

Downtown **Public Places Plan**

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT
PHASE 1 | CONCEPTUALIZE

April 2018

Edmonton

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Downtown public places provide respite, relief and room to socialize, celebrate and recharge. Specifically, Downtown public places support Edmonton's civic life, cultural expression, economic development, community wellness and ecology while functioning as important local parks for residents and workers.

These different interests, functions and users require a comprehensive engagement program to ensure the Downtown Public Places Plan meets community needs and desires to realize a sustainable, vibrant, well-designed and accessible Downtown through its public places.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Edmonton's Downtown is transforming. New investments, including the refurbished Legislature Grounds, Ice District and LRT Valley Line, are attracting new development and people. This new development includes high-density residential, mixed-use buildings and office towers. Despite this recent investment and development, the number of public places within the Downtown remains limited. As the public and private sector investment in the Downtown continues, the coordination of investment in public places is needed to support existing and new residents, workers and visitors.

The amount of people living in the Downtown is expected to more than double by 2030. As this population grows, the amount, quality, functionality and accessibility of public places become more important. New strategies to improve public places within the Downtown is required to meet the needs of a growing population, attract families and support a vibrant Downtown.

The existing Downtown public places offer limited opportunities for recreation, exercise, relaxation and socialization. Though each individual public place needn't offer everything, it is important that all public places within the Downtown work together to provide a range of amenities. In the past, Downtown public place projects focused on one place at a time, concentrating on the immediate area instead of examining each place's role in the broader network. This has resulted in spatial and functional gaps in this network. This is why a Downtown Public Places Plan is needed.

Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy (2017) and the *Capital City Downtown Plan* (2010) both identify the need to develop the Downtown Public Places Plan. **This Plan will provide clear direction for the programming, design, development and acquisition of Downtown public places.** This direction will inform Council decisions, direct Administration priorities and guide community partnerships, engagement and collaboration.

Investing in the Downtown benefits all Edmontonians. Public-place improvements are necessary to meet the needs of a growing population, to support families, stimulate business and tourism, support employment and help create a vibrant Downtown. Exceptional Downtown public places help attract new residents, businesses, festivals and events while contributing to civic pride, improving safety and creating a positive impression of Edmonton. A functional and attractive public-place network will support and enhance the health and vitality of Downtown Edmonton.

DOWNTOWN VISION STATEMENT

Downtown Edmonton is aiming to become...

Sustainable Environmentally

- Sustainable and a regional hub for green innovation.
- Known for its distinct neighbourhoods and the strong sense of community, diversity, social interaction and engagement that they offer.

Vibrant

- The economic driver for the region and provide a range of housing options for all Edmontonians.
- A regional, national and international centre for arts, culture, festivals, and entertainment.

Well-designed

- Well-designed in all areas of the public and private realm and include a comprehensive network of public places.
- Celebrated in its role as the Capital City of Alberta and as a winter city.

Accessible

- Pedestrian-oriented and will provide transportation options that are multi-modal and accessible to all.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Downtown Public Places Plan objectives are to...

- Apply BREATHE: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy approach to Downtown Edmonton to improve the quality, functionality, connectivity and supply of public places.
- Provide clear direction to inform the acquisition, development, design and programming of Downtown public places.
- Improve connections between the Downtown and the North Saskatchewan River Valley.
- Inform and/or align current and future projects in the study area.



ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The City of Edmonton is committed to excellence in public engagement. Building on Edmonton's shift towards an "Open City" system of public participation, the engagement process for Downtown Public Places Plan aims to make the most of stakeholders' and citizen's problem-solving potential, build community and create advocates for Downtown public places.

