

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND OUR FUTURE CITY

What We Heard: Economic Development

THE CITY PLAN

| **SHARE** YOUR VOICE  
**SHAPE** OUR CITY

September 2018 - June 2019

**Edmonton**



## Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the traditional land on which Edmonton sits, the Territory of the Treaty 6 First Nations and the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4. We would like to acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries such as: Cree, Dene, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, Blackfoot, as well as the Métis and the Inuit.

Edmonton is a welcoming place for all people who come from around the world to share Edmonton as a home. Together we call upon all of our collective honoured traditions and spirits to work in building a great city for today and future generations.

The authors thank everyone who participated in the engagement activities. Your contributions are greatly appreciated and we hope you see your values and ideas reflected in these pages.

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# CITY PLAN ENGAGEMENT SNAPSHOT



Throughout The City Plan project phases, specific efforts were made to reach a diverse range of Edmontonians of different age, cultural and socio-economic background in different geographic areas of the city.

# HOW WE LISTENED



For more information about the engagement activities and results for The City Plan, please visit [https://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/city\\_vision\\_and\\_strategic\\_plan/The-City-Plan-Public-Engagement.aspx](https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/city_vision_and_strategic_plan/The-City-Plan-Public-Engagement.aspx)

# **Economic Development and Our Future City:** The Edmonton Economic Action Plan

We are a city of entrepreneurs and change agents, innovators and students, employers and dreamers, newcomers and life-long residents. Collectively, we have and continue to work to build our community and our economy in this place we call Edmonton. Now one of Canada's big cities, a provincial capital, a leader in environmental stewardship, a destination of choice for people, and home to over 34,000 businesses and nearly one million residents in a dynamic region.

We are proud of where we are today but it hasn't always been easy. The economic growth and success we have seen is a testament to the hard work, creativity and passion of so many Edmontonians. We have faced and will continue to face challenges – some we can see coming and others that we would have never imagined.

Today, we have an economy shaken by COVID-19 and a volatile oil and gas sector. We feel the collective worry of Edmontonians who are out of work, of small business owners writing paycheques for their staff but not themselves, and of industry leaders looking for a path forward.

We may not know all that the future holds but we know that we need a plan. We need to ensure our economy is resilient and has room for everyone. The Edmonton Economic Action Plan (the Action Plan) offers a roadmap to build a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable economy. The Action Plan consists of tangible, specific actions that advance the direction provided in The City Plan and ConnectEdmonton. The Action Plan details priority actions to be carried out by the City and identifies how the City coordinates its efforts to leverage

the strengths of our economic development and community partners. Through these actions we will support job creation, diversify our industries, and support emerging markets. Partnership is key to the Action Plan, and actions contained within it require collaboration. We are stronger when we work together.

## Principles

The City Plan engagement data was examined for ideas and insights related to these five principles of The Action Plan:

- + We will **support** new and established businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive in the new economy
- + We will **seize the potential** of our existing land, assets, and physical attributes
- + We will support **growth** and **diversification** of our economy in a sustainable and equitable way
- + We will remain and **become** a destination of choice for talent and capital
- + We will **embrace** and grow our partnerships and relationships

# What We Heard About Economic Development

Throughout The City Plan project phases, specific efforts were made to reach a diverse range of Edmontonians of different age, cultural and socio-economic background in different geographic areas of the city.

For a full report of what we heard through The City Plan engagement, who we listened to and how we listened, please visit [www.edmonton.ca/thecityplan](http://www.edmonton.ca/thecityplan)

- + What We Are Hearing: October – November 2018
- + What We Are Hearing: November – December 2018
- + What We Are Hearing: January – June 2019 (City-Wide Engagement)
- + What We Are Hearing: January – June 2019 (Indigenous Engagement)
- + What We Are Hearing: June – December 2019

The City Plan charts out how we will get to a future city, a city that has the benefits we enjoy today with new opportunities for the future. The City Plan is about our spaces and places and how we move around the city. It is about our community and what we need to do together to grow, adapt and succeed. Edmonton's City Plan provides strategic direction on economic development through multiple policy intentions and directions. The Action Plan cascades from City Plan by identifying concrete actions that can help the City and its partners achieve the policy intentions and ambitions of The City Plan.

