Downtown and the Central Area

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THE CITY OF Edmonton PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Edmonton's New Downtown Plan

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DOWNTOWN URBAN STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY PROFILE

PREAMBLE

This section provides background geographic and statistical information on the Downtown's urban structure of the Downtown, the natural and built environment, as well as an examination of the historic growth patterns and its influence on Downtown development. Understanding the historical growth and development of the Downtown provides a solid foundation in moving forward with new policies and principles to create a more livable, amenity rich urban environment. Finally, this chapter examines a number of socio-economic and demographic profiles, issues and trends to help inform the formulation of policies and implementation initiatives.

THE URBAN STRUCTURE OF THE DOWNTOWN

Urban structure refers to the pattern or arrangement of development blocks, streets, buildings, open space and landscape which make up our Downtown. Examining the urban structure of our Downtown provides the foundations for detailed design of the individual elements. It creates a logical framework providing direction for the physical layout and design of the Downtown to achieve the following:

- **A Sustainable Community** – Balancing environmental, economic and social concerns.
- **A Livable Community** – Taking a balanced approach to development through melding together the natural and physical environments with economic and social diversity.
- **A Well designed Community** – Achieving a high quality of standard in architecture and urban design and a community that is clean and safe.
- **A Dynamic Community** – Ensuring Downtown is active and dynamic offering a range of services and entertainment possibilities day and night.
- **An Accessible Community** – Focusing transportation options on transit and pedestrians and ensuring strong connections between adjacent communities, Downtown neighbourhoods, and the River Valley, and a community that is
- **Moving Forward** – Achieving the vision for Downtown by creating strong partnerships with business and resident organizations and between different levels of government and City departments to realize the vision of the Plan.


Above Left: Jasper Avenue 1890. Above Right: Jasper Avenue 1910


Above Left: Jasper Avenue 1930; Above Right: Jasper Avenue 1960

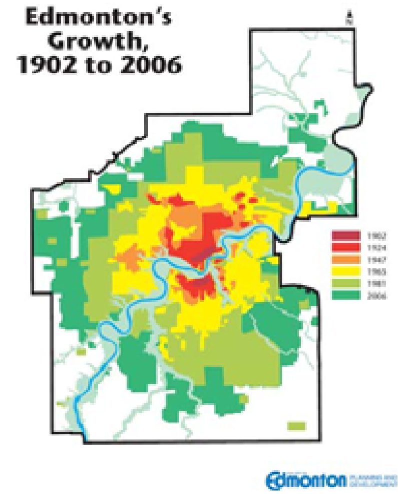
Above: Jasper Avenue 2007

The evolution of Downtown's urban structure is mirrored in the growth witnessed along Jasper Avenue between 1890 and 2007.

In 1890 Jasper Avenue was nothing more than a dirt road through an emerging City. By 1910 shops and services were well established along the Avenue and the first streetcars had connected the Downtown to the surrounding neighbourhoods. By 1960, transportation patterns had changed and the streetcar lines were removed. Today Jasper Avenue is a major corridor for Edmonton's transportation network including bus and light rail service. It has also become a focal point for Downtown redevelopment including new shops, services, and residential development projects.

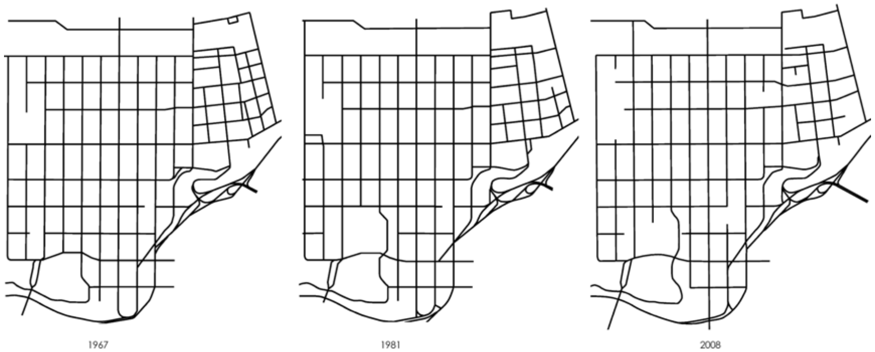
EDMONTON'S HISTORIC GROWTH PATTERN

Although Edmonton has a relatively compact downtown, most of the City's growth over the last 60 years has taken the form of single-use and low-density neighbourhoods. The city has grown from a town of 9 square kilometers in 1892 to a City of 700 square kilometers in 2007. Our Downtown has witnessed boom and bust economic cycles; urban renewal schemes of the 1950's and 1960's and suburban sprawl during the last 30 years. The resulting structure of the downtown reflects more than 100 years of growth and development and is a product of human and physical influence.