NEW PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT POLICY

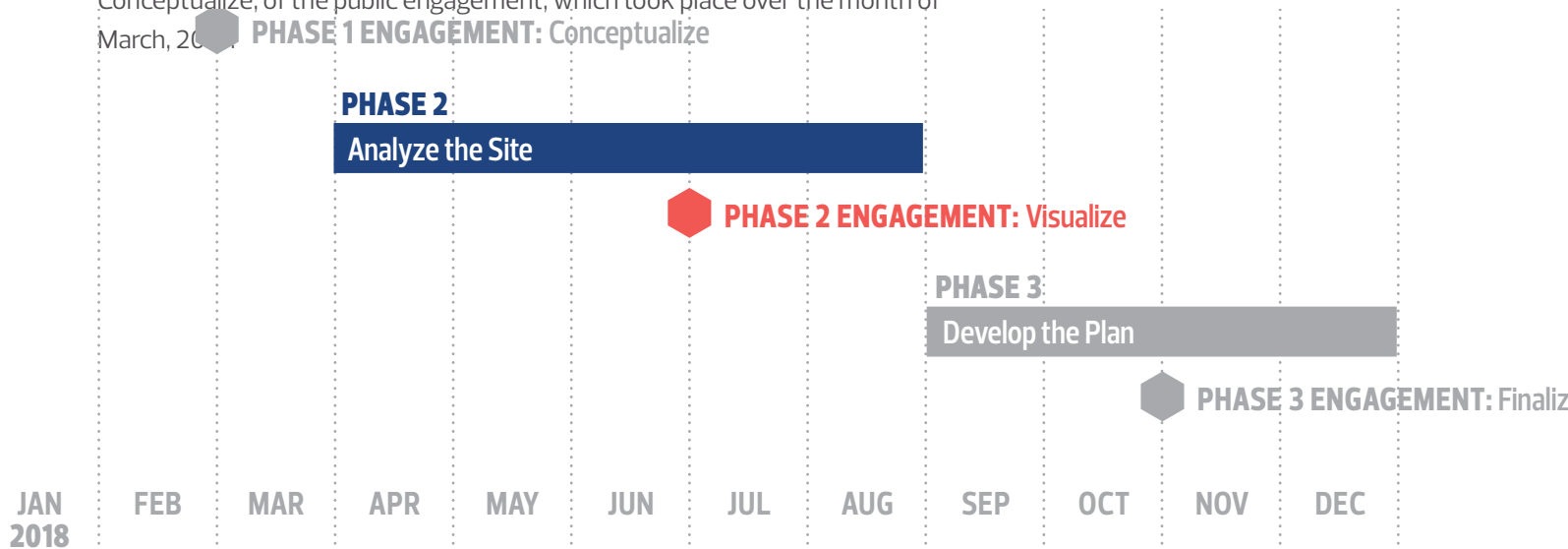
The City of Edmonton's policy on public engagement (C593) is a guiding document for The City's approach to public engagement. The Council Initiative on Public Engagement was launched in 2014 with a goal of strengthening The City's public engagement. For more information visit edmonton.ca/programs_services/public_engagement/council-initiative-on-public-engagement.aspx

THE STAGES OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The City will be engaging with the public to *Advise* and *Refine* the project three times over the span of the project.

- ▶ Phase 1: Conceptualize
- ▶ Phase 2: Visualize
- ▶ Phase 3: Finalize

This What We Heard Report summarizes the results from Phase 1: Conceptualize, of the public engagement, which took place over the month of March, 2018.



Engagement Values

The following values will guide the engagement process:

- Respect
- Honesty
- Openness
- Inclusion
- Cooperation
- Learning

Engagement Principles

These principles will anchor our actions and thinking as we engage with the public and stakeholders:

- Be open, timely and responsive.
- Listen and share stories to understand.
- Support informed engagement.
- Follow through on commitments.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

A robust public engagement process results in stronger, more locally relevant projects. The following goals ensure that the public engagement process is transparent, focused and accessible.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GOALS

- ▶ Understand the strengths, weaknesses, gaps, issues and opportunities in the Downtown public place network to validate and refine the supply and needs assessment from BREATHE.
- ▶ Collect feedback on proposed public-place improvements, recommendations and their alternatives.
- ▶ Hear public and private development perspectives on creatively developing privately-owned public places.
- ▶ Develop priorities for public-place improvements to inform the implementation plan.
- ▶ Build relationships with stakeholders who will advocate for this Plan.
- ▶ Have conversations with a range of stakeholders, including residents, communities of interest, workers, visitors, institutions, organizations and more.
- ▶ Provide opportunities throughout the project for participants to provide meaningful, appropriate and actionable input that will be used to create the Downtown Public Places Plan.
- ▶ Implement an engagement process that is open, transparent and respectful.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for involvement that are convenient and accessible.
- ▶ Provide opportunities to engage communities of interest and under-represented communities that are harder to reach.
- ▶ Creatively engage and communicate with the general public, residents, workers and visitors.
- ▶ Clearly communicate the project goals, what the engagement process can and cannot influence, and how public input was used to help shape the Plan.
- ▶ Combine engagement events with other projects, when possible.
- ▶ Implement innovative and place-based tactics.
- ▶ Understand the needs of residents and the requirements for public places.
- ▶ Support community-led/created initiatives for Downtown Public Places.