Given that City Plan anticipates 520,000 new jobs in the Edmonton region over the next forty years, and 145,000 jobs in Edmonton in the next 10 years. To achieve this goal, the overarching question that guides this action plan is: "How do we support another 145,000 jobs in Edmonton over the coming decade?"

**The information in the following pages reflects Edmontonians' views of our economic future.**

# Indigenous Voices

For the past five years the City of Edmonton has been engaging with Indigenous communities on city-building and infrastructure projects.

One of the City projects was The City Plan, a high-level plan that sets the direction for the way Edmonton grows towards a population of two million residents. In preparing The City Plan, several Indigenous communities and organizations were engaged to share their ideas on how Edmonton could grow and become a more inclusive city. Several topics discussed included: culture, language, history, environment, wildlife, housing, and programs and services, as well as, economic development, employment, small business, tourism and procurement.

**Economic Reconciliation** – Edmonton is a hub of economic activity for many Indigenous people, entrepreneurs, businesses and organizations and over the years the City has heard that more needs to be done to support economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous communities have shared that they not only want to be engaged in conversations that impact the environment and their important cultural places and sacred sites, but on economic benefits and how they can thrive economically like their non-Indigenous counterparts, accessing self-sufficiency and prosperity.

**Indigenous Business and Employment**– Indigenous Entrepreneurs should be provided with greater opportunities and mediums to promote their businesses within Edmonton. Better access to education and training have been identified areas that could help support Indigenous people and help improve their access to more meaningful employment and business opportunities.

**Accessibility** – Edmonton should be open to all Indigenous peoples, free of racism and discrimination and provide outreach and support to help Indigenous people feel welcome as they adjust to Edmonton's urban setting. Indigenous people should have gathering places within the City that they can learn, connect and practice cultural, historical and spiritual traditions.

**Cultural Awareness** – Prior to the establishment of Edmonton, forts were located alongside the North Saskatchewan River which were important to many Indigenous people who came from all over the Capital region to trade goods and purchase supplies. Not unlike the highways today, rivers were used to connect communities and provided access to hunting and fishing grounds, medicines, and valuable food sources. Edmonton has a rich and diverse history and a strong connection with Indigenous peoples, the City should explore ways to connect, share, and strengthen relationships and find ways to commemorate Indigenous peoples contributions, acknowledging their traditional territories and homelands.

# City–Wide Engagement

When asked about their future aspirations as a city, Instead, responses highlighted ideas related to shifting job markets, enhancing Edmontonians' quality of life and how attractive Edmonton is. They also identified alignment between community development, local job creation and supporting local entrepreneurs. The following sections highlight some of the common themes related to economic development and economic sustainability received in the city–wide engagement for The City Plan.

In general, participants were not focused on specific actions, goals or targets related to economic development. Nor were they descriptive about when these actions should be taken.

In addition, specific quotes have been included for illustrative purposes.

## The Data

In reviewing the existing City Plan Engagement Data, the following work was completed:

- + Review of roughly 2000 previously coded, written comments from pop-up events including City Plan HQ (Phase 2), Coffee Chats (Phase 3B), Community Meetings (Phase 3B), October 2019 Pop-Ups (Phase 4)
- + Review of workshop materials from Core Stakeholder Workshops, and Public Workshops
- + Review of City Plan What We are Hearing Reports
- + Review of Community Energy Transition Strategy What We are Hearing Reports

It should be noted that the engagement on the City Plan was completed before the COVID-19 pandemic and were not part of the engagement results.

Despite this, the broad reach of the City Plan engagement means that it does capture many topics that are still relevant to Edmonton and its recovery.

## Support our Local Economy

**Small Business** – Small/local businesses were perhaps the most common topic directly associated with economic development in the data. Responses were focused on supporting local businesses both as consumers but also through policies like having the City preferentially buy 'made in Edmonton' products and services.

Participants felt that access to small and local businesses close to their homes was key to a vibrant community and urban quality of life. Some people indicated that the current design of commercial areas are inaccessible and are not integrated into communities enough.

**Entrepreneurial Support** – Responses were also clear that the City should be supporting entrepreneurs to take risks and start businesses. Suggestions ranged from broad actions like promoting and highlighting entrepreneurs to encouraging specific industries like health and tech and promoting more entrepreneurial spaces like incubators as part of the start-up 'ecosystem'.

Some comments raised concerns that the business environment contained too much risk for local entrepreneurs and that the City should do what it can to expand the spaces and communities where local businesses can be established and operate.



Participants also highlighted that there are already numerous supports for entrepreneurs and that the City and its partners need to promote those available resources.

A subset of comments about supporting entrepreneurs identified the importance of supporting a more diverse set of business-owners in Edmonton. This included identifying relevant supports for minority-owned businesses as well as Indigenous-owned businesses.



*“Create more awareness about available resources.”*

*– Pop-up Participant*



**Local Districts** – Comments indicated a desire to 'live locally' with access to food that has been grown locally and support local small businesses all within walking distance or a short bike/transit ride. Also, this also meant having a local population that was dense enough to support those local businesses.



*“[In the future] I have access to all of the services & amenities I need within 25–30 minutes of travel via bike or transit, and I don't have to risk my safety to do that” –*

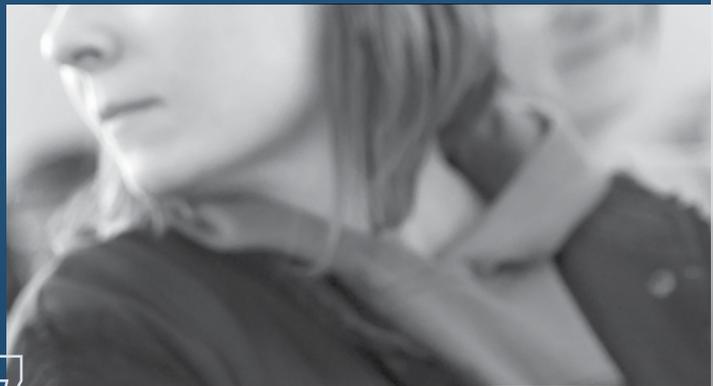
*Guiding Values Engagement Participant*



**Local Nodes** – Participants also identified that the City should be concentrating its efforts on local nodes when it came to supporting business development. This concept of local development nodes was most closely associated with infrastructure investment and redevelopment, but participants also identified that these areas were opportunities to create more vibrant businesses within their communities and allow people to live closer to where they lived.

**Growth Areas** – Many participants were supportive of identifying specific growth areas in the City to focus on additional development. Community Economic Development programs, like the Neighbourhood Revitalization Projects in Alberta Avenue, Balwin, and Belvedere were also seen as an opportunity for building economic capacity in specific areas that are economically marginalized. In contrast, some other participants were concerned that identifying these growth areas would have unforeseen impacts on those areas and surrounding communities. Other participants were concerned that future investment would not be distributed fairly around the city.

“Need more focus on identifying our strategies towards local economic development...this is key to building resiliency and creating a critical mass of population to allow for urbanism and urban lifestyles”  
– Community Meeting Participant



## Leverage our Strengths and Assets

One of the main questions that was asked early in the City Plan Engagement was “What is most important about Edmonton to keep?” Answers to this question highlight what Edmontonians see as the City’s assets. The following graphic from an earlier What We Heard report captures the main responses from participants. Some of these keywords may be helpful in identifying additional strengths and assets for the Economic Development Strategy.

