

CITIZEN PLANNING CIRCLE

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



“It was an honour to be invited to contribute to such an important endeavour, and to hear the diverse perspectives from each and every amazing, caring and passionate citizen who participated on the Citizens’ Planning Circle. My wish is that the ideas generated through this process become realities in Edmonton’s mature communities, so that citizens are empowered to actively craft their own vision of cherished and liveable communities, and become proud of our gem of a city and its liveability.”

Colleen Knechtel
Citizen Planning Circle Participant

We, the members of the **Edmonton Citizen Planning Circle**, present to the Task Force on Sustainable Communities ten recommendations that we believe will contribute to the veracity, reliability and quality of your final report.

We are 13 women and men of diverse incomes, ages, backgrounds and experiences, who came together in June 2011 to discuss issues facing Edmonton’s mature neighbourhoods, to refine and extend those issues, and to envision possible solutions to them.

The task that was set before us was a challenging one, but our commitment to our communities and belief in the innate value of involving citizen voices in decision-making processes were strong motivators in the achievement of our goal: over the course of three sessions, we were able to compile a set of recommendations for revitalizing mature neighbourhoods, schools, and local businesses in Edmonton, and suggest potential strategies for their implementation. While the final recommendations of the **Citizen Planning Circle** participants do not reflect consensus of the group as a whole, they are representative of the ideas that emerged from small group discussions of complex and interconnected issues, and include strategies that anticipate potential disadvantages, risks, conflicts, and pressure points. In every instance, we took care to capitalize on the strengths and opportunities that already exist in our communities.

This report documents the results of our collective work, and provides the context within which it was achieved. We hope that it contributes positively to the work of the Task Force and to City Council as it moves forward in addressing the important issues facing Edmonton’s mature neighbourhoods.

CITIZEN PLANNING CIRCLE PROCESS

Session 1: Building Common Ground

- Identifying the issues, challenges, attributes and opportunities of Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods
- Creating a vision: Edmonton's Mature Neighbourhoods circa 2016

Session 2: Understanding the Issues

- Prioritizing the issues
- Describing the top challenges, barriers and/or constraints for each issue
- Describing the top opportunities to leverage in order to address issues

Session 3: Developing Recommendations

- Creating a set of recommendations that will address issues and help achieve a desirable future for mature neighbourhoods

“Mature neighbourhoods should be viewed as assets, whereas the City and many members of the public tend to view them as liabilities. They are assets because they are generally in key areas of the city, they have stronger community connectivity than in many newer neighbourhoods, and they exhibit a character and history that do not exist in new areas.”

Jeff Pearson,
Citizen Planning Circle Participant

2011 CITIZEN PLANNING CIRCLE PARTICIPANTS

Henry Fung

Zedingle Ghebremusse

Mike Hanna

Mei Hung

Colleen Knechtel

John Kolkman

James Kosowan

Cameron MacDonald

Cheryl Miller

Lynn Parish

Jeff Pearson

Baldwin Reichwein

Jennifer Slywka

2 WHAT ARE MATURE NEIGHBOURHOODS?*

The City of Edmonton defines its mature neighbourhoods as those neighbourhoods that are well established and were effectively completed by 1970.

The majority of these neighbourhoods experienced their greatest growth in the post-WWII era.

Mature neighbourhoods are primarily residential and are found within a rough, concentric oval around the city centre called the Mature Neighbourhood Overlay. There are 109 mature neighbourhoods in Edmonton.

Today these neighbourhoods face significant challenges in remaining lively and vibrant. As the city continues to expand, limited resources are stretched further as the pressure to provide services in all communities increases.

Rapid development on the outskirts of the city, coupled with an aging population and infrastructure in its core, has resulted in a demographic shift that impacts our mature neighbourhoods at all levels, and presents unique challenges in our work to keep these communities liveable, lively and connected.



*Community Sustainability Task Force; Task Force News, May 2011.

HYPERLINK "http://www.ecsd.net/news_releases/pdf/TaskForce-News-May.pdf" http://www.ecsd.net/news_releases/pdf/TaskForce-News-May.pdf

3 TASK FORCE ON COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY



When Mayor Stephen Mandel launched the Task Force on Community Sustainability in February 2011, he was not only focusing much needed attention on the complex challenges facing Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods, but taking steps towards ensuring that the process to revitalize these neighbourhoods was as integrated, invigorating and engaging as the desired outcomes for them.