THE BIG QUESTIONS

- How can we make a vibrant, well-designed, accessible and environmentally sustainable Downtown through its public places?
- What investments in the public realm are needed to support new residents, workers and visitors in the Downtown and Quarters neighbourhoods? How can The City strategically coordinate these investments?

AUDIENCE

Effective engagement begins with considering the needs of different audiences and the engagement and communications tactics most appropriate for each group. The engagement streams included place based, strategic interviews, online surveys and in-person interactions. The communications tactics were to spread the word and the engagement tactics focused on collecting feedback. This audience ensured that the project offers the variety required to generate broad interest and feedback. These different groups were engaged at various times throughout the engagement process.

| | TARGET AUDIENCE | ENGAGEMENT TACTICS | COMMUNICATION TACTICS |
|--|---|--|---|
| STREAM 1: Place-based | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Downtown Residents ➤ Downtown Workers ➤ Downtown Institutions ➤ Downtown Visitors ➤ Communities of Interest | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sounding Boards ➤ Pop-Ups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sounding Boards ➤ Lobby Displays ➤ Posters |
| STREAM 2: Strategic Interviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Development Industry ➤ Downtown Institutions ➤ Communities of Interest ➤ Downtown Organizations ➤ City-wide Organizations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Interviews | |
| STREAM 3: Online | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Edmontonians ➤ Downtown Residents ➤ Downtown Workers ➤ Downtown Visitors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Online Questionnaire ➤ Insight Survey ➤ Online Interactive Map ➤ Social Media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Project Website ➤ Project Email ➤ Social Media ➤ Advertisements (print + online) ➤ Press Releases |
| STREAM 4: In-person | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Downtown Residents ➤ Downtown Workers ➤ Downtown Visitors ➤ Communities of Interest | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Event Attendance ➤ Interviews ➤ Pop-Up Events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Direct Contact ➤ 311 |

PHASE 1: CONCEPTUALIZE

Objectives:

Gather input about the strengths, weaknesses, gaps and opportunities in the Downtown public-place network.

Validate and refine the supply and needs assessment from Breathe.

Information Presented:

- Downtown public-place maps.
- Fact and figures to describe Downtown public places.
- The Breathe supply and needs assessment.

Questions Asked:

- What are the strengths of existing Downtown public places?
- What are the challenges of existing Downtown public places?
- Where are the gaps in the existing Downtown public place network?
- What are the opportunities to improve the Downtown's public places?



ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

ONLINE

Online Survey + Interactive Map

The online survey link was posted on the Downtown Public Places project website and provided residents with an opportunity to answer questions and pin points of significance onto the project's online interactive map.



Insight Community Survey

The Insight Community is an online platform that allows residents to engage on City issues. Insight Community members were sent the online survey to provide feedback.



PLACE-BASED

Sounding Boards

Large maps were affixed to fencing at three locations in downtown for the public to provide quick comments. The locations included Alex Decoteau Park, Railtown Park and the 100 Street Funicular.



Pop-up Events

Three pop-up events were held to share information and speak to the public in person. The locations included the Edmonton Tower lobby, Boyle Street Plaza, Enterprise Square and City Market at City Hall.



IN-PERSON

Stakeholder Interviews

One-on-one interviews with representatives from a selection of organizations.



PUBLIC INSIGHTS

DOWNTOWN PUBLIC PLACES

The **QUALITY** of downtown public places in Edmonton is excellent.



- Strongly Agree ●
- Somewhat Agree ●
- Neither Agree/Disagree ●
- Somewhat Disagree ●
- Strongly Disagree ●
- Don't Know ●

I feel **SAFE** in downtown public places.



Downtown public places are **ACCESSIBLE** to everyone.



There are **MANY** public places downtown.



Downtown public places are well **CONNECTED** to other destinations.



Downtown public places are well **CONNECTED** to the River Valley.



Downtown public places offer a **VARIETY** of experiences.



ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

VISION

People are passionate about the public places in Edmonton's Downtown and they are highly valued by many. Downtown public places are envisioned to be inclusive to all community members of different cultures, abilities, ages and socio-economic backgrounds. While individual residents and employees appreciate Edmonton's Downtown they suggested that families and children should also feel welcome and be able to interact with the space. Public places should make people feel comfortable and be aesthetically pleasing to encourage them to linger. Some people value vibrancy, while others value the calm and quiet nature of public places, therefore there should be a spectrum of public places with different levels of energy.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Summarized below are some key points made by the public regarding their approach to Edmonton's Downtown in general and its Public Places

Green Spaces

A large number of people suggested that Edmonton's Downtown feels as though there are too many paved surfaces. People value green spaces, trees, plants and landscaping, which would attract them to public places. Areas with greenery should be safe, comfortable, have ample seating and places to relax or engage with interactive elements such as art or play structures. People greatly appreciate the presence of nature within the blocks of tall buildings. Despite the presence of public places in the City's central core, many participants identified that there are plenty of public places closer to their residential neighbourhoods that are more convenient for them to use than having to travel the distance to Downtown. These individuals would only consider coming into Edmonton's Downtown to use its public spaces if there are events and festivals that interest them.

Parking

For those that do not live in Edmonton's Downtown, it is primarily the lack of parking space and its cost that prevent them from coming to Downtown. Affordable and improved access to parking would make it more convenient for people to come into the neighbourhood and enjoy its amenities.

Active Transportation + Transit

While access to parking is a barrier for those that require cars to travel to Downtown, there are many people who travel on foot, by bike or public transit. Although Edmonton's Downtown has ample public transit options, there are many who wish to have safer, accessible and faster public transit from their neighbourhood into Downtown. Some have also suggested free public transit to travel within Downtown once in the vicinity. A pedestrian and bike friendly environment that is well connected to public places encourages people to move around and experience Downtown differently. The idea of pedestrian (and bike) only streets are appealing and would encourage people to spend more time and engage with amenities, and interact with people.

Safety + Cleanliness + Maintenance

There are safety concerns in several public places within Downtown that prevent people from using the spaces. Reasons for feeling unsafe include poor lighting and potential confrontations with panhandlers, people experiencing homelessness and drunk people. Additionally, people requested that places should be clean and well-maintained. Some recommendations to improve these issues include added policing, surveillance and better lighting.

Festival + Events

People often enjoy attending festival and events with their family and friends. For some, events are the only reason to come to Downtown, experience the public places and socialize with other Edmontonians.

Public Amenities

A diverse range of public amenities attract various people to Downtown public places. People mentioned the ability to exercise, eat, drink, relax, sit, play with dogs and shop amongst other activities. Eating and drinking are activities that encourage people to interact with one another and is an action that can be enjoyed outdoors. People identified that they would like to be able to eat outside, have picnics and drink on patios that are adjacent surround public places, or in the parks themselves. This can be achieved by locating public places near restaurants, cafes and bars or having comfortable seating options where people are able to eat packed meals. For those that own dogs, they would like to see more dog-friendly places including dog parks. Additionally, areas of respite amongst green spaces where people can sit and relax are also highly desired.

TENSIONS

The public engagement surveys attracted participants throughout the city including people living in Downtown and Boyle Street. Much of the feedback from this group was in alignment with all participants not living in the study area. However there were some topics on which the public have conflicting opinions. These include bike lanes, parking lots, homelessness and crowded spaces. Some Downtown and Boyle Street area residents identified that they support bike lanes, prefer fewer paved surface parking lots, and feel comfortable in crowded places.

- ▶ While many find bike lanes to be obstructive to traffic flow others would like to see more and better connected bike lanes for transportation within Downtown.
- ▶ The access and affordability of parking is a major reason preventing many people from visiting Downtown, whereas others believe there is an abundance of parking lots that should be removed and converted into public spaces.
- ▶ Many people feel unsafe while encountering people experiencing homelessness while others believe that this marginalized and vulnerable population should be made to feel welcome in Edmonton's public places and more importantly, be housed.
- ▶ While many individuals feel uncomfortable and anxious in crowded spaces, others specifically want to visit Downtown to be surrounded by large groups of people.

I visit downtown to:

- Eat/Drink at Restaurants + Bars**
- Attend Community Events + Festivals**
- Attend Concerts + Sports Events**

I want to see more:

- Trees**
- Food** (Kiosks, Patios, Trucks)
- Green spaces**
- Seating**
- Facilities** (Washrooms, Drinking)

I want spaces that are:

- Inclusive + Comfortable**
- Aesthetically Pleasing**
- Vibrant**
- Calm + Quiet**
- Family Orientated + Child Friendly**

What is preventing you from using downtown public places?

