

Edmonton Design Committee Policies and Procedures

Recommendation

That the February 2, 2021, Urban Form and Corporate Strategic Development report CR_7736, be received for information.

Previous Committee Action

At the October 22, 2019, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration bring a report on the Edmonton Design Committee policies and procedures review. The report shall consider how recommendations of EDC influence development approval processes and contribute to the Committee achieving its mandate.

Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of the Edmonton Design Committee Review that was undertaken to ensure the continued efficiency, effectiveness and relevance of the Committee, and, in particular, to improve the impact of its recommendations on the development approval process, leading to good urban design outcomes for both private and publicly funded projects, in alignment with ConnectEdmonton and The City Plan. The review identifies key actions which can be implemented by preparing administrative and committee procedures, and as required, amendments to Edmonton Design Committee Bylaw 14054.

Report

In late 2018, Administration in partnership with the Edmonton Design Committee (EDC) initiated a formal review of the Committee and its scope, structure, processes and procedures. Over the course of 2019, internal and external stakeholders such as the design and development industry, as well as Council members, were engaged in order to identify issues and possible solutions to ensure the continued efficiency, effectiveness and relevance of the Committee. The results of this engagement are summarized in Attachment 1 - What We Heard Report.

A key focus of the review is the impact of Committee recommendations on the development approval process. The review also addresses issues related to

submission requirements and procedures, as well as Committee scope (e.g., project type and geographic location) in the interest of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the EDC.

Edmonton Design Committee Recommendations and the Development Approval Process

Recommendations made by the Edmonton Design Committee to applicants, Administration and Council have a major impact on the development approval process, and in turn, the quality of urban design in both the private and public realm in Edmonton. Well-designed urban places are central to the strategic vision of both ConnectEdmonton and The City Plan.

Edmonton Design Committee recommendations ensure development proposals align with current best practice and leverage the diverse perspectives and professional experiences of Committee members to encourage high-quality urban design. Committee recommendations frequently include urban design guidance to inform the continued discussion between applicants and Administration or Council as a project progresses through the development approval process.

Edmonton Design Committee recommendations fall into one of three categories:

- **Support** - The development proposal generally reflects good urban design and should proceed as designed.
- **Support with conditions** - The development proposal requires some refinement. The Committee provides conditions giving urban design guidance to both the applicant and Administration as the project progresses. Additional review by the Committee may or not be required.
- **Non-support** - The proposal requires significant refinement. The Committee provides commentary giving urban design guidance to both the applicant and Administration as the project progresses. Additional review by the Committee is expected.

Issues

Internal and external stakeholder engagement identified the following issues specifically related to the impact of EDC recommendations on the development approval process:

- Industry, Administration and the Committee have expressed confusion about how recommendations of 'support with conditions' and 'non-support' specifically impact the development approval process

- Industry and Administration have identified that at times Committee recommendations provide questionable design guidance; i.e., recommendations are unclear, unbalanced and out-of-scope
- Industry has identified that the value of Committee recommendations and design guidance is a direct reflection of the expertise of Committee Members.

Actions

The Edmonton Design Committee Review identifies a number of actions related to the efficiency and effectiveness of the EDC. With specific reference to Committee recommendations, the following actions have been identified:

- **Ensure a high-performing Committee** through improved recruitment, accountability, training and evaluation. In particular:
 - **Develop a more rigorous and proactive recruitment strategy** Under the current process, the EDC Chair works with the representative professional associations and groups to recruit potential Committee members. The Review recommends that all Committee members proactively engage in outreach with their respective organizations and groups, attending board meetings, annual general meetings and other events to recruit new applicants for Committee vacancies.
 - **Prepare Committee position descriptions** including roles, responsibilities, skills and qualities. These position descriptions are required (as per City Policy C575C), but will also assist in the recruitment of high-calibre professionals and the annual evaluation of Committee members.
 - **Improve Committee training** for both new and current Committee members, focusing on EDC Bylaw 14054 and other Committee procedures, as well as relevant City bylaws and procedures (eg. C575C, Bylaws 18155 and 18156).
 - **Update Committee member evaluation processes** in concert with the preparation of Committee position descriptions, with a particular focus on Committee specific functions and expectations.
- **Clarify the advisory function of the Committee**, clearly defining 'support', 'non-support' and 'support with conditions' for the benefit of both the Committee and Administration. Specific focus should be directed to how recommendations of 'non-support' provide guidance to Development Officers and File Planners, and otherwise impact development approval processes and decisions.
- **Clarify the scope of the Committee's review** to focus primarily on urban design matters and not issues of a technical or procedural nature. Under this action, the current EDC Principles of Urban Design would be reintroduced as the basis for the Committee's review and recommendations. In the future, the

Principles will be updated to align with The City Plan and other relevant City policy and strategy.

- **Ensure impactful Committee recommendations** that are balanced, insightful and clearly communicated. Recommendations should identify both the strengths and weaknesses of a proposed design, include clear design guidance, and as appropriate, context to the Committee’s recommendation. This approach contributes to a more positive interaction between applicants and the EDC, but more importantly, provides a more comprehensive assessment for Development Officers, File Planners, and in the case of rezoning applications, City Council.

Next Steps

Administration, in consultation with the Edmonton Design Committee, will implement actions identified in the Edmonton Design Committee Review as follows:

- **Prepare Committee procedures** for those aspects of Committee function and scope not addressed in other City Bylaws and policies. This work is scheduled to be completed by the end of Q2 2021.
- **Update administrative procedures** including Committee position descriptions, improved Committee recruitment and training, and updated performance evaluations. This work is also scheduled to be completed by the end of Q2 2021.
- **Amend EDC Bylaw 14054** as needed to reflect changes to the mandate and scope of the Committee, membership and related issues. This work is scheduled to be completed by the end of Q2 2021.

Public Engagement

Internal and external engagement on the Edmonton Design Committee review has been undertaken through a combination of in-person and online methodologies. Engagement is described in detail in Attachment 1 - What We Heard Report.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome(s): Edmonton is attractive and compact			
Outcome(s)	Measure(s)	Result(s)	Target(s)
Communities are well-designed	Edmontonians' Assessment: Well-designed Attractive City	53 percent (2017)	No targets have been identified for this measure

Attachments

1. Edmonton Design Committee Review What We Heard Report

Others Reviewing this Report

- M. Persson, Chief Financial Officer and Deputy City Manager, Financial and Corporate Services
- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- A. Laughlin, Deputy City Manager, Integrated Infrastructure Services
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor