

EXHIBITION LANDS UPDATE - EXPLORE EDMONTON LAND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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
Corporate Business Plan	Transforming for the future
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C512 - Environmental Policy • C511B - Land Development Policy
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 5, 2017, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_5234, Expanded Strategic Approach to Edmonton Exhibition Lands City-Building Opportunity • February 22, 2018, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_5480, Exhibition Lands Update - Expanded Strategic Approach • February 22, 2018, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_5464, Coliseum Site Redevelopment – Pros, Cons and Risks • April 3, 2018, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_5774, Exhibition Lands Guiding Principles • June 19, 2018, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_5787, Exhibition Lands Redevelopment Plan Update • April 23, 2019, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_6173, Exhibition Lands Redevelopment Plan - Preferred Working Concept • December 3, 2019, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_7713, Exhibition Lands Planning Framework • March 15, 2021, Charter Bylaw 19267 - Adoption of the Edmonton Exhibition Lands Planning Framework • April 26, 2021, Financial and Corporate Services report CR_8382, Exhibition Lands Implementation Strategy • January 17, 2024, Financial and Corporate Services report FCS02210, Land Sale Approval - Edmonton Exhibition Lands • April 9, 2024, Financial and Corporate Services report FCS02244, Exhibition Lands Planning Framework and Outdoor Festival Space

- August 25, 2025, Financial and Corporate Services report FCS03140, Master Agreement Approval: Public Event Park and Village at ICE District Site Servicing

Executive Summary

- The Exhibition Lands Planning Framework's goal to create space for a vibrant new urban community will result in the need for Explore Edmonton to evolve its operations and event delivery within a reduced footprint.
- Explore Edmonton leases and/or licenses 55 hectares of land within the Exhibition Lands planning area, which is to be reduced to 15.7 hectares upon the community's full redevelopment over a 20+ year period.
- A minimum of 21 hectares would be required to support EXPO Centre operations if large scale events, such as KDays, continue to be delivered on-site.
- Explore Edmonton is an essential interested party in the Exhibition Lands redevelopment work and will continue to be engaged as planning, design and construction progress.
- Administration is working with Explore Edmonton to program the Coliseum lands as a long-term, interim outdoor festival and events space until future development takes place upwards of 20 years in the future. This is in line with the Exhibition Lands Implementation Strategy and would provide sufficient room to deliver KDays during this period.
- Administration is using the \$55 million in grant funding provided by the Government of Alberta for Coliseum deconstruction costs and to create a safe, accessible interim event space on those lands.
- The City's obligations in the grant funding agreement with the Government of Alberta to contribute a minimum of \$35 million into site improvements and public infrastructure within Exhibition Lands can be achieved through the approved budget (Capital profile CM-17-5056 - Edmonton Exhibition Lands) for the preparation and servicing of Stage 1 and the continued, planned investment in future stages.

REPORT

For more than 110 years, the Edmonton Exhibition Lands site has been a gathering place for Edmonton's social, cultural, entertainment, sports and agricultural life. The site is home to KDays, FarmFair and several outdoor festivals and events.

The Edmonton Exhibition Lands Planning Framework¹ (Planning Framework) outlines a clear vision for future development within the Exhibition Lands site over the next 30 years. It was approved by Council on March 15, 2021, with the passing of Charter Bylaw 19267. The Planning Framework functions as the statutory Area Redevelopment Plan (ARP). It outlines a dramatic shift

¹ webdocs.edmonton.ca/infraplan/plans_in_effect/Edmonton_Exhibition_Lands_Planning_Framework.pdf

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from large land areas that are seldom used into a sustainable, transit-oriented urban community that will be home to over 6,500 residents.

The creation of the Planning Framework began in 2017 and included substantial engagement with Edmontonians and interested internal and external parties, such as Edmonton Northlands and, later, Explore Edmonton (formerly Edmonton Economic Development Corporation). The Exhibition Lands Implementation Strategy (April 26, 2021, Financial and Corporate Services report CR_8382) outlined the approach for the redevelopment of the area. It identified roles and responsibilities, engagement approaches and the need to thoughtfully shift the operational areas used by Explore Edmonton as the site progresses through redevelopment.

Redevelopment work is already underway in the southwest corner of the Exhibition Lands plan area, including the demolition of the horse barns, construction of Stage 1 and the upcoming demolition of the Spectrum and Jockey Dorms buildings.

