What We Heard

Priority Growth Area Rezoning Phase 2

ADVISE

City of Edmonton
Development Services

SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

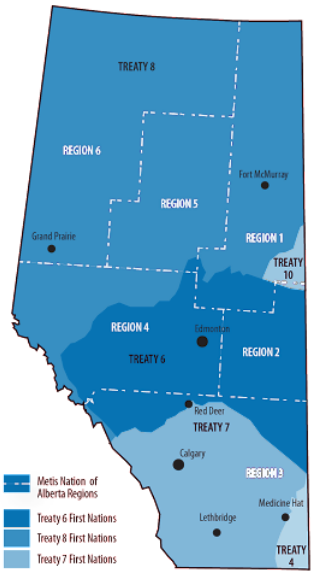
Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the traditional land on which Edmonton sits, the Territory of the Treaty 6 First Nations and part of the Métis homeland. We would like to thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, such as Nehiyaw (Cree), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Dene and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge this place as the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel.

Edmonton is a welcoming place for all people who come from around the world to share Edmonton as a home. Together we call upon all of our collective honoured traditions and spirits to work in building a great city for today and future generations.

This acknowledgement is significant to us as planning is about our accountability to the land, and the people, that call it home. Land is used for many things, and it is tied to the practice of culture. We owe our presence here — the city's vitality and very existence — to the land itself and the cultures that help build this city.

The project team and report authors thank the stakeholders who participated in engagement activities. Your contributions are greatly appreciated and we are enthusiastic to share your values and ideas as reflected in these pages.



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Project Overview

The City Plan - Edmonton's combined Municipal Development and Transportation Master Plan - sets out the development framework needed to support Edmonton as it grows to a population of 2 million people. It seeks to shift how we grow, targeting fifty percent of development to happen in the redeveloping area of the city (roughly inside the Anthony Henday) with an emphasis on encouraging taller buildings and greater development intensification in our network of nodes and corridors.

The 19 nodes and corridors The City Plan anticipates will see the most near-term growth are known as Priority Growth Areas. The Priority Growth Area rezoning project has selected five of these Priority Growth Areas for targeted rezonings to help catalyze demand and investment in these important areas. Creating a strong system of nodes and corridors and encouraging transit oriented development is an important part of creating a healthy, urban climate resilient city where everyone has easy access to amenities and services to meet their daily needs.

Not all land within the selected Priority Growth Areas will be rezoned. The rezonings will be limited to parcels of land in the selected Priority Growth Areas that have the greatest redevelopment potential, such as those located directly along corridors or within close proximity to mass transit.

Preemptively allowing targeted increases in height and density will create more certainty for both developers and the community on what types of developments will be supported and in what locations. This, in turn, helps streamline the development process and mitigate some of the costs and risks, which reduces barriers to building new homes and businesses and encourages investment in these areas.

Engagement Approach

Level of Influence

The City's public engagement spectrum defines the public's and stakeholders' level of influence in engagement processes. **The role of stakeholders during this phase of engagement was at the ADVISE level on the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum,** where participants are invited to share feedback and perspectives for consideration in the project**.** The Advise level was selected as the project will be working within the policy framework of both The City Plan and Draft District Plans, both of which were developed through multiple years of extensive Create and Refine levels of engagement.

Who We Engaged

A number of development industry associations, community groups, and advisory committees were invited to share their feedback and perspectives via several meetings with the project team from late March to early May 2024. Organizations engaged included:

- Edmonton Transit Service Advisory Board
- Edmonton Youth Council
- Accessibility Advisory Committee
- Women's Advisory Voice of Edmonton Committee
- Edmonton Transition Climate Resilience Committee
- Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues
- Canadian Home Builders' Association
- Infill Development in Edmonton Association
- NAIOP Edmonton -Commercial Real Estate Development Association
- Urban Development Institute Edmonton Metro

What We Discussed

During each meeting, the project team presented information on the project's background, selection criteria, and potential Priority Growth Areas. Attendees prompted discussion on the following topics:

- Missing evaluation criteria
- Strengths and weaknesses of short-listed Priority Growth Areas
- Other potential barriers to redevelopment
- Future engagement preferences

What We Heard & What We Did

Public Engagement

Equity is important
What We Heard: Parcel and zone selection needs to include a GBA+ component to ensure vulnerable groups are not displaced.

