

Council Initiative on Public Engagement

PHASE 1 FINAL REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2015





CONTENTS

Introduction **page 3**

A. Engaging on engagement **page 6**

B. Continuous improvement and innovation . . . **page 12**

C. Community leadership and capacity **page 18**

D. City culture and framework **page 20**

Next steps **page 21**

Introduction



Mandate

In 2014, City Council created the Council Initiative on Public Engagement. Subsequently integrated with Open City, this initiative kick-started a dialogue about public engagement and mobilizing leadership, staff, stakeholders and the public to answer four very important questions:

1. What do we mean when we say “public engagement”? Why do we carry out public engagement in the first place? What are the benefits and underlying principles of engagement?
2. If we agree that public engagement is important, what are the key elements of good public engagement? If we do it extremely well, what would that look and feel like in a city like Edmonton?
3. How can we all work together to create effective solutions and action plans? How will we grow and sustain meaningful, successful relationships and processes?
4. What is the role of the broader civil society as a key partner with the City in public engagement? How do we empower our most committed and engaged leaders to help us change, and how do we grow and develop new and emerging leaders?

The full Terms of Reference for the Initiative are available on the City website at edmonton.ca/OpenEngagement.

Team

This Council Initiative is led by Councillors Ben Henderson and Michael Walters. Members of City administration on the project team include three Branch Managers, the Director of Public Communications, the Manager of the Office of Public Engagement, and a Project Coordinator.

However, the most important members of the team are the people of Edmonton, in all their diversity and varying perspectives. This Initiative cannot and will not succeed without the participation of engaged and interested citizens, enthusiastic and thoughtful community leaders, and committed and innovative City staff.

What We Learned - Why Public Engagement is Important

Defining the importance and benefits of public engagement were identified as foundational questions for the initiative. Only by building a shared understanding and creating a shared voice on these key questions will the initiative build the momentum required to move it forward.

Decision Making - There was broad consensus that effective public engagement leads to better decisions, and decisions that are more trusted and credible. There was also broad consensus that good public engagement supports increased citizen influence in municipal decision making. The specific themes of consensus that emerged under decision making were:

- better decisions
- supported decisions
- more citizen influence in decision making
- accountability

Community and Democracy - There was broad consensus that effective public engagement builds strong communities with a greater sense of connection, belonging, and ownership. It also improves citizens' understanding of issues, builds citizen confidence and strengthens our democracy. The specific themes of consensus that emerged under community and democracy were:

- building community
- empowerment
- deeper understanding of issues
- represents input of the community as a whole
- democracy in action

City Building - There was broad consensus that good public engagement plays a major role in building a great city. Good public engagement creates efficient, realistic plans and improves project outcomes. It also fosters innovation and civic pride. The City has the potential to engage with more Edmontonians through the use of more appropriate and effective tools. The specific themes of consensus that emerged under city building were:

- best results
- makes a vibrant, smart city
- makes change
- fosters innovation
- fosters a sense of ownership in the community
- engages more of the public through appropriate tools



All Edmontonians can play a role in improving public engagement in our City - it's all of our responsibility.

- Public Workshop participant



Outcomes

In striving to answer the four questions it is hoped the Council Initiative on Public Engagement will:

- Identify challenges and opportunities in public engagement and establish the culture, principles and approaches to foster continuous improvement in how the City conducts public engagement. Ultimately, the outcomes of a strong continuous improvement program for public engagement will:
 - Provide opportunities for citizens to engage with city government to continue building a great city
 - Increase citizen satisfaction that their insights, knowledge and opinions are considered by the City of Edmonton in decision making by elected officials and administration
 - Ensure the best decision is made at the most opportune time to limit real costs in major projects
 - Increase public support of civic programs and services
 - Address changing citizen expectations and methods of engagement
- Integrate opportunities developed in all recent and on-going reviews of public engagement—City Auditor Report, internal Administration reviews (Transportation and Building Great Neighbourhoods), EFCL review, Corporate Approach to Public Engagement—and the Open City Initiative to enhance tools, techniques and approaches for engaging with, and among, Edmontonians.
- Identify opportunities to increase the capacity for civil society and community building as it relates to public engagement.

Activities

The Initiative's work (and the content of this report) is organized into four main activity streams:

- *Engaging on engagement* - discussing with Edmontonians and stakeholders options to improve the City's public engagement.
- *Continuous improvement and innovation* - working with branches and department teams to implement pilot projects and different approaches to make positive changes as we go.
- *Community leadership and capacity building* - working in partnership with community leaders and groups to re-energize and leverage our civil society.
- *City culture and framework* - examining how leadership and administration can change to support improved public engagement.

Over the past year, progress has been made in all four streams. The next part of the Initiative will be about building on what we've learned so far, identifying areas to focus on, and broadening out leadership of the Initiative within City administration and externally.

Improving public engagement in Edmonton is a responsibility shared by all Edmontonians, including elected officials, City staff, and community leaders. Thank you for taking the time to read this report and the commitment you have shown to improving public engagement in Edmonton and building a great city.