Land Needs Assessment

The April 9, 2024, Financial and Corporate Services report FCS02244, Exhibition Lands Planning Framework and Outdoor Festival Space noted the following:

- The implementation of the Planning Framework will affect the EXPO Centre's current operations.
- The planned Coliseum deconstruction provides opportunities for interim event space since those lands are planned to be developed upwards of 20 years in the future and the current zoning allows for hosting events.
- In response to concerns raised by Explore Edmonton (the operator of the EXPO Centre), Administration noted that it would undertake a land needs assessment to better understand the land required to deliver events, such as KDays, and the impacts of retaining lands for event and festival use rather than redeveloping them.
- At the April 9, 2024, Urban Planning Committee meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration, as part of the land needs assessment report, include information on all current and future Explore Edmonton needs as it relates to the Exhibition Lands site and provide a clearer and more comprehensive engagement approach that accurately reflects their important standing as an essential stakeholder in the execution of the Exhibition Lands ARP and any future activity.

The EXPO Centre's leased, licensed and utilized area totals 55 hectares and is spread across the majority of the Exhibition Lands, as shown in Attachment 1. Some buildings and yards across the site are used for storage and repair, while other areas host long-term tenants, such as the Urban Farm. Significant portions of the land are infrequently used, except when activated for major events such as KDays. Attachment 2 highlights the land and building uses associated with last year's KDays exhibition.

When the Planning Framework and Implementation Strategy were approved in 2021, these uses were known. However, there was an expectation in the Planning Framework that the EXPO Centre would reduce its operational area through more efficient use of space and a maturation of the business model to reflect its new operating reality in a highly urbanized environment. As

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the area redeveloped, operations and events, such as KDays, would shift to areas that continued to remain vacant until those areas were also redeveloped. At full build out, there would be no available space within the area to host major, large-scale outdoor events. The site lease and other operating agreements between the City and Explore Edmonton also align with that notion.

To respond to the motion, Administration retained Urban Strategies Inc. (USI) to support a land needs assessment and to evaluate the impacts of allocating additional land within the plan area to support EXPO Centre operations. This work included engagement with Explore Edmonton and other interested parties, assessment of the impact on units and population under different scenarios and an economic analysis.

USI's analysis and engagement focused on how to determine the appropriate balance between residential redevelopment of the Exhibition Lands and preserving sufficient outdoor event and storage/staging space (Attachment 3). Key findings include:

- A minimum of five to six hectares of land is required in addition to the current 15.7 hectares allocated to the EXPO Centre in the Planning Framework (total of 21 hectares). This would allow the Expo Centre to continue its existing operations and to deliver KDays.
- Deconstruction of the Coliseum will create 6.4 hectares of land north of 118 avenue which will create sufficient new space that could allow for the delivery of KDays until potential site redevelopment in the future.
- Consideration needs to be given to noise issues from events, conflicting adjacent land uses (i.e., residential uses directly adjacent to event space), and proposed replacement of the existing Coliseum LRT station if event space were maintained.
- Allocating additional land to Explore Edmonton operations would come at the expense of other land uses, lowering the unit yield and population of the plan area, or reducing or eliminating other land uses such as the Employment or Civic/Education Anchors.

An Economic and Market Analysis was also completed and is included in Attachment 3. The analysis evaluated three options:

- Option 1: Continued Operations Only - this option represents a scenario where no development occurs and the Expo Centre continues to operate as is.
- Option 2: Continued Operations + Modest Real Estate Development - This option represents a scenario where 21 hectares of total land is set aside for the Expo Centre and ongoing events while the remaining land is redeveloped.
- Option 3: Reduced Operations + Significant Real Estate Development - This option represents a scenario in alignment with the currently approved Planning Framework where the Expo Centres operations are significantly reduced to allow for maximum redevelopment.

The Economic and Market Analysis found that Option 2 provided a higher financial benefit to the City when accounting for factors such as sales revenue, tax revenue, job growth, economic impacts from events and GDP growth.

Explore Edmonton Requirements and Engagement

The Planning Framework directs that lands used by Explore Edmonton for events, parking, laydown and maintenance shops will be redeveloped into the new community. As the

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neighbourhood evolves, it was envisioned that Explore Edmonton's operations would need to evolve as well. Public transportation modes would replace driving, the new Borden Park Expansion would host smaller events and laydown and maintenance areas would need to be consolidated or eliminated. Under this approach, large events like KDays would have a significant period of time while development progressed to be reimagined or repositioned within the city.

The existing allocation of 55 hectares of City-owned land for these events and operations is not aligned with the long-term vision for a sustainable, transit-oriented urban community, presenting an opportunity for more efficient use of the site. Explore Edmonton's future land needs are dependent on whether or not large-scale events continue at the site after the eventual development of the Coliseum land:

- **Evolving Operations:** The 15.7 hectares allocated in the current Planning Framework is sufficient if the organization evolves its operations and large-scale events, like KDays, are discontinued on site.
- **Continuing Large-Scale Events:** If large-scale events like KDays are to continue at this location, the minimum allocated space must increase from 15.7 hectares to 21 hectares, as the proposed Borden Park Expansion area is not suitable for this purpose.

