

What We Heard Report

Edmonton Design
Committee 2024-25
Work Plan - Phase 1

edmonton.ca/edc
September 2024

| **SHARE** YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Land Acknowledgement	3
Executive Summary	4
Project Overview	5
Project Background	5
Work Plan Scope, Tasks and Timelines	5
Engagement Approach	7
Engagement Goals	7
Who We Engaged	8
How We Engaged	8
What We Asked	9
What We Heard	12
Standards and Procedures	12
Principles of Urban Design	14
Scope of EDC Review	16
Next Steps	18
How Input Will Be Used	18
Thank You	19

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.

Executive Summary

On March 5, 2024, City Council approved the 2024-25 Edmonton Design Committee ('EDC' or 'the committee') work plan, which included reviewing the EDC Standards and Procedures, the EDC Principles of Urban Design, and the scope of EDC review.

In May and June 2024, we engaged with the design and development industry - architects, landscape architects, planners and their clients - who regularly interact with the committee. We asked them how well the Standards and Procedures were working, and about their experience interacting with the EDC; their feedback on new Principles of Urban Design drafted by the committee; and if the EDC is focusing on the most impactful projects in the most impactful areas of Edmonton.

There are a number of key takeaways from this engagement:

- 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.
- The draft Principles of Urban Design represent a good starting point. As the principles are refined, the EDC needs to ensure the process for submitting projects, and their subsequent evaluation by the committee, is clearly articulated.
- 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 and will be explored further.

As a result of this valuable input, we are now able to proceed with the refinement of these deliverables with the goal of sharing them with our design and development industry partners for their review and feedback in late 2024.

Project Overview

Project Background

On March 5, 2024, City Council approved the 2024-25 Edmonton Design Committee work plan, which included reviewing 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 regarding 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); City of Edmonton plans and policies; and City of Edmonton capital projects.

Work Plan Scope, Tasks and Timelines

The Edmonton Design Committee 2024-25 Work Plan includes reviewing the following:

- **EDC Standards and Procedures** which 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. As part of this work, the EDC committed to the regular review of the Standards and Procedures.
- **EDC Principles of Urban Design** which provide the benchmark against which development applications are reviewed by the committee. Previous engagement identified the need to update these principles, and in 2023, the EDC drafted new principles with the intent to reflect current Council priorities as well as best practices in urban design; create clear expectations for submissions and their evaluation; and ultimately, improve processes and overall project quality.
- **Scope of EDC Review** including the current EDC boundary as well as the process for exempting projects from review. The boundary was also flagged in 2023 as requiring review; however, based on the complexity of this issue, the 2024-25 work plan only endeavours to validate the need to modify the boundary and identify potential scenarios for further review.

To complete this work, the work plan project includes the following tasks (timeline subject to change):

Task 1 / Project Planning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize project plan and project schedule Finalize engagement and communications plan Plan and facilitate information gathering session(s) with the EDC 	April 2024
Task 2 / Phase 1 Stakeholder Engagement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate communications in advance of engagement rollout Deliver phase 1 engagement program using an online survey, small group conversations and 1x1 interviews Present engagement findings in What We Heard Report 	May - June 2024
Task 3 / Draft Deliverables	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate the preparation of draft Standards and Procedures, draft Principles of Urban design, and potential EDC boundary scenarios Review with the EDC sub-committee and refine as needed Review with the EDC committee and refine as needed 	July - September 2024
Task 4 / Phase 2 (follow up) Engagement / Council Information Report	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate communications in advance of engagement Deliver phase 2 engagement program using online survey and 1x1 interviews (to be confirmed) Prepare Council Information Report (+/- 12 weeks, concurrently) Present engagement findings in a What We Heard and Did Report 	October - December 2024
Task 5 / Final Deliverables	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine Standards and Procedures, Principles of Urban design and preferred EDC boundary scenarios (for further review) Review by the EDC sub-committee and refine as needed Finalize and sign off by the EDC committee Prepare Briefing Note for sign off by City Manager 	January - April 2025

Engagement Approach

Engagement Goals

The [Public Engagement Spectrum](#) explains the four roles the public can have when they participate in City of Edmonton public engagement activities. As you move within the spectrum, there is an increasing level of public influence and commitment from the City and the public.