What We Did: The team is exploring how the Social Vulnerability Index can be utilized in the parcel and zone selection phase. Other actions underway outside of this project to address affordability issues include, phasing out the tax classification on rental properties, accelerating development of surplus school sites, prioritizing development applications for affordable housing and waiving the cost of Sanitary Sewer Trunk Charges.

There is a need to engage with communities beyond just the community leagues
What We Heard: To ensure that the voice of residents is not lost, the project team needs to engage more than just the community league. The team needs to reach out to youth groups and seniors as well as look at hosting engagement sessions at cultural or community centres. The demographics of selected Priority Growth Areas should be reviewed when planning engagement to assist in connecting with the community.

What We Did: We will be working with the City's Neighbourhood Resource Coordinators and undertaking a demographic analysis to ensure our engagement is as broad and accessible as possible.

Project information should be readily available and easy to understand to enhance public understanding and engagement participation
What We Heard: Engagement should include supporting documents that show where rezoning opportunities in the Priority Growth Area are and what the maximum built form could look like and should consider good urban design. Detailed maps can be helpful in conveying complex concepts. Providing shared documents, such as on a website, can be beneficial in enhancing public understanding.

What We Did: A website will be created to ensure that project information is readily available in advance of engagement opportunities. The project team will include several detailed maps and visuals to aid with future public engagement.

There needs to be a variety of accessible engagement options
What We Heard: To ensure as many people as possible have an opportunity to provide feedback, a variety of engagement tactics will be required. This should include a combination of virtual and in-person events and for engagement opportunities to be scheduled outside working hours and on weekends. Any in-person engagement events must be inclusive and accessible for all who wish to attend. Engagement opportunities should also be brought into the communities to make it more accessible.

What We Did: The team is planning to provide a wide-range of engagement opportunities to ensure everyone has an opportunity to provide feedback in a way that best suits their needs and preference. In-person workshops will be held at easily accessed locations in the selected Priority Growth Area communities. Efforts will be made to ensure events are held after working hours or on the weekends. In addition to these City-hosted workshops, the project team will meet and engage with the selected communities where they are through attending local events and pop ups. In person and virtual drop in engagement sessions and online engagement opportunities specific to the selected Priority Growth Areas will also be offered.

Some shortlisted Priority Growth Areas may experience higher volumes of community opposition
What We Heard: Some of the short-listed Priority Growth Areas are located in traditionally active neighbourhoods and rezoning could face high volumes of feedback and opposition.

What We Did: The team will be doing extensive amounts of engagements with the impacted communities to ensure there is significantly more opportunity for consultation and feedback than what is offered for a standard rezoning application. This will include gathering knowledge on local community context and sharing information on the parameters of Council approved land use policies, such as The City Plan and forthcoming District Plans.

Priority Growth Area Selection

The short-listed Priority Growth Areas make sense
What We Heard: The team heard that the shortlisted places either make sense or were the locations anticipated to be selected due to the importance of strong market demand. In particular, the City-Centre - Wîhkwêntôwin, 124 Street, and University-Garneau Priority Growth Areas are great locations for additional density. We also heard that the team should focus on corridors over neighbourhood interiors and should consider areas that have the most density potential (such as Centre City and Major Nodes). Alternative perspectives included that the shortlisted PGAs were too focused on the inner city and didn't reflect employment areas outside of the core.

What We Did: The feedback on desirable locations was considered when refining the Priority Growth Areas shortlist. Future phases of the project will identify focus areas within the selected Priority Growth Areas for further discussion.

Evaluation criteria makes sense
What We Heard: Picking Priority Growth Areas where the zoning does not align with the density objectives of a node or corridor inherently makes sense. We also heard that focusing on Priority Growth Areas with multiple transit connections and large amounts of vacant land were also good categories. Industry members suggested we include the number of rezoning applications within our analysis.

