

Edmonton City Soul

A Cardus Working Paper

By Milton Friesen and Spencer Andres

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Edmonton City Soul - Research Report

Project Lead: Milton Friesen

Program Director, Social Cities

Senior Fellow

Cardus

Working paper prepared for Cardus by Spencer Andres

INTRODUCTION

The City of Edmonton is a dynamic and vibrant place of growth and investment. The city is projected to reach over 1.1 million residents by 2040, which is nearly a 50% increase from population numbers in 2010 (The Way We Grow, 2010). In essence, Edmonton is planning for continued rapid growth and therefore considerable effort has been put into long term strategic planning for current and new residents alike. In “The Way Ahead” documents (2009-2011), policies to accommodate and plan for continued growth and investment laid the foundation for policy directives and government initiatives on a regional and local scale. The scope of these plans is broad, covering strategic directions for the preservation of critical resources and environments, the transformation of urban form, the livability of the city, the shift in transportation targets, the sustainability of municipal finance, and the diversification of the local economy. However, a critical component of the municipal fabric appears absent in these documents: faith communities.

In this exploratory report, the City of Edmonton will be examined in three key sections. First, the examination of planning and development documents will provide a broad perspective of municipal directives and policy initiatives for the accommodation of increased population growth, the creation of new neighbourhoods, the redevelopment of established communities, and the integration of social planning enterprises. An understanding of these documents will shed light on where faith based communities can engage the planning process and advocate for their perspectives on neighbourhood needs.

Second, a brief and broad overview of the faith-based institutional landscape in Edmonton will summarize the scope and impact of faith communities on the city. This overview was conducted with the understanding that there are many informal faith-based organizations and initiatives beyond what could be gleaned from Internet searches and Government listings of registered charities. However, the first step in this process was to understand the range of organizations in quantifiable terms.

Finally, the third section of this research will explore possible opportunities for increased engagement between long term planning at the City and faith based organizations.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE CITY OF EDMONTON

Edmonton is located within a conglomeration of municipalities making up the Capital Region. The region was brought into existence in 2008 under Provincial legislation. The purpose of this organization and its guiding documents is to achieve integrated and coordinated growth and planning the Capital Region. The governing body introduced a Growth Plan in 2009. All member municipalities were challenged to integrate their official Municipal Development Plans (MDPs) and other policy documents with the Region’s Growth Plan and its four principal components: Land use, Public Transit, GIS, and Housing.

The City of Edmonton’s vision and strategic plan for achieving its goals are encapsulated in seven foundational documents. The first, called “The Way Ahead” is a summary of the City’s consultation with various stakeholder groups including residents, developers, businesses, and community advocates and the resulting vision for the City, strategic 10 year goals to achieve the vision and various measured targets and objectives along the way.

Following the introductory plan “The Way Ahead,” six documents aid in the visioning of Edmonton’s long-term vision. They are as follows:

- **The Way We Green**
Preserving and sustaining Edmonton’s natural environment and natural resources
- **The Way We Grow**
Transforming the urban form of the city
- **The Way We Live**
Increasing the livability of all neighbourhoods and new growth areas
- **The Way We Move**
Shifting Edmonton’s transportation priorities
- **The Way We Finance**
Investing in financial sustainability for the city
- **The Way We Prosper**
Diversifying Edmonton’s economy

For the purposes of this research, two of these foundational documents will be explored in greater detail. “The Way We Grow” and “The Way We Live” provide excellent insight into the City of Edmonton’s focal point for urban and social planning. First, *The Way We Grow* and other key planning and development documents will be evaluated. Then, key social planning documents will be explored, including the City’s *The Way We Live*.

THE WAY WE GROW

Also known as the City’s Municipal Development Plan (MDP), *The Way We Grow* is a synthesis of Edmonton’s vision for a “sustainable, healthy and compact city.” The primary purpose of an MDP is to provide higher-level ideals for a municipality in addition to targets and policy directives that inform future plans and policies. For example, Edmonton’s MDP places emphasis on a shift in transportation from a car oriented street network to increased focus on increased efficiency of alternative transportation networks. More specific documents, such as the City’s Land Use Bylaw (LUB) or Engineering standards would outline regulations for the creation of bicycle lanes on major boulevards or the investment in transit oriented development. An understanding of the key components of this plan provides an excellent insight into Edmonton’s strategic direction for the future and the grounding for all other policy directives across all city departments.

Ultimately, the City recognizes the need to curb sprawling development and invest, to a greater extent, in compact development. The MDP recognizes the need for a variety of housing in all areas of the City and the management of fringe growth. These initiatives are summarized in nine strategic goals of the MDP.