- Access to parking**
- High costs**
- Feeling unsafe**
- Using public places outside of Downtown**
- Distance to Downtown**

What would make downtown public places attractive, and encourage you to connect with other people?

- Green spaces**
- Access to parking**
- Events + festivals**
- Safe + clean**
- Pedestrian friendly**
- Variety of food options**

Challenges:

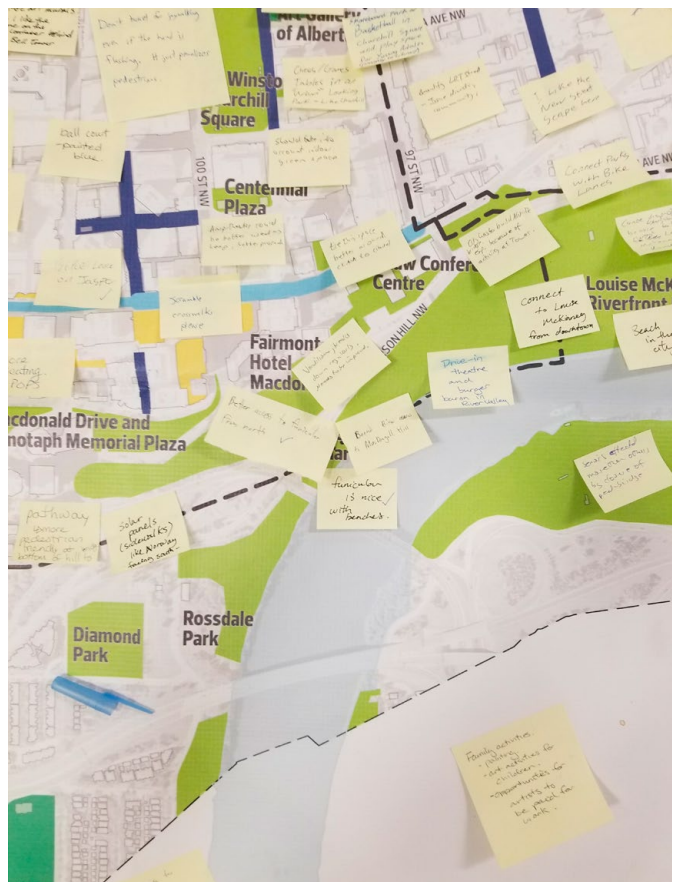
- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Construction
- Convenience
- Distance
- Homelessness
- Noise
- Parking
- Public Transit
- Stressful
- Time
- Too crowded
- Traffic
- Uninviting
- Weather

Opportunities:

- Accessibility
- Attractions
- Bike Paths
- Clean
- Events
- Festivals
- Food options
- Music
- Pedestrian Friendly
- Places to relax
- Places to exercise
- Safety
- Seating
- Surveillance
- Washrooms

OUR PUBLIC PLACES

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



MAPPING OUR PUBLIC PLACES

ONLINE INTERACTIVE MAP + POP-UP EVENTS

Participants were asked to place a post-it note (in-person at the Pop-Ups) or mark a dot on the interactive map (online survey) to identify locations of significance in the study area. These notes range from areas that should be better connected, wants and wishes for future parks, perception of safety and places that people like.

It was important to seek out the knowledge of individuals, in particular their knowledge of each study area to highlight significant sites, opportunities and challenges. Questions asked included:

- ▶ What do you like about Downtown Edmonton's public places?
- ▶ What opportunities are there to improve Downtown Edmonton's public places
- ▶ Where do you feel safe or unsafe in Downtown Edmonton?

The feedback is summarized spatially in the following pages and will be used to inform the conceptual plans for Downtown Public Places.



STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Participants in the online interactive map and those approached during pop-up events were asked the question of “What opportunities are there to improve Downtown Edmonton’s public places?” and “What do you like about Downtown Public Places?”. The responses received are summarized below. The map illustrates the areas that people like as strengths and the text indicates the opportunities recommended by the public.

CONNECTIVITY

Issues with connectivity through streets were the most frequent comments made. Areas of particular focus include north-south connections on Railtown park through Jasper Avenue, Legislature grounds into the river, 103 St onto 97 Av, 99 St by Churchill Square towards the Funicular. Opportunities for east-west connections include a link from Constable Ezio Faraone Park into the Alberta Legislature grounds through to Rossdale, 100 Avenue into MacDonald drive and into the funicular, 103 Avenue from 107 St into Churchill Square and Rice Howard Way.