A. Engaging on engagement



In February 2014, a project team meeting was held with Councillors Henderson and Walters, the council co-leads on the initiative. During this meeting, the project team was encouraged to “begin at the beginning” and engage with Edmontonians, City staff and community leaders to develop a common understanding of public engagement and start to build consensus on where the initiative needs to focus its efforts.

Therefore, Phase 1 of the initiative was organized in the following way:



From October 2014 to June 2015, the Council Initiative on Public Engagement initiated a broad dialogue with a cross section of Edmontonians, City staff, as well as the mayor and members of City council. This included over 40 workshops and outreach events listening to about 1,000 voices and leveraging hundreds of volunteer hours.

This work was designed to start the conversation about public engagement. We needed to hear from citizens and City staff about why they believe public engagement matters (the benefits of public engagement) and what good public engagement looks like (elements of effective public engagement). It was also hoped this initial engagement would begin rebuilding relationships and trust, create understanding between the various stakeholder groups, and build a shared voice and a foundation for the next part of the Initiative.

A comprehensive account of the activities and results of this early part of the Initiative can be found in the “Interim Report” on the City’s website at edmonton.ca/OpenEngagement.



What We Learned - The Elements of Effective Public Engagement

Edmontonians believe that good public engagement is important for many reasons. However, a critical part of this belief is that “good” public engagement makes a difference, which requires identifying of what “good” public engagement is.

Inclusion - There was broad consensus that effective public engagement is inclusive. It includes everyone and is representative and accessible. Inclusion also means: engaging early and longer in order to allow citizen influence, listening and showing respect to each other, building trust and being transparent, being welcoming and encouraging teamwork. The specific themes of consensus that emerged under inclusion were:

- include everyone, be representative and accessible
- welcome citizens and encourage teamwork
- always listen, show respects and be inclusive
- seek to build reciprocal trust and transparency
- engage early, longer and allow citizen influence

Process - There was broad consensus that effective public engagement includes open, fair and democratic processes. These processes must be adaptable, responsive, transparent, thorough, and show commitment. They must also be based on clear public involvement plans supported by adequate resources. The specific themes of consensus that emerged under process were:

- strive for an open, fair and democratic process
- engagement is clear and thorough
- design the process to be adaptable and responsive
- participation plan is clear, transparent and thorough
- show commitment and provide adequate resources to make the process effective
- engagement occurs before decisions are made

Communication - There is broad consensus that effective public engagement includes communication that is clear, frequent and informed. Effective communication uses diverse tools and methods and ensures the results of public engagement activities are transparent, which supports accountability for how decisions are made. The specific themes of consensus that emerged under communication were:

- communication is clear, informed and frequent
- communicate using diverse tools and methods
- ensure results are transparent





Public and staff workshops

Participants were engaged through a series of workshops and a discussion guide that could be completed online or on paper. City staff were engaged through internal workshops. This resulted in the participation of a wide range of City leaders, elected officials, staff, community leaders, and other Edmontonians. Combined, the participants contributed nearly 1,400 hours of time and provided invaluable input and ideas.

Capping workshop

On January 17, 2015, 37 people representing the participants in the previous workshops came together in a capping workshop to discuss and synthesize the results of all of the previous work. This involved sifting through, organizing, and theming thousands of pieces of individual input. The result was a shared voice on the key topics of why we should do public engagement and the elements or principles of effective public engagement. The objective was to retain the input provided in the previous workshops and to highlight matters that previous workshop participants agreed upon. The outcome was a powerful representation of collective wisdom.


City Council and CLT workshop

On January 21, 2015, a workshop was held with Edmonton City Council and the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). This workshop was facilitated using the exact same process that was used for the previous public and staff workshops. The results were then added to the results from the capping workshop to create a shared voice.

Discussion guide

Input was received in the form of responses to the online and paper discussion guide. This guide included the same questions and was organized in the same way as the workshops. The feedback received was incorporated into the input and ideas reviewed at the capping workshop, and therefore also played a role in creating a shared voice.

The results of all of the workshops, the capping workshop, and the discussion guide are available online at www.edmonton.ca/OpenEngagement.



Edmonton is a diverse, vibrant place so our public engagement needs to reflect this diversity.

- *Multicultural Workshop participant*

Building on the Momentum

On January 24, 2015, a half-day event called “Building on the Momentum” was held at the Shaw Conference Centre. All who had participated in the initiative so far were invited to attend. The intent of the session was twofold: communicate to participants the results that had been achieved so far, and provide an opportunity for networking and to celebrate our coming together to discuss and improve public engagement.

The workshop results were presented by a volunteer who had attended one of the initial workshops and the capping workshop. At the same time, the results were made available on the City’s website.

Seeking more diversity

After the completion of all the workshops and the Building on the Momentum event, it became clear that more time and focused effort was needed to have conversations with a greater diversity of Edmontonians.

Therefore, a series of workshops with aboriginal and multicultural groups were held. In addition to the two questions about why we carry out public engagement and what the key elements of effective participation are, these groups were also asked about the best ways to engage them and what they see as the obstacles to and strategies for achieving effective public engagement.

Obstacles

In May and June 2015 a smaller group of leaders, staff and Edmontonians met to review and discuss all the input gathered so far and chart a course forward. At the first workshop in May they were focused on answering the question:

- If this is what good public engagement looks like, what is standing in the way of us achieving it?