Built Form

Downtown remains organized along a grid of streets and blocks and the character of the Downtown is intrinsically linked to this pattern. With a few exceptions the grid patterns remains as it was when the City adopted the Standard Grid Dominion Land Survey patterns for streets and parks in the early 1900's.



Downtown Edmonton's relatively stable grid pattern – 1967, 1981 and 2008

Blocks in downtown Edmonton are relatively large ranging from 183 to 244 metres in length in the north - south direction and are 112.5 metres wide. The long faces of the blocks (the streets) are oriented north to south, while the shorter faces are oriented along the east-west avenues. Getting around Downtown on foot from one block to the next requires often a minimum walk of almost 366 metres, about a five minute walk.

Edmonton's evolution from a streetcar and pedestrian-oriented city into an auto dominated one had significant, unforeseen impacts upon the urban fabric. As the number of commuters increased, there was a corresponding demand for parking spaces. While parking lot construction was considered to be a savior assuring Downtown an upper hand in the competition with emerging suburbs, few realized that imposing suburban parking standards would threaten the very urban features, completeness and compact form, that drew people to Downtown. The removal of buildings for surface parking lots contributed to the degradation of the pedestrian environment through the loss of essential streetscape components, walls and continuous sidewalks. Urban renewal schemes of the 1960's encouraged the demolition of abandoned or derelict buildings. These early renewal schemes anticipated that once demolished, redevelopment would take place and in the interim the building sites would serve as surface parking facilities. In many cases, for a variety of reasons, redevelopment did not occur and as a result we are left with numerous surface parking lots littered across the Downtown. Today, surface parking covers almost 17. 0 hectares.

During the 1960's through the 1980's, Downtown saw significant change, riding the economic boom. This was when much of the high rise office towers that dominate the skyline today were constructed. A pattern of large block development began to replace the finer grain building assembly that had previously dominated. Several of the large development projects included the assembly of whole blocks, altering the historic gridiron street configuration changing the fabric and character of the downtown, and especially the pedestrian experience. New plans for the Civic Centre area centered on Winston Churchill Square reshaped the eastern portion of Downtown. As part of the Civic Centre redevelopment, several lots were consolidated to form larger parcels and historic buildings demolished to make way for new facilities. Often the new large block developments did not respect this traditional development pattern and reduced the permeability of the street, reducing or eliminating street activity. Interior downtown malls were also completed during this period, often linked to office tower development. This was a further blow to smaller-scale shop owners who saw street activity internalized to this new network of shops, services and Pedway in the Downtown.

In more recent years, the integrity of the urban form at certain locations has been further challenged by building typologies that are more car-oriented and suburban in nature. These development projects present a barrier to achieving a quality pedestrian environment detracting from the walkable nature of the downtown and are at odds within their urbane context. Void and underused spaces represent opportunity sites in a growing and evolving Downtown.

Approximately16.8 hectares of potentially developable parking lots throughout the Downtown core and an additional 30 plus hectares of vacant land, parking lots and sites with buildings that have redevelopment potential. The majority of developable land is located in the Warehouse District where almost 60% of the Downtown's surface parking is located. The figure ground study shown below demonstrates the void spaces Downtown. Between 1967 and 2008 the Downtown witnessed the loss of many buildings. This is apparent as the amount of white space on the figure ground study shows an increase from 1967 through to 2008. The challenge today is to reintroduce the fine grained building typology back into the Downtown to ensure a walkable, amenity rich, and vibrant city centre where density and intensity of uses is maximized.

Downtown Figure Ground Study: 1967, 1981, 2008

Today, the Downtown is one of the most desirable neighbourhoods in Edmonton and one of the fastest growing. The residential population has increased by more than 50% since 1997 and now boasts a population of more than 10 thousand people. Several new residential high rise projects have been completed, new shops and restaurants have opened and a renewed vitality seems to exist in all corners of the Downtown. Its economy is more diverse, expanding from the traditional government focus to include high tech, financial, and post secondary learning institutions.

It is useful to consider the existing features of our Downtown including the natural landscape, land use and built form to understand how policy objectives of this Plan might fit within the existing urban structure to best direct growth and development opportunities over the lifetime of the Plan.

The Natural Landscape

Edmonton owes its existence to the North Saskatchewan River which has served as a trade route through the area for hundreds of years. The North Saskatchewan River Valley forms a natural edge to the southern boundary of the Downtown. This edge provides open spaces, dramatic water vistas and recreational opportunities. The River Valley and the North Saskatchewan River provide a unique opportunity for Downtown Edmonton but also act as a barrier making access to the River from Downtown difficult.

Land Use

Successful Downtowns have traditionally played host to a vibrant mix of uses. These uses play off one another to create a unique and dynamic expression of urban culture. Optimal development of the Downtown depends on an appropriate mix and intensity of land uses.

The combination of a wide range of uses concentrated within a defined area is a source of strength for Downtown and the City. Downtown is centrally located making it a desirable location for businesses, high density employers, and education institutions which draw from across the entire City. Businesses in close proximity to one another stimulate creativity, innovation and growth in the economy. Residential and commercial developments combine to create a market for sustainable retail and service businesses that draw people into Downtown throughout the day and into the night. Education contributes to the concept of a learning community, bringing new ideas into the community and, in the case of many schools, bringing young people, their ideas and energy into the culture of the community. This dynamic mix of activity is different from traditional suburban community development where different uses and development intensities have traditionally been separated.

The table below presents a statistical breakdown of land uses in the Downtown. As might be expected, the majority of properties in the Downtown are commercial. Commercial properties make up 33.5 percent of the total land area. Residential land use comprises 15.5% of the total Downtown land use, a 50 percent increase since 1997.

Downtown Land Use - 2007

Land Use	Land Area	
	Hectare	%
Residential	24.8	15.5
Commercial	53.6	33.5
Institutional	41.8	26.1
Industrial/Utilities	3.3	2.1
Recreation/Open Space	6.2	3.9
Transportation (Parking)	22.8	14.2
Vacant/Undeveloped	7.6	4.8
Total	**160.1**	**100**

Commercial Office Space and Institutional Uses

Commercial office space and institutional uses are a major source of strength for the Downtown's identity and an essential element of its role as an employment growth centre.

Downtown is a major regional employment centre – home to more than 65% of the commercial office space in the City – and a significant hub for the education sector with over 40 different education service providers including the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan College and Norquest College.

There are two major commercial office nodes within the Downtown. The first is located between 109 and 106 Streets south of Jasper Avenue and north of the Provincial Legislature. This node is built on a concentration of government offices but also includes major institutions and private sector commercial operations. The other node has its centre roughly at the intersection of 101 Street and 102 Avenue and extends in a four block radius to encompass a wide range of public and private sector activities. Most retail and services are concentrated within the latter of the two areas. The two nodes are connected by Jasper Avenue where there is significant redevelopment opportunity including well serviced vacant and underutilized properties.

Residential

Residential development in the downtown has proved an important ingredient in creating a sustainable local economy. A strong residential population stimulates and makes viable retail and services that would otherwise depend mostly on 9-5 business activity in Downtown. People who have a strong personal investment in Downtown are more protective of and involved in the issues that face their community.

Today, the residential focus Downtown is in the McKay Avenue Area and the Warehouse District. Residential development has been designated as the primary land use in the development concept for the core part of the McKay Avenue Area and is offered as a transitional use in combination with commercial use where the area lies adjacent to the commercial core. The Warehouse District reflects a more mixed-use area where residential development has been encouraged. The Warehouse District reflects an urban mix, comprised of former warehouses which have been converted to commercial, residential and other uses. Within the Warehouse District a large number of vacant properties and surface parking lots possess tremendous potential for development.

DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY PROFILE

Planning for the future of the Downtown involves an appreciation of such factors as business, development, existing land use and demographic statistics. It also involves an understanding of the distinct characteristics of the different areas which makeup up the Downtown.

Downtown Statistical Summary - Highlights

	1997 Plan	2007 Plan
Downtown Employment (est.)	50,000	43,000
Office Vacancy Rate	16.9% (December 1996)	4.14% (2007)
Leasable Office Space	1,367,674 m^2	1,389,278 m^2 (2007)
Assessed Value of Downtown Properties	$2.2 Billion	5 Billion (2007)
Land Area	137.4 ha	137.4 ha
Resident Population	6,250 (May 1993)	8,706 (2005 Municipal Census)
Dwelling Units	5,470	7,019 (2005 Municipal Census)
Apartment Vacancy Rate	6.3% (October 1996)	1.0% (CMHC 2006)
Hotel Rooms	2,639	2,595 (Downtown Edmonton – Retail Market Analysis 2006)

NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

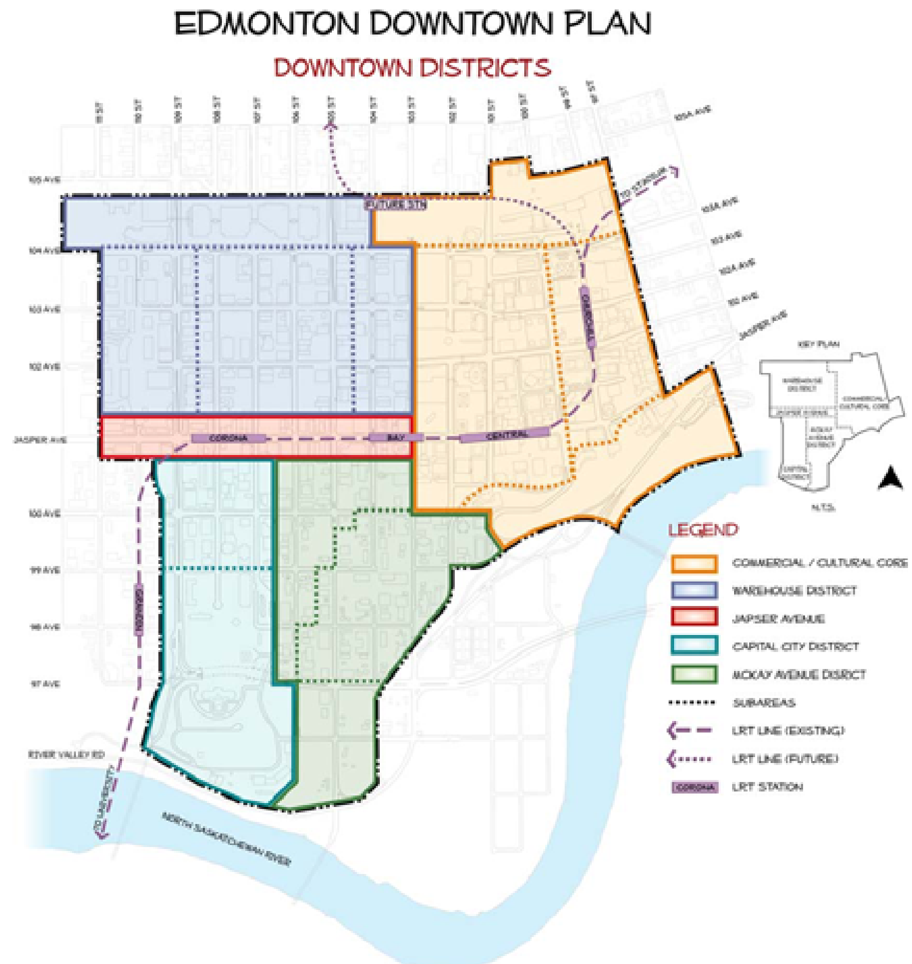
A combination of land use and other factors define the Downtown's five districts.

The Commercial Cultural Core is a concentration of high density commercial uses combined with cultural facilities. It is home to City Hall, the Art Gallery of Alberta, the Winspeare Centre, Citadel Theatre, Provincial Law Courts, and the City's main Library. All but one of Downtown's major office towers (25 storeys or greater) are located here.

The Warehouse District is an urban mix, made up of old warehouses converted to commercial, residential and other uses and a large number of vacant properties ripe for development. This area is less dense, with buildings ranging from one to thirty-five storeys high, most buildings are one to three.

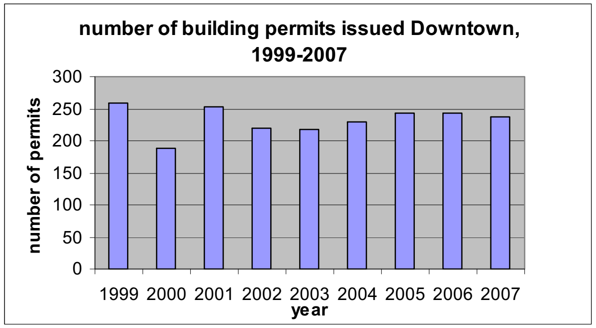
Jasper Avenue is Edmonton's Main Street. It contains a variety of retail and other commercial uses interspersed with several high rise office towers. Recent initiatives have focused on reinvigorating underused buildings and the Jasper strip is re-emerging as a nightlife hotspot.

The Capital City Precinct is home to the Alberta Legislature building and grounds and several high quality mid rise offices towers and associated commercial uses, along with notable heritage buildings.
McKay Avenue Area contains an established residential community with single detached housing as well as walk-up and high-rise residential units. The area has seen significant development over the last three years for additional high-rise development projects. The area is a well established neighbourhood featuring mature tree lined streets, characterized by steep sloping topography, dramatic views of the River Valley and a cluster of significant heritage structures.



DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

In 2007, 238 development permits were issued in the Downtown, totaling approximately $109,600,000 in value. This is down up down slightly from the 244 development permits issued in 2006 totaling just under $200,000,000.

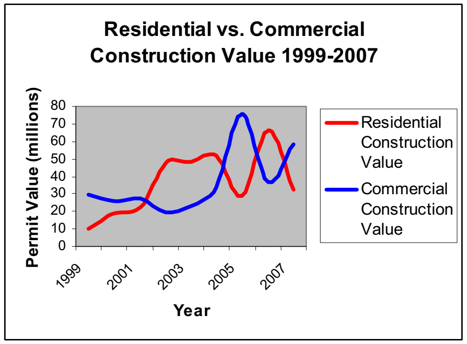


The table below summarizes residential construction value in the Downtown between 2000 and 2007. Residential construction reached a high of more than $66 million in construction value in 2006.

Residential Construction in the Downtown (2000 – 2007)

Year	Construction Value	Number of Residential Dwelling Units Added
2000	$18,189,350	398
2001	$22,030,877	418
2002	$49,685,000	546
2003	$47,948,400	652
2004	$52,066, 375	628
2005	$29,038,000	272
2006	$66,0914,723	199
2007	$32,355,670	220

Residential and commercial construction activity has fluctuated between 1999 and 2007 as the below chart demonstrates. The value of residential construction reached a high in 2006 as a number of high profile projects were either completed or initiated including Vivacity and the Icon Towers. In 2007 there has been a downward trend in construction value. A number of large development projects are pending approval by Council with construction likely to occur in 2008. Commercial construction reached a high in 2005, dropped through 2006 and has risen through 2007.



In 2007, the Downtown provided the City of Edmonton with over $64 million in tax revenues. Approximately 6.8% of all property taxes and 10.7% of all business taxes in the City were obtained from the Downtown in 2007.

The table below shows the amount of taxes generated from the Downtown in 2007 with comparisons provided for 2006, 2005, and 2004.

Tax Revenues Generated from Downtown

	Taxes Generated in 2007	Percent of City-wide Taxes		
		2006	2005	2004
Municipal Tax Levy	$38,238,941	6.4	6.2	6.2
Business Tax Levy	$10,152,835	11	11.9	11.5
School Tax Levy	$15,507,546			
Total	**$64,593,980**			

RESIDENTIAL POPULATION

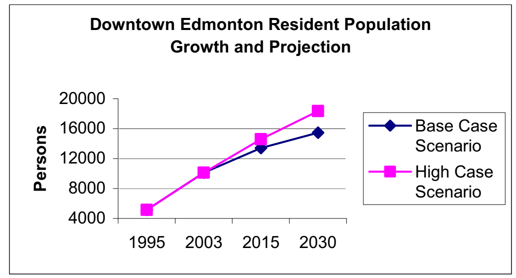
Since 1996, the population of Downtown Edmonton has increased from 5,130 people to an estimated 10,000 people in 2008. Over the last ten years, the population of Downtown Edmonton has grown faster than any other inner city neighbourhood. In addition to population, the number of units created Downtown continues to grow. In 1999, there were 4,055 units. In 2006 the number of units completed or currently under construction has doubled to almost 8,000 units. Compared to the City as a whole, the Downtown population is significantly younger – 58% between the ages of 20 and 39 years – compared to the overall city population – 33% of the population between the ages of 20 and 39 years. The proportion of owners to renters has also increased significantly over the past seven years. In 1999, 12% of residents were owners. By 2005, the percentage of owned units increased to 33%.

Population Counts 1996-2008

	1996	1999	2001	2005	2008 (Projection)
Population	5130	6120	6175	9027	10,000
Dwelling Units	3430	4055	4140	5935	

Source:
1996 Federal Census
1999 Municipal Census
2001 Federal Census
2005 Municipal Census

The continued population growth is expected to continue. Two scenarios have been established, one based on a "base case scenario" and the other on a "high scenario" case. The base case scenario represents projections of healthy economic and population growth given the growth Edmonton has experienced over the past five years. The high scenario case represents projections of stronger economic and population growth, higher than what has been experienced by the City of Edmonton over the past five years.[1] The City's policies encouraging growth in the Downtown, including *Smart Choices for Developing Our Community* recommendations and the *Walkable Edmonton* initiative, are expected to help promote both continued residential and non-residential development.