The current phase of the Edmonton Design Committee 2024-25 Work Plan project falls within the **Advise** level of the spectrum: *The public is consulted by the City to share feedback and perspectives that are considered for policies, programs, projects, or services.*

The visual below illustrates the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum:



In this phase 1 engagement, we sought input from the design and development industry on the following topics:

- What has been your experience working with administration on EDC submissions?
- What has been your experience presenting to and interacting with the committee?
- How have the recommendations of the EDC impacted your development application?
- How will the proposed requirements impact your planning and design / approval process?
- Do you feel the proposed principles reflect current best practice in urban design?
- Does the review of projects within the current boundaries improve the quality of urban design in Edmonton?
- Are there areas of Edmonton in which projects could benefit from EDC review?

In the phase 2 (follow-up) engagement, we will again engage with the design and development industry as we share, review and receive feedback on the following topics:

- Revised Standards and Procedures and Principles of Urban Design.
- Scenarios for potential EDC boundary changes.

Who We Engaged

While the general public does have the opportunity to interact with the committee, it is the design and development industry - architects, landscape architects, planners and their clients - who interact with the EDC on a regular basis. As a result, the engagement strategies specifically targeted the design and development industry.

The project team is also seeking input from impacted City of Edmonton business partners.

How We Engaged

Phase 1 Engagement took place in May and June 2024. To reach a wide range of stakeholders in the design and development industry, three tactics - an online survey, one-on-one interviews, and small group conversations - were employed, ensuring there were multiple options for participation, both virtually and in-person.

Online Survey

An online survey was available from May 13 to July 5, 2024. The survey provided the design and development industry with an opportunity to provide feedback on the three work plan tasks. The survey was available on the Edmonton Design Committee website (edmonton.ca/edc). We received 25 responses to the survey.

One-On-One Interviews

We interviewed 10 stakeholders from the design and development industry from May 22 to June 7, 2024. The interviews were offered in both in-person and virtual formats.

Small Group Conversations

No members of the design and development industry chose to participate in small group conversations.

Communications Approach

The communications approach to support phase 1 engagement included:

- Using the Edmonton Design Committee website (edmonton.ca/edc) as the main point for information on the project, including timelines, resources and engagement opportunities (i.e. completing the online survey or scheduling a one-on-one interview).
- Direct emails to organizations within the design and development industry:
 - Alberta Association of Architects (AAA)
 - Alberta Association of Landscape Architects (AALA)
 - Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta (APEGA)
 - BILD Edmonton Metro
 - Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA)
 - Canadian Home Builders Association (CHBA)
 - Commercial Real Estate Development Association (NAIOP)
 - Edmonton Construction Association
 - Media Art Design Edmonton (MADE)
 - Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC)
- Direct emails to recent applicants to EDC (approximately 80 were contacted).

Overall, the engagement opportunities were designed to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders to understand their unique perspectives and experiences.

What We Asked

External stakeholders were asked questions corresponding to the three work plan tasks - reviewing the EDC Standards and Procedures, the EDC Principles of Urban Design, and the scope of EDC review. The questions below were asked in the online survey and were generally asked in the one-on-one interviews as well.

WHAT WE ASKED	WHY WE ASKED THIS
---------------	-------------------

Standards and Procedures

What is your primary role in industry relative to the Edmonton Design Committee?

To gather feedback on how well the Standards and Procedures have been working (i.e. since their adoption in February, 2022) and identify areas for improvement.

Have you appeared before the EDC or been involved in a presentation to EDC?

Have you made or been involved with a presentation to the EDC after February 15, 2022?

