

Quality of life in Canadian cities getting worse — report

Date: April 15, 2004

Cash-strapped cities seeking financial aid to address problems

SARAH O'DONNELL
Civic Affairs Writer
EDMONTON

The social fabric of Canada's cities is fraying and risks tearing without attention from governments at all levels, says a new report released by a national organization of municipalities.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities issued the warning Wednesday in its 2004 Quality of Life survey of 20 urban centres. The report, which examined statistics ranging from family demographics and rental housing costs to unemployment rates and education levels, found the quality of life has deteriorated for a growing number of Canadians since its last survey in 2001.

"Despite some improvements, prosperity is not shared equally in urban Canada," said Edmonton Coun. Michael Phair, chairman of the report's technical team.

Of particular concern, Phair said, was the widening income gap between the rich and the poor, the mounting cost of housing and growing clusters of urban poverty.

The improvements included higher rates of post-secondary education, employment and home ownership.

The goal of the report was to remind all politicians that cash-strapped cities need help addressing disparities beyond funding projects, such as road construction.

"It helps make the case that a new deal

“Despite some improvements, prosperity is not shared equally in urban Canada.”

Coun. Michael Phair, chairman of the report's technical team

needs to be a comprehensive new deal and look at quality of life of citizens — the social, the economic and the environmental issues, as well as such things as bridges and roads,” Phair said.

Federation president Yves Ducharme, the mayor of Gatineau, Que., said it also

indicates cities and towns must get that extra support quickly.

It “illustrates the urgent need for those new tools and new partnerships to stop the erosion and build sustainable communities,” he said in a news release.

The study included Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Quebec City, Regina, Saskatoon, Vancouver, Winnipeg, and the Ontario municipalities of Halton, Hamilton, Kingston, London, Niagara, Ottawa, Peel, Sudbury, Toronto, Waterloo, Windsor and York. It did not give the 20 cities an overall quality of life ranking. Instead it evaluated cities separately. Those details were not available on Wednesday.

Phair said Edmonton's statistics im-

proved on about half of the indicators compared to the 2001 report, declined on about 30 per cent and stayed the same for the remaining 20 per cent. For example, the city's jobless rate has dropped while it's a national leader when it comes to diverting waste from its landfill.

The city's aboriginal population also has grown significantly. But that has been accompanied by an increase in aboriginal Edmontonians who are unemployed or living on low incomes.

Those statistics are “much higher than it should be in this city,” Phair said. “It presents a real challenge for us that we need to take seriously and see how we can best address it over the long term.”

The city will release a detailed analysis of its standing on Monday.

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News Clips

EDMONTON JOURNAL

DATE: April 15, 2004

(p. 1 of 3)

BUILDING A BETTER CITY*While Edmonton struggles to raise enough money from property taxes, some U.S. cities tap a wide variety of revenue sources*

SARAH O'DONNELL
Civic Affairs Writer
EDMONTON

When local politicians from Canadian cities speak of their U.S. counterparts, there is often a hint of jealousy in their voices.

The envy has everything to do with money, and the fact that most American cities cash in on a wide range of taxes that Canadian cities can only dream about.

But increasingly, cities in this country — largely restricted by provincial legislation to a few revenue sources, such as property taxes — are trying to convert their envy into action. The goal is a new financial deal for cities.

Today, Edmonton's council will hold the second of four brainstorming sessions on the city's future, with a focus on how Edmonton pays its bills.

A look at many U.S. city budgets highlights the discrepancies.

Edmonton is largely limited to property and business taxes, federal and provincial grants, user fees, and a slice of the provincial fuel tax.

Denver, Colo., collects sales taxes on general retail, lodging, restaurants and liquor, vehicle rentals, aviation fuel, entertainment events, and a head tax on each person employed in the city.

Denver also shares a piece of the fuel, tobacco, vehicle registration taxes and a share of state lottery revenue tax with the state.

U.S. cities don't necessarily bring in more money than Canadian cities of similar size. They also do not shoulder the identical responsibilities; some have more, some less.

But the diversity of their revenue sources allows them to take some of the economic burden off property owners

and absorb changes in the economy.

No tax is perfect, as the experience of both Denver and Austin, Texas, shows. Sales taxes fluctuate with the health of

the economy. When times are tough, people spend less and sales tax revenue drops. In Austin's case, its one-cent piece of the state sales tax will bring in \$12

million less than it did three years ago.

Still, many local leaders say the city's economic health depends on securing a wider range of revenue sources. With

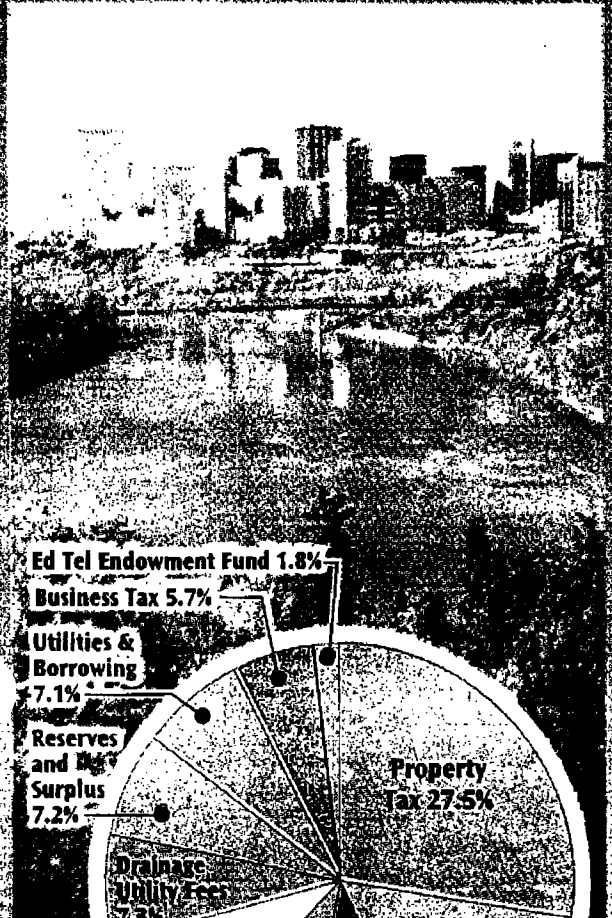
that in mind, here is a look at how Edmonton's revenue sources compare with those of Denver and Austin.