Recognizing the diversity of stakeholders interested in renewing the vitality of Edmonton's foundational communities, the Task Force brings together representatives from the provincial government, City, school boards, University, business, community groups and private citizens to work towards building innovative partnerships and plans across jurisdictions. Their goal: to recommend solutions to the challenges facing core neighbourhoods and begin to chart the path toward renewal.

In addition to gathering input from the public through surveys and online questionnaires, the Task Force requested the participation of the Centre for Public Involvement in developing one additional aspect of their public involvement process: to facilitate the participation of a small group of citizens - each with some background experience in the issues - in a discussion and deliberation of the challenges and opportunities for mature neighbourhoods that could contribute to the overall recommendations of the Task Force.



The City of Edmonton believes that a key element of representative democracy is that people have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them.

City of Edmonton, Policy C513, Public Involvement

4 THE CITIZEN PLANNING CIRCLE

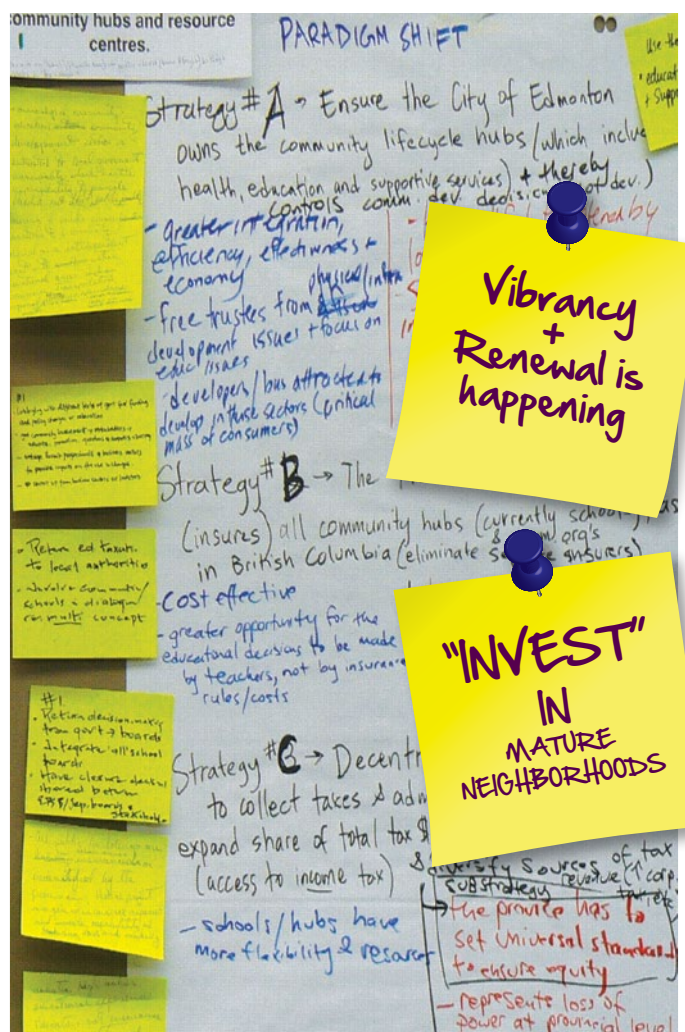
The Centre for Public Involvement, a new and innovative partnership between the University of Alberta and the City of Edmonton, responded to a request for support and participation in the Task Force on Community Sustainability by designing and implementing a Citizen Planning Circle to:

- Contribute to strategies to address the complex challenges for neighbourhoods in Edmonton
- Demonstrate the value of meaningful citizen participation for developing public policy
- Assist and support City Council's decision making

The Citizen Planning Circle worked to give voice to the concerns and considerations of citizen participants from several of Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods and provide the environment and effective process for them to collaborate across their communities toward the creation of a collaborative vision for a strong, vibrant and sustainable city core. Over the course of three half-day sessions in June 2011, 13 Edmontonians with varying experiences, backgrounds and ideas, examined the broad issues facing mature neighbourhoods, and then worked to establish ten recommendations and explore the potential barriers, constraints and tradeoffs of each.



CENTRE FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT



Mission Statement

Provide leadership in understanding and applying innovative public involvement ideas, practices and technologies for citizen participation and deliberation.