Please state the extent to which you agree with the following:

- Submission procedures and requirements have been improved since 2022.
- Scheduling and timelines have improved since 2022.
- There are clearer recommendations made since 2022.
- There are more helpful recommendations made since 2022.

How would you describe your experience in interacting with the EDC?

To gather any other feedback on what improvements to the Standards and Procedures, or any aspect of the EDC in general, could be made to improve applicants' experiences and design outcomes.

Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: Overall, the EDC has helped improve the quality of my project.

Any other comments on the Standards and Procedures.

Principles of Urban Design

Thinking about the newly drafted Principles of Urban Design, please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

To gather feedback on how well the draft Principles of Urban Design meet their intended objectives.

- Draft principles reflect Council priorities.
- Draft principles focus on best practices in urban design and placemaking.
- Draft principles emphasize improved analyses of neighbourhood and site factors.

WHAT WE ASKED	WHY WE ASKED THIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft principles have created clear expectations for submissions. • Draft principles have created clear expectations for project evaluation. • Overall, draft principles will improve the way I do my work. • Overall, draft principles will improve the quality of my project. 	
<p>In your opinion, what is missing from, or should be changed, in the Principles of Urban Design?</p>	<p>To gather any other feedback on what improvements to the draft Principles of Urban Design could be made to improve design outcomes.</p>
<p>Scope of EDC Review</p>	
<p>Thinking about the scope EDC review, to what extent do you agree or disagree about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The types of projects that are currently being reviewed by the committee. • The areas (i.e. boundaries) of the city that are currently being reviewed by the committee. 	<p>To gather feedback to determine if the scope of EDC review is being appropriately focused.</p>
<p>What changes should be made to the types of projects being reviewed by the committee or its boundaries?</p>	
<p>Overall, to what extent do you agree that the EDC boundaries should align with Council policy (e.g. nodes and corridors network within The City Plan)?</p>	<p>To gather feedback on determining if the nodes and corridors network offers a potential framework for future EDC boundary changes.</p>

What We Heard

Standards and Procedures

In this Initial Stakeholder Engagement (Task 2), respondents were asked to provide input on their experience interacting with the EDC, and the impact of the committee on their work. Key responses and comments are presented below.

Figure 1 / Please state the extent to which you agree with the following (Among those who have been involved in presentations with EDC after Feb 15, 2022; 16 responses)

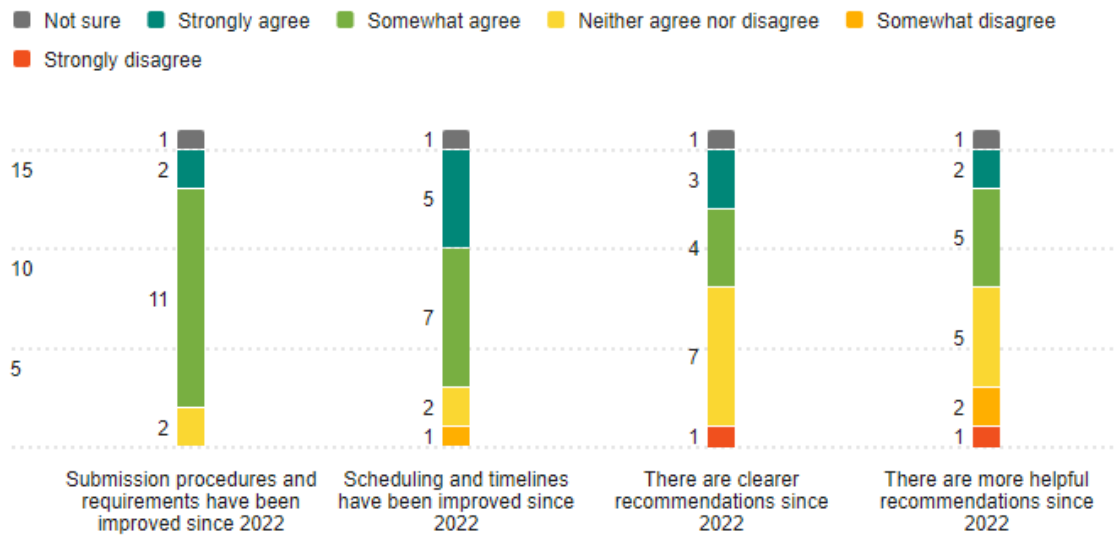


Figure 2 / How would you describe your experience in interacting with the EDC (Among those who have appeared before EDC or been involved in a presentation to EDC; 24 responses)

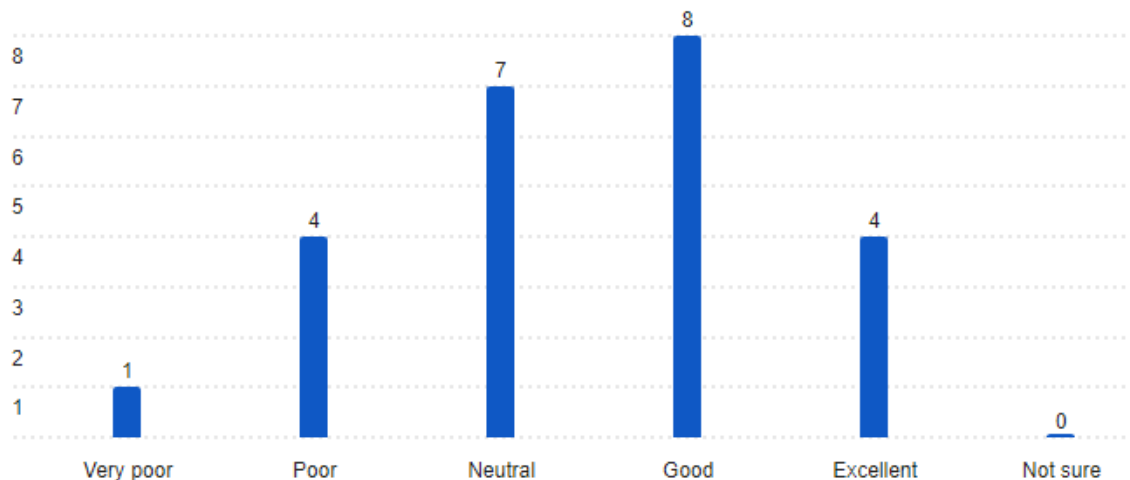
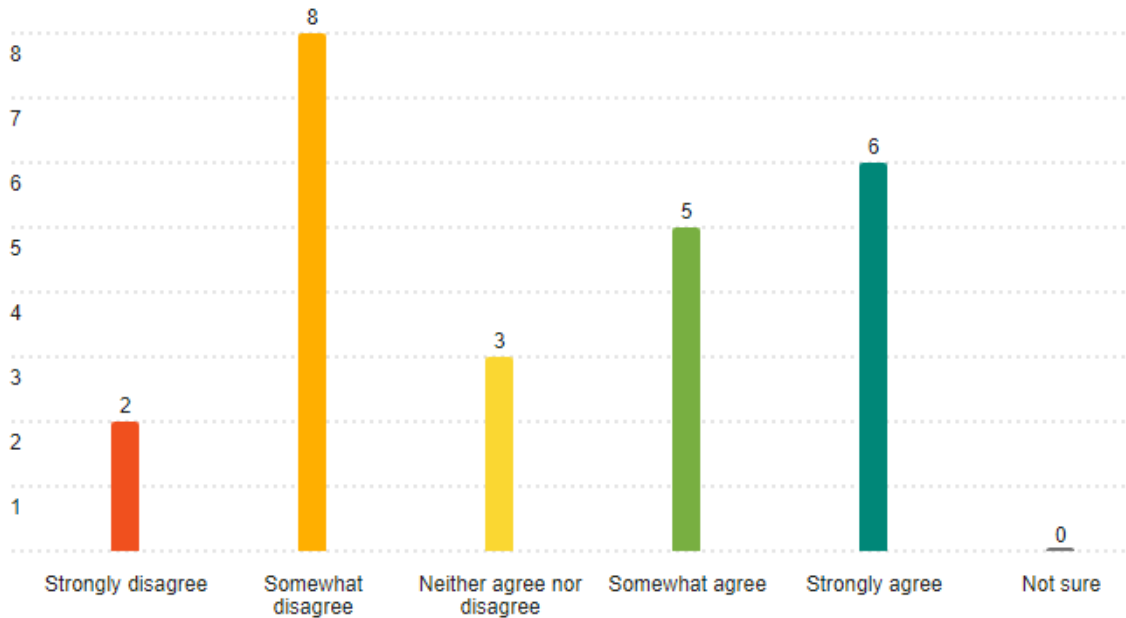


Figure 3 / Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: Overall, the EDC has helped improve the quality of my project (Among those who have appeared before EDC or been involved in a presentation to EDC; 24 responses)



In summary, the responses from the online survey (Figures 1-3) illustrate that:

- There was overall agreement that submission procedures and requirements have improved since 2022 and that scheduling and timelines have improved since 2022.
- Few agreed that recommendations are clearer, or more helpful, since 2022.
- Respondents' experience dealing with the committee was generally good; however, (Q6) there was mixed feedback on whether EDC has improved the quality of projects.

The City also received 12 responses from the online survey related to the Standards and Procedures. Respondents indicated that:

- Clear submission requirements are needed for both Rezoning and Development Permit Submissions.
- Subjective aspects of design review need to be addressed.
- High-level design should be emphasized over detailed considerations.
- A mechanism should be considered to ensure compliance with the approved design.

Finally, from the 10 one-on-one interviews we learned about:

The Value of the EDC

- EDC offers constructive feedback in a collaborative manner that supports architects and designers as they work with their clients (e.g. developers), seek variances, etc. As a result, many applicants endeavor to include their clients in EDC presentations as much as possible.
- Informal presentations create valuable open dialogue early in the design process. As a result, it was suggested that informals be made mandatory.
- Preparing EDC submissions allows the applicant the opportunity to pause and 'step back' from the design.
- The committee sets a high standard for design. We heard that it is important for committee members to have demonstrated excellence in urban design.
- Switching to digital submissions has been a positive move; and the scheduling process and timelines have improved.

