What We Heard Report

Heritage Places Strategy

Phase One

Spring-Summer 2025

Executive Summary

SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

Executive Summary

Project Overview

The City of Edmonton is rethinking how we identify, celebrate, and protect Edmonton's heritage places. Rather than only focusing on historic buildings, the Heritage Places Strategy is looking at including natural spaces, cultural landscapes, and community places that tell Edmonton's story. Drawing on UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape approach, this strategy will replace the City's Historic Resource Management Plan (2009) and update Policy C450B (2008), while supporting The City Plan's goals and Council priorities like affordable housing and climate action.

Phase 1 engagement, the first of three phases, happened in the spring and summer of 2025 at the ADVISE and REFINE levels of the City's Public Engagement Spectrum. Phase 1 invited people to share their familiarity with the heritage program and ideas on what to consider for the strategy. The project team heard from heritage partners, Indigenous partners, representatives from communities whose voices may not have been part of heritage planning before, and the general public.

What We Heard Highlights

Heritage Must Expand Beyond Buildings

A consistent message across all the feedback was the importance of heritage places in addition to historic buildings. Participants discussed how heritage includes things that aren't always tangible like cultural practices, community connections, stories, and traditions that give places meaning.

Natural heritage came up as well, with people emphasizing the river valley, mature trees, natural formations, and landscapes as fundamental to Edmonton's heritage story. This broader view shows that people understand heritage as connected places and systems rather than separate objects.

Inclusivity and Indigenous Involvement

People were clear that heritage can't just be about settler stories - it needs to reflect Edmonton's diversity. Indigenous heritage and perspectives came up consistently as foundational and that this needs to be upfront in the strategy. Both the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations and Otipemisiwak Métis Government emphasized the need for meaningful collaboration, community-led engagement, and storytelling to include cultural landscapes and intangible heritage.

Recognition of newcomer and immigrant communities was also important, with people pointing out the contributions of diverse cultural groups who have shaped Edmonton's character for decades.

Creative and Flexible Approaches Needed

People wanted creative ways to tell stories, such as digital storytelling, art projects, walking tours, interpretive programming, and community-led initiatives. For example, members from the 2SLBGTQIA+, Black and African, South Asian, and Francophone communities involved in heritage efforts described innovative approaches to making invisible histories accessible and meaningful.

Community leadership came up as critical as people emphasized that communities should determine their own heritage priorities rather than having significance imposed on them. People pointed to successful examples like community-led plaque programs, neighbourhood walking tours, and grassroots initiatives that deserve City support and expansion.

Development Pressures and Growth Management

People shared their concerns about the impact to heritage due to infill and redevelopment. They called for heritage-informed approaches to development rather than viewing heritage and growth as opposing forces. This includes policy integration across City departments, flexible regulations, and incentives that make preservation economically viable while supporting growth objectives.

Policy Integration and Resource Allocation

Another theme was that heritage must connect with broader City initiatives such as climate resilience, waste reduction, economic development, and social equity. Feasibility was a concern, with people calling for enhanced incentives, streamlined processes, and recognition of heritage as an economic investment rather than a constraint. The strategy should show how heritage contributes to a vibrant community that attracts residents, businesses, and visitors.

Next Steps

Phase 1 engagement revealed a shared vision that positions heritage as a tool for strengthening community identity while accommodating change. The feedback shows that people understand heritage requires moving beyond single-building preservation to embrace Indigenous histories, diverse community stories, and natural and cultural elements. Based on this feedback, combined with research from other cities and alignment with City policies, Phase 2 engagement will invite feedback on themes that will form the core of the Heritage Places Strategy. The path forward involves collaboration to honour the past, build an inclusive future, serve all residents, and reflect the complexity of Edmonton/amiskwaciwâskahikan.

Visit edmonton.ca/historicresources for the full **Phase 1 What We Heard Report**.