Strategic Goals (2011)

Enhance the Capacity of Municipalities and Universities for public involvement

Increase citizen understanding of public involvement

Increase citizen engagement

Advance the practice of public involvement through research

Understand and explore the role of technology in public involvement

5 ADVANCING THE PRACTICE OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT THROUGH RESEARCH

The Centre for Public Involvement is a new and innovative partnership between the City of Edmonton and the University of Alberta. The Centre is established to deliver well researched, tested, and effective means of involving citizens. The Centre is dedicated to leadership and excellence in the theory and practice of public involvement.

Researchers from the University of Alberta collaborated in this project by examining the effectiveness of the Citizen Planning Circle as a method of public involvement in municipal decision-making.

Because the objective of the research is distinct from that of the Circle, it did not impact the content of the recommendations, but contributes to the advancement of public engagement practice.

Citizen Planning Circle

Session #1: Building Common Ground

- Exploring the challenges and opportunities for Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods
- Envisioning the future: Mature Neighbourhoods in 2016

Session #2: Understanding the Issues

- Prioritizing the issues
- Considering challenges, barriers and constraints
- Describing the opportunities for addressing each issue

Session #3: Developing Recommendations

- Fleshing out the recommendations that will address the issues and achieve a desirable future

Research Project Goals

Goal #1: Documenting the Process

- Observe all three sessions of the Citizen Planning Circle
- Review all Citizen Planning Circle materials and processes

Goal #2: Analysis and Critique

- Participant written reflections
- Participant interviews
- Project team interviews
- Participant focus groups

Goal #3: Recommendations

- Evaluate the Citizen Planning Circle
- Suggest ideas for future public involvement processes

6 OUR MATURE NEIGHBOURHOODS



While the participants in the Citizen Planning Circle shared a common motivation to positively impact the future of Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods, they came to their collective table from diverse backgrounds, experiences and locations. Planning Circle organizers sought to benefit from and build on that diversity by having participants bring a piece of their neighbourhoods with them to the first session: each participant was asked to capture, prior to meeting, the strengths, challenges and possibilities of their neighbourhood in the form of a photograph. Taken together, the photographs provided insight into the shared pride and concerns that the participants have for their communities, and laid the groundwork for collective analysis and deliberation on their vision for a more vibrant future.

The photographs provided a springboard for discussion that was further focused through activities designed to flesh out common concerns, and an Issues Guide that provided a broad overview of key areas to consider in the development of recommendations to the Task Force.

CITIZEN PLANNING CIRCLE: RECOMMENDATIONS



“It is 2016 and Edmonton’s mature neighbourhoods are well on the path to a brighter future that includes positively engaged residents and visitors, vibrant local businesses and institutions, and a renaissance in the creative use and reuse of neighbourhood schools. The mature neighbourhoods include a blending of peoples of varying ages and cultural-ethnic/socio-economic identities living, working and recreating together in ways that exhibit caring and respect for each other, for the built environment and for nature.”

Jeff Pearson,
Citizen Planning Circle Participant
VISION STATEMENT



SCHOOLS IN MATURE NEIGHBOURHOODS

VISION

The schools in mature neighbourhoods are vital centres that reach beyond their mandate within the school system to build community and actively contribute to neighbourhoods that are vibrant, attractive and sustainable.

ISSUES

Because schools are highly integrated with other aspects of community well-being, the issues surrounding schools in mature neighbourhoods are wide-reaching and varied.

There is no simple solution to the problems facing schools, and consideration needs to be given to the **unique nature of each community** and the subsequent roles that schools need to play in those communities.

In addition to the diversity between our neighbourhoods, our schools are impacted by development beyond them, as **urban sprawl** continues to draw families with school-aged children to the outer edges of the city, effectively hollowing out the inner core.

This results in **declining enrolment** and is compounded by a demographic trend toward smaller family sizes, and a reluctance to provide the **funding** necessary to maintain the deteriorating **infrastructure** of aging schools with small student populations.

Finally, a perceived lack of **collaboration** between the school boards and the municipal and provincial governments restricts possibilities for overcoming obstacles with creative and innovative approaches to the challenges presented by schools in mature neighbourhoods.

