

<b>Title</b>	<b>What happens when a City, its residents and their Council decide it's time for change?</b>
<b>Organizing Group</b>	City of Edmonton, Public Engagement Section
<b>Location</b>	Edmonton, Alberta, population 932,546
<b>Key Question/Problem</b>	Is public engagement important to the City of Edmonton, if so, what makes it effective and what are our areas for improvement?
<b>Sample Methods</b>	<p>The project had two phases bringing together Council, Administration and the public. Phase 1 "Learning" had approximately 1,400 hours of participation with: 40 collaborative, consensus-based workshops; online and paper discussion guides; specialized workshops with Indigenous and multicultural groups, analyze and theme input, identify obstacles and define focus for Phase 2; Council &amp; Executive Leadership Team workshop and "Building on the Momentum" event to report back and celebrate.</p> <p>Phase 2 "Solutions &amp; Actions", 8,000 hours of participation: an Advisory Committee; 5 working groups co-chaired by the public and Administration.</p>
<b>Results</b>	A new course for public engagement, trust and relationship building and accountability at the City. A 27 item action plan for Administration and a new PE model has been developed. Outcomes to date include: new PE policy; Council reporting guidelines; PE promise to the public; corporate-wide learning and training program; community mapping tool; PE communications guidelines and visuals; respectful engagement guidelines; strategic PE planning; and a Guiding Coalition to hold the City to account and ensure PE stays at the forefront of City business. This is just the beginning.
<b>Impact Level</b>	City-wide, including Council, Administration and the public
<b>Time Frame</b>	2014-2017
<b>People Engaged</b>	>1,100 members of Council, Administration and the public.
<b>Web Link</b>	<a href="https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/council-initiative-on-public-engagement.aspx">https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/council-initiative-on-public-engagement.aspx</a>

## **BACKGROUND**

Public Engagement is complex work. It's also important work; it's the primary way that the City of Edmonton works with the public to understand, examine, and make decisions.

Following the 2013 Civic Election, as well as a 2014 [City Auditor report on public involvement](#), City Council and Administration identified a need to review the City of Edmonton's approach to public participation. Many Edmontonians, stakeholders, Councillors, and members of City Administration observed that the City faced a number of challenges and opportunities in public participation, including responding to evolving citizen expectations, supporting growth, ensuring consistent and quality processes, and capitalizing on opportunities for innovation.

Through a collaborative based process that involved City Council, Administration and Edmontonians, the [Council Initiative on Public Engagement](#) (the Initiative) has defined and set the stage for innovative and inclusive public participation practice for years to come.

The Initiative was designed using a phased approach for “engaging on engagement” with City Council, Administration and the public. It was given a broad mandate to examine public participation practices at the City, while also implementing immediate improvements to public participation practice where possible. The initiative recognized that making lasting change to public participation must be part of a larger organizational change at the City. However, a focus on internal change must be balanced by an effort to understand, engage, and enable the city's broader civil society. Good public participation requires increasing both the capacity of the City and the community to engage.

### **P2 Challenges and Opportunities**

#### **Challenges -**

Most of the public participation challenges centered around internal leadership, who were involved in the Initiative, pushing the City norm on public participation and sticking their neck out to challenge how decisions are made at the City. Traditionally, decisions were made hierarchically with little meaningful public participation involved in decision making. The Initiative was bumping up against that tradition which is often a challenge. Though the work was heavily supported by Council, there was resistance internally for the need of public participation or the Initiative as a whole. Having community contribute to a big policy decisions was scary for an organisation that was often used to making those decisions for themselves.

Another challenge was a general lack of trust by residents in City public participation initiatives. Residents told Council candidates during the 2013 Civic Election that they did not trust that the City used any of the input they provided and that the City did what it wanted to do anyway. Residents felt that public participation at the City was just checking a box and not sincere or meaningful. This view was mirrored in a [City Audit report](#) in May of 2014 regarding public participation. Due to that lack of trust Edmontonians were reluctant to participate in some of the Initiative's public participation events. In order to get residents to participate a public participation plan was developed with the focus on building trust, with listening and learning from residents playing an important role. Doing this “public participation on public participation” was a key part of gaining trust from residents on the process as well as the outcomes of the Initiative.