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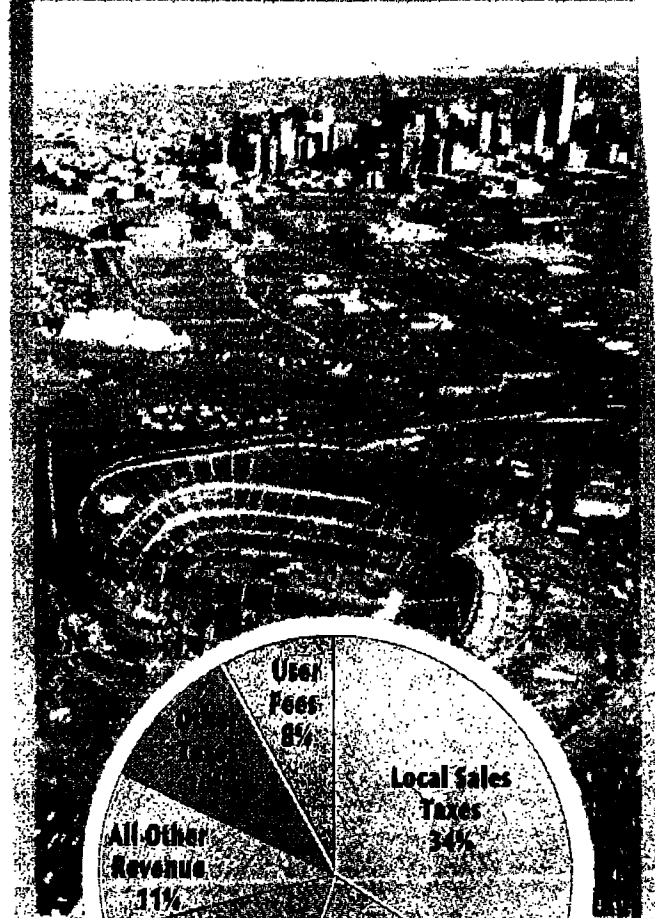
News Clips/Journal

Date: April 15, 2004

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EDMONTON

Edmonton
 Population: 660,104
 Budget: \$1.5 billion

DENVER

Denver
 Population: 554,636 (2000 census)
 Budget: \$1.1 billion US

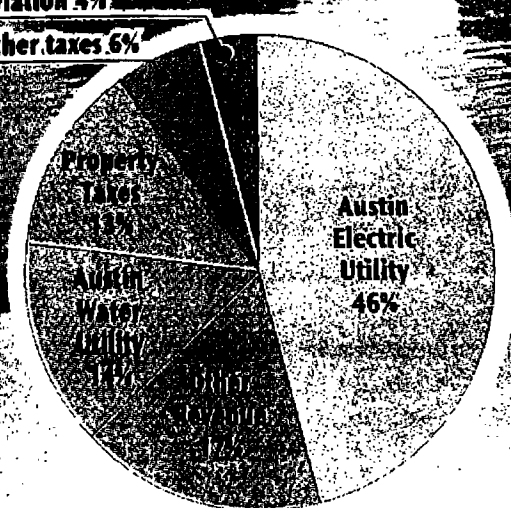
News Clips/Journal

Date: April 15, 2004

(p. 3 of 3)

Aviation 4%

Other taxes 6%



Austin

Population: 656,562 (2000 census)

Budget: \$1.9 billion US

News Clips/Journal

Date: APRIL 8, 2004

EDITORIALS

High-speed transit on the fast track

OK, it may not be as exciting as having the Oilers in the hockey playoffs. But Edmontonians ought to be cheering that at long last, city council appears ready to get serious about a high-speed, city-wide transit system.

A report by the transportation department released this week proposes a combination of expanded light rail transit and high-speed busways to serve commuters in the north, west and south parts of the city.

The proposal would cost \$1 billion (including \$500 million to finish the south LRT line) to \$3 billion depending on the mix of LRT and new, bus-only lanes.

The busways — to be created using a combination of existing roads and new exclusive-use pavement — could eventually be replaced by LRT if the city grows enough, says the report.

If council finds the courage — as it must — to follow through and commit to fully develop the proposed six-legged network, Edmonton will take a major step forward. Only the northeast is well-served now.

The proposal calls for high-speed routes from downtown to West Edmonton Mall, north to Castle Downs, northeast to St. Albert, due south and southeast along 66th Street.

It's crucial to demark the future routes immediately, even if construction takes a few years. That will allow the city to start buying rights-of-way and protecting land for stations. Developers can make land-use decisions that take advantage of locations next to future high-speed transit links. And Edmontonians who wish easy access to transit can look for nearby housing.

Difficult choices must be made in the months ahead. Do we abandon the more capital-intensive but efficient LRT system for the cheaper, more flexible option of busways?

What's the top priority: To serve the north and NAIT, or to go west to West Edmonton Mall?

we need another bridge across the river to get traffic from the west and

south to the University of Alberta or downtown?

In this city of vibrant neighbourhood democracy, pinning down the exact routes through older neighborhoods is bound to spark a vigorous round of those "not-in-my-backyard" battles.

But council must not shy away from the hard choices as it has in the past.

The city is growing. A modern, high-speed transit network is essential to move commuters, relieve congested roads, fight urban sprawl, reduce the need to build costly new roads and contribute to a more sustainable city.

Muddling along without such a plan or vision for the future is a recipe for a second-tier city, a status that eventually will limit economic growth.

What's regrettable, of course, is that this basic planning exercise did not get started 26 years ago after the first leg of LRT opened in 1978.

To have made that initial, multimillion-dollar investment without knowing where the rest of the tracks would go was appallingly short-sighted. For two decades, the city lost the ability to use rapid transit routes to influence land-use.

To make up for the lost years, council next week needs to put this proposal on a tight schedule. Let's not get bogged down in neighbourhood battles or make the mistake of waiting until the construction money is in the bank before defining the proposed route.

The city report is right: Edmontonians currently do not see transit as an alternative to their cars because the LRT doesn't go far enough and regular buses stuck in traffic simply can't compete with the comfort of cars. "Without high-speed transit, the competitiveness of public transit relative to the private automobile will suffer."

As ridership on the existing LRT shows, Edmontonians will use transit when it is fast, comfortable and efficient.

Council needs to provide that type of service across the city.

News Clips/Sun

Date: April 7, 2004

It's time to fast-track fast buses



Kerry Diotte

It is great to see city transportation officials promoting a fine, long-term vision of high-speed transit for Edmonton. Yesterday, transportation and streets officials were at a council committee meeting to detail much-welcomed future plans to build an extensive busways system in Edmonton.

That is something I and a few others have been promoting for years as a cheaper yet more extensive alternative to LRT.

Busways are special, grade-separated roadways for use by high-speed

transit vehicles. Ottawa has a successful system of busways where, last I checked, commuters were whisked along 60 km of roads at speeds of up to 80 kmh.

Edmonton's envisioned busway system would include these routes:

- West Edmonton Mall to the south LRT.
- NATF to the downtown core.
- Mill Woods to the downtown using parts of 75 Street and 66 Street.
- A northwest route using St. Albert Trail.

The whole ambitious \$1-billion plan includes purchasing some property, building dedicated busways, shelters and park-and-ride centres, buying buses and constructing a bridge over the North Saskatchewan River near the Valley Zoo.

That includes about \$500 million to expand the LRT from the area of the University Hospital to the moribund Heritage Mall, \$200 million to go west by busway, \$100 million to go to Mill Woods and \$50 million a pop to get it to the north and northwest.

It would entail about 40 km of busways.

But given how our city council gets bogged down by progressive ideas, I predict we won't see this system built for a very long time, if at all.

After all, it took them forever yesterday to haggle over how the public should be consulted on the busway plans.

