

Downtown North Edge DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Vision Building Workshops Summary Report



August 4, 2004

1.0 WORKSHOP PURPOSE

The City has retained the consulting team of Bunt & Associates, Armin A. Preiksaitis & Associates Ltd., Gibbs & Brown Landscape Architects and Focus Engineering to complete a development plan for the Downtown North Edge. The Development Plan will be used as a planning framework to guide future development in the area and will include development, servicing, implementation and financing plans.

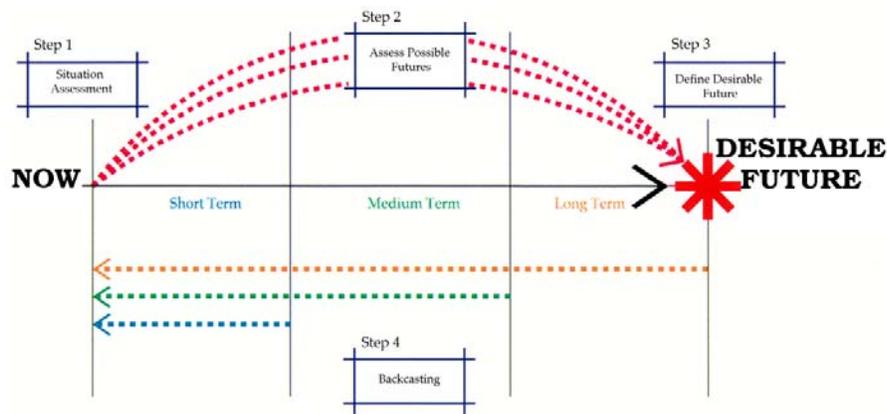
Two Vision Building Workshops were held at the Grant MacEwan City Centre Campus on July 20, 2004. The purpose of the Workshop was to identify a vision for the Downtown North Edge and to establish strategic priorities related to land use, urban design guidelines, streetscape and servicing improvements, a multi-use trail connection and a financing strategy. The community-based vision will guide the preparation of the North Edge Development Plan by involving stakeholders and the community in the planning process, ultimately enhancing project implementation by generating community support.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF VISION BUILDING PROCESS

Vision building is a strategic planning tool that helps a community develop a shared vision for their neighborhood. The benefits of community vision building include:

- Developing a greater sense of community consensus,
- Establishing a long-term direction for future development,
- Setting priorities, and,
- Allocating responsibilities for implementing the vision.

Vision building includes a four-part process that guides local residents through a situation assessment, identifying possible futures, selecting a desirable future based on consensus, and “backcasting” to ensure the vision is achieved over the short, medium, and long term. This process is illustrated in the following diagram:



3.0 WORKSHOP METHODOLOGY

Nearly 8,000 downtown stakeholders, property owners, renters, businesses and the general public were invited to participate in the two Vision Building Workshops. A four-page newsletter was prepared that provided background information on the project and extended an invitation to the Workshops and an August 31 Public Meeting. The following summarizes the invitation process.

- A newspaper ad was placed the Edmonton Journal.
- The City of Edmonton mailed the newsletter to 1,820 property owners in the Central McDougall and Queen Mary Park neighborhoods.
- The newsletter was delivered to apartment dwellers through Canada Post unaddressed mail - 2,485 in Central McDougall and 3,710 in Queen Mary Park.
- An additional 25 newsletters were sent to the Mayor; Ward Councillors; Central McDougall and Queen Mary Park Community Leagues; internal City Departments; the Downtown Edmonton Community Association; the Business Revitalization Zones for the Downtown, 97 Street and Kingsway; and developers in the Plan area.

The Workshops were held at Grant MacEwan Community College (10700 – 104 Avenue) in the Multi-Purpose Room from 2:00 to 4:30 pm and 6:30 to 9:00 pm. A total of 116 people participated in both Workshops - 56 in the afternoon and 60 in the evening session.

