

Actions to Support Edmontonians Coping with the Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 global pandemic changed the lives of all Albertans. The City of Edmonton responded early and decisively to support Edmontonians and the local economy.

The actions to support various stakeholders in Edmonton are listed below.

Businesses

Edmonton Economic Recovery Grant

Implemented in 2020, this grant supports the immediate needs and recovery efforts for Edmonton businesses impacted by COVID-19 through two streams, with a budget of \$5.3 million over 2020 and 2021:

- The City Stream focuses on the short-term stabilization of the local economy by supporting businesses that must change their operations as a result of the Provincial COVID-19 operating guidelines.
- The Business Association Stream directs funding to partner groups to deliver economic development programs for the local economy's relaunch and recovery.
- The program is offered through a \$1,000 matching grant for individual businesses and up to \$75,000 for organizations with an economic development mandate.
- As of January 19, 2021 the City has disbursed \$927,000 to 899 individual businesses and over \$360,000 to seven organizational applicants.

Edmonton Economic Recovery Construction Grant

Approved in 2021, this tax relief grant is available to developers in the downtown core to incentivize high-impact development in the Centre City area for construction in 2021.

- The program amount is up to \$22.9 million.
- Future grant payments will be equal to the uplift in municipal property taxes that result from new construction, each year, for five years (2022-2026).
- Eligible projects must be located in the Centre City, create at least 50 new residential units and involve at least \$10 million in construction costs, and begin construction in 2021.

Waiving of business license fees

While business licensing fees are a small portion of costs for business, fee waivers demonstrate a continued commitment from the City of Edmonton in supporting and reducing barriers for local businesses.

- 2020: \$3.1 million; waived fees by 50% from June 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020
- 2021: \$4.9 million; proposed fee waiver of 50% from April 1, 2021 to March 3, 2022 (Executive Committee recommended to City Council for approval on March 22, 2021)

Explore Edmonton

Explore Edmonton has adjusted their operations to their revised mandate, though the effect of the pandemic has been significant given the decline in tourism and the visitor economy and the inability to host events of any significance at the convention centres.

The City supplemented Explore Edmonton's budget to support their tourism mandate providing funding support of \$17.0 million in one-time funds over 2021 and 2022.

Business Improvement Areas (BIA) Levy Forgiveness Program

In 2020, the City provided up to \$900,000 for reimbursement of 2020 BIA levies to businesses for some or part of the period that they were not operating due to health orders. Commercial property owners could qualify for up to three months or a 25% reduction to their 2020 BIA levy.

Reduction of fees for vehicle for hire industry

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically decreased Vehicle for Hire customer service requests and increased expenses for personal protective equipment and other provincial health and safety requirements. City Council approved the following fee reductions for the industry for 2020:

- 100% reduction in dispatch and vehicle licence fees for limousines
- 50% reduction in these fees for all other vehicles for hire.

Temporary patio expansions

The City provided regulatory support for restaurant and retail businesses to extend their operations into public space to expand their areas to improve revenue while adhering to public health orders for physical distance.

Rent abatement for qualified commercial tenants

The City created a program that allowed tenants in City-owned spaces to apply for a similar level of support to the Federal Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program. Tenants could apply for 75% rent forgiveness for April - June 2020, conditional upon payment of 25% of the rent owing over the same period. This supported tenants who were not eligible for the Federal program.

All Edmontonians

Delay in property tax deadline

The City extended the property tax payment deadline for two months until September 1, 2020, reducing \$5.9 million of budgeted tax penalty revenues. The extension also applied to Business Improvement Areas and taxpayers enrolled in monthly payment plans.

Deferral of utility payments

In 2020, EPCOR customers could request a 90-day deferral on utility payments. The City also deferred waste collection fees.

Waste Services reduced rates

Savings from avoided waste collection costs of \$4.2 million were returned to customers through a pro-rated rate reduction between June and December, 2020.

Commuters for Work, Business and Study

Public transit is a driver for economic recovery and growth. It is an essential service that connects people to jobs and enables worker mobility throughout the region. It helps people access essential services such as healthcare, groceries, recreation, places of worship and so on. Public transit has been proven to reduce social isolation, enable education and employment, and supports positive health outcomes

Suspended parking fees

From March 21, 2020 to June 8, 2020 parking fees for City curbside, City-owned parkades and EPark zones were temporarily suspended, reducing budgeted revenues by \$7.9 million.

Suspended transit fares

From March 21, 2020 to June 15, 2020, the City temporarily suspended fare collection on all ETS and DATS services resulting in reduced budgeted revenues of \$54.2 million. This was also to allow for rear door boarding and eliminate the need for interaction between operators and passengers, which was essential for physical distancing practices.