The results were used to identify strategies to overcome the obstacles.

Strategies

In June 2015 the same group of leaders, staff and Edmontonians who had discussed obstacles in May, met to review and discuss strategies to overcome these obstacles. They were focused on the questions:

- If these are the obstacles to effective public engagement, what can we do to get around them?
- What are the strategic areas of focus that Phase 2 of the Initiative should focus its work on?

The results were used to develop the Terms of Reference for Phase 2 of the Initiative.

What We Learned - Misaligned Expectations and Broad Definitions

A major theme that was consistently voice throughout Phase 1 of the Council Initiative on Public Engagement was misaligned expectations, which results in lack of trust when it comes to commitment, process and resources. Unfortunately, the City's current definition of public engagement, although very broad and inclusive, does not provide guidance to making expectations more clear:

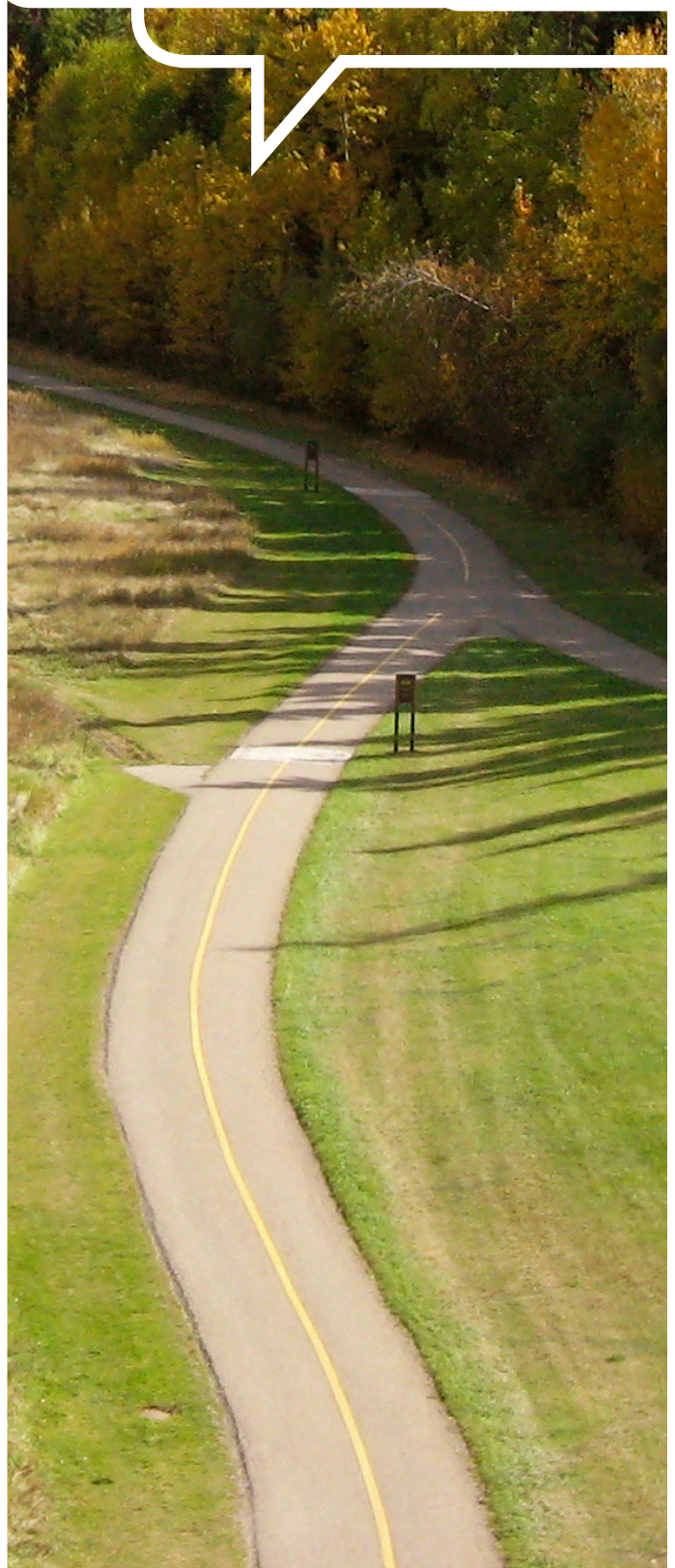
At the City of Edmonton, public engagement means all the ways of bringing people, community organizations, business and government together to build community and participate in civic government.

Similarly, the Continuum of Public Involvement, which forms part of the City's current policy on public involvement, although based in recognized public involvement theory, does not describe the City's activities specifically enough to be helpful. Its catch-all categories of "information sharing", "consultation", and "active participation" are too general to ensure alignment of expectations between Edmontonians, City Council, and City staff.

In reality, the City engages with Edmontonians in several ways, each with their assumed expectations from both planners and participants. If it is unclear to one or both parties what type of engagement is expected or actually being done, then expectations are misaligned, which can lead to frustration, distrust, and disillusionment.

Misaligned expectations are mostly around the key issues of why people are being asked to participate, what will be done with their input, and how this input will influence decision making. There is also a strong current of thought that "information sharing" should not be part of the engagement continuum at all but should be a given activity for all that the City does and a foundational element for all public engagement.