Kulbir Singh, Director of Strategic Area Services for the City Planning & Development Department, open the Workshops by welcoming everyone and introducing the consulting team. He provided background about the need for the plan, referencing recent rezoning applications received by the City.

The consultants Ray Davis of Bunt & Associates, Armin Preiksaitis of Armin A. Preiksaitis & Associates Ltd., and Stefan Johansson of Gibbs & Brown Landscape Architects Ltd. gave an overview presentation that summarized the land uses, transportation network, open spaces and pedestrian linkages within the plan area. They summarized feedback received in meetings with community league representatives, discussed sound planning principles and provided examples of successful urban design locally and in other cities. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation is appended to this report.

4.0 GROUP EXERCISES

After the presentation, participants were invited to gather in groups of 6 to 8 to work through a series of questions presented in the Discussion Guide. Each group was asked to select a spokesperson to record comments and present the group's vision and strategic priorities at the end of the session. The following is a summary of the feedback received from participants of both Workshops.

A. A VISION TO THE YEAR 2024

Participants expressed concerns about the current level of safety in the area, the street atmosphere and built environment. They also shared a number of ideas and desires about what the area could become – describing a mixed-use, active, accessible and safe neighborhood. The following vision represents an amalgamation of these ideas.

By the year 2024, the Downtown North Edge will be:

- A mixed-use community that offers a place to live, shop, work, learn and play.
- A diverse and inclusive neighbourhood that offers a range of housing types and welcomes a variety of age and income groups.
- An attractive and inviting urban environment that is occupied and active around the clock.
- A safe neighbourhood that employs Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles, in addition to a community police presence.
- An area with strong, functional linkages in all directions - to the Downtown and neighbourhoods to the north, east and west.
- A pleasing, people-friendly environment that encourages and accommodates alternative forms of transportation, including pedestrians, wheelchairs and cyclists.

The following is a synopsis of responses to questions in the Workshop Discussion Guide.

1. What are five of the most important strengths / assets of the area that your group would like to see preserved or enhanced in the future?

- (1) Proximity to Downtown, the River Valley and Grant MacEwan Community College.
- (2) Diversity of people currently residing in the area and the heritage of the area.
- (3) Mixed village atmosphere (commercial and residential uses).
- (4) Accessibility, pedestrian-friendly, and linkages (enhance 107 Avenue and linkages to downtown)
- (5) Existing street trees.

2. What are the five most important issues / policy directions that your group feels need to be addressed in the North Edge Development Plan?

- (1) Maintain a balance between commercial and residential uses.

- (2) Provide social, cultural and recreational opportunities / increase the number of parks and open spaces (pocket parks, linear park along 105 Avenue and linkages with the Multi-use Trail).
 - (3) Enhance commercial development on 107 Avenue as well as on 101 Street; 101 Street is a gateway to the City.
 - (4) Address concerns regarding crime and safety in the area (community policing and CPTED).
 - (5) Address current traffic problems in the area (reroute traffic to 109 Street and 119 Street away from residential streets and limit vehicular traffic on 105 Avenue).
- 3. *Who are the population / user groups that the area serves now and we envision living, working, or using the area in the future and how can their needs best be met?***
- People working downtown and within the Downtown North Edge Plan area.
 - Students
 - Young professionals.
 - Families with children.
 - Seniors / retirees.
 - Business clients / customers.

HOUSING

- 4. *What types of housing forms should we be encouraging in the area as a transitional area from the downtown to the residential neighborhoods of Central McDougall?***
- Variation in housing forms;
 - Mid-rise apartments (8-10 stories);
 - Townhousing;
 - Live/work opportunities (along 107 Avenue for instance);
 - Owner-occupied housing;
 - High rises – consider locating in southern portion of the plan area and incorporating ground-level retail;
 - Special needs housing;
 - Affordable housing;
 - Co-op housing.