There are already people carping in some hoity-toity west-end neighbourhoods including Valleyview and Laurier Heights.

You can bet there will more beefing because transit officials believe the fastest busway route would go from West Edmonton Mall along 87 Avenue, crossing the river at a new bridge near the Valley Zoo.

Coun. Allan Bolstad is one who appears to be jumping on the NIMBY (not in my back yard) bandwagon.

He sponsored a motion at committee to hold three so-called open houses so residents could get more busway details.

Administration and some council members did not like that notion a bit, reasoning it would only stir up the NIMBY crowd despite the fact that exact busway routes are still very preliminary. That motion lost.

The sensible Coun. Stephen Mandel was in a different camp, wondering whether busways should go to the top of the list of transportation and streets plans.

He noted we will wind up spending more than \$600 million merely to build a single eight-kilometre leg of LRT from the University of Alberta to Heritage Mall.

"Why not scrap that" and spend the money instead on "busways to all parts of the city?" Mandel suggested.

Good question. Sadly that will not happen because most other councillors are enamoured of LRT - a mode of transportation that is far sexier than high-speed buses.

That is too bad because it makes a whole lot more sense to have a widespread system of busways than just a single-leg LRT.

We should try to fast-track a busways system, but I cannot see that flying - especially once councillors and residents climb aboard the NIMBY bandwagon.

With any foot-dragging, I dread how choked our traffic will be in 15 years or so.

Let's get on board this busways scheme - the sooner the better.

Council discusses the plans next week.

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- File photo

LRT: Sexier than busways?

The ups and downs of Edmonton's core

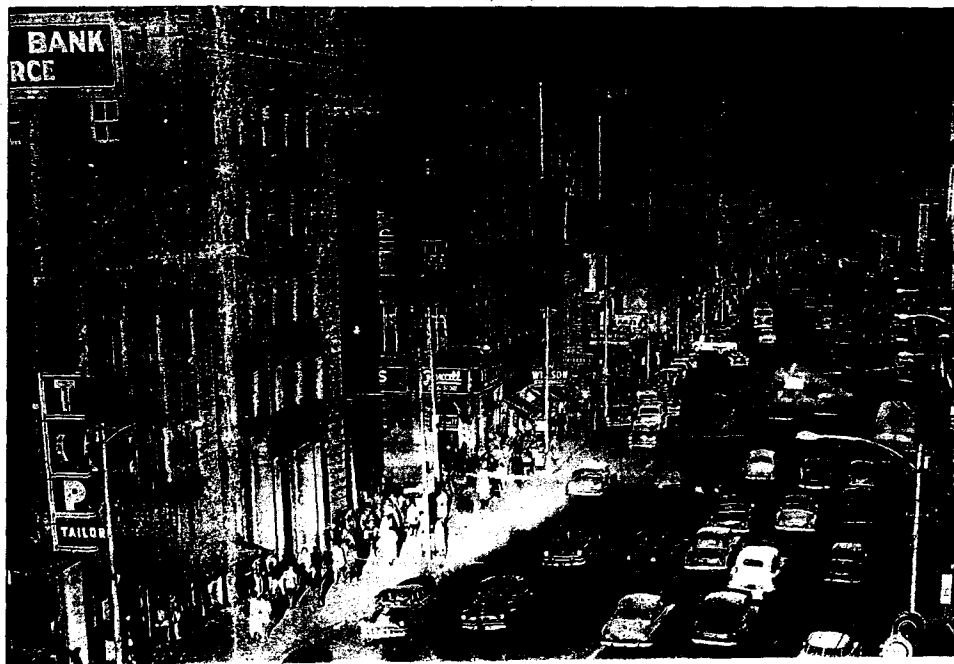
Heart of the city
overcomes suburban
malls and wrecking
balls to reclaim its
title as a swinging
place

BILL SASS
Journal Staff Writer
EDMONTON

In the beginning, or at least 100 years ago, downtown Edmonton was Edmonton. Most of the 4,000 residents lived, worked and played in an area roughly demarcated by what is now 50th Street to the east, 109th Avenue to the north and Riverside Drive to the south.

The roads were dirt; what sidewalks there were, were wooden. People rode horses, drove carriages, or walked to get around.

Jasper Avenue, named for Missouri-native-turned-trapper Jasper Hawes in 1813, was lined with shops, bars and restaurants. Alberta College had just opened its doors on 101st Street.



the anonymous ground-floor retail areas of the new towers.

To get office workers to the new buildings, the city started to construct an underground light-rail transit system through downtown in the 1970s. From 1974 to 1978, streets were torn up and traffic rerouted. Shoppers avoided the area, reinforcing changes in shopping habits started by the malls.

Only people who worked downtown came downtown and fewer were coming. In 1981, Syncrude closed its Jasper Avenue headquarters across from the Hotel Macdonald and 900 workers were lost to the core economy.

Phase 1 of the mother of all malls — West Edmonton — opened Sept. 12, 1981. Eaton's, The Bay and Woodwards, all steadfast anchors of the town centre shopping district, felt the pinch.

City politicians and downtown businessmen began to cast about for ways to rekindle downtown as a city commerce and social hub. A series of downtown plans was proposed, including one in 1988 calling for the median beautification on Jasper, underground pedways

Jasper Avenue, named for Missouri-native-turned-trapper Jasper Hawes in 1813, was lined with shops, bars and restaurants. Alberta College had just opened its doors on 101st Street.

Pockets of single-family dwellings, small apartment blocks and even tents lined the avenue. Water and sewer lines were appearing, but not enough to displace outhouses lining the curbs. Electricity and phone service was available. The Bijou Theatre showed silent "magic lantern" films.

In short, downtown was a rollicking, boisterous, dishevelled and, probably, smelly place rolling up its sleeves and ready to tackle the 20th century.

The town boomed into a city. Land rushes were common and real estate sharks prowled the streets hawking lots in new subdivisions like Belvedere and Highlands. By 1911, the population was 57,000. The towns of Strathcona, Beverly and Jasper Place were added to Edmonton over the decades ahead.

The two-runway grass field airport opened just north of downtown in 1926 and grew into a major economic hub by 1950, making the city a true Gateway to the North. It brought business and tourists, which meant more hotels, theatres and office buildings downtown.

But in the 1950s, something changed. By then, the city had sprawled in all directions and the population was about 216,000. Downtown was getting crowded. Congestion was guaranteed and parking was problematic.

Edmonton was ripe for something new and that something was its first suburban shopping centre. In fact, Westmount Shopping Centre was the first of its kind in Canada when it opened in 1955. It was the brick-and-tile reality of a new way of thinking about urban planning in growing cities.

Some would argue it was also the first nail in downtown Edmonton's coffin.

Westmount boasted 3,000 free parking spaces, which taught residents that they may not have to brave downtown traffic and



Jasper Avenue was bustling with cars and pedestrians when this photo was taken in 1954 for the city's 50th anniversary.

Patrol for parking spots to buy a pair of pants.

After Westmount, malls like Northgate, Londonderry, Southgate, Bonnie Doon and Meadowlark popped up all over the city, kilometres away from its core. The prosperous downtown businesses were feeling the pressure.