River Valley	Main Streets	Business
Festivals	Trail System	Attraction
Parks	Choose	Cultural
Affordability	Edmonton	Amenities
Arts and Culture	Communities	Education
Scene	Multi-Cultural	Food Scene
Historic Buildings	City	LRT Expansion
Small Town Feel	Opportunity	Neighbourhood
Community	People First	Reinvestment
Leagues	Post Secondary	Progressive
Community	Public	Regional
Spaces	Engagement	Perspective
Diversity	Safety	Shopping Malls
Entrepreneurial	Transit	Small
Culture	Transportation	Businesses
Recreation	Options	Winter Activities
Facilities	University of	Cycling Trails
Sense of	Alberta	Volunteerism
Community	Walkable	NAIT
Edmonton	Neighbourhood	MacEwan
Culture	Winter City	

**Edmonton’s River Valley** – Although not always directly connected to economic development, one of the most common comments received from participants was about the importance of promoting the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine systems as focal points of public space and identity in Edmonton. Access into and through the River Valley should be improved and highlighted as much as possible both for local residents but also for tourists and visitors. Despite the support for bringing more people into the River Valley, participants had mixed reactions to the idea of increasing development in the River Valley.

For instance, at the time of engagement, EPCOR was proposing to develop a solar farm that was highly contentious and there were many comments against it.

In general, other kinds of urban development in the River Valley were not supported, especially the sale of River Valley land to private developers.

**Business Acumen** – Participants had mixed feelings about Edmonton’s business community. Some responses indicated that participants felt that Edmonton has strong academic and governmental experience but lacked the ‘acumen’ to capitalize on innovation. In contrast, others indicated one of Edmonton’s defining characteristics is its entrepreneurial spirit and a large pool of hard-working and well training and educated population.

**Local Events** – Participants were supportive of continuing to support festivals and community events of a variety of scales. This included promoting Edmonton as a destination for international events like the Olympics and FIFA. At the time of engagement in 2018, there had been recent news of several successfully community-scale events and participants were interested in ensuring that more neighbourhoods had space and capacity for more community-scale public events.

**Infrastructure** – Given the planning focus of the City Plan, there is extensive input about infrastructure in the data. When it comes specifically to economic development, there was a clear message that the City should continue to invest in infrastructure to support day-to-day operations as well as give Edmonton a more global reputation.

“So many people in the city right now who want to and can work together to make things happen and we have a track record to build on.”

– Engage Edmonton Participant



## Economic Diversification

**Diversification** – Across the board, participants felt that the City needs to be doing more to diversify its economy, especially given the past decade and the challenges that the oil and gas sector has faced. When it specifically came to identify actions and directions, the following are some of the proposed opportunities:

- + Ensure that economic development is baked into each plan that the City creates
- + Continue to promote small businesses
- + Support oil and gas workers and businesses to transition

Participants also identified some of the benefits of diversifying Edmonton's economy including continuing to attract young people, creating a more stable economy and building resilience to climate change.

**Industries of Interest** – Participants identified that there were other industries that the City should be supporting in order to diversify our economy.

Expanding Edmonton's tech industry was seen as an opportunity by many participants. In contrast, some comments indicated that tech is such an uncertain field that there would be too much risk in over investing in it.

Participants also identified that Edmonton leads the AI industry from a research perspective but is missing the ability to convert that experience into tangible products and businesses. They also indicated that Edmonton does not do enough to "tell the story" about innovation in the city.

The specific industries identified included:

- + Film/TV
- + Health technology
- + Agriculture/local food systems
- + Hydrogen and alternative energy

 *"Needs to diversify. We need to take leadership & build resilience. Keep going with the current path!" – City Plan HQ Participant*



**Climate Lens** – In general, participants were quick to identify the importance of including climate considerations in all planning decisions. The importance of including the climate lens was emphasized to that point that there were comments requesting that the City use “Climate” to replace “Connect” as the overarching theme of ConnectEdmonton.

The ongoing Community Energy Transition Strategy (CETS) Update identified Economic Development objectives as part of that project's What We are Hearing reports. Some of those themes included:

- + Financing the Transition – Promoting the transition through incentives, loans and leveraging federal and provincial funds.
- + Integrating the CETS work – Use existing and emerging networks of businesses and advocates to ensure alignment between the CETS and the business community.
- + Research – Further research and innovation on ideas like smart cities integration, carbon neutral buildings and local implementation pilots.
- + Advocate and Educate – The City should play a role in educating and advocating to policy makers, industry and others about the opportunities of the transition.
- + Data – Support the transition through data gathering and publishing.