In general, participants often believe the process is "higher" up the continuum than does the City, regardless of where it should be for that particular project or issue. The term "consult" as commonly used can mean "research", "clarify", "receive", "collaborate", or even "share", but each of these has a very different expectation for how people will be asked to participate, if and how their input will be gathered, and if and how their input will influence decision making.





What We Learned - Realigning Expectations with Shared Understanding

For many participants, a good first step to realigning expectations around public engagement would be being more clear and transparent about what type of engagement is being done for each specific process or activity so expectations are unambiguous. This would go a long way to building trust. It would provide a solid foundation for discussing what the appropriate level of engagement should be in various circumstances, of which there will be varying perspectives and viewpoints, resulting in healthy and robust debate about the role of public engagement in our municipal democracy.

A possible revised continuum of engagement for the City could be:

Informing (always required) - building awareness and providing information to people in a one-way fashion - City to resident (eg. news releases, websites, brochures, posters). Informing could also be removed from the continuum and considered a mandatory part of all projects.

Researching - collecting opinions and perspectives from people in response to a standard set of questions, which may or may not be used to influence specific decisions (eg. surveys, focus groups).

Clarifying - entering into a two-way dialogue with people to provide information, answer questions, and listen to feedback (eg. open houses, public meetings, 311, customer service, online forums, citizen groups).

Gathering - entering into a two-way dialogue with people to receive, document, and analyze feedback on particular questions or topics, with the purpose of using this feedback as one of many criteria for making a decision (eg. public meetings, townhalls, workshops, citizen groups).

Collaborating - entering into a two-way dialogue to receive, document, and analyze input, often to develop solutions at the community level, with the purpose of using this input as one of the primary criteria for making a decision (eg. workshops, design charrettes, citizen advisory groups).

Sharing Decision Making - using a decision making model that shares decision making between the City and residents (eg. citizen advisory groups, citizen panels, citizen juries).

Delegating Decision Making - using a decision making model that delegates City decision making to residents (eg. plebiscites or referendums, juries). In our political system as currently constructed, this approach is not used often as ultimate decision making authority resides with City Council.



B. Continuous improvement and innovation



Areas for improvement

Even prior to City Council creating the Council Initiative on Public Engagement, the City - Councillors, staff and Edmontonians - were aware that improvements in public engagement were needed. When developing the Terms of Reference for the Initiative, it was made clear that while taking a step back was required to examine the most basic, fundamental questions about public engagement, the City would continue to engage with Edmontonians on a wide range of issues and topics. Therefore, it would need to strive for immediate improvements. This effort should not wait until the Initiative was completed. “Fixing the airplane while continuing to fly it” was both necessary and desired.

Previous conversations with residents, Councillors and staff, and output from the initial discussions under the Council Initiative brought to light the following areas for improvement that could be worked on immediately, on a project-by-project basis:

- improving meeting facilitation, especially for planning and development
- going to where people are instead of expecting them to come to us
- involving people earlier in the decision process whenever possible
- enabling more community leadership and ownership over local projects
- making meetings and sessions more engaging and fun
- leveraging innovation and new technologies to make engagement easier, more convenient and more accessible
- striving for a clear and transparent process and showing participants how their input will be and is used in decision making
- using simpler, easier to understand words and phrasing and avoiding the use of technical jargon and bureaucratic language

Improving public engagement is about answering the big questions but also about making continuous improvements along the way.

- Chris Ward, Branch Manager,
Co-Lead for the Council Initiative on Public Engagement



Pilot projects

Across the City, project teams began looking for ways to do public engagement better. The following pilot projects, some completed and some just getting started, address some or all of these areas for improvement.

311 Mobile App

The Edmonton 311 App is an easy way for people to report their concerns and then to see the status of their requests. Having this information available in an easy-to-search format is a great way to build accountability and to trust. It demonstrates that reports are being followed through. Residents can send a photo with their request and use their smartphone's GPS function to pinpoint an issue's location. By doing this, they help the City better assess, prioritize and determine the corrective action based on severity, location, and other factors.

Bike lanes - 40 Avenue event and pop-up bike lanes (Transportation Planning)

A project to review bike facilities on 40th Avenue included integrating engagement into fun community events and efforts to "go to the people" to solicit input instead of requiring people to come to meetings. The project included a kick-off community barbecue that invited people to the barbecue and included activities at the event to facilitate input gathering. The project also included pop-up engagement activities at key community locations such as local schools.

The City is completing bike route studies for 83 Avenue and 102 Avenue. However, the types of routes planned are new to Edmonton and many citizens are not aware of what they look like or how they would work. As part of the engagement process the project team set up a special weekend with pop-up bike lanes and bike festival to support informed participation. The pop-up demonstrated how different types of bike infrastructure could fit into the same space, and therefore what the impacts of different infrastructure choices could be. They had an opportunity to experience trade-offs such as traffic calming measures and roadway closures, and to try out these options as a cyclist, pedestrian, or motorist.