Suspension of the U-Pass Program for the Spring/Summer and Fall 2020 Terms

Given how most postsecondary classes were no longer held in person, reducing demand for transit, the City suspended the U-Pass program. For students attending one of the four U-Pass institutions, alternative discounted transit fare options were in effect from May 1 to December 31, 2020. The change reduced budgeted revenue by \$9.5 million (included within reduced transit fare revenues above).

Edmonton Transit (ETS) resumed full service on August 29

Although ridership, and resulting revenues, were down, the City made a choice to resume full transit service for those who rely on it for transportation, while maintaining enhanced cleaning and safety protocols.

Community

Delayed rent for non-profits

- The City chose to not enforce rent obligations on its properties for leases with non-profit partners for up to three months (April to June 2020).
- There were no budget impacts as outstanding amounts became payable at the end of the period.

Fort Edmonton Management Company

- Due to COVID-19 impacts, revenue streams still available to Fort Edmonton during construction were lost.
- The City provided a loan of \$1.7 million to support planned 2021 opening following a two year closure for significant Fort Edmonton Park Enhancement project work.

Operating Support to the YMCA of Northern Alberta

- The YMCA of Northern Alberta faced significant financial challenges due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The City provided \$1 million in operating support to reopen the Castle Downs Family YMCA.

Support for vulnerable Edmontonians

- In 2020, the City provided operating resources and \$5.1 million in funding for the EXPO Centre Day Shelter and isolation centre.
- Edmonton Convention Center 24/7 Pandemic Shelter
 - \$10.7 million in City funding was set aside to operate the Edmonton Convention Centre as a shelter through a multi-organizational initiative to provide 24/7 emergency shelter services to vulnerable people in our community from October 30, 2020 to March 31, 2021. Homeward Trust (\$1.5 million) and the FCSS grant (\$1.5 million) were also used to fund operations through the end of March 2021.

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)

- The provincial government automatically renewed Edmonton's FCSS funded programs for the 2021 year (applications would have come in during the summer of 2020) to reduce added stress concerning funding for local-nonprofits organizations that were focused on a COVID-19 social response.
- With the support of the Government of Alberta (our partner for FCSS), funded groups were also allowed the flexibility to shift their funding to emerging and immediate needs of the communities they serve, including services that are typically not funded under FCSS, such as food security efforts.

- Edmonton FCSS also directed funding to organizations like Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Community Services, and Bent Arrow for preventive services that aligned with the FCSS mandate occurring at Tipinawaw.
- Edmonton FCSS increased funding to the Community Bridge Program for eviction prevention efforts.

Other Community Supports

- The City supported urban gardening initiatives, such as pop up gardens and the City farm.
- Socially distanced outdoor activities were promoted through shared streets and lane closures, vehicle access to local traffic only, reduced speed limits to 20 km/h, and additional signage.
- While many cities in Canada closed their public washrooms due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the City of Edmonton worked with Boyle Street Ventures to provide attendants (who cleaned and disinfected washrooms) to keep a number of washrooms open in strategic locations around the city. This ensured that residents, especially individuals experiencing homelessness, still had access to public washrooms.
- To support public health measures, approximately 20,000 signs and decals were produced and posted in public open spaces, facilities, shared streets and lane closures to explain safe behaviours in those areas.
- To ensure local non-profits, community leagues and other eligible organizations could continue business while adhering to safe social distancing practices, the City relaxed requirements for hosting Annual General Meetings (which is often a requirement for funding the following year).
- The City of Edmonton Community Social Work Team coordinated a food security table that included funders and community organizations to respond to increasing food security challenges.
- The Community Safety Team responded to complex emerging community safety issues arising as a result of COVID-19, including safety and social disorder issues around the 24/7 shelters and transit infrastructure.
- The City worked with community and health partners to expand efforts to address the increase in overdose incidents in the city that were exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19.
- City of Edmonton social workers provided Psychological First Aid Pandemic training to interested community partners.
- The City supported the work of a broad community collaboration effort to address the disproportionate impacts of COVID 19 on ethnocultural and indigenous community members and to access the Government of Alberta funding administered by the City.

Continued existing operating and capital support from the City to our partners

While the City reduced expenses to manage the impacts of COVID-19 on its 2020 operating budget, it opted to maintain support to partners. The list below includes the amounts budgeted in 2020:

- Community Investment Operating Grant: \$3.6 million
- Community League Operating Grant: \$2.8 million
- Senior Centre Investment Program: \$1.9 million
- Emerging Immigrant and Refugee Grant: \$0.4 million
- Family and Community Support Services: \$22.3 million
- Community Facility Partner Capital Grant: \$4.8 million
- Community League Infrastructure Program: \$2.6 million
- Operational Service Agreements with umbrella or sector capacity building organizations: \$27.4 million