 *“Recognize that we are a climate refuge. We need forward planning to enable homeowners / businesses to green, live and celebrate it.” – Community Meeting Participant*



For additional detailed descriptions of public engagement results directly related to the topic of Climate Change and Resilience please also see the following resources:

Climate Resilience and Our Future City – City Plan September 2018 – June 2019 ([https://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/documents/PDF/ClimateResilience-WhatWeHeard-CityPlan.pdf](https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/ClimateResilience-WhatWeHeard-CityPlan.pdf))

Energy Transition Strategy – Phase 1 What We Heard Report – September 2019 – May 2020 ([https://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/documents/PDF/CETSWhatWeAreHearingReport-Phase1.pdf](https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/CETSWhatWeAreHearingReport-Phase1.pdf))

## Attract Talent and Capital

**Innovation** – Participants were clear that the City should be more open to innovation and new ideas for economic development. This included both the City trying new ideas (civic innovation) and also providing flexible policy to businesses who are seeking new opportunities and expand.

**Reasons to Move** – Many participants noted that they had moved to Edmonton either in search of a job or because of a specific job. In their comments, the availability of jobs, as well as opportunities for advancement, was seen as the main reason why someone would move to Edmonton. In some cases, members of newcomer communities noted that despite there being good, high paying jobs for some, many newcomers ended up working multiple lower-paying jobs when they first arrived in the city.

Looking forward, participants noted that well paying jobs in other industries and improvements to Edmontonians' quality of life were important in attracting people to move here and stay in the City.

**Doing Business in Edmonton** – Participants often noted that the City should be taking action to make doing business easier in the city. This included notes like reducing restrictions around starting businesses and also lowering taxes and directly supporting local entrepreneurs through grants and incentives.

**Community Vibrancy** – Some participants would like to see more focus on having a greater mix of land uses and amenities located within neighbourhoods and walking distance from more people's homes and offices. This was often associated with helping to make Edmonton a more attractive place to live, something that would attract and retain a more mobile workforce.

Across most comments, participants did not support the current approach of developing larger, multi-use recreation centres compared to smaller, more integrated neighbourhood centres. Common complaints were that staff at larger centres were less friendly, that it was not possible to walk to those centres and that they were very busy.

**Taxes** – In general, participants had a general interest in keeping taxes low in the city. They indicated that ongoing tax increases "sucked", hurt investment in the city and disproportionately impacted lower-income Edmontonians.

 *"Edmonton is a city that balances 'megaplexes' with neighbourhood level services"*  
– Community Meeting Participant



## Work in Partnerships

**Training/Re-Training** – Training and education were relatively common themes. They were most often raised in relation to Edmonton's existing training and research institutions as opportunities. Re-training was almost always tied to helping oil and gas workers change industries over time. In some cases, re-training was also associated with job losses from automation.

*Re-training was also a major topic of interest during the CETS update. See the What We Heard documents produced for more detailed information.*

**Flexibility and Adaptation** – Business stakeholders were most interested in seeing policy that provides opportunities to be adapted to meet changing needs in the market and emerging technologies. This also included providing opportunities for strategies to be updated over time and to provide more flexible and case-by-base decision-making around development.

**Surplus Land for Amenities** – Some people were interested in allowing community groups to purchase or lease land from the City to be developed as community centres, gardens, or recreation facilities.

**Housing and Homelessness** – Participants were interested in providing housing to people who lack adequate housing. Some comments highlighted the importance of helping people get stable jobs to "get back on their feet" and that this would support greater participation in the local economy.

**Potential Partners** – The graphic showing the things that Edmonton should "keep" as part of the City Plan also identifies some of the different partners that the City could be partnering with and considering in its Economic Development work.

Partners identified in the engagement results include traditional partners like educational institutions including the University of Alberta, NAIT and MacEwan University. It also includes community and advocacy organizations like the Community Leagues, and local Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) like the Downtown, Alberta Avenue and Old Strathcona Business Associations. Some participants also identified other opportunities like partnering with smaller businesses, minority business associations or Indigenous businesses to help build prosperity for a more diverse cross-section of Edmontonians.