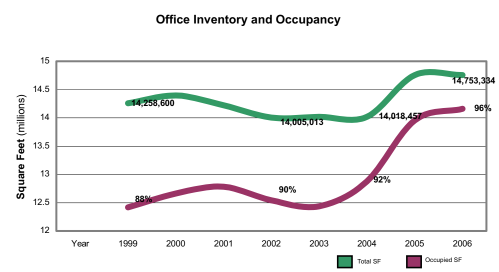


Source: Population & Employment Forecast 2003-2030 City of Edmonton

OFFICE

Total Downtown office growth saw declines in inventory through the years 2001 and 2002 followed by continued expansion in subsequent years to 2006. Vacant space has generally dropped from 1.84 million square feet at the end of 1999 to 0.62 million square feet at the end of 2007. The corresponding vacancy rate drop for the period was from 12.9% in 1999 to 4.14% in 2007. In the high profile Class A buildings in the Commercial Core the office vacancy is a low 2.9%.

Downtown Edmonton Office Inventory and Occupancy



Source: Colliers International

[1] Population and Employment Forecasts: 2003-2030. August 2005. The City of Edmonton, Prepared by Applications Management Consulting Ltd.

RETAIL

Retail in Downtown Edmonton has flourished over the last ten years offering an expanding array of choices to a growing base of workers, residents, and visitors. Downtown Edmonton includes a mix of street-level retail, mall-type retail (Edmonton City Centre, Manulife Plaza, Commerce Place), and Pedway retail. Combined, there is over 1.8 million square feet of occupied retail space.[2]

Downtown Edmonton Retail Summary[3]

	Number of Stores	% of Total	Square Footage	% of Total
Retail Merchandise	129	21.4%	656,642	39.9%
Convenience Goods	67	11.1%	108,674	6.6%
Eating and Drinking	219	36.3%	404,229	24.6%
Services	150	24.8%	387,171	23.5%
Vacant	39	6.5%	87,800	5.3%
Total Retail Commercial	**604**	**100.0%**	**1,644,516**	**100%**

EDUCATION

Enrollment in the Downtown's 30 plus institutions of higher learning remains strong, drawing over 45,000 students from across the region and around the world with the largest concentration, 12,000 at Grant MacEwan College. The University of Alberta attracts another 35,000 students within easy access of the Downtown by public transit. The table below presents current figures for student enrollment at the Downtown's major education institutions.

Major Learning Institutions in Downtown Edmonton

	Approximate Registered Full-time and Part-time Students
Grant MacEwan College	9,700 (2007)
Norquest College	5,000 (2007)
Centre High School	2,000
Lethbridge University	600
University of Alberta	1,000
Boyle Street Educational Coop	125
Metro Community College	3,500
Athabasca University	n/a
Total	24,225

Source: each learning institution

CREATIVITY: FESTIVALS AND ATTRACTIONS

Edmonton is known as Festival City because of the ever increasing number of festivals held in the city throughout the year. The majority of these festivals and special events are focused in the Downtown over the summer months. In 2006, nearly ________ people came to Downtown Edmonton to attend these major events.

Downtown Festivals and Attractions

Festival	**Attendance (2007)**
Taste of Edmonton	>600,000
New Years Festival (2006)	35,000
The Works	
Edmonton Pride Festival	
Street Performers Festival	
Movies in the Square	
Total	

[2] *Downtown Edmonton Retail Market Analysis and Action Plan*. March 2006.
[3] *Downtown Edmonton – Retail Market Analysis and Action Plan.* March 2006.

DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY PARTNERS

A number of private sector organizations focus on the Downtown. While several city-wide organizations have a major interest in downtown issues, the organizations listed below deal exclusively with the development of the Downtown.

The Downtown Business Association (DBA) was established under the Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ) legislation in 1985 to represent the businesses operating within the Downtown area. As a self-help organization funded by its more than 2000 members, the goals of the DBA are:

- To promote Downtown Edmonton's image and identity through events, attractions and marketing;
- To encourage planning and environmental standards for new developments and to promote beautification, safety and mobility, and
- To provide leadership and to communicate matters of concern to members, government official and the public.

The Edmonton Design Committee (EDC) is a committee of Council established in 2005 replaced the Urban Design Review Panel (UDRP) which was formed in 1986. The role of the EDC is to review development applications and Direct Control rezoning applications against a set of principles aimed at improving the level of design quality.

The Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation (EDDC) was established in 1986 by City Council as a private non-profit corporation as a result of the Mayor's Task Force on the Heart of the City. The mandate of the EDDC is to promote, co-ordinate and facilitate projects to revitalize Downtown Edmonton.