Budget 2016 (Financial Services)

The public engagement campaign aims to fulfill the expectations laid out in the Report to Council on the Multi-year Budgeting Policy, namely that the public be provided with a deeper understanding of the City's programs, services, cost drivers and performance, while increasing accountability and transparency in the budget process. To this end, the City has developed a full-fledged direct engagement campaign, setting up a 'budget booth' at summer events across Edmonton where residents can learn about and discuss budget issues, provide feedback, and generally engage with City employees one-one-one. The team has also employed an Insight Community survey and enhanced the website, yegcitybudget.ca.

The goal is to "engage citizens where they are" due to the mixed results from open houses in the past. The campaign seeks to engage a wide range of citizens by attending public events across the city which reflect the social, cultural and political diversity of Edmonton – various types and sizes of events are being attended, and each ward also has at least one event. Attending these events allows for a greater number of citizens to be reached in a manner that is more convenient for them. Furthermore, this approach allows for greater publicity than open houses, as the events' own social media channels can be leveraged in addition to the City's. There is also better grassroots integration with the communities in which the events take place and a more neutral, comfortable and personable setting to engage with citizens.



City Hall Express (Office of Public Engagement, 311, Community Services)

City Hall Express is a revamp of an existing program (Connections) to bring information about City programs and services to residents in convenient areas and events. The van and its team, using a tent and table set up, travel to different locations in the City (e.g. parks, facilities, events, etc.). It is staffed by 311 customer service agents to answer questions, provide hard copy information, take service requests, and show residents how to access online services and information. The program is flexible, proactive and face-to-face, providing a complement to online and telephone-based methods of providing information. The reception has been overwhelmingly positive by those accessing the van. Staff are able to provide information based on residents' location and interests in a proactive way. At the end of the summer, the program will be evaluated to determine if and how it will continue.

Edmonton Insight Community (Office of Public Engagement, all City departments)

In June 2014 the Edmonton Insight Community was launched. It is an innovative, online panel of Edmontonians who sign-up to receive regular questionnaires on a wide range of City topics. The one year goal was to recruit 2,000 members, which was surpassed in six months. The Community currently has almost 3,500 members and is striving for 5,000 by the end of 2015. The Community allows Edmontonians to engage with the City when they want, on the device of their choice, on the topics that are important to them. It allow project teams from across the City to engage regularly with residents in a very cost effective, easy way that broadens out the City's reach and enables everything from quick hitting questions on an issue to more in depth studies. To date, the Community has provided thousands of lines of input that has been used in reporting and decision making. For example, after the Community showed strong support for a new pedestrian plaza off Whyte Avenue, which transformed an alley into a people friendly space, the project was quickly moved forward. The future of the Community includes making more use of online discussion forums, bringing in members for in-person focus groups, making the online user experience even more fun and interactive, and improving how participants can track an issue from beginning to end. The Community has immense potential as an engagement tool, which will only grow as more members join and more staff become aware of it as a powerful tool for their project.

Engage 106 - 76 (Transportation Planning)

Engage 106-76 is an effort to collaborate with community groups to develop and co-deliver engagement for a concept plan for 106 Street from Whitemud Drive to Saskatchewan Drive, and 76 Avenue from 104 Street to Saskatchewan Drive. Working closely with the QA (Queen Alexandria) Crossroads community group, an innovative engagement approach puts significant focus on building relationships and leveraging community networks to support discussion. Implementation has community members leading many of the activities, with the City's role largely focused on facilitating involvement, providing technical expertise, and developing technical designs.

Better public engagement can improve the way we make decisions about how we live, work and play.

- City Staff workshop participant



Evolving Infill (Urban Planning and Environment)

Infill is a key part of the City of Edmonton's vision of creating safe, vibrant, compact and sustainable communities. Evolving Infill was a conversation with citizens and stakeholders about residential infill and city growth. It was aimed at sharing and exchanging information, with the end goal of developing key actions to support more and better infill in mature communities. These actions became Edmonton's Infill Roadmap. The conversations were not project-based, but rather general discussions about why and how the City and its partners could better approach infill. Evolving Infill used a variety of conversation platforms, including online, drop-in workshops, and conversation guides to encourage conversations in many venues. The name Evolving Infill continues to be used for infill-related events, publications, discussions and changes. Planning is currently underway for how the City will engage even more with Edmontonians on this important topic, which continues to be of keen interest to many people in our growing and changing city.

Great Neighbourhoods Engagement Process

This engagement process is intended to create a shared space for conversation between the City and grassroots, citizen-led neighbourhood leadership networks. A key input into this conversation will be the snapshot provided by the Stewarding Great Neighbourhoods program. This snapshot of the City's and partner's metrics, and planned and approved programs, services and investments will provide context for the neighbourhood to develop or refine their vision and identify potential opportunities for community-driven actions. Pending approval of a 2016 service package, implementation of a pilot(s) will document a neighbourhood's assets, and its collective knowledge and vision as it relates to the delivery of City programs, services and investments. This document will be made available to all stakeholders for future planning and engagement.