What We Did: The number of rezoning applications in the Priority Growth Areas was included in our final evaluation criteria to inform Priority Growth Area selection.

A heavy focus on transit for Priority Growth Area selection is important
What We Heard: Increased density should be concentrated around transit stations to help boost ridership while also allowing future residents of these communities to be less car-dependent. Additional transportation connections, such as vehicular, pedestrian, and other active modes, should also be considered.

What We Did: Transit connectivity was weighted highly when scoring each of the Priority Growth Areas during the selection process. Proximity to multi-modal transportation options will be examined at the parcel and zone selection phase.

Land consolidation is challenging and important to consider
What We Heard: Land consolidation is a timely and expensive process with the risk that the market shifts to other neighbourhoods before the process is complete. Greater priority should be given to land ownership during the parcel selection phase.

What We Did: City administration reviewed the number and size of large landing holdings as part of the Priority Growth Area evaluation process and will work with stakeholders during parcel and zone selection to identify areas where land consolidation opportunities will be easier.

Priority Growth Areas must have infrastructure capacity
What We Heard: The team should pick Priority Growth Areas where there is sufficient infrastructure capacity (water, drainage, power) to accommodate the additional density. Concerned with increased traffic and on-street parking as a result of density was also raised.

What We Did: In progress infrastructure studies with EPCOR and transportation experts will identify areas lacking capacity and identify high order costs for upgrades. The project team will also continue to collaborate with other City initiatives and explore the potential for upgrades to be supported through the City's Housing Accelerator Fund actions, future capital funding or funding programs from other orders of government.

Community Buy-in
What we Heard: There was interest in selecting areas where there was strong community desire for redevelopment and investment.

What we did: The focus of this project is to support redevelopment in the short term. Factors such as strong market demand were given higher priority. If City led rezoning projects are undertaken in the future, additional PGAs can be explored.

Additional criteria to consider
What We Heard: The team heard that people want to live close to open space, particularly the river valley, as well as grocery stores and "Third Spaces", which includes free access community areas such as libraries. We also heard crime rates could be explored, bike lanes and city wide trip generation should be considered and that infrastructure capacity should be examined to ensure that development can proceed without additional costs.

What We Did: Infrastructure studies are underway and the team will take additional metrics, such as access to amenities and green space, under consideration to see how they can be applied at the parcel selection stage. Additionally, the project team will continue to collaborate with the City's Open Space team as Breathe, Edmonton's Green Network Strategy, is updated to consider the quality, distribution and diversity of open space in Priority Growth Areas.

Future Considerations

Ensure that community amenities keep up with the increased density
What We Heard: There is concern that the communities will lose their character as land values increase. In particular, there is a concern that amenities such as open space will not be able to keep up with the additional population growth. It was also suggested that the City should consider analyzing the cost to upgrade local amenities, such as fire stations, libraries, and parks, to ensure that new residents will still have adequate access.

What We Did: Breathe, Edmonton's Green Network Strategy, in conjunction with The Approach to Community Recreation Facility Planning in Edmonton, provides the framework for how amenities will be developed to support increased population growth.

Include family friendly and accessible units
What We Heard: Redevelopment should include larger multi-bedroom dwellings that can support families or be inclusive and accommodating. Some concern was expressed that developments would be overly focused on studio and one-bedroom units.

What We Did: While the types of dwellings provided within standard zones is market-driven and not something the City can regulate, the project team can explore using zones that include floor area ratio bonuses in future stages of the project to encourage inclusive design and/or family-friendly units.

Affordability is important
What We Heard: The project should aim to increase opportunities for vulnerable people and for those who struggle with the cost of housing with Priority Growth Areas lacking affordable housing options being prioritized.

What We Did: While these concerns are largely outside the scope of this project, rezoning can enable the development of more residential units and help increase supply. During the parcel and zone selection phase, the team will look to connect with the City's Housing Action Team and external partners such as Homeward Trust to explore affordable housing opportunities within selected Priority Growth Areas.