Downtown Edmonton Community League (DECL) was established in 1999. DECL is a member of the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues and is an organizer and sponsor of community events in the Downtown. DECL also acts as an advocate for the residential population of Downtown Edmonton.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS, OPPORTUNITIES and CHALLENGES

Strategic trends and the Downtown itself have changed dramatically over the last ten years, testing the relevance and focus of many of the policies and actions set out in the 1997 Capital City Downtown Plan. The City has had ten years to work with the 1997 Downtown Plan and to assess its specific direction, clarity and the most successful means of implementation. This Plan offers the opportunity to bring a sharper focus to Plan content and implementation.

The 1997 Capital City Downtown Plan set the framework for many of the accomplishments in Downtown Edmonton including:

- Completion of the 104th Street pedestrian promenade and creation of the Heritage Area Zone resulting in a very successful mixed-use street;
- Railtown development – conversion of rail yard to urban neighbourhood;
- Access improvements into the Downtown including removal of the 'Rathole' and conversion of one way streets to two way;
- Encouraging new housing and commercial development; and
- Expansion of the education sector including MacEwan College and the University of Alberta.

Other changes in the Downtown that are either direct or indirect result of the 1997 Plan include:

- Growth of Downtown retail and entertainment;
- Expansion of the Shaw Convention Centre; and
- Development of the North Edge Study Area and 105 Avenue multi-use trail corridor;

Opportunities

Since 1997, Downtown Edmonton has undergone considerable growth emerging as one of Edmonton's most attractive neighbourhoods. Following the Downtown Resident Survey, completed as part of the 2008 Downtown Plan, residents of the Downtown sited the following as influencing their decision to move Downtown:

- Proximity to River Valley
- Close to employment
- Close to amenities
- Close to school
- Availability of public transportation
- Affordable housing
- Central location
- Atmosphere/lifestyle/activities

The numerous high rise residential towers and the start of Edmonton's first new commercial high-rise in close to twenty years amply demonstrate the advantages of developing in Downtown Edmonton. The following describe the Downtown opportunities:

An Accessible Downtown
Downtown benefits from a high concentration of professional and business-services and enjoys easy access to a labour market as being the centre of a growing and expanding metropolitan region. 11%percent of downtown workers take transit or alternative means to get to work. The Downtown's Pedway network connects shops, offices, homes and transit and is part of an expanding network of a downtown growing more connected.

A Dynamic Population
Downtown Edmonton boasts one of the City's youngest residential populations. Close proximity to major colleges and universities puts employers in touch with the latest research and a steady stream of recent graduates and provides employees opportunities for continuing education and professional development.

Extraordinary Amenities
A wide variety of arts and cultural institutions, a farmers' market, shops, restaurants and cafes adds to the abundance of amenities offered Downtown. Downtown is part of an ever growing LRT and future BRT network. Proximity to the River Valley provides recreational opportunities and is part of the greater River Valley park system.

Recent Momentum
Downtown Edmonton has been experiencing a relative residential building boom over the last five years and the market is expected to remain at elevated levels for the near future. With much of the projected growth to occur in the next five years, Downtown is in a good position to capture the potential market demand. The Plans for the North Edge Study area allow for the potential of 5,178 additional dwelling units directly adjacent to Downtown. The eventual build out of the North Edge area will support the commercial businesses in the Downtown residential areas and bring more amenities to the area.

Challenges

Despite the outstanding advantages offered through Downtown Edmonton, a number of important issues were raised by the individuals and organizations involved in the Capital City Downtown Plan public participation process which highlight the challenges associated with Downtown Edmonton. A brief sampling of these issues is provided here.

The Environment
- Parkland acquisition in the Downtown is more complex than any other area of the City because of the unique factors associated with site selection, land purchase negotiations, high cost of land, the physical landscape and use needs.
- Connections to the River Valley are underdeveloped and underutilized and consequently undervalued, these facilities have been identified by the community for improvement.

Urban Design
- The current structure of flexible design guidelines do not yield the standard of design and architectural quality demanded by Downtown residents and residents of the City as a whole.
- Large, complex, out of context developments with a significant impact on adjacent and surrounding properties are not gaining a higher corresponding degree of administrative review.
- Current development standards for public amenities such as sidewalks, landscape plantings, public parks and street furniture do not fit the unique functional and aesthetic characteristics of the Downtown.
- The scale of some developments is grossly out of context and does not effectively relate to street-life and pedestrian activity.

Transportation
- Above ground parking garages built on otherwise active or redeveloping streets sterilize and deaden street level activity, compromise public safety, reduce walkability and sense of place.
- Increasing levels of development activity are likely to tighten parking supply in key areas of the Downtown.
- Developers are not maximizing transit oriented development potential around LRT stations.

