

EDMONTON PLACE BRAND FRAMEWORK

Recommendation

That the January 21, 2026, Office of the City Manager report OCM03331, 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	THRIVE / CREATE
Corporate Business Plan	Managing the Corporation
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2021-2023 Place Brand Strategy
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> October 15, 2018, Communications and Engagement report CR_5048, Brand and Reputation Role Clarity April 12, 2021, Communications and Engagement report CE00235, Edmonton Place Brand Strategy

Executive Summary

- With many of the 2021-2023 Place Brand strategy objectives complete and a heightened corporate focus on economic development and financial sustainability, Administration has been developing a refreshed four-year (2026-2029) Place Brand Framework.
- The shift from strategy to framework is intentional, as Administration is mindful that partners may have unique mandates and needs at different times.
- The proposed Edmonton Place Brand Framework has core principles, cornerstones and calls for a coordinated brand architecture.

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- It builds on prior Council-approved work and aligns with The City Plan, ConnectEdmonton and economic development priorities.
- The City of Edmonton has been tracking perceptions of Edmonton for nearly 20 years as a place to attract talent, investments, and tourists.
- Edmonton is a relationship-based city. The Place Brand Framework positions Administration as the strategic steward of Edmonton's place brand, not as its sole owner.
- Best practice shows that successful place brands are built through alignment across many voices: economic development, tourism, arts and culture, business, institutions (including post-secondaries) and residents.
- The Edmonton Place Brand Framework timeframe was intentionally chosen to better align with the City's four-year budget cycle, Council's term and to better enable conditions to measure progress and success. It also intentionally concludes in 2029 to align with the 125th anniversary of the City of Edmonton's incorporation.
- Why.Edmonton.ca is the City's official Place Brand website. It is a comprehensive library of data-informed stories and digital assets and a public resource for all partners to reference. There are some helpful facts about the strengths and highlights of the city and what makes it unique.
- Place branding and place making are distinct but closely connected.
- The current annual allocation for Place Brand through the Office of the Chief Communications Officer is approximately \$259,000 per year.
- Should Committee receive the Edmonton Place Brand Framework report (OCM03331) for information, Administration will proceed with its implementation and enhance engagement and collaboration with various City and industry partners.

REPORT

The City's 2021-2023 Place Brand Strategy included short, medium and long-term strategies and actions that focused on the development of a library of brand assets, as well as supporting pandemic recovery.

With many of the 2021-2023 Place Brand Strategy objectives completed, and the corporate focus on service delivery, economic development, financial sustainability, growth planning and safety and security, including commitments to anti-racism and reconciliation, Administration has been developing a refreshed four-year (2026-2029) Edmonton Place Brand Framework (Attachment 1).

The shift from strategy to framework is intentional. A strategy focuses on specific objectives and tactics while a framework provides high-level vision and guidance. A framework recognizes that different partners have unique mandates and may have different needs (and therefore different marketing strategies) at different times. Administration determined a framework approach would be better suited to enable collaboration, coordination and overall collective success.

Why.Edmonton.ca is the City's official place brand website. Its development fulfilled one of the key deliverables from the 2021-2023 strategy. Why.Edmonton.ca is the City's place brand website

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and provides a library of data-informed stories, key messages and digital assets, including complimentary high-resolution photos, b-roll and video profiles. Analytics demonstrate the resources have been well-used. Currently, the site has 24,000 unique active users from markets across the country where the City has run marketing campaigns. On average, users have spent over two minutes per visit and downloaded 1.8 assets from the comprehensive Digital Asset Library. Over the past few years, Administration has been populating and refining the site, ensuring search optimization and incorporation of the highest standards based on Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. As a result, Why.Edmonton.ca earned the international Digital Gold Award from AVA Digital Awards in early 2025. This has positioned the next iteration of place brand for success, ensuring resources are in place for longer-term brand sustainability.

Supporting the place brand site are other brand touchpoints, including social media channels. The City has leveraged the reach and engagement built up over time and has demonstrably capitalized on uniquely Edmonton opportunities. For example, Edmonton has had several viral posts, including during the Edmonton Oilers' playoff runs. This has contributed to a solid brand presence for Edmonton. This type of visibility showcases the spirit of our city to a broader audience and can be leveraged among the City and its partners in the years to come.