Recommendation S.1:

Assess the potential for aging and/or closed schools to become the heart and soul of our neighbourhoods: repurpose them as community focal points that are multifunctional, multigenerational, accessible community hubs and resource/learning centres.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Capital and Funding
- Inequity and Poverty
- Rigid Policies and Procedures
- Lack of collaboration between stakeholders and throughout levels of government
- Public resistance to school closure/consolidation
- Diverse and unique community needs
- Resistance to change: moving toward a vision of schools as community learning centres

Strategy S.1-A:

Create and implement a process for repurposing schools as community hubs.

Arguments and Actions:

- Facilitate a shift for stakeholders in their understanding and operation of the school system
- Consider fundamental changes to funding, ownership, responsibility and authority
- Allow greater taxation rights to local authorities or seek support from the business community
- Divest greater authority over schools management to local institutions
- Relieve School Board Trustees of issues relating to infrastructure, and enable them to focus on education issues and programming

Considerations

- School Boards may feel threatened by decreased autonomy and/or be reluctant to share space between and beyond their mandates
- Current governing models may be incongruent with necessary changes to ownership, authority and responsibility

Strategy S.1-B:

Address complex liability issues and insurance needs by providing public insurance and indemnification for community-hub schools.

Arguments and Actions:

- Create one central, public insurer for schools, similar to the approach taken by the Province of British Columbia

Considerations

- Pushback from private insurance industry
- Blanket public insurer may not allow for unique school and community issues or requirements

Recommendation S.2:

The Province of Alberta, City of Edmonton, and Public and Separate school boards collaborate on determining school closures, school consolidations and resource allocation.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Funding structure and policies
- Territorial behaviour and tension between school boards
- Competition between educational institutions
- Ability to agree on closure or creation of community hubs

Strategy S.2-A:

Legislate a multi-stakeholder decision-making process and mandatory collaboration between Public and Separate school boards.

Arguments and Actions:

- Establish an efficient, uniform system throughout the city
- Encourage co-housing Public and Separate schools in the same building
- Effective and collective use of limited resources
- Resolve the debate regarding the incremental cost of after-school use
- Keep schools close to students; address transportation issues
- Public services will be closer to the people accessing them, including seniors and immigrants

Considerations

- Potential resistance from the separate school board, which may perceive an infringement on its ability to maintain a unique identity and religious belief

Strategy S.2-B:

Broaden the scope of the current school planning process to the extent that it becomes a more comprehensive community development process.

Arguments and Actions:

- Use data and resources, like the Maps Project from Alberta Education, more effectively
- Consider the demographics of the community as a whole, including income, age and cultural background
- Promote universal, basic community education over 'schools of choice'
- Encourage the development of diverse, localized programming that reflects the needs of the community
- Address transportation issues related to student enrolment beyond catchment areas

“I wonder what can happen if community development and sustainability becomes more active – a well planned process that involves all interested stakeholders.”

Baldwin Reichwein
Citizen Planning Circle Participant

Strategy S.2-C:

The Province of Alberta amends its funding formula for schools to include: (1) student population, (2) community demographics, and (3) infrastructure renewal needs.

Arguments and Actions:

- Efficient and effective allocation of resources
- Increase budget flexibility at the school level
- Consider current reality and long-term needs of the public

Considerations

- Concentration of decision-making at the local level requires relinquishing some control at the Provincial level

Strategy S.2-D:

The Province of Alberta commits to long-term funding for education.

Arguments and Actions:

- Schools are no longer vulnerable to revenue cycles and budget cuts
- Make long-term education plans possible
- Provide a foundation for improved community planning, curriculum development and the implementation of sustainable programs
- Follow the precedent set by AB Health via the establishment of five-year spending thresholds irrespective of provincial revenue
- Acquire capital grants to implement a community-hub vision for schools
- Renovate existing infrastructure accordingly

Considerations

- Requires provincial leadership via Alberta Education and Alberta Infrastructure
- Volatile provincial revenues lend support to arguments that favour public spending cuts over long-term funding

Strategy S.2-E:

Provide the City of Edmonton with the funding required to fulfil its responsibilities in the community-hub model for schools.