Areas for Improvement

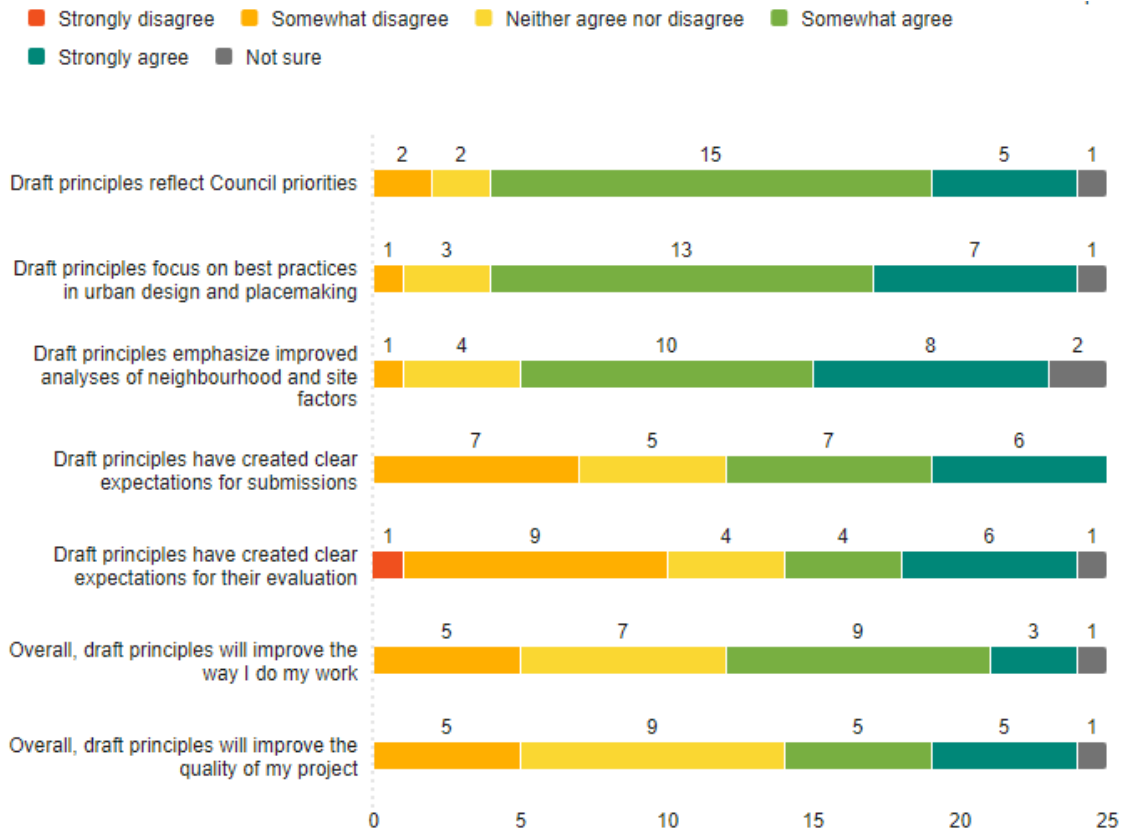
- The EDC often makes recommendations that clients do not wish to pursue due to costs, timelines, etc. The EDC could be a more strategic tool to convince developers to pursue a better design outcome. A number of participants suggested EDC should be given more authority.
- EDC presentations are sometimes viewed negatively by clients due to the cost of preparing submission packages.
- Committee comments are sometimes inconsistent between informal and formal presentations, creating confusion and frustration for applicants.
- We heard that committee questions and recommendations are sometimes poorly thought through, contradictory, out of scope, and / or too detailed. Some participants noted that recommendations sometimes conflict with the Zoning Bylaw, creating confusion.
- Improved processes are needed for project exemptions (including better communication between EDC and the Storefront Improvement Program).

Principles of Urban Design

In this Initial Stakeholder Engagement (Task 2), respondents were asked to evaluate how well the draft Principles of Urban Design reflect current Council priorities as well as best practice

in urban design; create clear expectations for submissions and their evaluation; and ultimately, improve processes and overall project quality.

Figure 4 / Thinking about the newly drafted principles of urban design, please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (25 responses)



In summary, the responses from the online survey (Figure 4) illustrate that:

- Respondents agreed that the draft principles reflect Council priorities, focus on best practices in urban design and placemaking, and emphasize improved analyses of neighbourhood and site factors.
- Fewer respondents agreed that draft principles will create clear expectations for submissions, improve the way applicants do their work, or improve the quality of applicants' projects.
- There was mixed agreement related to expectations for the evaluation of projects.

From the online survey, we also received 15 comments that the draft Principles of Urban Design should:

- Encourage greater vibrancy and emphasize winter city design.
- Prioritize natural systems and resilience, but address ecological and human health as separate principles.
- Clarify how Direct Control rezonings are reviewed.
- Ensure rezonings are contextually appropriate.
- Eliminate repetition and improve clarity.
- Ensure criteria are specific and pragmatic, yet flexible enough to be applied to reflect specific projects and circumstances.