Place Brand and Place Making

Place branding and place making are distinct but closely connected. A place brand is a compelling articulation of why people are drawn to and stay in a particular. Simply put, it answers the question, *Why Edmonton?*

In the proposed framework, the City's place brand will focus on how the city's brand assets (including voice and presence), identity and reputation are strategically positioned to attract people and business investment, while place making will have a focus on authentic, lived-experiences that bring that brand to life. Edmonton's place brand is not intended to be a standalone campaign or slogan, but a longer-term framework that shapes how a city is consistently represented to various audiences.

Place making is an approach to defining public places to make them attractive for people to live, work, play and learn. Place making personifies Edmonton in a way that attracts investment, skilled talent and signature events.

"I love New York," for example, is a campaign that has contributed to the City of New York's overall place making and brand efforts for nearly a half century. In that same timeframe, Edmonton has had over 15 slogans or place brand related campaigns. In other words, storytelling ultimately reinforces the overall brand. Establishing a framework that convenes the strengths and stories of partners will be important to the amplification of Edmonton's identity.

Brand Architecture

The City's proposed Place Brand Framework has core principles, cornerstones and calls for a coordinated brand architecture. Brand architecture is the strategic organization of various brands and sub-brands or brand strategies. Through brand architecture, the City will cultivate a flexible ecosystem in recognition that different partners will have different needs at different times. The Place Brand framework is intended to provide nimble guidance that will coordinate and enhance

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individual place making strategies or campaigns into a collective effort that reaches well beyond Edmonton's borders.

Corporate Identity

While parallel to and complementary to the place brand, the City of Edmonton's corporate brand has a distinct purpose. The corporate brand is specific to the City of Edmonton as an organization, how it governs, delivers services, builds infrastructure and supports residents. It shapes internal culture and provides clear identification for City-owned facilities, programs and services. Importantly, the corporate brand is fully managed by City Administration.

Although distinct, the City's corporate identity assets provide a strong foundation for Edmonton's Place Brand Framework. How the City of Edmonton performs as an organization (including perception and reputation outcomes), through service delivery, infrastructure development and impact on everyday life, directly shapes how people feel about and perceive Edmonton as a place.

Edmonton's Place Brand Framework

The proposed 2026–2029 Place Brand Framework builds on prior Council-approved work and aligns with The City Plan, ConnectEdmonton and economic development priorities. It deliberately focuses on Edmonton's authentic strengths, and is based on evidence and opportunity readiness. It is adaptive by design to allow for messaging to shift as market conditions change, while maintaining a consistent, values-based narrative about who Edmonton is and where it is going.

The Place Brand Framework positions Administration as the strategic steward of Edmonton's place brand, not as its sole owner. Best practice shows that successful place brands are built through alignment across many voices: economic development, tourism, arts and culture, business, institutions (including post-secondaries) and residents. Administration is uniquely positioned to convene, coordinate and align this ecosystem. With a corporate promise to enable a better life for all Edmontonians, a politically-neutral mandate, strong governance structures and accountability to Council and taxpayers, the City is best positioned to gather extensive research and data while coordinating and supporting collective place brand efforts.

The Framework has four key storytelling cornerstones, intentionally designed to meet the distinct needs of diverse partners and audiences:

- Invest here
- Live here
- Learn here
- Play here

Strategic Alignment and Approach

The proposed Place Brand Framework is intended to be activated between 2026 and 2029. This timeframe was intentionally chosen in order to better align with the City's four-year budget cycle, Council's term (given Council is positioned as governors and champions of the City's place brand work) and to better enable conditions to measure progress and success. It also intentionally concludes in 2029 in order to align with the 125th anniversary of the City of Edmonton's incorporation.

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Further, Edmonton is known as a relationship-based city. At the heart of the Place Brand Framework are city partners who can either activate, influence and/or support various place brand strategies and initiatives under the overarching framework.

Administration's role is to set the framework, provide shared tools and data, steward partnerships and measure progress. Partners lead where they have reach and expertise; the City amplifies, aligns and ensures Edmonton tells one coherent story. This approach is intended to multiply impact, protect public investment and position Edmonton to compete more effectively for talent, investment and opportunity over the long term.

Potential Outcomes

Place brand is a significant contributor to a municipality's economic development. Similar to economic development, place brand and place making is complex. It does not happen in isolation, is not controlled by one entity or one action and the results are better when partners work together.

Driving economic growth requires diverse partners to work together to achieve shared economic goals. A strong place brand framework, coordinated and convened through municipal Administration, supports economic development by aligning partners, amplifying Edmonton's strengths, and presenting a clear, credible and consistent value proposition that attracts investment, talent and opportunity.