Arguments and Actions:

- Increase the share of total tax revenue captured by municipalities by increasing the municipal share of income tax and diversifying sources of tax revenue
- Allow for flexibility in programming and resource allocation by improving access to resources
- Improve local authority to allocate resources by implementing a Local Improvement Charge

Considerations

- Potential for public perception of an increased tax burden (costs vs. social wage/public benefits)
- Requires that the Province set universal standards to ensure equity
- Concentration of decision-making at the local level requires relinquishing some control at the Provincial and Federal levels

“Everyone I talked to mentioned school closures in mature neighbourhoods and how counter-productive this is to attracting more families with school aged children. As an alternative to closing a school outright, the two school boards need to place greater value on finding alternative uses for vacant classrooms, and on the value of small schools generally.”

John Kolkman
Citizen Planning Circle Participant

Recommendation S.3:

Support diverse, quality, collaborative programming that meets unique community needs and strengthens social relationships.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Curricular restrictions
- Liability and risk involved with opening schools to the broader community
- Buy-in from diverse stakeholders
- Establishing a new coordination structure, process and accountability model
- Capacity for outreach and communications
- Engaging a broader cross-section of the community and increasing parent involvement

Strategy S.3-A:

Research and complete a comparative analysis of the benefits of basic community schools versus specialized school programming.

Arguments and Actions:

- Increase awareness of real versus perceived benefits of both approaches to education
- Facilitate shift from competing school programs to community hub learning centres