Then came the '70s. A new provincial government rode in on a wave of energy development and money in 1971 for a decade that would last the next 15 years. Downtown Edmonton was to be redesigned and the skyline became crowded with high-tower cranes building offices for a new generation of executives. But for everything that went up,



Jasper Avenue looking west from 99th Street in 1903

something came down.

The venerable King Edward Hotel on 101st Street and 102nd Avenue burned to the ground in 1982 to be replaced by the Manulife Building, the city's tallest structure.

Across the street, the 70-year-old Tegler Building, held as a symbol of Edmonton's historic past, fell in 1983 to make way for a new bank at 101st Street and 102nd Avenue.

Along with Canada Place, the Convention Centre and the Principal Trust building, the new buildings represented the future of downtown. One price of that future was the loss of many smaller shops with easy-access street entrances, and the movement of others into

linking Churchill LRT station with Eaton Centre and improvements to Churchill Square.

Downtown started to fight back. The new brass-and-glass Eaton Centre opened in 1988. Ninety-five acres of Canadian National Railway land along 104th Avenue became available for development in the early '90s. Grant MacEwan College built on the site. When the historic court house and civic building were razed, they were replaced with a new concert hall, the Winspear Centre.

For some stores, it was too late. Woodward's was the first to go in 1993. Eaton's went in 1999. The Bay left its historic Jasper Avenue building in 1995, moved to the abandoned Woodward's building on Churchill Square and then to the vacated Eaton Centre — now City Centre West — where it seems to have found a healthy equilibrium.

Today, into the new century, downtown is still there and still swinging. As in 1903, businesses come and go as they try to out-guess economic trends and find a long-term toehold in a place forever changing.

It's as hard now to predict what the core will look like in 16 years as it was 16 years ago in 1987 when *The Journal* contacted some experts and asked them to predict what Edmonton would look like at the turn of the century.

Architect and urban planner Armi Fullerton saw a city under a plastic dome that would "put us on a world map."

Then-mayor Laurence Decore proposed a dam, wider river and cafes along the bank connected to downtown by tree-lined walkways.

The LRT extensions to Mill Woods and West Edmonton aren't quite finished. And, despite predictions by urban designer Wolf Wilbert, people still walk the pedways, instead of riding leisurely on moving belts.

But the 21st century isn't over yet.

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Federal gas funds wanted for LRT

Mayor Smith urges city to explore options for light rail transit line

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EDMONTON

The city must explore all options, including the possibility of a public-private partnership, if it is serious about extending light rail to Heritage Mall, Edmonton's mayor said Friday.

Mayor Bill Smith said the use of a public-private partnership — P3 — is one option the city should investigate as it lobbies future prime minister Paul Martin to return to the cities half of the 10-cent federal fuel tax charged on each litre of gas.

"If we were to get five-cents a litre for the gas that we (could) spend as we move forward in the future, all our transportation problems would be solved," Smith said. "We could build, finance LRT anywhere we want to go, we could build the busways."

The key, Smith said, is to have a stable, reliable funding source which allows the city to plan and commit to construction timelines.

Without investments by the federal or provincial government, there is little chance the city will be able to afford the \$500-million cost to extend the LRT beyond the University Hospital, he said.

On Tuesday, council will discuss a document which Smith wants to send to Martin outlining Edmonton's transportation needs and how five cents of the federal fuel tax — about \$75 million a year — could help build environmentally friendly projects, such as the LRT.

Martin has stated the federal government should return a portion of the federal fuel tax to cities, but has not specified how much.

At the same time, Smith said he will continue to meet with experts, as he did Thursday, to explore other financing options, such as public-private partnerships that see private companies build major infrastructure projects and then lease them back to a government over a number of years.

The province announced in September that it will finance the southeast quadrant of Anthony Henday Drive, the outer ring road, through a P3 project.

Smith said the city must determine whether the same approach would work to build the south LRT extension.

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EDITORIAL

Bill Smith's urban agenda

Refreshing and encouraging are how we'd describe Mayor Bill Smith's new-found readiness to tackle the major policy changes that Edmonton needs to stay competitive, environmentally healthy and financially viable.

Last week, Smith produced a draft report that capitalizes on the forward-looking Sustainable Cities Conference held here earlier this fall. In it, he outlines four laudable goals: a new financial deal with the province; the use of so-called "smart debt" to finance infrastructure; encouragement of mixed-use neighbourhoods and more housing along the Light Rail Transit line; and a new strategy for dealing with other municipalities in the region.

"While by most measures we are an extremely successful city, we cannot ignore the trends we face — including our growing infrastructure and operating gaps and a range of increasingly challenging social and environmental issues," says Smith. He's calling for four special meetings of council in February to discuss the issues.

The mayor says a lot of the right things in this draft report. But some proposals are curiously at odds with his own record, and in other cases, such as targeted new borrowing, council has already moved ahead and the point of further discussion isn't clear.

Smith is absolutely correct to highlight the key role LRT could play. Not only will it relieve traffic congestion in the city's south but it is an important tool to encourage efficient land use; that is, higher-density housing and office complexes close to existing services.

Consider, for instance, all that under-used land at Heritage Mall that could be turned into houses and offices.

"In my opinion, LRT to Heritage Mall, combined with realistic strategies to intensify residential development along the entire line, are fundamental to achieving our overall urban sustainability goals," says Smith.

The test of his commitment to LRT will come soon enough. Next year, council will likely face the prospect of borrowing to keep rail construction rolling south of the University of Alberta.

Smith has always said the city should wait for federal-provincial funding. But it's clearly time to

move ahead, if council is serious about promoting sustainable growth and minimizing urban sprawl.

Smith also signals support for the planning department's proposed "Smart Choices" program. This is a series of guidelines to revive older neighbourhoods, encourage sensitive infill housing and promote mixed-use communities as an alternative to car-dependent suburbs. With the mayor's support, council could turn these recommendations into policy.

It's puzzling, however, that Smith's report puts the idea of "smart debt" back on the table. Council has already wisely acted on a modest \$250-million five-year borrowing program. Smith, who adamantly opposes taking on new debt in the past year, is perhaps changing his mind. What additional borrowing, and what tools for doing so — municipal bonds? — does he have in mind?

Smith wants council to debate a new financial deal for city from higher levels of government. But there's been lots of vague talk already. Perhaps, instead, he should tackle Edmonton's cash crunch with concrete proposals about how to reform our own tax regime, as Winnipeg is currently doing.

Under Mayor Glen Murray, the city is in the midst of a public debate about a basket of ideas to move away from property tax. Called "tax shifting," the proposals include a tax on land value (instead of property), user fees, city sales tax and other fees.

The mayor's fourth goal — develop regional policies, land-use planning and service sharing — is ambitious, to say the least. Building those alliances takes time, a commodity in short supply considering that municipal elections are only a year away.

Indeed, Smith hasn't left himself or council with a lot of time to develop new directions and new policies into action. So progress on some fronts is possible and the prospects are exciting.