1. Sustainable Urban Form

Managing growth through a compact, transit oriented, and sustainable urban form. Focus is placed on downtown residential development, renewal of mature neighbourhoods, and the careful development of sustainable new neighbourhoods.

2. Integrated Land Use and Transportation

The promotion of medium to higher density residential and employment uses around transit centres and corridors

3. Complete, Healthy and Livable Communities

Integrating the elements of physical design that promote safe, walkable, and accessible communities. Community gathering spaces and a range of housing options will contribute to a well-balanced and healthy community.

4. Urban Design

Enhancing Edmonton's built form through design that reflects the goals of the plan including attractive public spaces and high quality design in all redevelopment projects

5. Supporting Prosperity

Targeted investment in retail, office, and industrial spaces that are supported by the transit network and a variety of housing options for employees.

6. Natural Environment

Maintaining and Edmonton's ecological network and natural systems

7. Working Within the Region

Intermunicipal planning and regional cooperation

8. Managing Land and Resources

Striking an appropriate balance between resource based activities and urban growth

9. Food and Urban Agriculture

Bringing food production together with urban planning for resilient future of food supply

The City's MDP also recognizes the current challenges facing Edmonton. Rapid growth and expansion in the Region poses a problem for aging infrastructure in conjunction with policy directives directed at compact and more efficient development. It is also recognized that the way in which the City has grown in the past is unsustainable and there will be consequences for municipal budgets when citizens require the same level of services in the future. In addition, the car-oriented built form of the City translates into an uphill battle for a shift in fossil fuel dependency and investment in transportation alternatives.

CAPITAL CITY DOWNTOWN PLAN

One of Edmonton's central tenets of future growth and development is the investment in a dynamic downtown with a mix of housing, jobs, and recreation space. The Capital City Downtown Plan is built on four "pillars" to ensure success in coordinating development and land use in centre of Edmonton. A map of downtown and the central neighbourhoods of the city are shown in Figure 1.

The first pillar is a set of policies integrated into a structure that supports the vision for a sustainable, vibrant, well designed and accessible downtown. Each section in the plan features key policies for planners to implement in the downtown core. The second pillar is the introduction of new zoning regulations. These regulations are where the rubber meets the road for many policies by specifically outlining the form of new projects within the downtown. The third pillar of the Downtown Plan is implementation strategies. Specific targets and the identification of stakeholders and responsible parties provide an organizational structure to any City initiative. Finally, the fourth pillar includes central catalyst projects the City

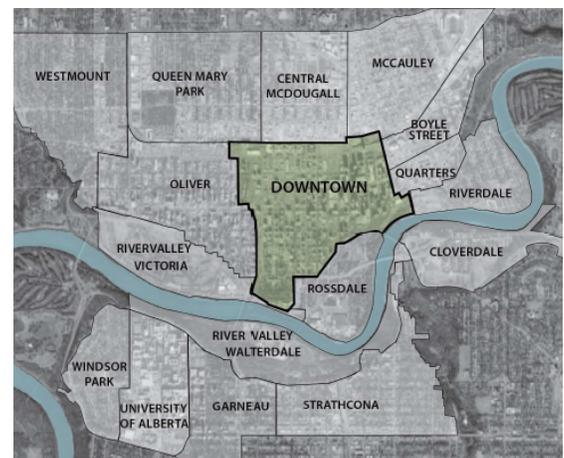


Figure 1: Map courtesy of the City of Edmonton

has identified to aid in building momentum in the downtown core. For the purposes of this plan, 13 catalyst projects were identified, however future plans may also be identified under this category.

The ultimate benefits of this strategy for the downtown is, according to the plan, increased densification (12,200 new residential units), increased economic activity and tax revenue (5.55M sq. ft. of new commercial and office space), higher land values, improved sustainability (via greenhouse gas reduction as a result of intensification and transportation investment), and enhanced transit networks.

The plan recognizes the crucial role that social and faith based community service organizations play in providing for a diverse population. It also recognizes the facilitation of communication between these organizations and the City.

CITY CENTRE AREA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN (ARP)

It is very rare that a municipality has available land within its core neighbourhoods for development. It is even more rare that a City has over 200 hectares of available land in the core for development. With the recent closure of the Edmonton City Centre Airport, an opportunity has been presented to develop a new core neighbourhood from the ground up. The City has already put into place some overarching objectives and a vision for a new community that will become home to 30,000 new residents.

