



May 12, 2025

Edmonton City Council
City of Edmonton
1 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, AB T5J 4R7

Re: May 13 Urban Planning Committee Item 7.1 – Downtown Action Plan

Dear Urban Planning Committee, Mayor Sohi, and Members of Edmonton City Council,

On behalf of the Edmonton Downtown Business Association (EDBA), I applaud the great work City Administration has undertaken in developing the new Downtown Action Plan. We appreciate its recognition of the urgent need for renewed investment, coordination, and focus to ensure that Downtown can be re-established as a vibrant, inclusive, and economically resilient core for our entire city. A tremendous amount of groundwork and smart planning has gone into this, and it builds upon the work that we and others, including the Downtown Revitalization Coalition through the Downtown Investment Plan, have done in the past. We support this plan.

We must also express a few critical concerns from our perspective as the group most intimately involved in day-to-day Downtown place management and business community support. We recognize that the Downtown Action Plan is a high-level steering document and can't address every detail of implementation, and so we believe Council direction would be valuable to ensure our recommendations are addressed in the forthcoming work to implement the plan over the next 1-5 years. As Edmonton's only organization with a singular mandate to steward the Downtown economy and public realm and having personally done extensive research and professional development in these areas, I have shared this feedback with City Administration and am sharing it with you now, in the spirit of constructive partnership:

1. Establish clear recognition and formalized partnership with the EDBA for implementation

The EDBA is not referenced as a strategic partner until the very end of the plan, and only in passing. We are the only non-City entity with several of our current initiatives identified in the plan, without acknowledgement. This omission was surprising—it overlooks our significant operational role in Downtown activation, beautification, safety coordination, and business support, and leaves us in an uncertain position.

Recommendation: Going forward, identify the EDBA as a lead partner in the implementation of Actions 4 (Safety), 5 (Beautification), 6 (Economic Engine), and 7 (Public Programming), with defined roles and a formalized partnership framework which includes an identified funding source to resume cost-sharing for the Downtown Core Patrol and Downtown Ambassador programs, which currently receive no City of Edmonton funding.

2. Develop a Public-Private Partnership Strategy

While the plan acknowledges the success of past public-private investment, it offers no forward-facing public-private partnership (P3) strategy. Some of our most successful, well-managed public spaces and highest levels of private investment have come through P3 models, i.e. the Enbridge Place promenade, ICE District Plaza and streetscaping, and the Union Bank building's new plaza currently under construction. Cities that have successfully



revitalized their downtowns—such as Calgary, Montreal, and Denver—have done so through a significant focus on formalized P3s for everything from housing development to parks and public space activation.

Recommendation: Design and prioritize a P3 approach in the implementation of the plan to guide investment attraction, land development, and park/public space renewal and stewardship.

3. Address gaps in urban parks and public space management

The plan's approach to parks and public spaces (Action 5) is limited in scope and fails to address the significant ongoing problem of negative experiences in Downtown public spaces deterring visitors and perpetuating negative perceptions and low investor confidence. Edmonton is very good at making massive investments in Downtown public spaces, but we are still very bad at managing and maintaining those spaces once they're built. There is still no cohesive strategy for community safety, cleanliness and maintenance standards, park programming, or long-term stewardship of our most important public gathering places, and especially with the significant renewal and construction work currently underway, we are at a critical moment in time to get this right.

Recommendation: Develop a comprehensive Public Space Management Framework, co-led with EDBA and other partners, that includes year-round activation, cleanliness and maintenance standards, community partnerships, and safety interventions, leveraging existing resources like the EDBA's Downtown Core Patrol program.

4. Establish a strong governance and implementation structure

The proposed "Downtown Leadership Group" is vague in structure and appears to serve only an advisory role. Without a clear governance framework that shares authority and accountability across sectors and organizations, there is a risk of stalled implementation and a continued duplication of efforts.

Recommendation: Establish a Downtown Action Plan Implementation Task Force with shared leadership and accountability from City Administration, EDBA, and other essential organizations to oversee delivery. If done well, this could satisfy the aims of the Downtown Revitalization Coalition and could ultimately replace that group.

We want this plan to succeed, and our members NEED this plan to succeed. We believe the EDBA is uniquely positioned to help make that happen—not only because of our mandate, but because of the trust we've built throughout the Downtown community and our track record of getting things done. We urge Council to help ensure the success of this plan by more clearly embedding collaborative leadership, robust public-private mechanisms, and a clear commitment to place-based partnership.

Puneeta McBryan
Chief Executive Officer