

What We Did Report

Edmonton Design Committee
2024-25 Work Plan
Phase 1

edmonton.ca/edc
October 2024

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Edmonton

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APPENDICES

- A Proposed Changes to EDC Standards and Procedures
- B Draft EDC Submission Guide
- C Potential Changes to Scope of EDC Review

Land Acknowledgement

The City of Edmonton acknowledges the traditional land on which we reside is in Treaty Six Territory. We would like to thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, such as nêhiyaw (Cree), Dené, Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Isga (Nakota Sioux), and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis' homeland and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel. It is a welcoming place for all peoples 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.

Introduction

Project Background

On March 5, 2024, Urban Planning Committee approved the 2024-25 Edmonton Design Committee work plan, which includes three tasks: reviewing and updating the EDC standards and procedures, the EDC principles of urban design, and the scope of EDC review.

The Edmonton Design Committee was established by City Council in 2005 to improve the quality of the City's urban design. Edmonton Design Committee Bylaw 20673 specifies that the EDC shall meet this mandate primarily by providing recommendations on development applications and advice regarding urban design policies and principles. This generally translates into the review of development permit applications (within the EDC boundary); comprehensive rezoning applications (both within the EDC boundary and for large sites); and City of Edmonton plans, policies and capital projects.

Work to Date

Phase 1 of the 2024-25 EDC work plan included engagement with external stakeholders and internal business partners in summer 2024. Details and findings of the engagement with external stakeholders is included in the [What We Heard Report](#).

As a result of this engagement, the EDC and administration have drafted a number of recommendations related to three deliverables - updated standards and procedures; new principles of urban design; and recommended changes to the scope of EDC review. This What We Did report provides a high-level overview of the draft recommendations responding from Phase 1 engagement, and is the basis for Phase 2 of engagement with the stakeholders in fall 2024.

How to Read this Report

This What We Did Report provides a **brief overview** of the recommendations related to the standards and procedures, new principles of urban design, and the scope of review. The detailed recommendations are presented in their entirety in Appendices A, B and C, so that the reader can review and consider those recommendations of most relevance or interest to them.

EDC Standards and Procedures

The EDC standards and procedures establish roles and responsibilities and otherwise direct the day-to-day function of the committee. The EDC standards and procedures were developed in 2021 and came into use in 2022. At that time, the EDC committed to the regular review of the standards and procedures to ensure they continue to support the efficiency, effectiveness and relevance of the committee.

What we Heard and Did

A key takeaway from the [What We Heard Report](#) is that there have been some positive changes since the standards and procedures were adopted in 2022, and overall the EDC is seen as having value, but there is room for improvement. One of the key areas to further explore is in the recommendations that the committee makes - they need to be consistent, clear, relevant and impactful.

In response, we have identified a number of key changes to the standards and procedures to underscore the value of the committee and maximize the impact of its recommendations:

- **Introducing a mission statement** to help applicants better understand the purpose and value of the committee, and structure their submissions and presentations to take best advantage of the committee's insights.
- **Proposing a new approach to Informal submissions**, that gives the committee the ability to exempt projects from formal review, to encourage greater use of informals and ultimately increase the opportunity to integrate committee input early in the design process.
- **Providing new guidance on committee recommendations** to focus the scope of review, manage the expectations of applicants, and ultimately maximize the committee's impact.

Other highlights include:

- **Improving engagement on City projects** by encouraging alternative engagement methods with the committee (e.g. workshops) for complex projects.
- **Clarifying how administration utilizes recommendations** in the development approval process, and requiring development approval decisions to be relayed back to the committee.
- **General process improvements** to enhance committee function; e.g. chairing meetings, receiving correspondence, holding elections, and providing direction to administration and/or Council outside of the committee's typical area of focus.

See [Appendix A Proposed Changes to EDC Standards and Procedures](#) for all recommended changes.

EDC Principles of Urban Design / Submission Guide

The EDC principles of urban design provide the benchmark against which development applications are reviewed by the committee. Prior to the current work plan, EDC began developing new principles of urban design that better align with Council priorities and reflect current best practice; simplifying submission requirements (with a greater emphasis on neighbourhood and site factors); clarifying expectations for project evaluation.

What we Heard and Did

A key takeaway from the [What We Heard Report](#) is that the first draft of these new EDC principles of urban design represents a good starting point; however, as the document is refined, the EDC needs to ensure the process for submitting projects, and their subsequent evaluation by the committee, is clearly articulated. Based on feedback, we also renamed this document the EDC submission guide, for clarity.

In response to this feedback, we are focusing on:

- **Making the submission process simpler and less onerous** through additional refinement and clarification of the principles of urban design, focusing on schematic level design, and requiring more succinct submissions with fewer drawings and less text.
- **Making the evaluation process more straightforward, clear and impactful** by focusing specifically on how the project aligns with the principles of urban design, responds to its context, and achieves the applicant's design intent.

See [APPENDIX B Draft EDC Submission Guide](#) for the most recent draft of this document, including the revised EDC principles of urban design.

Scope of EDC Review

Bylaw 20673 - Edmonton Design Committee Bylaw identifies what projects are reviewed by the Committee - by type (e.g. large sites over 1ha, within 400m of a transit station) and location (within a specific EDC geographic boundary). The Bylaw also includes a provision to exempt projects from review by the Committee.

The review of the geographic boundary in particular was identified by industry during the preparation of the EDC standards and procedures in 2020-21. Through subsequent discussion it was identified that the nodes and corridors network in The City Plan should be explored as a potential model for a new EDC boundary.

Due to resource constraints, it was originally proposed that this review would only include the identification of *potential* boundary changes - the refinement and ultimate adoption of a new boundary will be the focus of the Committee in 2025.

What we Heard and Did

A key takeaway from the [What We Heard Report](#) is that there is general agreement that an update to the scope of EDC review is needed, including revising the EDC boundary and reviewing the process for exempting projects. In both cases, maximizing the impact of the committee's review is of paramount importance. The concept of aligning the EDC boundary with that of the nodes and corridors network of The City Plan was positively received.

In response to this feedback, we are considering:

- **Exploring revising the EDC boundary to align with nodes and corridors.** The centre city / primary corridor model, as well as priority growth areas (nodes and corridors that the City expects to see the highest dwelling unit growth to the 1.25 million population horizon) ([City of Edmonton](#)) were examined. Both models have a similar geography to that of the current EDC boundary, while adding new areas of focus, and neither will substantially increase the committee's workload.
- **Exploring reviewing projects adjacent to major transportation corridors** (e.g. Anthony Henday, Whitemud Drive, Yellowhead Trail) to ensure a high level of urban design in these highly visible areas which contribute to the perception of the city and its image - for both residents and visitors.
- **Reviewing all large site rezonings** regardless of their proximity to a transit centre.
- **Improving the project exemption process**, including exempting standard rezonings and articulating general principles for when the exemption guidelines do not readily apply.

Please see [Appendix C Possible Changes to Scope of EDC Review](#) for more information.

Next Steps

The current phase of engagement, for which this interim report was prepared, concludes at the end of November 2024. At the end of this engagement, administration and the EDC will:

- Prepare an updated What We Heard Report;
- Revise the key deliverables (updated standards and procedures; new submission guide / principles of urban design; and recommended changes to the scope of EDC review);
- Prepare a Council Report presenting the new principles of urban design;
- Finalize approval of the standards and procedures by the City Manager; and
- Advance revisions to EDC Bylaw 20673 as needed.