The City Centre Area Redevelopment Plan provides a land-use planning framework for the future development of the Airport lands. The development of the entire area is projected to take place over the next 25 to 30 years. The proposed redevelopment plan includes the construction of a town centre, two neighbourhoods, a large public park, and a technology and research park connected to light rail transit. The concept plan incorporates the citywide principles of sustainable, walkable, and integrated neighbourhoods and employment centres. This developable area has given Edmonton the chance to build a “greener” community with high expectations for the project output.

MCCAULEY NEIGHBOURHOOD REVITALIZATION

An example of City investment in neighbourhood revitalization took place in the McCauley neighbourhood. The City had identified this neighbourhood as a place for revitalization and began a public consultation process in 2008 to provide direction and incentives for development and neighbourhood buy-in. Crime and violence was cited as a major issue for McCauley and in response, planners from the “Great Neighbourhoods” office at the City of Edmonton and community members came together to identify and resolve neighbourhood issues.

The result was an overall strategic plan for the neighbourhood including focused urban design standards to increase street safety and highlight the unique cultural diversity of the area. City investment was put into street infrastructure and various components of the neighbourhood walkability.

DESIGNING NEW NEIGHBOURHOODS

Due to the City’s continued growth, new neighbourhood development is taking place all over the municipality. Currently, the City is also planning to annex land from adjacent municipalities to accommodate this growth. The “Designing New Neighbourhoods” Plan is a guideline for future residential communities. Overall, the plan’s focus is placed on outcomes rather than prescriptive standards. In essence, the City has added considerable flexibility to encourage new ideas and ways to develop new neighbourhoods.

SOCIAL PLANNING AT THE CITY OF EDMONTON

At the City of Edmonton, the Community Strategies and Development Branch emphasizes the accessibility of all residents to services so that all citizens in the City have the tools to thrive. This mandate includes community investment, relations between different cultural backgrounds, strategic plans for community services, and investment in public spaces and recreation. For the purposes of this report, the focus will be placed on planning initiatives.

PROVINCIAL SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

In 2013, the Province of Alberta published a vision for social policy and programs. Although it is not legislation, the framework is a tool for guiding future decision making. The document is divided into three sections: clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all those involved with Alberta's social fabric, coordinating governmental and non-governmental bodies for consistent policies and initiatives, and influencing the strategic plans and decisions that will lead to overall improved quality of life across the Province.

Ultimately, the "Social Policy Framework" seeks to highlight the importance of understanding the interrelationships between social phenomena and economic vitality and environmental sustainability. When communities are strengthened and connected, a strong economy is sustained. When communities build strong relationships and healthy lifestyles, our natural environment is better protected.

In the past, social policy has pinpointed deficiencies and gaps in the current social fabric. This results in solutions that may only address specific issues and do not look at the complete picture of the challenges people may face. For example, a policy directive or a specific organization may focus on reducing drug use in certain neighbourhoods, but without a complete understanding of the interrelationship between substance abuse and mental health challenges, homelessness, and inconsistencies in the social safety net. The way we look at the social ills requires a complex and flexible approach. The Alberta Social Policy Framework recognizes the need for a new approach and encourages governments and agencies to collaborate in finding new solutions that are not crisis oriented, but instead focus on prevention and intervention.

THE WAY WE LIVE

One of the companion plans for Edmonton's strategic "The Way Forward" plan is "The Way We Live – Edmonton's People Plan." The essence of the plan is questions regarding quality of life in the city. Is the City of Edmonton a welcoming, attractive and safe place for its residents? Also, the plan seeks to formalize "the Edmonton way of life." Put another way, what relationships exist in the city that make it a ideal place for people to live, work, and play?

Societal shifts such as an aging population, an increase in cultural and ethnic diversity, and a continued growth trend suggest that the City needed to address how services are provided and how communities could partner with the City to tackle housing, health, education, and other social complexities. "The Way We Live" is the first strategic plan of its kind in Edmonton and recognizes community connections and the impact of these connections on the overall health of the city.

The "People Plan" is meant to integrate existing initiatives and plans into the overall vision for a better quality of life for Edmonton residents. Plans such as the "Great Neighbourhoods Initiative," the Downtown Plan, residential infill guidelines and master plans for Edmonton libraries, parks and recreation facilities, accomplish ongoing objectives for the City in addition to Community Strategies and Development branch programs. Concurrently, public input into the plan resulted in six goals for Edmonton that are bolstered by benchmarks and specific policy directives.

The six goals to improve Edmonton's livability are as follows:

1. Edmonton is a vibrant, connected, engaged and welcoming city

- a. Relationships are an important part of Edmonton's quality of life
- b. Objectives and policy directives focus on building neighbourhoods and public spaces for increased connectivity, connecting residents with city programs and services, and building an overall city identity as a diverse and culturally rich capital city.