But Smith must remember leadership means more than talk. Rather, it's a matter of conceiving and carrying through with an action plan that makes a difference and sets a course for the city.

Edmonton Journal
Nov. 1/03

Winnipeg shows the way to deal with city slums



**SADAVA
ON SATURDAY**

**Permit costs
push slumlords
to level buildings**

The sight of a big backhoe knocking down a condemned house in Norwood last week was a good-news story indeed.

People cheered as the house — the one where a man killed himself last summer after a standoff with police — came tumbling down like the walls of Jericho. A new home will likely be built soon.

It was a stroke of luck for the people on the 113th Avenue block of 93rd Street. The house had been repossessed by a bank and it had serious structural problems.

Three blocks north the residents aren't so fortunate. They've been dealing with a huge barn of a slum for many years. The house has been condemned, fixed up a bit and un-

condemned, condemned again and flipped numerous times. Despite being boarded up, the house has been home to hookers and dope dealers at various times.

Marie Renaud, who lives across the street, has had to look at this eyesore for the past eight years. She has heard promises from the city and has even had a visit from Mayor Bill Smith, but nothing has been done.

"It makes you feel like you're an ant, that you don't matter, that you're so small," Renaud says. "It's hard to even get mad anymore."

The property rights of the owners of these houses seem to have more value than the rights of neighbours. Try to sell a house that's next to a vacant slum.

The city has grappled with the issue of slums for years and it is even more sensitive now. A severe shortage of low-cost housing is enabling slumlords to get away with renting substandard housing to vulnerable people.

But a house that's bad enough to be condemned is not doing anyone any good. It doesn't mean that the house needs a paint job, but that it has deficiencies, such as unsafe wiring or mould, which would threaten the health of any inhabitants.

The city demolishes a couple of dozen such houses per year, but has limited ability to force owners to either fix them up or knock 'em down. As long as they're not falling over and as long as they're boarded up, they can stand there as a glorious



BRUCE EDWARDS, THE JOURNAL FILE
This notorious drug house in Norwood was reduced to rubble a week ago by a city order.

blight in the neighbourhood for years.

Yet all it takes is a screwdriver, a crowbar and some elbow grease to remove the plywood and turn such buildings into crack houses. Coun. Michael Phair has asked the administration to look into a bylaw with more teeth to take a bite out of these slums.

He thinks some progress can be made. For instance, the Municipal Government Act allows an or-

der to demolish a house to be attached to the property rather than the owner, which makes it more difficult to evade authorities by flipping the property.

Perhaps our building inspectors could look to Winnipeg, that jewel on the Prairies, for some ideas about cracking down on vacant slums.

Last year Winnipeg passed its vacant dwellings bylaw which forces owners of vacant houses to get a permit to board them up.

"It makes you feel like you're an ant, that you do matter, that you're so small. It's hard to even get mad anymore."

Marie Renaud, who lives across the street from a condemned house in Norwood

ing the building won't become eyesore. Failure to deal with that car sult in demolition at the owner's expense.

Garry Solkoski, Winnipeg's administrator of building inspections, says the bylaw is starting to have an effect.

The permit requirement means the city can keep track of all vacant houses and ensure they are properly sealed and that the owners incentive to take action.

"The pressure to fix them is working to an extent, but in some cases it's not economically viable and they're forced into a position to tear them down," Solkoski says.

About 40 condemned houses have been demolished in the year.

The bylaw has been vetted by Winnipeg city lawyers and there have been no challenges or basis of property rights violations. Winnipeg officials are so confident that the bylaw is effective and legal that it is considering adding vacant commercial buildings.

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Curb urban sprawl, Edmonton told

Bigger not always better, leading architect says

SARAH O'DONNELL
AND KEITH GEREIN
Civic Affairs Writers
EDMONTON

For those who believe the mantra that bigger is better when it comes to building a world-class city, a leading Canadian architect suggests they think small.

Speaking to a major national conference on the future of cities, Jack Diamond said Tuesday the tendency of Canadian cities to sprawl will ultimately be a drain on city coffers and residents' quality of life.

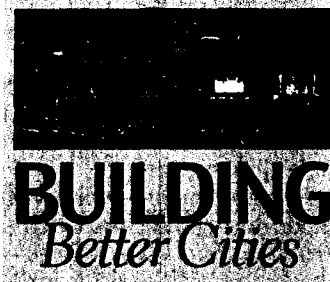
Edmonton is among the offenders.

"In terms of urban issues, there is a vacuum of leadership," Diamond said.

Canadian municipal leaders are acting like a factory owner who is running the production line at half-capacity but still planning a costly expansion, he said.

"You'd say he's a very stupid factory owner," Diamond told several hundred politicians, planners and academics gathered at the Shaw Conference Centre.

COMPARATIVE URBAN SPRAWL



Edmonton is playing host to international and local experts at a two-day conference on how to make our cities more livable. See today's and Thursday's *Journal* for full conference coverage.

"Well, our cities are doing just that. We've got infrastructure, underutilized land, unutilized land within the urban boundaries that have a huge capacity to absorb growth. Let's use that first before we move out."

■ Province plays Monopoly with tax revenues.

Scott McKeen / B1

■ Cities must take charge, TD economist says / B3

■ Business leaders embrace regional strategy / G1

■ Alberta corridor concept splits CEOs / G2

Pushing development into suburbs forces municipalities to extend sewer and water lines, electrical wires, roads and transit services, all of which will have to be upgraded and repaired as the population grows and neighbourhoods age.

Cities are quickly becoming unworkable as they crumble under the weight of infrastructure bills, Diamond said.

See COMPACT / A8

EDMONTON

News Clips

EDMONTON JOURNAL

DATE: September 25, 2003

Sprawl not a problem, planners say

But councillor says new areas don't pay their own way

SARAH O'DONNELL
Civic Affairs Writer
EDMONTON

Edmonton may have booming suburbs, but the city does not suffer from urban sprawl, an affliction crippling some North American cities.

That's the conclusion of a new report by the city's planning and development department. According to the city's definition, the term "urban sprawl" refers to growth which leapfrogs existing development and is built far from existing neighbourhoods. The definition does not apply to Edmonton, the report says.

"We have contiguous development," planning manager Larry Benowski said.

"Urban sprawl is where it goes beyond our existing suburban development and causes pressure because it's beyond our contiguous development."

There is growing evidence across North America that scattered, low-density, car-oriented development comes at a high cost to taxpayers.

The theory is that municipal governments do not reap enough property taxes from far-flung neighbourhoods to cover the costs of providing services, such as new roads, water and sewer lines, parks, transit and policing.

In their report, planners looked at a question posed by Coun. Stephen Mandel, who asked whether Edmonton's new subdivisions pay their own way.

"Do they pay for the cost of services when they first develop? The answer is yes," Benowski said, particularly when talking about features such as roads, sidewalks and sewer lines, which developers pay for under a deal with the city.

Taxes paid for older areas too

The situation gets hazier, however, when the city looks at services such as policing. Taxpayers cover the cost to build new police stations in the suburbs. But they also paid to build those amenities in older neighbourhoods, Benowski said.