The interim event space on the Coliseum lands is planned to be available upwards of 20 years in the future. During this time, the City and Explore Edmonton will have ample time to assess operations and determine whether the Planning Framework needs to be amended to accommodate long-term large event delivery.

Reduced parking (to align with the Planning Framework's transit-oriented vision) and the consolidation/relocation of storage and maintenance shops will occur gradually over many years. This gradual shift may have budget implications, but will also allow Explore Edmonton sufficient time to adapt its operations.

Explore Edmonton was extensively involved in the creation² and implementation of the Planning Framework and is an essential party in the transformational redevelopment project (Attachment 4: What We Heard Reports). As noted in the Planning Framework, "the Edmonton EXPO Centre is at the heart of the Exhibition Lands development concept and is envisioned to diversify its uses in a manner that contributes to the vibrancy of the community". The required operational changes are an intentional shift laid out in the Planning Framework, not a reflection of diminished value or a lack of engagement.

The City and Explore Edmonton maintain communication and awareness of each other's activities and plans in a variety of ways, including:

- Regular meetings and updates on the progress and upcoming plans of the redevelopment;
- Formal engagement such as that carried out in the development of the Planning Framework, Implementation Plan and land needs assessment;
- Ad hoc meetings and communication; and
- A newsletter distributed to all interested parties.

² https://www.edmonton.ca/projects_plans/edmonton-exhibition-lands

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This collaborative approach to strategic shifts in operations has already been successfully implemented, with the relocation of the Edmonton Urban Farm from within the first stage of development to the area directly south of Bonanza Park. Factors that influenced the timing of this shift included construction schedules, the farm's operational seasons and the Edmonton Heritage Festival's relocation during the William Hawrelak Park Rehabilitation Project. The \$1.75 million cost to relocate the farm was included in the Stage 1 project costs.

Coliseum LRT Station Replacement and Provincial Grant Funding

The August 25, 2025, Financial and Corporate Services report FCS03140, Master Agreement Approval: Public Event Park and Village at ICE District Site Servicing, proposed an agreement between the City of Edmonton, the Government of Alberta and the Oilers Entertainment Group regarding the continued development and expansion of the Ice District.

As part of the agreement, the provincial government will provide a maximum grant of \$55 million for eligible expenditures related to the deconstruction and interim site-use development of the Coliseum building and land. In addition, the City must contribute a minimum of \$35 million towards public infrastructure improvements within the Exhibition Lands by December 1, 2032. For both the \$55 million and \$35 million, the City must report to the province annually to ensure the funds are used for eligible expenditures. At the August 25, 2025, City Council Non-Regular meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration, as part of the Exhibition Lands Update report FCS02493, include how the Coliseum Station replacement may be prioritized amongst other site enhancements, as the City considers how to allocate funding in alignment with the Grant Funding Agreement.

The City is using the \$55 million grant funding from the Government of Alberta to advance work on both the Coliseum deconstruction and the planning, design and construction of an interim event space for festivals and events until redevelopment occurs. The redevelopment work, funded by Land Enterprise Retained Earnings and completed after the signing of the grant agreement, along with future planned stages (site clearance, demolition and site servicing investments), will satisfy the City's \$35 million commitment with the Government of Alberta.

Upon the completion of the \$35 million contribution, including reporting to and confirmation from the Government of Alberta, there are no further funding contribution obligations on the City for alternate projects in the plan area. Investment in City-building projects identified in the Planning Framework will support development efforts and serve as a catalyst for growth. A strategy for Capital Profile CM-99-9000 - Infrastructure Delivery - Growth will be developed as part of the 2027-2030 budget cycle. Options for the funding could include the rehabilitation or replacement of the existing Coliseum LRT Station, the development of the new South Transit Village Station or another capital project within the plan area.

Next Steps

Taking into consideration the approved Planning Framework, needs of Explore Edmonton and EXPO Centre to maintain ongoing operations, analysis completed by USI and the grant funding provided by the provincial government, Administration will:

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- Continue to utilize the \$55 million grant from the Government of Alberta to plan, design and construct the Coliseum lands into a safe and usable space (subject to eligibility and funds remaining after the Coliseum deconstruction), to host relocated events that are currently located throughout Exhibition Lands, including KDays, in both the short term and long term.
- Continue planned site clearing and servicing work associated with the redevelopment to meet the City's \$35 million reinvestment contribution required in the agreement with the provincial government.
- Maintain the lands south of the EXPO Centre for redevelopment.
- Continue to work with Explore Edmonton to ensure they have sufficient lead time to relocate storage, maintenance shops and parking within Exhibition Lands as the area redevelops.
- Return to Council in the future with any proposed amendments to the Planning Framework as required and when appropriate.