2. Edmonton celebrates life!

- a. Enhancing the opportunities for active and healthy residents
- b. Objectives and policy directives focus on investment in leisure, social, and recreational prospects, improve upon the city's rich arts community, and continue to improve on Edmonton's festival culture.

3. Edmonton is a caring, inclusive and affordable community

- a. Building a city that allows all citizens to achieve their aspirations while finding a sense of belonging
- b. Objectives and policy directives focus on providing services to the marginalized and vulnerable and decreasing barriers for all residents to engage in an active lifestyle.

4. Edmonton is a safe city

- a. Connected and caring communities are safer communities
- b. Objectives and policy directives focus on enforcement, development design, and support networks to decrease crime and the effects of crimes.

5. Edmonton is an attractive city

- a. Highlighting Edmonton as a beautiful place in all seasons
- b. Objectives and policy directives focus on building civic pride through design initiatives, showcasing arts and culture, and preserving historical resources.

6. Edmonton is a sustainable city

- a. Social sustainability is achieved through empowering the next generation of community leaders
- b. Objectives and policy directives focus on "complete communities" through building a balance of social services, housing options, and businesses in every neighbourhood while investing in environmental resources and economic opportunities.

In 2012, the "People Plan" grew in scope through the production of an implementation plan. The implementation plan revisits each of the six goals and explores current initiatives and future plans to further the City's vision.

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CITY OF EDMONTON

Using the Government of Canada's charity database and other search engines, a comprehensive list of all organizations was compiled. The list is not exhaustive, as it was discovered that the charity database separates organizations by categories such as "religious," "welfare," and "education." For the purposes of this initial list, the "religious" category was used. However, some faith-based organizations were found under the other categories. The complete list is found in Appendix I.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED ENGAGEMENT

Faith based organizations have an important role to play in the social fabric of a city. These places of worship, schools, and other service providers are an essential community pillar and cannot be separated from the vitality of a neighbourhood

In an overview report on the impact and influence of religious organizations by Brownlee et al. (2005) found that 94% of faith-based organizations are registered charities. In other words, faith based organizations overwhelmingly meet the eligibility requirements for charity status because of their primary purpose of one or more of the following: relieving poverty, advancing education, promoting health, or the development of religion.

Faith based organizations primarily provide services for their local neighbourhoods and communities with a principal focus on the general public rather than just those with religious backgrounds (Brownlee et al. 2005). Therefore, ignoring the

influence of these organizations of the social stability of an urban centre is ignoring the very foundation in which a city's social networks exist.

In this context, planners and municipal representatives and faith-based organizations must find avenues to cooperate and engage in the long-term planning and strategic directions for the City of Edmonton. To adequately plan for increased quality life on either a citywide and local neighbourhood scale, the City's faith-based organizations can play an important role in representing those who they serve and their communities.

Other opportunities exist beyond municipal government for faith-based organizations to engage and influence long term strategic planning in the City of Edmonton. Firstly, the University of Alberta has recently introduced an accredited planning program for undergraduate students with hopes for further expansion into graduate studies. Such a program can facilitate and support interaction between charitable organizations and planning professionals. In addition, churches with the institutional capacity to have long term planning staff may consider connecting with the school for professional development in the field of strategic planning.

Second of all, faith based organizations can partner with specific planners, consultants, municipal staff, or elected officials who are supportive of or specialize in social planning projects. Gaining traction at a political or staff level in a municipality or even the provincial government can take place through the public information campaigns or legislative agendas which put social building as a primary policy directive for the overall well being of Edmonton and its residents. In the context of the Edmonton City Soul Project, a partnership with long-term projects such as the airport lands development or specific neighbourhood revitalization plans would be an excellent first step in engaging faith based organizations with the planning process.

One issue that currently facing faith-based organizations is space. The majority of new and established neighbourhoods either have limited institutional space, if any at all. In the preliminary research of this report, one pastor presented a possible case study. His church was looking to find a permanent space for a church-plant in the Southeast of the City. However, finding space or land has been a nearly impossible task. At this point, the church is unable to find something suitable for a new congregation. Further research should seek to understand the possible issues with land use and space sharing in the City of Edmonton. Possible partnerships may exist with public and private school boards or existing public spaces. Further study should also explore possible obstacles faced by new organizations seeking space.

Finally, after an exploratory evaluation of the Charitable Organization Database online, one can surmise that Edmonton contains a wide variety of faith-based organizations in the majority of the City's neighbourhoods. One question for further study in what capacities and to what extent to these organizations collaborate to achieve community and social development goals.

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