Fairness dictates that the city should one day pay to repair and replace infrastructure in neighbourhoods being built today, as it does now in the inner city, Benowski said.

But that doesn't mean the city should not redirect some growth back into the urban core, where services already exist.

There is also a growing consensus that there needs to be a change in how new developments are built.

A diverse group of planners, architects and experts in urban infrastructure from across the country spent Tuesday and Wednesday brainstorming to create more livable, environmentally sensitive neighbourhoods.

The effort focused on a specific piece of land in southwest Edmonton, but architect Vivian Manasc, who brought the group together, said the ideas will be applicable across the board.

"There are ways that Edmonton can be growing more sustainably," said Manasc, of Manasc Isaac Architects.

The planning department's definition of sprawl may not be the end of the debate.

Coun. Allan Bolstad said he disagrees with the report's conclusion that Edmonton's new neighbourhoods pay their own way or that the city's growth isn't sprawl.

"That's not a word you like to have associated with the city, that's why I have no doubt people are trying to avoid the 'S' word," Bolstad said.

"But the fact is, we have a significant sprawl problem to deal with and we're not going to make any headway in dealing with it until we acknowledge it is an issue for this city."

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As cities spread into surrounding farmland, some argue that low-density development comes at a high cost to taxpayers. The scene above is in the south end, on Ellerslie Road near 120th Street.

ED KAISER, THE JOURNAL

EDITORIAL

A new posture on urban sprawl

Edmonton has been blessed with five years of strong economic growth, and the city's burgeoning subdivisions are a sign of the good times.

This region's expansion is the envy of many cities. Yet suburban streets are not paved with gold. Right now, the city can only afford about half the services — libraries, parks, arenas, transit, fire halls — compared to established areas. That won't change unless all citizens are prepared for double-digit tax increases.

Given that fiscal crunch and the need to be prudent with tax dollars, it makes sense to ask if there's a more efficient, less costly way to accommodate all those new residents we want to come here. Are we getting anywhere close to full use of already built-and-paid-for parks, libraries and roads within the city?

What is the toll to the rest of the city by growing suburbs and discouraging regeneration of older neighbourhoods with their built-in amenities? Suburbs also increase pressures for bigger roads through older neighbourhoods.

These questions go to the heart of the debate about how to build stronger, more vibrant cities for the future as discussed at this week's conference on urban sustainability.

The city must, of course, support a variety of housing choices. Suburban lifestyle is the dream of many — a big yard, a two-car garage and quiet streets. Others prefer older, pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods, closer to stores and entertainment.

The abundance of cheap land in western cities (as opposed to cities like New York with a restricted land base) makes it possible to accommodate that suburban dream.

But is there a growing cost?

Thanks to wise policies by Edmonton's administration, the residents of new subdivisions do pay for most of the immediate capital cost of new physical services — something that doesn't happen in all North American cities. Development levies cover sewer and water pipes, sidewalks, roads and street lights.

Charging for real costs

While cities like Calgary charge a flat fee for any development, Edmonton takes a more fiscally sound route and calculates the real cost of those services for each subdivision. Developers pass that cost on to the new home buyer.

The city and the development industry have recently agreed that the developers will pay for two lanes of new four-lane arterial roads built to accommodate each subdivision.

On the other hand, taxpayers as a whole pay for things like new parks, transit, ambulance service, garbage collection, fire halls, libraries, arenas, sports fields, and roadways such as the new \$70-million interchange at 23rd Avenue and Calgary Trail.

And of course taxpayers shoulder the increased operating cost of sending garbage trucks, sanders and police cars further out to new subdivisions.

Councillor Allan Bolstad says the hidden cost of low-density suburbs is partly in the extra operating costs associated with greater distances.

Here's one way to look at it. The 20,000 people slated for Heritage

Valley in the far south could be accommodated within the developed areas of the city. The new community in the old Griesbach barracks, for instance, would fill up in 10 years rather than the current target of 25 years. That community is located near existing roads, parks, schools, transit and malls, and is therefore less expensive to service.

Bolstad points to another example. Council approved a "leapfrog" development for acreages on agricultural land in the city's northeast corner last year. A further expansion of Quarry Ridge Estates — with large half-acre lots and a "rurban" lifestyle — was approved this spring and it is more than a kilometre from Clareview.

The planning department opposed this piecemeal development because it is on prime agricultural land and because the cost of bringing services so far out to such a low-density, small population is expensive.

Bolstad said the developer promised that new residents will not lobby for services, but as he noted, that's impossible to guarantee for the long term.

Bolstad says this example shows it might be fairer to base property taxes on lot size rather than house size. Right now, property taxes penalize a homeowner who renovates an existing dwelling because the assessment goes up with improvements. Yet the improved house doesn't cost more to service.

Costly areas to service

What is costly to service are low-population areas, with bigger than average lots far from existing services — like Quarry Ridge.

Research by noted urbanist Richard Florida also shows that vibrant cities that want to plug into the new economy need lots of diverse, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods, not just car-dependent suburbs. That's what attracts skilled workers, the "creative class," for new knowledge-based industries.

And let's not forget that each time we add more roads and sewer pipe, we are building up a maintenance bill for 25 years down the line. We're already having trouble paying for those repairs for older areas. With investment concentrated in subdivisions further out, older neighbourhoods don't necessarily get the rehabilitation they need.

We're lucky to have this challenge of how to house a growing population. The suburban dream will always have a large place in Edmonton and other western cities. But the city also needs to look at new policies to encourage alternatives and contain urban sprawl.

Bolstad is on the right track. As this week's conference pointed out, sustainability of cities does not just mean giving councillors more money and power to continue growing the way cities do now. It means looking for more efficient ways to accommodate growth, to get service costs down, to reduce future repair bills and to create more environmentally sensitive cities.

That debate is always complicated in Edmonton because of competition for growth from surrounding towns and cities. But that's no excuse. It's time to look at some meaningful reform.

Six ideas to improve Edmonton

From walking trails to transit terminals, here's how the city sees itself in 2025

SARAH O'DONNELL
Civic Affairs Writer
EDMONTON

Booming at its edges and sagging in its core, Edmonton is struggling with its future.

As new neighbourhoods go for years without services, and old communities struggle with aging roads, parks and pipes, a consensus is emerging that Edmonton must change the way it grows.

To that end, the city planning department embarked this summer on a project called Smart Choices. The point is to ask residents how they want the city to look in 2025 and what changes they're willing to make to get there.

"This is a made-in-Edmonton



BUILDING *Better Cities*

Today, Edmonton welcomes international and local experts to a two-day conference on how to make our cities more livable. Watch Wednesday's and Thursday's *Journal* for full conference coverage.

project," planner Mary Ann McConnell-Boehm said. "We know these things have been done elsewhere. How could we do it here?"

Many of those ideas, ranging from making cities more walkable to redeveloping industrial sites, also will be hot topics today as politicians from across the country gather in Edmonton for



ED KAISER, THE JOURNAL

Old Strathcona is considered one of Edmonton's most walkable neighbourhoods.

the start of a two-day conference dedicated to the problems of cities and the potential solutions.