Budget/Financial Implications

The current approved capital budget includes \$143.1 million dollars of funding towards Exhibition Lands, broken down as follows:

- \$53.1 million within capital profile CM-17-5056 - Edmonton Exhibition Lands, funded by Land Enterprise Retained Earnings (LERE), to facilitate the redevelopment of the Exhibition Lands.
- \$55.0 million within capital profile 26-10-9550 - Coliseum Demolition and Site Improvements, funded with provincial grant funding, to fund the demolition and interim site development of the Edmonton Coliseum building and land.
- \$35.0 million within capital profile CM-99-9000 - Infrastructure Delivery - Growth, funded with Pay-As-You-Go (\$15.75 million) and interim Land Enterprise Retained Earnings (\$19.75 million), approved within the 2027-2030 capital budget cycle to fund future site enhancements or other public infrastructure investments within Exhibition lands. The interim funding from LERE is to be paid back via the Land Enterprise annual dividend. There is no obligation to hold these funds in this capital profile to meet the obligations of the grant agreement with the province.

The Implementation Strategy outlines the program of land sales to facilitate activities forwarding the redevelopment of the site, such as demolition, utility and road network upgrades. Following the phasing strategy outlined in the Implementation Strategy, which calls for the lands south of EXPO Centre to be sold and developed in the short-to-medium term, proceeds from those sales can supplement further future neighbourhood development. This ensures that the neighbourhood is developed in line with market conditions and strategy, as well as with the Planning Framework's overall goals. Any changes to the prescribed land uses in the Planning Framework will affect the overall project pro forma, as well as long-term tax levy collections. These effects, along with the overall impacts on the City related to the EXPO Centre and festivals and events, will also need to be considered as part of any permanent land use changes that may be explored in the future.

Community Insight

Engagement with the public and interested parties began in 2017 and continued through 2020, Attachment 4 includes the What We Heard Reports, with several rounds designed to inform the development of the Edmonton Exhibition Lands Planning Framework and Implementation

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Strategy. Engagement included meetings with interested parties (including Explore Edmonton), public meetings and surveys. Themes heard from engagement participants included: open space, transit orientation and connectivity, the mix of uses as an opportunity to enhance lifestyle, density and housing mix, the future of KDays and other events.

The feedback received internally, and from the public, including community, business and industry representatives, as part of the workshops facilitated by Urban Strategies Inc. in 2025 has been summarized and is included with Attachment 3 of this report.

GBA+

In developing both the Edmonton Exhibition Lands Planning Framework and Implementation Strategy, key guiding principles served as pillars for the future neighbourhood. The City is working to ensure Exhibition Lands reflect Council's priorities, rooted in ConnectEdmonton and The City Plan, including equitable growth. This includes offering an inclusive neighbourhood for Edmontonians at a variety of income levels. Market-rate housing in the neighbourhood is targeted at average income levels, and parcels of land have been identified for future affordable housing developments. The City will continue to work with developers and all housing providers to support the provision of attainable housing and strive toward the City's aspirational target of 16 per cent affordable housing within the development.

A comprehensive approach to transportation planning will ensure people who walk, cycle, wheel, ride transit and drive have safe, reliable, high-quality and connected travel options to and through the area. Planning will also support vibrant, safe, accessible and inclusive communities for existing and new residents and visitors, so people of all ages and abilities have the opportunity to fully participate in the life of their city and neighbourhoods.

Environment and Climate Review

The Planning Framework and Implementation Strategy incorporate the guiding principle of advancing environmental sustainability and resilience while balancing various land uses within the development. Attachment 5 provides an overview of environmental and climate intersection points associated with potential changes to the Planning Framework. These include:

- Opportunities to incorporate climate resilience measures into the design and use of potential Explore Edmonton facilities, such as mitigating stormwater runoff and urban heat island effects
- Alignment of residential density targets and active transportation provisions to support the City's climate goals, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive carbon assessments, and considering the impact of various land-use scenarios on greenhouse gas emissions and overall mobility
- Benefits to air quality, urban heat mitigation, ecological connectivity and stormwater management through maintaining and expanding park space, incorporating green buffers and including the Urban Farm for food system resilience
- Exploration of pathways to create a low-carbon community, in line with the City's environment and climate goals. This includes the potential implementation of a district energy system as a scalable solution for low-carbon heating for select locations within the plan area.

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Administration is planning to bring forward a report related to district energy to Council later in 2026.

As options and proposed land-use changes are considered, it will be important for revisions to align with the Edmonton Exhibition Lands Planning Framework's environmental vision and climate resilience objectives to support long-term ecological health and city-wide sustainability goals.

Attachments

1. Exhibition Lands Leased and Licensed Areas (Explore Edmonton)
2. KDays and Event Area Utilization Map
3. Review of the City of Edmonton's 2021 Exhibition Lands Planning Framework Report - January 2026
4. Edmonton's Exhibition Lands Redevelopment - What We Heard Report, Phase 1
5. Environment and Climate Review