Other identified partners included regional governments, the federal government, economic development organizations and business associations and regional First Nations. Some participants were concerned that the current provincial government was not currently supporting provincial diversification and was focused on existing industries.

# Conclusions

The engagement results from the City Plan provide a snapshot of the visions and aspirations of Edmontonians for their City into the future. The review of engagement results was supplemented by integrating findings of other major engagement efforts like the Community Energy Transition Strategy which had a much more focused lens on economic development.

While it is important to note that these aspirations were provided in a time before we saw the human and economic impacts of COVID-19, they can still serve to identify some of the overarching goals of the economic development and recovery strategy.

The review highlighted what parts of Edmonton people think are most important, from the River Valley to our education institutions and entrepreneurial citizens. It also helped to identify how the design of our communities is linked to our economic prosperity through the creation of local economic nodes that are integrated into our communities and grow local and minority economic capacity and participation.

The aspirations of participants also included common refrains like diversifying Edmonton's driver industries, continuing to provide good jobs and reducing barriers to operating and expanding businesses. It also included a focus on supporting local businesses and workers transition towards a greener future, developing vibrant and diverse communities to attract long-term residents and working with old and new partners to bring prosperity to a broad cross-section of Edmontonians.

This What We Are Hearing Report gathers data about economic development from the engagement undertaken for The City Plan (October 2018 to June 2019). The ideas captured here are the beginning of public engagement for the update of Edmonton's Economic Development Strategy and were gathered before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's now up to Edmonton's residents, municipal administration, businesses, community organizations as well as other levels of government and decision makers to listen and take action.

## More Information

The What We Are Hearing Report contains feedback from Edmontonians about economic development during the engagement processes in the creation of The City Plan. This feedback was used to develop The Edmonton Economic Action Plan.

For more information on The Edmonton Economic Action Plan, please visit...

For a full report of what we heard through The City Plan engagement, who we listened to and how we listened, please visit [www.edmonton.ca/thecityplan](http://www.edmonton.ca/thecityplan)

**Figure 1.** Indigenous Input and the Economic Action Plan Principles

	<b>Economic Action Plan: Principles</b>				
Indigenous Input	Support Business	Existing Assets	Growth and Diversification	Destination of Talent and Capital	Relationships and Partnerships
<b>Indigenous Business and Employment</b>	+	+			
<b>Accessibility</b>			+		
<b>Indigenous Tourism</b>		+		+	+
<b>Cultural Awareness</b>	+			+	+

**Figure 2.** City-Wide Input and the Economic Action Plan Principles

	Economic Action Plan: Principles				
City-Wide Input	Support Business	Existing Assets	Growth and Diversification	Destination of Talent and Capital	Relationships and Partnerships
<b>Small Business</b>	+				
<b>Entrepreneurial Spirit</b>	+				
<b>Local Districts</b>	+				
<b>Local Nodes</b>	+				
<b>Growth Areas</b>	+				
<b>Edmonton's River Valley</b>		+			
<b>Business Acumen</b>		+			
<b>Local Events</b>		+			
<b>Infrastructure</b>		+			
<b>Diversification</b>			+		

**Figure 2.** City-Wide Input and the Economic Action Plan Principles

	Economic Action Plan: Principles				
City-Wide Input	Support Business	Existing Assets	Growth and Diversification	Destination of Talent and Capital	Relationships and Partnerships
<b>Climate Lens</b>			+		
<b>Industries of Interest</b>			+		
<b>Innovation</b>				+	
<b>Reasons to Move</b>				+	
<b>Doing Business in Edmonton</b>				+	
<b>Community Vibrancy</b>				+	
<b>Taxes</b>				+	
<b>Training/Re-Training</b>					+

**Figure 2.** City-Wide Input and the Economic Action Plan Principles

	<b>Economic Action Plan: Principles</b>				
City-Wide Input	Support Business	Existing Assets	Growth and Diversification	Destination of Talent and Capital	Relationships and Partnerships
<b>Flexibility and Adaptation</b>					+
<b>Surplus Land for Amenities</b>					+
<b>Housing and Homelessness</b>					+
<b>Potential Partners</b>					+

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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