonton Valley Zoo. These organizations do not undertake destination marketing as it is understood to be the role of Explore Edmonton.
- Administration is not proposing a shared funding model as each organization has a distinct but complementary role in Edmonton's visitor economy.
- There are opportunities to optimize destination marketing through improved coordination, targeted promotion of city attractions and curation of unique experiences for visitors. The attractions consulted in addressing this motion have expectations for enhanced collaboration with Explore Edmonton as the lead in promoting Edmonton experiences to other markets.

REPORT

Destination marketing comprises the planning and actions taken to promote Edmonton as a place to visit by travellers who live outside the city and region. Included in these activities are the promotion of various experiences and attractions, piquing visitors' interest and helping them to build itineraries for their time in Edmonton. In this context, Explore Edmonton leads and conducts destination marketing, in part by featuring attractions such as Fort Edmonton Park, the Muttart Conservatory, TELUS World of Science and the Edmonton Valley Zoo (City-funded attractions and entities). Experiences like festivals and events are also an important part of Edmonton's reputation and create brand and marketing opportunities to tell the city's story nationally and internationally.

Explore Edmonton is a separate company owned by the City of Edmonton with an independent board of directors appointed by City Council. The organization's purpose is to increase the economic impact of the visitor-based economy. Explore Edmonton focuses on three lines of business: destination development and marketing; venue management (Edmonton Convention Centre and Edmonton EXPO Centre); and signature events such as K-Days, Canadian Finals Rodeo and Farmfair International. The organization promotes Edmonton as a four-season destination of choice, delivering year-round visitor and guest experiences. This is done through collaboration with numerous partners and stakeholders such as hotels, attractions and businesses. This work adds to the economic prosperity and quality of life for Edmonton residents.

As Edmonton's destination management and marketing organization, Explore Edmonton's mandate is focused on attracting visitors from beyond the city, including provincially, nationally

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and internationally. This involves direct marketing tactics as well as cultivation of experiences designed to contribute to Edmontonians' quality of life so that residents will become indirect brand ambassadors and promoters of the city. This is achieved, in part, through implementation of Explore Edmonton's Tourism Master Plan, a 10-year framework (2021-2030) which provides a common vision for growth and investment with tourism industry partners.

Explore Edmonton features and promotes more than 150 of the city's and region's attractions and experiences to help market the city as a destination. Destination marketing is also accomplished through the attraction of business, sport and cultural events to Edmonton, which bring with them delegates and visitors and the opportunity for them to experience Edmonton first hand.

To that end, 'Edmonton Events' is not an entity, but a business-to-business (B2B) brand that was formerly used to represent the partnership between the City of Edmonton and Explore Edmonton that attract events to the city. Over the past year, both Explore Edmonton and the City of Edmonton have stopped using this brand in favour of their own respective brands for clarity and consistency.

Based on engagement with Fort Edmonton Park, the Muttart Conservatory, TELUS World of Science and the Edmonton Valley Zoo, these organizations do not undertake destination marketing as it is understood to be the role of Explore Edmonton. However, these attractions, using their own operating budgets, market and promote their venues within the city and region as well as in select cases beyond the region for special events, features or exhibits (e.g. Calgary, northern Alberta, Saskatoon). These non-local target markets are typically locations from where visitors travel by automobile in a day or less. In these select instances it could be perceived that destination marketing is overlapping. However, this marketing is targeted and focused solely on the attractions themselves – their programs, features and exhibitions – not on Edmonton or the region as a whole.

Administration is not proposing a shared funding model as each organization has a distinct but complementary role in Edmonton's visitor economy. Attractions serve as critical elements for building an Edmonton experience, and Explore Edmonton markets and promotes them in a larger context in order to attract visitors. Explore Edmonton was established in large part to lead destination promotion on behalf of the City, and based on feedback from city-funded entities and Explore Edmonton, changing this model has not been contemplated.

There are opportunities to optimize destination marketing through improved collaboration, targeted promotion of city attractions and curation of unique experiences for visitors. The attractions consulted in addressing this motion have expectations for enhanced collaboration with Explore Edmonton as the lead in promoting Edmonton experiences to other markets. As the entity responsible for destination marketing, Explore Edmonton could take leadership on tactics that include:

- Regularly convening attraction operators to inform destination marketing approaches and tactics;
- Coordinating attraction packaging that would incent visits to multiple attractions;
- Cross-promoting attractions with common geography, features and target audiences; and

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- Lending Explore Edmonton expertise and networks to support attraction-led marketing for targeted markets.

Explore Edmonton confirmed that there are opportunities to work more collaboratively. As a tangible example, Explore Edmonton's production of marketing assets that are shared with tourism sites for their own use can be enhanced through better coordinated marketing efforts. Aligning messaging to potential visitors can more consistently amplify Edmonton's appeal as a destination.

Explore Edmonton is a board-governed agency, and policy and operational decisions are the responsibility of the board and management. The City, as shareholder, is responsible for appointing the board of directors. Administration is not providing explicit or implicit advice but highlighting potential opportunities to optimize and capitalize on promoting Edmonton as a destination.

Financial Context

City funding provided to Explore Edmonton is used, in part, to promote Edmonton and attract visitors to the city. In doing so, a large number of attractions within Edmonton and the region are featured to demonstrate what is available to visitors.

City funding provided to Fort Edmonton Management Company, the Muttart Conservatory, the TELUS World of Science and the Edmonton Valley Zoo is typically not used for destination marketing. Budgets allow for marketing and communications, but that portion is focused on featuring these attractions, their programming and exhibitions in a local context, except where markets are targeted to promote specific events or features.

The opportunities highlighted above to optimize destination marketing through improved collaboration, targeted promotion of city attractions and curation of unique experiences for visitors do not require new or additional funding to implement.

Community Insight

Explore Edmonton's Tourism Master Plan development included a deliberate and thorough community engagement process. In November 2020, Explore Edmonton engaged with a wide variety of industry partners and Edmontonians through one-on-one interviews, focus groups and surveys.¹ Explore Edmonton also engages with city-funded attractions when it develops strategies to test approaches.

Administration engaged Fort Edmonton Management Company, the Muttart Conservatory, the TELUS World of Science and the Edmonton Valley Zoo for this report. These organizations shared their mandates, roles in marketing, and described their working relationships with Explore Edmonton in the context of destination marketing and visitor attraction. Marketing efforts by these organizations are guided by visitor information they collect that can identify where a person visits from, what events or features they choose, and who makes the purchase (e.g. a parent with a family).

¹ <https://exploreedmonton.com/tourism-master-plan-history>. Explore Edmonton, cited February 5, 2024.

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GBA+

One of the five Guiding Principles in the Tourism Master Plan is a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive visitor economy: "Tourism in Edmonton should contribute to both equity and economic growth. In fact, many of the cities with the strongest tourism industries are known for their diversity and inclusion. It is our goal that Edmonton's visitor economy will mirror our society by 2030. We will do so by recognizing and removing systemic barriers to marginalized and underrepresented communities and celebrating the broad range of human differences among us, while also embracing the commonalities we all share."²

Explore Edmonton has also established an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) council to inform the organization's work. They are in progress of developing a method to track diversity within events.

² https://assets.exploreedmonton.com/images/Edmonton_Tourism_Master_Plan.pdf. Explore Edmonton, cited February 5, 2024.