VIEWS

There are several pristine view points along the slopes of Downtown Edmonton in which there are opportunities to improve and enhance the public places. 100 Av and 100 St. The existing areas from which people are currently able to enjoy the views are frequently visited and appreciated by many. They particularly use the stairs in these view points for exercise or a through fare.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Several streets have been recommended to prioritize pedestrian orientated and bike-friendly pathways and public realm. While many areas were recommended for improved connections, there were also areas where people value the existing pedestrian only pathways and bike lanes.

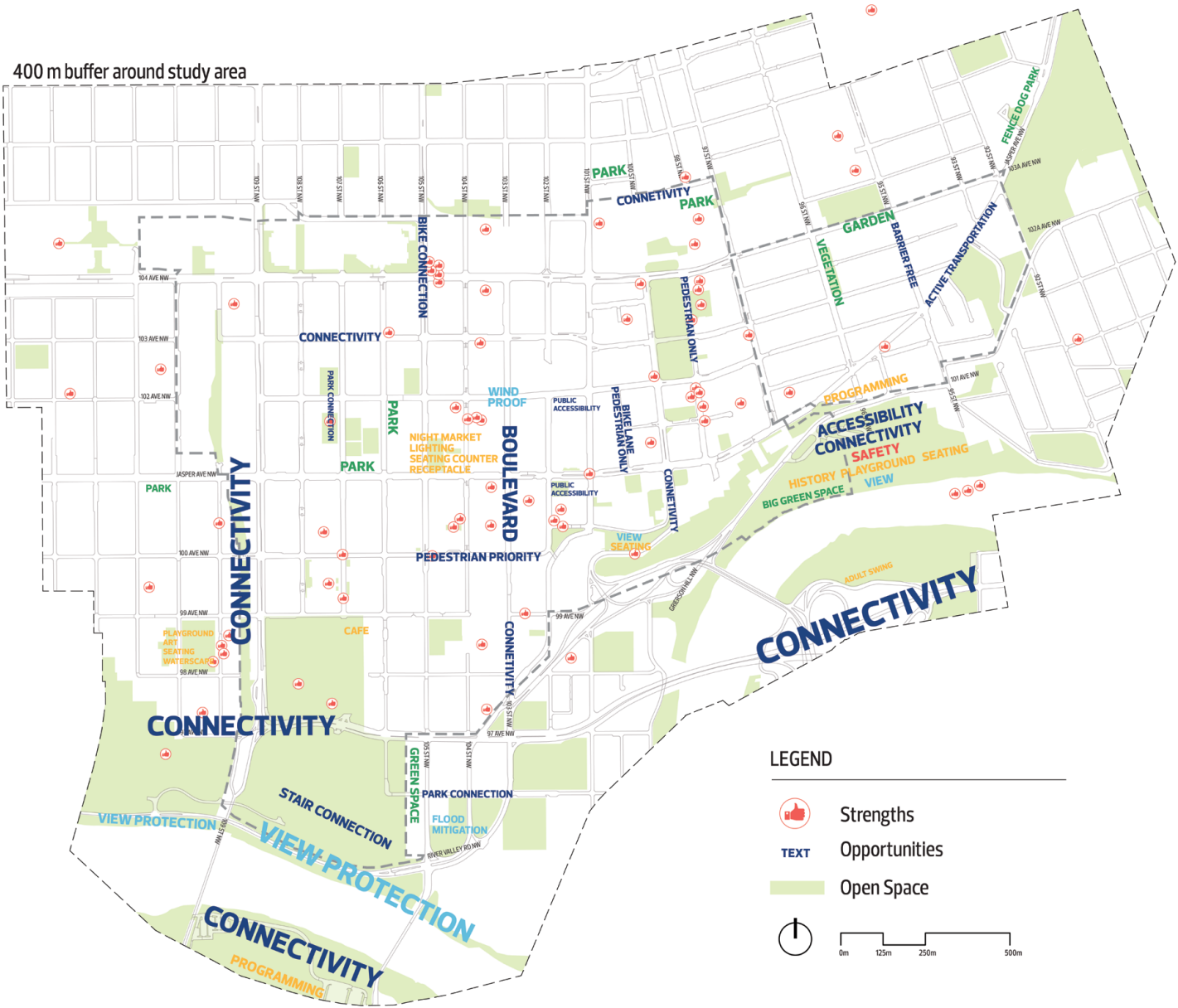
AMENITIES

People have recommended the opportunity to enhance park spaces through amenities including public art, seating, cafes, lighting and programming opportunities. Amenities that are currently highly valued include public art, the dog park, playgrounds, stairs, wade pools, historical details, the Funicular and the farmers markets.