See CITIES / A2

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BUILDING Better Cities

With the automobile, the city has been built along a grid pattern that makes it relatively easy to get from one point to another on foot, new suburban neighbourhoods are shaped by twisty roads that look more like spaghetti. Zoning that segregates housing from shopping and business zones compounds the problem by leaving nowhere to walk to without crossing treacherous roads. New studies suggest these sprawling suburbs are contributing to North America's obesity problem.

THE SOLUTION: Make sure future neighbourhoods are pedestrian-friendly. That means creating communities that are well-connected by safe sidewalks and trails that allow people to work and shop within walking distance from home. A consultant recommended the city require a bicycle and pedestrian plan for all subdivisions, and that it create a master plan that makes commercial corridors more pedestrian-friendly.

Add apartments, townhouses and duplexes — small scale

THE PROBLEM: This is the kind of thing no one likes to complain about, especially a city that bemoaned its stagnation in the 1990s. But the boom in residential growth is putting a strain on the city. There were 8,821 housing starts in 2002. That's the highest number of new starts since 1982. The city risks letting developers build homes at a faster pace than it can afford to pay for the roads, water lines and other amenities around those neighbourhoods. (Developers pay for infrastructure inside).

THE SOLUTION: Turn single-family home sites into townhouses, duplexes or fourplexes as existing homes age and are demolished. Older homes still in good shape can be converted to include granny suites. This strategy increases the variety and cost of housing available to Edmontonians. Redeveloping select pieces of land also takes advantage of the road, piping and parks networks already in place.

None of the city's plans, developed by consultants, are a sure thing. They are more like a catalogue of ideas being shopped around that residents can drop into or take on the shelf. Here's a look at some of those ideas that could be smart choices for Edmonton.

TRY TRANSIT



RICK MACWILLIAM, THE JOURNAL. FILE
City planners are working with businesses and community groups to create a transit village around Belvedere Station, pictured here, and nearby Fort Road.

Edmonton is a city built around the car. Most of us own a car, and we spend an average of 60 minutes a day commuting. Those times will only increase as the city's roads get busier. Transportation planners now say 27 per cent of the city's major roads are congested at peak times. That congestion hurts air quality, robs people of valuable time and costs businesses money.

THE SOLUTION: Make transit centres the heart of the high-density neighbourhoods. People are more likely to use transit if it is convenient, comfortable and more efficient than their cars. That means building attractive communities that put plenty of people within easy walking distance of transit and guaranteeing that those neighbourhoods are well-connected to other transit hubs. Transit villages also are defined by their wide array of housing, shops and businesses in close proximity. That will require changes to city zoning, which typically segregates those different uses.

ADD APARTMENTS, HOUSES & DUPLEXES — MEDIUM SCALE



ED KAISER, THE JOURNAL
This apartment complex under construction near the river valley along 98th Avenue close to 95th Street is an example of the kind of medium-density housing Edmonton could see more of.

Add apartments, townhouses and duplexes — medium scale

THE PROBLEM: Edmonton may be one of Canada's youngest cities, but it is aging. More people reaching senior-citizen status will probably want to trade in their single-family homes for condos, rental housing or retirement homes. Add to that the fact that Edmonton is growing fast. Estimates are that if the city continues to grow at its current pace, its population will increase 140,000 by 2025 as 100,000 new jobs are created. Vacancy rates are tight and homes are selling fast.

THE SOLUTION: Adjust zoning laws to allow for more medium-density housing in existing neighbourhoods. That includes townhouse developments of 2½ storeys with more than eight units and apartments that are four to eight storeys high. Again, this type of housing can revitalize aging neighbourhoods by injecting more people into a place that already has a range of shopping and employment options. The city should consider this type of housing near LRT stations, bike paths, neighbourhoods near universities and colleges, around under-utilized shopping centres, abandoned health-care centres or corner sites on major roads, a consultant says.

ADD APARTMENTS, HOUSES & DUPLEXES — SMALL SCALE



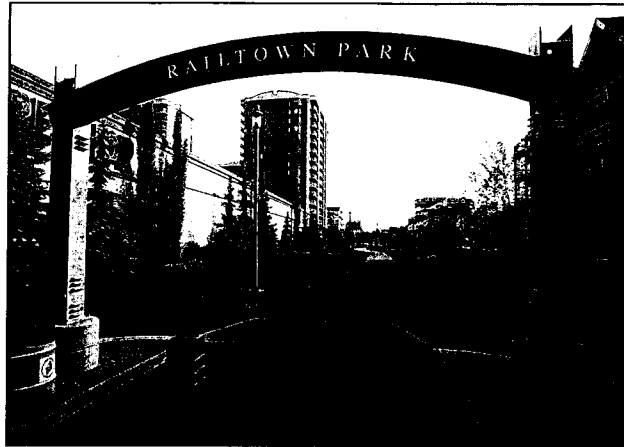
ED KAISER, THE JOURNAL
These Cloverbar homes on 98th Avenue are an example of the type of small-scale residential infill housing the city is picturing.

TRANSFORM THE TRAILS

Transform the trails

THE PROBLEM: The city is full of abandoned rail lines and utility rights-of-way, many running through industrial areas that also have old warehouses. Currently, these belts of land, at least 10 metres wide, are just sitting empty, acting as a great divide between one part of the city and another.

THE SOLUTION: Turn those land strips into trails and expand the city's path network beyond the river valley and ravines. Line those paths with apartment-style housing and ground-level shops. That will create a population that has easy access to the trail, while simultaneously creating destinations along the trails to visit. There are 62 kilometres of potential multi-use trails identified in the city, only about four kilometres of which have been built. Developing the entire system would give cyclists, walkers, runners and rollerbladers more locations to exercise, contributing to the city's health. It also opens the possibility for more people to traverse the city by means other than car.



Raitown, built between Jasper Avenue and 104th Avenue, west of 109th Street, is the most talked about Edmonton example of a neighbourhood that includes a multi-use trail.

BRIAN GAVRILOFF, THE JOURNAL

Alberta looks to Martin to return gas tax

Cities need money back to spend on roads: Boutilier

SARAH O'DONNELL
Civic Affairs Writer
EDMONTON

Alberta's Municipal Affairs minister expects a federal government led by Paul Martin to return a portion of the federal gas tax to be spent on roads and similar projects.

Guy Boutilier said that's one area he will touch upon this week in Edmonton at a conference on the challenges of Canada's cities and at a gathering of provincial ministers in Prince Edward Island.

Boutilier's main targets are Liberal leadership candidate Paul Martin and Edmonton MP Anne McLellan, who he speculated could be the next Finance minister. Martin promised a national gathering of municipal leaders this spring that as prime minister, he would change his govern-

ment's policy and give cities a portion of the 10-cent-per-litre federal gas tax.

"If that is the case, I expect in the first federal budget a portion of that 10 cents per litre will be going to the cities, through the province, of course," Boutilier said.