Lewis Farms Recreation Centre (Community and Recreation Facilities)

Ensuring residents are provided good, clear information about upcoming projects in an accessible way is a key foundation of quality engagement, and this was the focus of the Lewis Farms Facility and Park project. It had a lot of history and components -- it's a recreation centre, a district park, a school and a library branch. Using Project Management as a guiding force in the consultation process ensured consistent delivery and messaging the project. Sharing Ideas was the first phase of consultation in the project and an innovative open house format was used to provide information on the current state of the project and what information the City needed from residents to move forward. Establishing a common point of understanding for participants to provide their input was a critical factor. A number of visual elements were incorporated into the session. For example, a shorthand-sketch video was shown theatre-style with popcorn, so people could sit comfortably and casually and orient themselves to the project. Participants were asked to vote with stickers and stars for their favourite recreational activities, which allowed them to see how their results compared to others. One unique feature was the colourful mural that was created by a graphic artist, which knitted together all the wonderful, visionary ideas for the facility and park. Overall, the open house was a fun and informative way for people to learn about the project and provide feedback - one that was well-received by residents of all ages.



Living Wall (Drainage Services)

The living wall demonstration project is part of flood mitigation program work planned for the Tweedle Place community. The flood improvements identified for Tweedle Place included expansion of a dry pond requiring removal of an existing earth berm. An alternate noise barrier was required to replace the noise attenuation function of this earth berm. Drainage Services presented several options to the community and the North Millbourne Task Force for replacement of the noise barrier, including standard concrete or synthetic material noise barriers and a living wall. Of the options presented, the community chose the living wall.

A living wall is a noise barrier and visual screen that uses natural materials to provide a more aesthetically pleasing alternative to standard barriers and fits well with the City's naturalization objectives. It consists of a soil core held in place between two wooden frames embedded in the ground. Willow shrub stems are threaded between the wood frames because they grow quickly and leaf out to form a 3 metre high, hedge-like structure while the soil and core provides a sound barrier.

Public engagement for the project included community consultations, onsite tours/media events to promote the project, on-site interpretive signage to provide background information and invite feedback, and an online survey.

McKernan-Belgravia Redevelopment Plan (Urban Planning and Environment)

The City has been working with community stakeholders in McKernan and Belgravia through a series of meetings, workshops, and online surveys to explore what challenges, principles, expectations, and actions should guide collaborative implementation of the Redevelopment Plan. This work is unique in that it encourages the community and City to come together to find different ways to implement a plan that does not rely solely on capital improvements or incremental change driven by the market. Instead, it aims to identify local 'pinch-points' to implementing the plan, principles of working more collaboratively together, and series of actions that will not only help achieve the vision of the plan but hopefully allow other communities to learn from it.

Transit Strategy (Transportation Planning, ETS, Office of Public Engagement)

Transit is a foundational element to building a great city. A Transit Strategy is being created to provide a framework to guide future development of and investment in the Edmonton transit system. The result will be a vision and set of guiding values for transit, which will inform the refresh of the Transportation Master Plan (The Way We Move), as well as identified priorities and issues to consider for a detailed Bus Network Plan. A number of engagement tools and techniques will be used to reach a wide range of Edmontonians, including those groups who may face barriers to engagement. Based on feedback from these groups on how they would prefer to be engaged, the approach is to make engagement as convenient as possible. For example, the Transit Strategy team will go to where Edmontonians are, rather than ask them to come to the engagement activity. This will include public and targeted workshops tailored to meet the needs of various stakeholders and demographics and an engagement bus that will gather input from Edmontonians at special events, as well as on bus routes. Online surveys and focus groups will also be used to solicit feedback.

Our city is growing and we all deserve a voice in how we manage this growth for our collective future.

- Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFLC) workshop participant



Valley Line LRT (LRT Design and Construction, Public Communications)

In early 2015 the City launched a dialogue-based engagement initiative utilizing a Community Relations Advisor and a series of Citizen Working Groups in five distinct zones along the LRT line to build and maintain trusting relationships with affected communities during procurement, detailed design and construction of the Valley Line LRT. Innovations in this initiative have included:

- Hands-off approach by the City with respect to membership as community leagues and other local organizations were invited to appoint representatives, and members from the public at large were peer-selected at town hall meetings.
- Initial loose definitions of zone boundaries, thereby allowing the working groups themselves to confirm or re-define the geographical zones to more closely reflect their view of neighbourhood affinities.
- Opportunity for the Groups to contribute to the refinement of their terms of reference in response to public suggestions to enhance transparency.
- Informal rules of order and a personal approach to support long-term relationship-building.
- An emphasis on dialogue documented in summarized minutes posted along with meeting agendas on the City's website for transparency.
- Multiple roles for the Community Relations Advisor who is the facilitator as well as the City's voice to the working group and the advocate of the working group/community within the City organization.

All five Citizen Working Groups have held their initial meetings. Response has been positive and while participants generally are maintaining a wait-and-see attitude, they appear to appreciate the City's commitment to what is seen as an innovative approach and have expressed optimism about the value of the initiative.

Zoning and Rezoning Meetings (Current Planning)

Planning Services within the Current Planning branch, with the support and assistance of the Office of Public Engagement, is reviewing the overall process for public meetings and open houses in relation to development applications - rezonings and plan adoptions and amendments. The focus is on meeting facilitation and reporting. Presentation materials have been updated, sign-in and evaluation forms have been revamped, and new meeting formats are being considered, among other potential changes. Training has, and will continue, to be offered on meeting facilitation and dealing with emotional and contentious issues.