MIXED USE / COMMERCIAL USES

5. *How can the commercial potential of the area be enhanced / improved?*

- Ensure land use compatibility and a balance between uses;
- Ensure taxes are reasonable;
- Encourage commercial developments that attract people at all times of the day;
- Support ethnic restaurants to reflect the cultural diversity of the area;
- Expand on the Avenue of Nations concept;
- Improve safety and overall attractiveness of the area;
- Save and convert old warehouses;
- Encourage business incubators.

6. *What are your group's thoughts on where business / industrial uses should be maintained in the Plan area? Where should mixed-use opportunities be encouraged? What conflicts may arise with incompatible uses? How can these conflicts be avoided or mitigated?*

- Current businesses and small shops should be encouraged to stay.
- There should be less yard storage; industrial uses with adverse nuisance effects should be made more attractive.
- Maintain a balance between land uses.
- Encourage stakeholders to co-operate and co-exist;
- No casinos, pawn shops or massage parlors.

WALKABILITY / PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT

7. *What specific things can be identified in the Plan to achieve better linkages and improve the pedestrian environment (e.g. streetscaping, new links, etc.)?*

- Traffic calming on 105 Avenue between 109 Street and 116 Street;
- "Eyes on the street" on 113 Street and in Rail Town;
- Improve street furniture and attractiveness with trees, landscaping, benches, lighting, etc.;
- Develop pocket parks and green spaces;
- Widen sidewalks;
- Link up with the Multi-Use Trail (105 Avenue as a promenade);

- Provide north-south pedestrian routes along 104 Street, 106 Street and 108 Street;
- Consider making 116 Street bicycle friendly and rerouting traffic to 109 Street;
- Pedestrian access needed to link Oliver Square shopping center with residential area to the North (note existing informal path behind Safeway);
- Make sidewalks wheelchair accessible (curb cuts).

8. *What opportunities exist to augment parks and open space in the Plan area? Where should they be located? What purpose should they serve? How can additional parks be provided and financed?*

- Develop park space on the Casino land;
- Develop pocket parks in residential areas;
- Add linear parks where possible;
- Parks and recreational space should include play areas and small wading pools for children;
- Add plazas, a pond and skating rink;
- Consider incorporating community gardens within the Plan area.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

9. *Implementing public transit improvements such as high-speed transit (HST) and future light rail transit (LRT) have to be planned for. How can this best be done in a manner that increases transit ridership and ensures effective integration with land uses / development in the Plan area?*

- Identify high-speed transit routes and location of LRT station;
- Commit to those routes and stops;
- Provide a definite plan and timeframe for public transit to reassure investors and owners;
- Ensure accessibility, convenience, reliability and safety;
- Provide free transit along 105 Avenue;
- Consider locating transit routes along 104 Street instead of 106 Street, which is residential;
- Incorporate mini-buses in the Plan area.

PARKING

10. What strategies need to be adopted to adequately manage the various parking needs in the area, yet encourage an attractive pedestrian environment, public transit usage, and sustainable development principles?

- Avoid large, unsightly surface parking lots;
- Increase regulated parking (one-hour meter parking for instance);
- Spread surface parking lots evenly throughout the area to minimize their impact in any one particular area;
- Regulate parking lots and discourage surface parking lots not attached to businesses.
- Encourage underground or above ground (multi-level) parking lots instead of surface parking lots;
- Parkades could be disguised by multi-level shops or townhousing;
- Have loading/drop-off zones for walkup apartments – streets get very tight with parking.
- Encourage developers to have landscaped space between apartment buildings and parking areas to enhance view of residents.

ENSURING QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

11. What are the most important topical areas that these guidelines need to address (e.g. active street frontages, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, height and massing of buildings, etc.)?

- (1) Active street frontages;
- (2) Height and massing of buildings;
- (3) Architectural control on residential development;
- (4) Planned and appropriate mixed-use development - industrial pockets are acceptable but should not be haphazard throughout the area;
- (5) Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED);
- (6) Landscaping and provision of green space.