The Alberta government already gives Edmonton and Calgary five cents of its nine-cent-a-litre tax collected in those cities. That adds up to about \$70 million for Edmonton this year. Municipal govern-

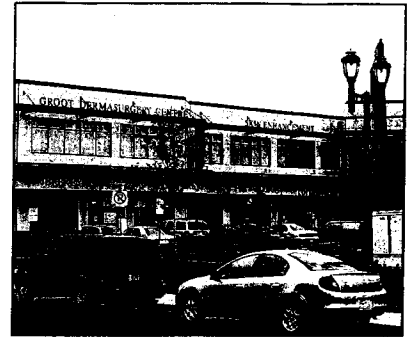
ments across the country are clamouring for the federal government to do the same.

Boutilier promised that federal money will be directed to the cities, without the province cutting its funding.

"There is no question it will go towards provincial and city infrastructure projects because we have a deficit in infrastructure," Boutilier said. "This would be Albertans benefiting from their own money that has gone to the federal government."

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REINVENT COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL LAND



JASON SCOTT, THE JOURNAL

City planners say this strip mall in west Edmonton is an excellent example of a revitalized locale. Once largely vacant, the combinations of stores now draw people for groceries, coffee and a wide range of other products.

Reinvent commercial and industrial land

THE PROBLEM: Empty or run-down industrial and commercial buildings appear throughout Edmonton. These properties, sometimes contaminated, often are easy to see from major roads, tarnishing the city's image and sullying neighbourhood pride. It also is an inefficient use of land.

THE SOLUTION: Breathe life into these sites through redevelopment. The city has a major role to play in these kinds of projects and a consultant recommended creating a redevelopment office in the city's administration to co-ordinate the work. Housing should be considered for many of these former industrial sites, since it would help rebuild populations in older neighbourhoods. This kind of project requires creativity and flexibility in city guidelines. It also could require a cash investment by the city. But that investment could be repaid through high property taxes.

Sources: The City of Edmonton, EDA Collaborative Inc., Urban Revision the Dagny Partnership, IBI Group
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European cities show the way

COMPACT

Continued from A1

It takes about 39 acres of land to accommodate 1,000 people in single-family homes, Diamond said, but only two or three acres to put the same number of people in a mixed community of single homes and low-rise condominium complexes.

"It doesn't take a genius to figure out that it is cheaper to service two or three acres than 39," Diamond said.

European hubs such as Zurich and Amsterdam are examples of cities that have grown around the core, he said.

Zurich has almost the same population as Edmonton, but eats up half the land.

"Even Vienna, with 1½ times the population of Calgary and Edmonton, is not as big in its footprint," Diamond said. "These are extraordinarily livable cities, with virtually no highrises."

Part of the solution for Canadian cities, Diamond said, is to start making suburban homeowners pay the full cost of extending water lines and highways. Faced with higher costs on the fringe, many people will opt for homes in the city's core, where services are already in the ground.

Mayor Bill Smith called Diamond's ideas "thought-provoking," but rejected the notion that Edmonton should curb urban sprawl.

"People want choices about where they live, Smith said. For many people in Edmonton, that choice is a single-family home.

"We have to develop those choices here, otherwise we would lose everything to the suburbs and this would be a tremendous financial (problem) on us," Smith said.

Representatives from other cities had a different take.

Patrick Robson, who works for Ontario's Regional Municipality of Niagara, said his community's research showed Diamond is right to point out the high costs of building new single-family homes outside a city's core.

Their finding: For every \$1 a city receives in property taxes from a typical new residential development, it costs the city \$1.42 to provide services.

Because of that, the city is making a dramatic change in the fees it charges to new developments. It is waiving development charges on projects in the city's core, where infrastructure already exists. But in suburban areas, those fees are being increased.

EDITORIALS

More focus on good building design needed

It's heartening to see downtown residents rallying over a new condominium highrise on the fringe of their neighbourhood in the nouveau-chic warehouse district. A familiar neighbourhood drama — homeowners aggravated by a new development — is playing in a new theatre, namely Edmonton's hitherto-underpopulated downtown.

The controversy is happy proof that people can show the same passion for living in the city centre as others do in more typical residential areas. That's good news for inhabitants, for developers and for the city as a whole.

The concerned citizens live in old brick-and-concrete warehouses that have been converted to loft-style condominiums along 104th and 105th Streets north of Jasper Avenue. They are downtown's early supporters who moved in and spruced up the area before it was fashionable to do so. They're worried a new 19-storey condominium under construction across the alley will clash with the low-rise character of their new "old" warehouses.

The new condo's developer, True North Properties, is of course within its rights to build. Although a 1997 city plan established preservation guidelines for the Warehouse Heritage Area, the highrise site is on the other side of an alleyway just outside the heritage zone. The condo is going up in what the city calls an Enterprise Zone, which features several relaxed planning requirements as an incentive to encourage development.

In hindsight, perhaps it was a bit jarring to have a heritage area abut a special highrise zone where anything goes. But the downtown is also highrise territory. The city's core has to accommodate a mix of densities and land uses.

The question is whether special design features on the condo could mitigate the residents' concerns and the incongruent zoning.

True North, to its credit, proposes a two-storey parking garage as a pedestal with the 19-storey tower setback. The red-brick-and-concrete structure models the company's other apartments. True North says that tower design is the company's signature and it makes economic sense. The company said it saves about 30 per cent in construction costs by employing the same contractors on every new building project.

Savings like those might mean the difference between a new building and no new building.

The city's forward-looking housing policy successfully nurtured the downtown building boom. An imaginative city would also take advantage of this moment to encourage a local architectural rebirth to make downtown a showcase for good design. Many of Edmonton's highrises aren't exactly on the leading edge of creativity and beauty.

Architectural beauty, of course, is nigh impossible to write into regulation, but some steps can be taken. Already, the city's planning and development department refers new downtown structures to the Urban Design Review Panel, an independent board of designers, builders and others that the Downtown Business Association facilitates. Although the panel has no binding authority, developers generally follow its recommendations. But the panel, for the most part, resists being an overall arbiter of good design.

City authorities only monitor compliance with zoning and building codes. In Edmonton, "you can build a square box of the worst materials or a square box of the best materials," said Larry Benowski, planning and development's general manager. In Benowski's view, that's how it should be.

In 1989, a pair of city councillors rightly upset by Edmonton's ugly skyline proposed an architectural review board that could approve or forbid designs for large commercial buildings. Developers and architects ridiculed the go-nowhere idea, saying the Romans built fine structures by choice, not legislated threat.

But the city could certainly use less intrusive measures to encourage good design. Financial incentives from the city worked to get the first round of lofts constructed; incentives for design innovation might be in order.

The Urban Design Review Panel could be improved; one former panel member explained that new designs usually come to the panel far too late for any serious revisions. Vancouver's Urban Design Panel, by contrast, focuses on early assistance, trying to make the process more like a design workshop, less like a critique.

Another solution might require that developers spend a certain proportion of a building's funding on original architecture. Housing prices might go up but has anyone tested that market to see if people are willing to pay a bit more for distinctive design as they do elsewhere? It might be a reasonable expectation of an area that defines the whole city's image.