C. Community leadership and capacity



The City of Edmonton has a huge role to play in public engagement and the Council Initiative on Public Engagement is focused on how the City can do engagement better. However, the City must support development of leadership in our community and the capacity of our “civil society” - that is the non-government organizations and individuals who are vital to a city’s growth and well-being. These groups and individuals, including everything from organized civic groups to everyday residents, form a diverse and vibrant civil society, which the City needs to support and learn from. Therefore, building an understanding of this ever evolving landscape, developing and nurturing relationships, and involving people in the Initiative in more meaningful ways has become a critical part of the Council Initiative. The City needs to be able to connect with diverse groups, learn from more groups, and, sometimes, get out of the way of effective community improvements led by local residents.

A civil society inventory

One of the first tasks of the Initiative was to develop an inventory of all the groups and individuals. We needed to gain a better understanding of the makeup of our City, along with the practical goal of gathering contact information to make people aware of the Initiative and invite them to participate in its initial activities. The result is a database with hundreds of entries. This task is far from over. The inventory is a living document that must be constantly updated. There is unlimited potential for the type of information that can be gathered and how it can be put to best use.

Everyday Political Citizen

To reach out to and celebrate our civil society, in 2014 The City of Edmonton participated in the national Everyday Political Citizen campaign. This annual campaign was created by Samara, an independent charitable organization that works to improve citizen engagement with democracy through innovative research and education. Canadians are encouraged to nominate those in their community who are exemplary “everyday political citizens.” Samara received more than 350 nominations from across the country. Edmonton accounted for almost 100 of those nominees, by far the largest from any single municipality in the country. The 2014 national youth winner, Nessa Deans, is from Edmonton.

In addition to being nominated for the award, nominees in Edmonton were invited to a reception in January hosted by Councillor Michael Walters and focused on leadership development. Former Prime Minister Kim Campbell spoke on the City’s leadership principles and mobilizing community engagement. It is anticipated that more gatherings of this kind will occur in 2015 and 2016 and the City of Edmonton will once again participate in the Everyday Political Citizen campaign in the fall of 2015.



The Centre for Public Involvement (CPI)

Edmonton is very lucky to be home to a centre of excellence for public engagement. The Centre for Public Involvement is a partnership between the City of Edmonton and the University of Alberta focused on advancing the practice and scholarship of public involvement, with the objective of enhancing decision-making at all levels. CPI brings together researchers, citizens, policy makers, public servants, industry and students through partnerships and projects to explore a wide range of issues. Through community collaboration, CPI tests innovative processes and promotes meaningful civic engagement.

CPI has been directly involved with the Council Initiative on Public Engagement. Staff members have participated in workshops and will be part of the Advisory Committee and Working Groups. To inform the discussion during Phase 1 of the Initiative, CPI produced “Strengthening Public Engagement in Edmonton”, a report that examines the practices, cultures and structures to support excellence in engagement, and builds on current foundations for enhanced research and best practices.

To view this report and for more information on CPI you can access their website at: www.centreforpublicinvolvement.com

The Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL)

The EFCL has been a key partner in city engagement for over a century. Leading one of the oldest and most successful community league movements in North America, EFCL and its member community leagues engage with the City regularly on a range of planning and community issues. EFCL staff and many community league board members have participated in various Council Initiative workshops to date. A targeted workshop, especially for community leagues, was held in January, and the EFCL will play an important role on the new Advisory Committee for the Initiative.

Concurrent with the Council Initiative and recognizing the importance of public engagement to their mandate and future work, in 2014 and 2015, EFCL engaged in a strategic planning process and review of engagement. It confirmed the important role of that community leagues play in engaging with the City and identified current challenges and opportunities for the future. The Initiative plans to build on this work as activities focus to developing and implementing solutions.

Abundant Community Initiative (ACI)

The objective of ACI is to advance the well-being of all Edmonton neighbourhoods by contributing an accessible asset-based community development model of practice. Integration and collaboration by neighbourhood stakeholders at the block-to-block level is essential in building a more caring and connected Edmonton. The ACI Project contributes to neighbourhood well-being as it affords all neighbourhoods an effective process to intentionally develop a sense of connectedness and formation of social networks, and capacity to take responsibility for the common good of the neighbourhood. An outcome of people becoming more connected to their neighbourhood may mean they become more engaged in civic discussions.

D. City culture and framework



Much like our overall civil society is the overall context in which the City of Edmonton undertakes public engagement, the City's own culture and organization is an important sub-context that heavily influences public engagement. Therefore, carefully examining how it needs to evolve over time to support better public engagement is an important part of the Council Initiative on Public Engagement. If improvement efforts are to succeed, part of the success will be an organizational change effort.

Branch Managers' Working Group

Through out Phase 1, the Initiative worked closely with a City Branch Managers' Working Group, which was focused on the overall changing nature of public administration and evolving organizational culture, of which public engagement is a key part.

The group met regularly to discuss how to move the practice of public engagement forward organization-wide, while recognizing the particular circumstances and unique challenges facing each branch in the City. The desired outcome is a One approach to public engagement, which makes the leadership principles come alive and furthers the move to more open government under the Open Initiative.