A shared effort is fundamental to the sustained successful promotion of Edmonton. A recent example of successful place making includes the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)'s live-stream national broadcast of Edmonton's New Year's Eve Downtown Festival and Fireworks in Churchill Square for the second consecutive year. Last year's broadcast garnered over 6.8 million viewers. This year, viewership was even higher at an estimated 10 million nationwide views, which proved advantageous for the City who had secured mainstage brand placement. Edmonton and Toronto were the only two cities selected for this opportunity. In addition to the livestream, coverage aired across all CBC platforms (TV, Radio, Gem, News Network and YouTube).

A strong place brand is a long-term, relationship-driven approach that shapes how Edmonton is understood, trusted and chosen by investors, talent, visitors and future residents. When done well, it is expected to strengthen economic development outcomes, build civic pride and ensure Edmonton shows-up consistently and credibly on the national and international stage.

Should Committee receive this report for information, Administration will proceed with implementation of the Place Brand Framework and enhance engagement and collaboration with various City and industry partners.

Budget/Financial Implications

The Office of the Chief Communications Officer holds the corporate budget for place brand initiatives. To date, the funding has focused on marketing, storytelling and media relations opportunities. The current annual allocation through the Office of the Chief Communications Officer is approximately \$259,000 per year.

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Community Insight

The City of Edmonton objectively understands its place brand and place making impressions through long-term and extensive research and engagement. There continues to be strong civic pride, another important component of successfully telling the collective story, whether that's the nostalgic City of Champions, embracing Winter City or taking pride as a Festival City. Edmonton is all those things and more.

Administration has been tracking perceptions of Edmonton for nearly 20 years as a place to attract talent, investments, and tourists. The City conducted brand-specific research studies in 2008, 2013 and 2019. Additionally, the City has conducted several other studies that include specific measures for place brand. In general, these studies focus on perceptions among Edmontonians. Many of them are tracking studies that have been repeated over the years.

Community insights are also gathered through key contributors to Edmonton's overall place brand. The process of creating the place brand and collaborating with partner organizations is as important as the final product. Inviting Edmontonians to participate in the development, to contribute to the place brand creates space for people to really reflect on what they love about their city. This process of reflection is not only generative in articulating what makes Edmonton special, but it activates them as agents of the brand.

In February 2025, Explore Edmonton hosted a facilitated place brand session. Nearly 30 participants represented 10 organizations, including the City of Edmonton, Explore Edmonton, Chamber of Commerce, HealthCities, University of Alberta, Edmonton International Airport, Edmonton Arts Council, Edmonton Global, Edmonton Unlimited and Indigenous Tourism Alberta. During the half-day session, it was identified that the participants saw Edmonton's current place branding as disjointed and expressed a desire for either a shared brand (71 per cent) or unified brand (23 per cent).

Public and partner engagement will provide Administration with the insights needed to steward the development of Edmonton's overall place brand. Partners sharing data they have on place brand, as well as their organization's facts and perspectives of Edmonton's strengths will inform the creation of a robust and sustainable Edmonton place brand. Administration will strategically identify shared themes that arise across the ecosystem from the data shared and the formal engagement undertaken. The City has planned to host roundtables, group meetings and individual interviews to gather this data from partners. Common themes will help to build the foundation for a strong place brand that truly resonates with partners and the community.

GBA+

Place brand is guided by The City Plan, Edmonton's blueprint for a healthy, urban and climate-resilient city of two million people that supports a prosperous region. The Big City Move of Inclusive and Compassionate is outlined in the City's strategic vision because it is essential to realizing the vision of equitable cities and workplaces.

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Though a comprehensive Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) was not specifically undertaken for this report, a full analysis is applied on an individual project basis, allowing for future contributions to equity outcomes. However, place brand efforts will strive to centre Indigenous perspectives as foundational to Edmonton's brand architecture, informed through ongoing and meaningful collaboration and engagement.

The City also applies a GBA+ to its public engagement and public opinion research activities and intentionally works to mitigate or remove barriers when soliciting input from diverse audiences.

Environment and Climate Review

This report was reviewed for environment and climate risks. Based on the review completed no significant interactions with the City's environmental and climate goals were identified within the scope of this report.

Attachments

1. Edmonton's Place Brand Framework 2026-29
2. Where We've Been Report