#### **Opportunities -**

In undergoing this work there were a number of public participation opportunities that were identified and realised.

##### [Phase 1](#) “Learning” - collaboration based:

In the initial phase of the Initiative an opportunity was identified to build consensus amongst City staff, Council and residents to develop a common understanding of public participation and build consensus on the direction of the Initiative. This opportunity was realised through the firm commitment of Council and Leadership Team in changing the way the City practiced public participation as well as the vision and goals of the Initiative. This commitment was demonstrated through Leadership's ongoing participating in the public participation activities, alongside residents and other City staff. This leadership buy-in and active visible support was key to the success of the Initiative. Also through Leadership's acceptance of a collaborative based approach there was an opportunity to gain trust for public participation as well as between the City and community.

[Phase 2 \(Terms of Reference\)](#) “Solutions and Action” - collaborative solution building: A public participation opportunity developed in phase 2 to further collaboration between Administration and community as well as continue to focus on accountability. The opportunity was realised through the design of the methodology used. In this phase collaboration was used to develop solutions in five strategic areas: 1) vision, policy and framework; 2) tools, techniques and practices; 3) community leadership; 4) learning and training; and 5) evaluation, reporting and recognition. To do this an Advisory Committee was formed to create accountability and leadership for public participation between Council, Administration and community members, consisting of representatives from these groups. In addition, five working groups were created (one for each strategic area) to develop solutions, as well as one subcommittee focused on Communications. Membership included community, and City Administration with co-chairs of a similar makeup. Each working group had regular meetings and worked on their action plans for approximately 15 months. All the work came together in April of 2017 ([Report 6.1](#)) when [Council approved](#) the new Public Engagement Policy and working group action plans.

## **Rationale for P2**

Due to the lack of trust residents had in public participation, the Initiative was given the direction by the Council co-leads to “begin at the beginning” and engage with Edmontonians, City staff and community leaders to develop a common understanding of public participation and start to build consensus on what the Initiative and public participation at the City needed to focus its efforts on. Doing “public participation on public participation” was a key part of gaining trust from residents on the process as well as the outcomes of the Initiative. To ensure the outcome of the Initiative worked for all (residents, City staff, stakeholders, Council ext.), all needed to be involved.

## **Impact of P2 on decisions**

The public participation activities undertaken directly impacted the decisions on the direction the Initiative was going to take as well as the final outcomes. Collaboration between Administration, City Council and community was a focus and theme throughout the entire Initiative. That theme continues to impact the way the City practices public participation today.

The public participation activities in Phase 1 built a shared understanding of public participation and began to develop consensus around where the Initiative would need to focus its efforts in Phase 2. The second phase was about taking what was heard and creating solutions (action plans) that would be implemented in the future. What was heard and learned in Phase 1 was that the City needed to focus on five strategic areas: [vision, policy and framework](#); [tools, techniques and practices](#); [community leadership](#); [learning and training](#); and [evaluation, reporting and recognition](#). Those five areas became the topics of five working groups ([Public Engagement Advisory Committee & Working Groups](#)), made up of half City staff and half community members, whose task it was to build solutions. The working groups reported to an [Advisory Committee](#) which was designed to create accountability and leadership for public participation between City Council, Administration and community.

Public Participation directly impacted the final outcomes of the Initiative as well as decisions surrounding those outcomes. One of the main impacts was the decision to link public participation with decision making. This was not something that was identified as an approach going into the Initiative, although it is a best practice within the practice. Linking public participation to decision making was one of the things that we heard through the many voices of the Initiative.

Other outcomes and impacts on decision making include:

- A [Public Engagement Policy](#) which provides direction on engagement at the City and links public engagement to decision making
- A new [Public engagement spectrum](#) that removed Inform and included communication to underneath all the roles the public can play when participating
- [Public Engagement Framework](#)
- [New Public Engagement Practice and Implementation Roadmap](#)
- Creation of a Public Engagement Section at the City with 16 Public Engagement Advisors, a 6 member Corporate Research Unit and a 4 member Methods and Practices Unit
- Outcomes of the working groups
  - Training program for all City staff on public engagement
  - An approach for City staff on evaluation and recognition

- Development of a new public engagement planning tool, a catalogue of techniques and practices as well as a new Communications Guidebook.
- An internal community leadership database and mapping tool
- A Guiding Coalition that will monitor the City's progress in executing the [Implementation Road Map](#) for public engagement
- A Communications Guidebook
- Public Engagement Language Guidelines to standardise how the City talks about public participation
- A Public Engagement section added to each Council Report

## IMPACT ON CULTURE

We are only just realizing the impacts of this important work. The following provides examples of the shift in culture that we are noticing that is pointing us in the direction we want to go.

### City Projects

A number of City projects have already adopted and demonstrated this new approach to PE.

**Bike Lanes.** 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 with input gathering, pop-up engagement activities at key community locations such as local schools. The types of routes are new to Edmonton and many citizens were not aware of what they look like or how they would work. As part of the engagement process weekend pop-up bike lanes and bike festivals were held to experience impacts and trade-offs to inform their participation.

**[Edmonton Insight Community.](#)** Launched in June 2014 the Edmonton Insight Community 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 and currently has 7,746 members. 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.

**[Engage 106 - 76.](#)** A collaboration with community groups to develop and co-deliver engagement for a concept plan for a major mixed residential and commercial corridor. Working closely with the Queen Alexandria Crossroads community group, an innovative engagement approach was used with significant focus on building relationships and leveraging community networks to support discussion. Implementation had community members leading many of the activities, with the City's role largely focused on facilitating involvement, providing technical expertise, and developing technical designs.

**[Evolving Infill.](#)** This was a conversation with citizens and stakeholders about residential infill and city growth. 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 resulting actions became Edmonton's Infill Roadmap, and the name Evolving Infill continues to be used for infill-related events, publications, discussions and changes.

**[Lewis Farms Recreation Centre.](#)** This project had a lot of history and components -- it's a recreation centre, a district park, a school and a library branch. Sharing Ideas was the first phase of consultation in the project and an innovative open house format that incorporated a number of visual elements: a [shorthand-sketch video](#) shown theatre-style with popcorn, voting with stickers and stars for favourite recreational activities to see how their results compared to others and a colourful mural created by a graphic artist that knit together the visionary ideas for the facility and park. It was a fun and informative way for people to learn and provide feedback that was well-received by residents of all ages. This project was also one of the first to [report back to the public in a new way](#), explicitly explaining what decisions were made based on the input received.

**Engage Edmonton.** Engage Edmonton was created in response to both the growing demand from the public to be involved earlier in the course of City decision making, but also to support in the reduction of engagement fatigue. Edmonton is a rapidly expanding city, with many crucial city building projects that are of high interest with significant impact to residents. At these yearly events we bring multiple project teams together at locations throughout the City at accessible times and spaces. This providing project teams maximum exposure to the general public in a small time frame to meet their tight timelines in an affordable manner and provides multiple engagement opportunities at one time for the public.

Administration

The new PE model at the City has a team of PE and research advisors to support business areas and projects. We know that the culture is changing because we have received a significant number of requests for services from project managers who are open and eager to learn more about the new approach to ensure the best possible information to inform decision making. Our new approach to PE planning makes explicit the link to decision making, role of the public and commitments by decision makers. In our work with staff and decision makers there has been an increased awareness of decision making practices. The language of decision making and mapping can now be heard throughout the work areas of the City of Edmonton. We are striving to eliminate the use of the term “Open House”, as it is a tool that can be used for either information sharing or engagement which creates confusion and misaligned expectations. Instead, we want to explain events as either information sessions, public engagement sessions/workshops or surveys/focus groups. In our communications we are also including the role of the public, from our new spectrum; this is currently being done for the [Bus Network Redesign](#) project. We have also created a new consistent look and feel and supporting templates for our PE materials. We are getting many requests from Communications and project teams about these new standards and the tools they can be using instead.

Decision Makers

Throughout the Initiative there was strong and visible leadership support demonstrated from Branch Managers to Executive Leadership Team to Council. Each of the five working groups from Phase 2 of the Initiative had a Branch Manager champion and community member who was responsible for reporting back on progress to the Advisory Committee. The nearly formed Guiding Coalition is the City’s ongoing commitment to continuing our growth and improvement.

The Public

These impacts are yet to be determined. An evaluation framework was developed and is in early stages of implementation. It links our PE goals with outcomes and performance measures, and standardizes the tools we use to evaluate, tailored for each of our audiences of leadership, Administration and the public. Project teams have started incorporating these measures and using these tools in their engagement projects, collecting consistent and relevant data. Shortly, we will have enough data to be able to see, and report back on, the impact of our new PE approach on the public.

**EVALUATION AGAINST CORE VALUES**

CORE VALUE	EVIDENCE
1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision making process.	The City recognized that our decisions about when, where, how, why and with whom to engage affects public trust and relationships. The City recognized the public has a right to influence our practice. The Initiative was about “engaging on engagement”. City’s Policy Statement: “The City values public engagement processes and activities that contribute to policy, program, service and project decisions by providing City Council and Administration with the best possible information to support decision making.”
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public’s contribution will influence the decision.	Our new PE planning process is striving towards having every business area and project identify the level of influence the public has over decisions, what inputs are considered in decision making and a commitment by decision makers describing how they will consider public input, and making this

	<p>information public.          Active participation by leadership at PE events was a visible demonstration of this promise.</p>
<p>3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.</p>	<p>To ensure sustainable solutions many approaches are being used. For new systems like establishing bike networks which may be unfamiliar to the public, real-life bike lane samples were constructed on roadways so people could experience the fit and see the impacts and tradeoffs. For <a href="#">redesigning our City's bus network</a>, the technical team created a draft network based on the principles from the <a href="#">Transit Strategy</a>, which had extensive PE. This incorporated the limitations and technical requirements and the public were asked to share their local knowledge to enhance and refine the plans.</p>
<p>4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.</p>	<p>"Inclusive and accessible" is one of our Guiding Principles where we strive to reach diverse communities. In practice this looks like engagement beyond community leagues and beyond representation, going to where the public is gathering, pop up events, community locations, conversation guides, intentional engagement with multicultural and faith groups, new Canadians, youth and seniors and outreach activities to extend personal invitations and answer questions in advance.</p>
<p>5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.</p>	<p>"Pre-engagement" is becoming standard practice using interviews, surveys and community advisory committees to identify who is the audience, issues and concerns, understanding of the project, barriers to participation and mitigation measures to inform the design of robust PE plans</p>
<p>6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.</p>	<p>City issues are complex and information needs to be provided that is not. This has been done through maps, videos and walking site tours.          Engage Edmonton is an initiative to reduce engagement fatigue and coordinate our corporate PE events.          The City's Bus Network Redesign engagement is offering translation in Cantonese, Hindi and Punjabi and support for those with visual impairments.</p>
<p>7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.</p>	<p>Throughout the Initiative, interim and final reports back and celebration events were held for this purpose.          To demonstrate its commitment to this the City has incorporated this core value directly in its new PE definition, role of decision makers and our guiding principles. Not only are projects reporting back what was heard from engagement but even more importantly what decisions were made and how the input influenced those.</p>

## MEDIA GALLERY

Links to videos that talk about the Council Initiative on Public Engagement

- [Summary of the Council Initiative on Public Engagement](#)
- [Media Gallery](#) (scroll down page to media gallery)
  - Building Momentum
  - Importance of Public Engagement
  - About the Council Initiative on Public Engagement
  - Importance of Storytelling

Photos can be found in the reports

- [Phase 1 Final Report](#)
- [Phase 2 Interim Update Report](#)
- [Phase 1 and 2 Final Report Summary](#)
  - [Phases 1 and 2 Final Report](#)

## REPORTS AND LINKS

- [Phase 1 Final Report](#)
- [Phase 2 Interim Update Report](#)
- [Phase 1 and 2 Final Report](#)
- [Terms of Reference Council Initiative on Public Engagement Phase 2](#)
- [Public Engagement Advisory Committee & Working Groups](#)
- [Public Involvement Audit Report](#)
- [Working Group Information](#)
  - [Advisory Committee](#)
  - [Community Leadership](#)
  - [Evaluation, Reporting and Recognition](#)
  - [Learning and Training](#)
  - [Tools, Techniques and Practices](#)
  - [Vision, Policy and Framework](#)