The Downtown Community
- The relatively young population in Downtown combined with the increasing number of homeowners in Downtown suggests a possible future gap in family-oriented amenities and services.
- There are concerns about personal safety in the Downtown in certain places at different times of the day.

Economic
- The economic environment in Alberta over the last ten years has changed rapidly from one of low economic activity to booming economic activity. Compromised development regulations adopted ten years ago designed to attract any kind of development activity

have proven short-sighted and inadequate in providing the type and quality of regulatory direction necessary to create a high quality sustainable built environment in the Downtown. This regulatory gap is especially problematic during periods of intensive economic activity, housing shortages and rapidly increasing costs of home ownership.
- Increased accessibility of suburban commercial land resulting from aggressive transportation infrastructure expansion programs like Anthony Henday Drive highway project may result in increased development of suburban office space and satellite business parks thereby eroding Downtown's position as the dominant commercial office space provider in the City.
- Rapid residential growth and a higher population of owner occupied and investor owned residential units has increased demands for basic public services and amenities in the Downtown including parks, general maintenance, streetscaping and other value added public improvements that contribute to a higher overall quality of life.
- City Departments are strained by the scale of development activity occurring across the City. One of the results is that programs and spending targeted at the Downtown have been stretched thin during a period where redevelopment activity is intensifying, as are demands for increased amenity maintenance and provision.

Land Use
- Existing Zoning Bylaw regulations are not effectively addressing development trends toward high density, high-rise multi-unit development, nor do they adequately facilitate negotiations for discretionary approvals processes, or the preservation of views and sunlight.

TRENDS

Downtown Edmonton is changing, subject to local forces as well as much broader national and international trends. National trends create opportunities and challenges for our Downtown.

As a country we are becoming increasingly urban. As of 2006, 80% of Canadians were living in urban centres. This is creating stress between the urban/rural fringe and driving the argument for compact communities preserving agricultural land in the vicinity of cities. Coupled with rising urban populations are trends towards smaller families and an aging demographic. Smaller families and dramatic increases in real estate prices in recent years are driving demand for smaller, more affordable, housing options. An aging population means we must address a range of service provisions to ensure individuals have the resources and capacity to age-in-place in communities that are flexible and adaptable to age related needs and concerns.

Nationally, Canadians are increasingly becoming aware of the need to be sustainable. Sustainable development is influencing how we live and work and is leading towards mixed use, 'complete communities' where we can live, work and play with minimal impact on the environment. Green development has become less of an isolated occurrence and is part of mainstream development – it has gone from an exception to the rule.

On a more localized scale, broad trends are impacting our Downtown in a number of ways:

- The days of strictly segregating land use through zoning is coming to an end. A dynamic mix of residential, institutional and commercial land uses is viewed as highly desirable especially within the confines of Downtown.
- A strong economy in Edmonton has increased development activity in the Downtown. There is significant development activity towards building high-rise residential towers;
- In the last ten years Edmonton has experienced a real estate boom with the cost of housing increasing dramatically over the past several years; there is greater demand for smaller, more affordable housing units;
- Since 1997, Edmonton has moved into the wireless age with Downtown as the centre for the expanding WiFi network connecting people, business, and institutions together;
- Since 2002, the Creative Cities movement has continued to gain momentum. Creative cities, offering cultural amenities, a healthy environment, and vibrant lifestyles are attractive places which draw people and investment; and,
- There is increased appreciation and a greater sense of responsibility in protecting our natural environment. Though our Downtown is perhaps the most intensely developed area of the City there is a growing movement towards building green and reducing our impact on the natural environment.

In addition to these factors, the Downtown community is more active and involved in providing direction in Downtown policy and development than it was even ten years ago. Since 1997, the Downtown Edmonton Community League has been established which acts as an advocate for the residents of downtown. Downtown's growing population has created a neighbourhood where one barely existed before, now bringing forward demands for additional amenities such as parks and open spaces and services to supply the day-to-day needs of residents.

City Council direction over the last several years has actively shaped the Downtown spurred by greater demand from citizens to make Edmonton a highly livable, amenity rich city and beautiful place. This includes specific shifts in policy direction toward sustainability and quality of life initiatives. Administration has been encouraged, by Council, to address sustainability and quality of life initiatives as part of rezoning and development applications and to more thoroughly assess a proposed developments impact on the built environment.

To capture the potential for change created by these forces, Downtown Edmonton must create an environment that caters to changing demographics, provides a high quality urban lifestyle, and maximizes the ability of local businesses to compete globally. This hope is reflected in a long term vision and set of design principles articulated by stakeholders in a number of workshops.