The work of this group will continue but will align more directly with a new Advisory Committee via Branch Manager membership on the Committee.

Vision and Principles

As the Initiative moves into Phase 2, it will be important to bring together a shared understanding of why public engagement is important and the elements of effective public engagement into a vision and set of principle for public engagement at the City of Edmonton. The vision and principles will state the commitment the City has to carrying out effective public engagement, describe what effective public engagement looks like, and inspire elected officials, City staff, community leaders, and all Edmontonians to reach for those ideals.

The results of Phase 1 of the Council Initiative on Public Engagement clearly provide direction for the development of this vision and principles. Inclusion must be top of mind. Process is important and must be transparent and responsive. Good communication is critical. Improved decision making, community and democracy, and city building can result from effective public engagement.

It will now be up to a new Advisory Committee to assemble the vision and principles from the collective wisdom gathered and test it with community leaders and Edmontonians more broadly, to ensure it is something that we can all support, which will guide our future actions and allow us to evaluate our success at the conclusion of the Council Initiative and beyond.

Next steps



This first part of Phase 1 of the Council Initiative on Public Engagement provided a foundation of collective wisdom on which to build. It was the first step in a long journey. Together, we started to build a shared understanding and a common voice on why public engagement is important and what we should strive for as a City in our approach to public engagement.

The remaining activities in Phase 1 of the Initiative continued this conversation and started to move it forward to the development of a vision for public engagement, identifying the obstacles to achieving effective public engagement, and developing a strategic road map for how to achieve effective public engagement in the City of Edmonton.

In Phase 2, the Initiative's work will build on the results of Phase 1 and continue to address the four activity streams from the initial Terms of Reference. However, the Initiative will shift from being carried out by a small, internal project team to leadership provided by an internal/external Advisory Committee (modeled on the Winter City Strategy approach), with work being carried out by five Working Groups that will each be tasked with working on one of the five strategic areas of focus.

Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee will be designed to create collaborative accountability and leadership for public engagement between City Council, City Administration, and community. It will develop a vision and principles for public engagement, based on the work done in Phase 1, and will oversee the creation and implementation of Working Groups to carry out work in Phase 2, providing review and guidance as needed.

The Advisory Committee will liaison with the two Council leads (Councillors Ben Henderson and Michael Walters) and will be made up of five Branch Managers and five members of the public. Those Branch Managers in each department who have a high concentration of public engagement in their areas will be asked to take part and it will be up to each department to designate one Branch Manager to be a member of the Committee. Public members will be selected based on achieving a wide representation of the Edmonton community, drawn from a pool of participants who expressed interest during Phase 1. The Office of Public Engagement will provide support for the activities Advisory Group, along with those of the Working Groups.

What We Learned - Strategic Areas of Focus for Improving Public Engagement

After identifying the obstacles to effective public engagement, participants in the Council Initiative on Public Engagement were asked to identify strategies to overcome them. As a starting point, the group reviewed all the strategies spontaneously suggested by participants during the first part of the Initiative and strategies resulting from Transportation Services review of their public involvement practices. The group then brainstormed additional strategies. All potential strategies were then organized under the obstacles they address.

This output was then reviewed by a sub-group to identify the following Strategic Areas of Focus, which will become the topic areas for future Working Groups in Phase 2 of the Initiative. These Working Groups will be provided with all the raw output from the Obstacles and Strategies Workshops, as they will be charged with determining the specific strategies they will work on in their work plans.

Strategic Area A - Community Leadership

Expand, diversify and facilitate community involvement and leadership in public engagement by fostering connection points and sharing influence.

Strategic Area B - Evaluation, Reporting and Recognition

Create a culture of excellence and accountability for public engagement through improved transparency, measurement, and celebration.

Strategic Area C - Vision, Policy and Framework

Create organizational foundations that support, inspire and guide effective public engagement as One City and Open City.

Strategic Area D - Learning and Training

Improve public engagement knowledge and capacity through learning, leadership development, skill building, and training (City and citizen).

Strategic Area E - Tools, Technologies and Practices

Expand and diversify public engagement tools and techniques, and pilot innovative public engagement processes.



Working Groups

Working Group members will be suggested by the Advisory Committee, but each Group will decide on their own membership criteria and recruitment processes to achieve the best outcomes. Each group will be led by a chair and will determine its own priorities, which will be detailed annually in an Action Plan.

The Working Groups will work under the Advisory Committee, which will update both CLT and City Council on its work. Each Working Group will be funded via the Advisory Committee from the budget for the Council Initiative on Public Engagement, which is supported by several branches and which will be almost completely focused in 2016 and 2017 on supporting the work of the Committee and Working Groups.

Phase 2 Terms of Reference

The initial Terms of Reference for the Council Initiative on Public Engagement only covered Phase 1 of the Initiative. It committed to developing a Terms of Reference for Phase 2 at the conclusion of Phase 1. This approach was taken because it was understood that the results of Phase 1 would be needed to plan for Phase 2.

As a result, the Advisory Committee, Working Groups, and Strategic Areas of Focus - and all the work that will result from them -will form the content of the Terms of Reference for Phase 2 of the Initiative. Completing this Terms of Reference will form the transition between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Initiative.