Focus your efforts
What We Heard: The City should focus its efforts on a limited number of Priority Growth Areas to send a strong signal that the area has been selected for significant change. Prime locations for this would be areas with high demand, such as University-Garneau, City Centre - Wîhkwêntôwin, and 124 Street.

What We Did: The team will focus its efforts on fewer Priority Growth Areas and concentrate parcel selection in highly developable areas, such as around LRT stations.

Avoid analysis paralysis

What We Heard: Some stakeholders indicated that the City shouldn't be picking "winners and losers" while others stressed the need to move forward, with clear delineation on where increased density is anticipated. This would help achieve goals from The City Plan such as having vibrant and walkable neighbourhoods around mass transit stations.

What We Did: The team has selected five Priority Growth Areas, each with existing or planned mass transit stations, which are anticipated as key focus areas during the parcel and zone selection phase.

Rezoning is not a significant barrier

What We Heard: Most rezoning applications are generally supported by City administration and Council. It is not clear that this project will be solving any specific problems and additional incentives could be offered to encourage construction.

What We Did: While the scope of this project is limited to removing potential barriers around zoning to streamline development and reduce time, cost, and uncertainty, other projects are actively looking at how to support development at other stages of the development process.

Pick the right zones

What We Heard: Industry indicated the need to pick the right zones to reduce the need to rezone the property again when market demands change. We also heard from committees that development should be accessible, welcoming, and safe.

What We Did: The team will engage with both industry and the public to inform parcel and zone selection and ensure that the choices are both buildable and respond to local context.

Land speculations

What We Heard: Proactive rezoning could increase land value, making redevelopment more expensive as landowners demand higher prices. This could result in developers prefering to purchase land outside of nodes and corridors where prices are lower.

What We Did: The team is aware of studies that have found that increasing development potential in a limited geographic area can lead to speculative behavior and increased land costs. Additional studies have found that in areas where high density is already expected, such as in Priority Growth Areas, or anticipated through statutory plans, upzoning has a less significant impact. Targeted rezoning is more disruptive when it diverges significantly from Council-approved land use planning. However, the team will work with the development industry to identify other tactics that could reduce speculation and encourage land consolidation.

Collaboration with other City projects is key
What We Heard: To ensure that the City's efforts and investments are maximized, this project needs to work collaboratively with other projects that are aimed at spurring development. It was indicated that if rezoning is not the barrier for redevelopment in a PGA, then the City should identify what is preventing redevelopment and explore other tools to leverage redevelopment.

What We Did: The project team regularly meets with the Infill Infrastructure Fund and Housing Accelerator Teams and has ongoing communication with EPCOR, Building Great Neighbourhoods, and the Climate Resilience Planning & Development Framework teams.

Restrictive covenants and caveats
What We Heard: Properties in some Priority Growth Areas may have caveats registered on their titles that enforces exclusivity for single-family homes and large lots. Since these caveats are not regulated by the City, these areas are not available for redevelopment.

What We Did: The team is aware of these caveats and their implications on redevelopment. This will be further examined at the parcel and zone selection phase.

Future application's outside of selected Priority Growth Areas
What We Heard: There is concern that future development applications outside of the selected Priority Growth Areas would not be supported.

What We Did: Council-approved land use guidelines are used to review applications. Future submissions would proceed through the standard review process with the potential to support applications that align with the height and density objectives of The City Plan or future District Plans.

Key Changes & Next Steps

In response to the feedback received, the team made three key changes to our approach. Firstly, we added the number of rezoning applications in the Priority Growth Areas to our scoring analysis. Then we reduced the number of selected Priority Growth Areas to five and created focus areas around prime developable land.

Following the presentation of the final drafts of the District Policy and 15 District Plans to City Council, the project team will announce those Priority Growth Areas selected for rezoning. This will be followed by the project team connecting with affected community leagues and beginning community outreach to increase project awareness through pop-ups, drop-in events, and by launching a project webpage. By summer, the team aims to begin engagement on parcel and zone selection through a variety of methods such as workshops, focus groups, and one on one communication with team members.