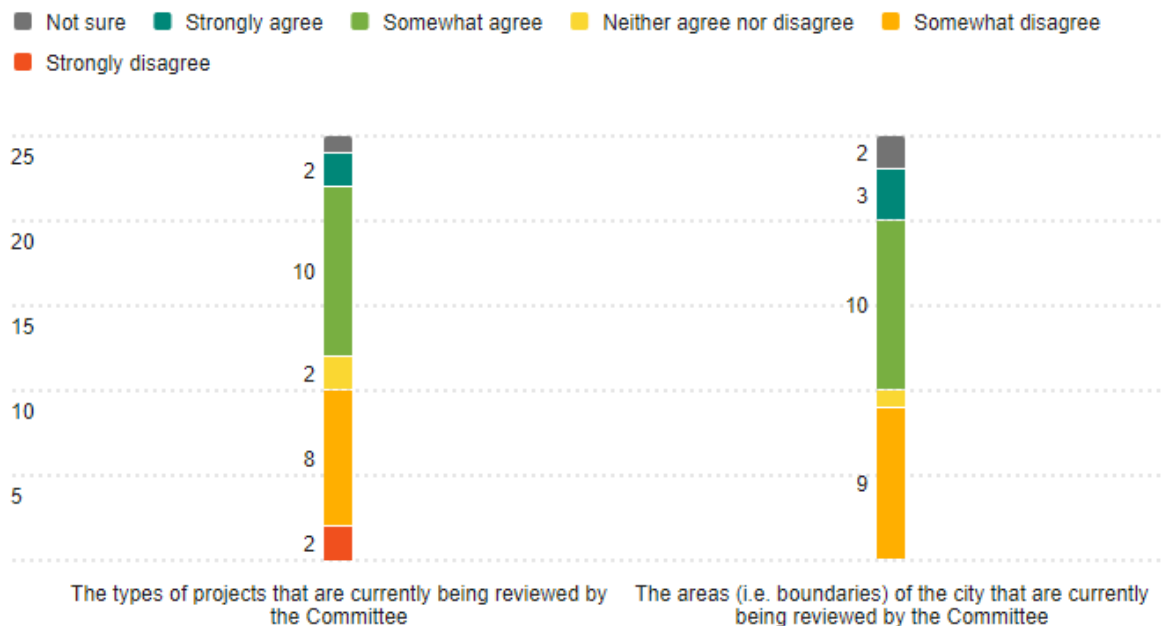
Finally, from the 10 one-on-one interviews we learned that:

- The draft principles feel very academic and vague, and require clear language and greater focus.
- There may need to differentiate how the principles apply to development permits compared to rezonings, and there needs to be a clear understanding that all principles may not be applicable to all projects.
- Some participants noted that the current principles do not align with their own design process, and are therefore not of particular relevance.
- The principles should focus on general considerations such as scale and connectivity, and advance concepts and initiatives including climate resilience, affordable housing, winter city design, and 15 minute cities
- Submission requirements should be structured to reduce the amount of effort while maximizing the value to the Committee (e.g. emphasizing visuals over excessive writing). There may also be an opportunity for applicants to undertake and include best practice research in submissions to the Committee.

Scope of EDC Review

In this first phase of stakeholder engagement (Task 2), respondents were asked to consider if EDC is reviewing the most appropriate types of projects, from the most appropriate areas of the city, in order to have the greatest impact on Edmonton's built environment.

Figure 5 / Thinking about the scope of EDC reviews, to what extent do you agree or disagree about (25 responses):