GREEN SPACES

Several areas for new parks have been recommended most of which are currently parking lots. These include areas surrounding the Warehouse Campus District, West of Railtown park and the areas surrounding the Royal Alberta Museum.

400 m buffer around study area



LEGEND

-  Strengths
- TEXT** Opportunities
-  Open Space
-  

PERCEPTION OF SAFETY

Participants in the online interactive map and those approached during pop-up events were asked the question “Where do you feel safe or unsafe?” The map illustrates the areas where people feel unsafe. Some reasons for which people feel unsafe are summarized below:

POOR LIGHTING

In several areas of Downtown particularly on the eastern parts of Jasper Avenue, there is a lack of lights which make people feel unsafe.

PATHWAYS

People feel unsafe walking or running along several pathways near the river valley due to narrow sidewalks and pathways. Additionally, many feel that some pathways are too close to streets with high and steady traffic flow. The intersection between Constable Ezio Faraone Park and the Alberta Legislature grounds is one that is perceived as unsafe due to high traffic speeds and poor sight lines. Some pathways are also outdated and broken resulting in drainage issues and trip hazards.

AREAS USED FOR INTOXICATION

Areas that are used for intoxication that are not within drinking establishments, but rather in the public places themselves are felt to be unsafe.

STAKEHOLDER INSIGHTS

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The City of Edmonton has met with 21 different stakeholder groups over the month of March and will continue to have meetings when interests arise. Representatives from diverse organizations were invited to discuss issues and opportunities in Downtown Public Places. Organizations approached included community organizations, businesses, communities of interest, developers, service agencies, institutions and the government. Each focus on aspects including: festivals, events, homelessness, art, heritage, education and accessibility. While much of the information gathered resonates the public voice, noted below are some additional key points that emerged from the conversations are noted below.

- ▶ Public Places should be created with optimum use in mind where these spaces are easily accessible from institutions, residents and offices. Spaces that are under-utilized should be re-evaluated for highest and best use. The entire park rather than just portions of the park should be enjoyed by everybody. Spaces should be inclusive and welcoming for all including children, people with mobility issues and people experiencing homelessness. For example, playgrounds should provide play for children with different accessibility needs.
- ▶ Public space is important because people experiencing homelessness lack a private space however, conditions are deteriorating for them. The homeless population is often made to feel unwelcome or harassed based on loitering and sleeping in these areas therefore a part of the experience in public places is being incarcerated. In addition to direct indications that make them feel unwelcome, there are also indirect signals including defensive architecture, the possibility of being ticketed, park names or removal of amenities. Washrooms and water fountains are of utmost importance to people experiencing homelessness.
- ▶ Accessibility should gain recognition beyond physical accessibility. For example, a contrast in colours for benches and stairs is important. Pathways should be connected and continuous. Stairs should be linear and not disconnected. Other connectivity considerations should also include clear pathways that are not made inaccessible by wood chips or fecal matter from dogs. Accessible parking spots should be in areas that are closest to the access point into the public places. There should be regular seating that is with an armrest and proper back support. Some seating in sheltered areas and warming huts are also appreciated.
- ▶ Consider places for display where people can see information about events and activities happening Downtown. Public service announcements can inform the community on what they can engage in and city activities they can get involved in.
- ▶ Ownership of the public space has to be an organic process that should come from the ground up.
- ▶ It is important to include interpretive work that portrays the right voice and perspective for any historical element.
- ▶ Public places should be multi-functional and have the potential for growth.

NEXT STEPS

NEXT STEPS

The feedback from 'Phase 1: Conceptualize' will inform the second phase of the project where the conceptual framework for the Edmonton's Downtown Public Places Plan will be developed.

The input will define the current state of public places in the Downtown and highlight areas for improvement that the Plan needs to address:

- › Strengths to maintain and enhance
- › Gaps to fill
- › Weaknesses to improve
- › Opportunities to realize

The draft concept plan will be shared with stakeholders and the public in Summer 2018 for feedback during the second stage of public engagement – 'Visualize'.

Stay up to date with the project and future opportunities for engagement at edmonton.ca/downtownpublicplaces