IMPLEMENTATION AND FINANCING

12. Reinvestment will be needed for the area for parks / open space, streetscaping, and municipal services (sewer, water, storm, roads). What are your group's recommendations as to how these improvements might be implemented? What are some potential financing sources, and who should be responsible for implementation?

- Encourage partnerships between the City and developers;
- The City must invest in infrastructure improvements;
- Investor funding;
- Focus on business retention;
- Casino should devote 1% of its yearly profits to a Downtown North Edge fund.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

13. Does your group have any other considerations that we should be aware of in preparing the North Edge Development Plan?

- "Accessibility" also means wheelchair accessibility;
- ATCO Gas site could have a 'village square' feel and could incorporate a glassed-in market for year-round use;
- A recycling depot should be provided in the area (the northeast corner of the Oliver Square West parking lot was suggested);
- Limit the number of bars to avoid noise and crime issues that have developed in Old Strathcona.
- Allow boards for community posters and to advertise events.
- Avoid unacceptable increases in traffic in the general area.

B. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The following is a synopsis of the five most important strategic priorities identified by Workshop participants.

Strategic Priority #1 – Develop a mixed community of people (adults, families, seniors, young professionals, students, different cultures), businesses and uses (residential, commercial, live/work). In other words, foster a neighborhood with opportunities to live, work, play, shop and learn. As part of this mixed community, a variety of housing types and forms - from low / mid rise to high rise - are desirable.

Strategic Priority #2 – Increase recreational opportunities through the continued development of the multi-use trail, pocket parks, streetscapes and other green spaces.

Strategic Priority #3 – Reduce crime and increase safety by increasing “eyes on the street” (attracting people to the area), incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles and maintaining a police presence in the Plan area.

Strategic Priority #4 – Encourage non-vehicular modes of transportation (walking, bus, LRT, bikes) that are convenient, safe and accessible to all.

Strategic Priority #5 – Maintain the current character of the area by preserving mature street trees and respecting the current population and cultural diversity. Incorporate theming and ensure that new development is integrated with the existing neighborhood.

Other strategic priorities that were mentioned include:

- Encourage a quality residential environment with a variety of housing types.
- Increase access to affordable housing and provide support services.
- Minimize the impact of large surface parking lots.
- Increase community involvement and neighborhood development.
- Ensure reasonable taxes.
- Improve municipal infrastructure.
- Ensure landlord responsibility for building and grounds maintenance.
- Increase density.

5.0 WORKSHOP EVALUATION

Fifty-one people completed an exit survey at the end of the Workshops. A scale of one to five was used to assess the workshop’s effectiveness, with one indicating strong disagreement and five indicating strong agreement. The results are listed below:

1. The Workshop was well organized and appropriately paced. 3.8
2. The information presented was useful and clear. 3.9
3. Opportunities to participate were good. 4
4. Other comments included the following:
 - *Too many good ideas! Our group was great!*
 - *No opportunity for questions.*
 - *Useful session with valuable input. Hope ideas are taken into account when planning goes forward.*
 - *Because the group I was in was very diverse (landowner, developer, business owner and tenant), the vision is very different depending on your point of view.*

- *It was long – could have used more time to discuss. Would appreciate a copy or summary of input before seeing the draft plan.*
- *Time for group exercises was too short.*
- *Keep the two communities, Queen Mary Park and Central McDougall involved in an on-going way. Advertise that this is the next exciting downtown development so people who are thinking of moving back to the center will come and express their needs.*
- *I believe developers were in the majority and I am unsure that residents concerns will matter. Unless City and Police deal with drunks and bums, this are will not thrive.*
- *Presentations by architects, etc. never explained how these concepts for multi-use trail is going to work during the winter.*
- *The integrated process is the only answer. Edmonton currently reads like a land of missed opportunities. Profit has been the motive for too long, it is nice that people have been brought back into the loop.*
- *No RA9 at the Pentecostal Church at 116 Street and 107 Avenue. Inappropriate density with RA7 in the neighborhood.*