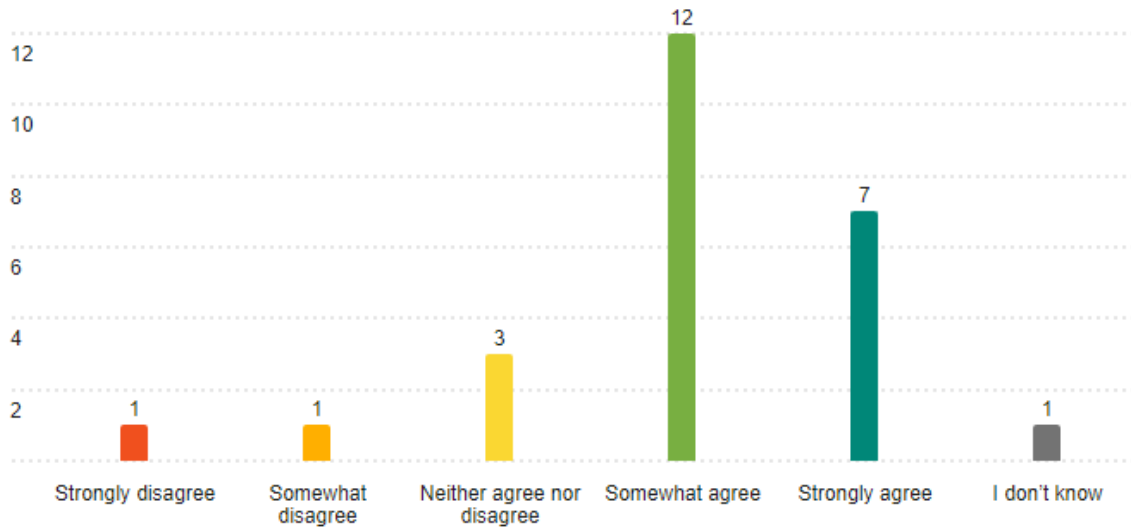


The responses from the online survey (Figure 5) indicate no strong agreement or disagreement related to the types of projects being reviewed, or the areas of the city that are being reviewed.

We received 14 comments from the online survey on the types of projects being reviewed by the Committee or its boundaries. Respondents indicated that:

- Geographic inconsistencies need to be addressed (e.g. east and west side of 124 Street).
- The current practice of exempting small-scale City projects should be re-evaluated.
- Changes to the boundary / scope should include:
 - Master plan areas.
 - Major roadways into Edmonton.
 - Key projects that are highly visible and publicly accessible, such as Transit Oriented Development within the nodes and corridors network.
- Exemptions should be considered for:
 - Conventional rezoning applications (One respondent noted it may still be valuable to review MUh65 zones).
 - Areas where redevelopment is desired but is challenging (e.g. Queen Mary Park, Central McDougall).

Figure 6 / Overall, to what extent do you agree that the EDC boundaries should align with Council Policy (e.g. nodes and corridors networks within The City Plan (25 responses):



The responses from the online survey (Figure 6) showed agreement with the concept of realigning the EDC boundary with that of the nodes and corridors network in The City Plan.

Finally, from the 10 one-on-one interviews we learned that:

- In general, participants supported revising the EDC boundary, reflecting the idea that urbanization is occurring throughout the entire city. Aligning the EDC boundary with the City's Nodes and Corridors network was viewed positively by participants.
- Potential project criteria include project location and context; proximity to LRT; size, scale and/or type (e.g. mixed use / TOD); zoning (e.g. MUH65).
- Consideration should be given to exempting rezoning applications.

Next Steps

How Input Will Be Used

Phase 1 Engagement of this work plan project falls within the Advise level of the spectrum:

The public is consulted by the City to share feedback and perspectives that are considered for policies, programs, projects, or services.

The feedback gathered from the design and development industry, as well as engagement with affected City of Edmonton business partners, will inform:

- Revisions to the Standards and Procedures.
- Revisions to the Draft Principles of Urban Design.
- The identification of potential EDC boundary revisions, as well as changes to the project exemption process.
- The identification of other actions (outside of this project scope) which EDC and Administration can consider in upcoming work plans.

In Phase 2 Engagement (Task 4), we will again engage with the design and development industry to share, review and receive feedback on the above deliverables.

Thank You

Input from the design and development industry is essential to the work plan process and will guide improvements that ensure the continued effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the Edmonton Design Committee as it strives to meet its Council Mandate to 'improve the quality of the City's urban design.'