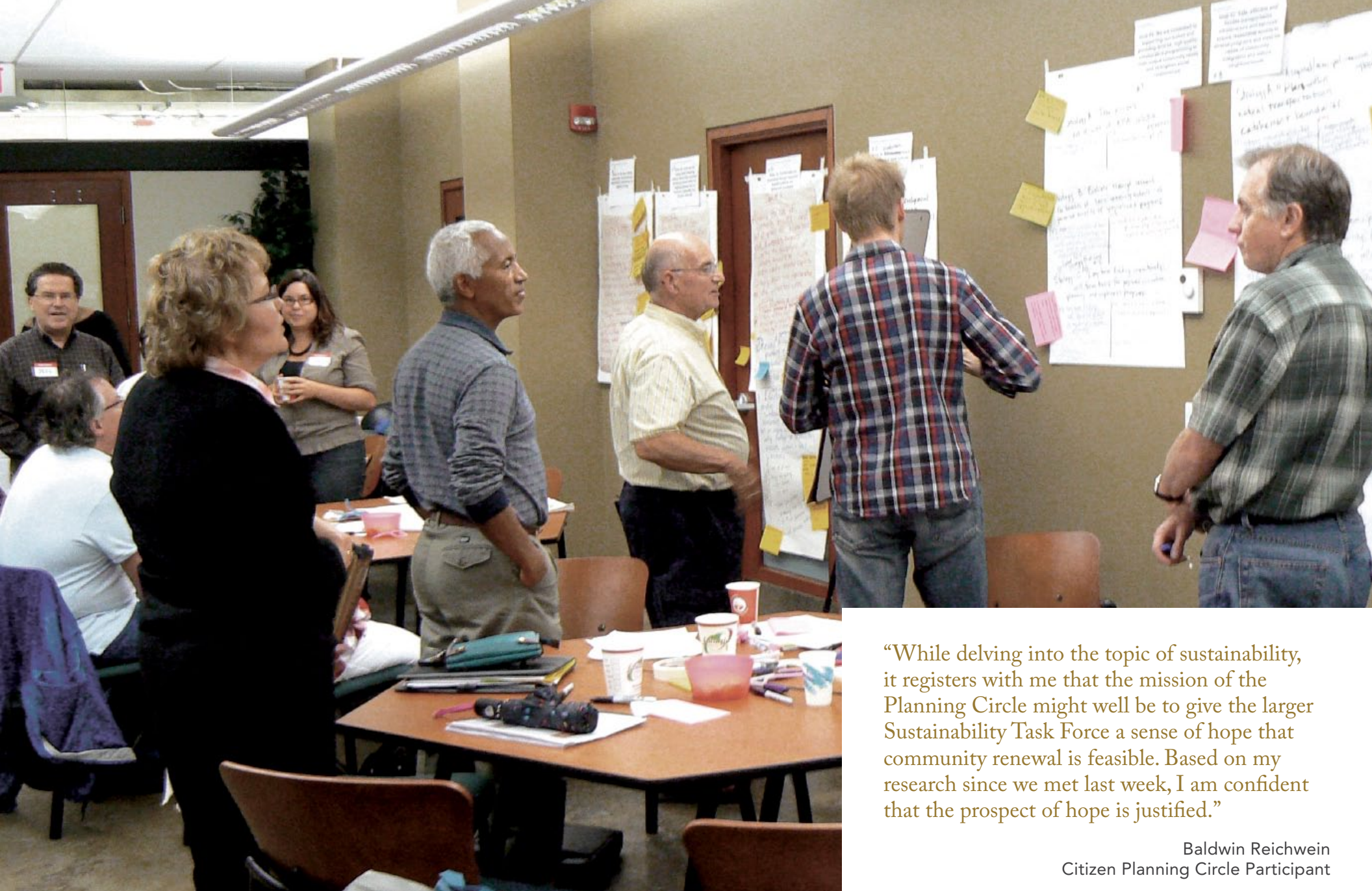
Considerations

- Findings from research could disrupt the hypothesis that specialized schools are superior to community generalists with diverse programming and vice versa

“I have spoken to a number of people about their ideas for a desired future of mature neighborhoods. All seemed to have very similar ideas such as, mature neighborhoods will have ‘a sense of community’ with community green spaces, activities and opportunities for people to ‘connect’; schools are a part of the neighborhood, perhaps serving a ‘multipurpose’ function; mature neighborhoods will be safe places for families and mature neighborhoods will have a mix of ages and stages of life”

Cheryl Miller
Citizen Planning Circle Participant





“While delving into the topic of sustainability, it registers with me that the mission of the Planning Circle might well be to give the larger Sustainability Task Force a sense of hope that community renewal is feasible. Based on my research since we met last week, I am confident that the prospect of hope is justified.”

Baldwin Reichwein
Citizen Planning Circle Participant



MATURE NEIGHBOURHOOD SUSTAINABILITY

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

VISION

Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods are vibrant, sustainable, environmentally responsible communities.

ISSUES

The physical infrastructure of a neighbourhood is intricately linked with the social experience of a community and consideration of this relationship played a key role in the discussion of issues in this area.

Despite a propensity for varied communities throughout Edmonton to lay claim to the term 'mature neighbourhood', participants articulated an understanding that the City's foundational communities face unique challenges regarding sustained **investment in infrastructure** and its corresponding impact on the liveability of their neighbourhoods: vacant lots, contaminated sites, dilapidated buildings, and excessive space dedicated to unsightly parking lots negatively impact the vibrancy

of their communities in ways that are not experienced beyond the Mature Neighbourhood Overlay.

A critical component of this unique experience is the perceived – and often legitimate – concern for **public safety**, as criminal activity can be more prevalent in these neighbourhoods, and is compounded by a dearth of **services** required to render the area liveable for the diverse population it supports.

A historic lack of **collaboration** between decision-makers and community members has been prohibitive to the creation of a joint long-term plan for these neighbourhoods that would address their needs to attract young families, allow the elderly to age in place, and confront the

unique challenges faced by low-income individuals and diverse cultural and ethnic groups.

Deficits in the physical and social infrastructure of Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods have had a **polarizing** effect within and between communities, negatively impacting their potential for connectedness, sustainability and vibrancy.

Participants recognized too that the aging physical footprint of their neighbourhoods was developed with little regard for **environmental sustainability**, and any plan to revitalize them would not only need to incorporate concern for the environment in future development, but overcome and correct the legacy of the existing infrastructure.

Recommendation I.1

The creation of healthy, attractive and environmentally responsible communities.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Lack of long term planning and vision
- Economic challenges: expense of living and building in mature neighbourhoods

Strategy I.1-A:

Support environmentally responsible development that contributes to a healthy community.

Arguments and Actions:

- Become a leader in environmental-impact reduction and set standard for other municipalities
- Improve quality of life and health of community members
- Promote positive community profile
- Clean up and repurpose contaminated sites; remove blights that detract from the appeal of the area
- Supporting energy efficient housing and infrastructure
- Provide incentives for parks and green space
- Introduce opportunities and incentives for innovative, environmentally sustainable technology
- Capitalize on economic benefits of energy efficiency and environmental sustainability

Considerations

- Short-term thinking may constrain possibilities for the long-term investment required
- Substantial cost associated and the City has limited resources
- Potential legal issues and restrictions

Strategy I.1-B:

Develop a comprehensive public awareness and promotions campaign to capitalize on the strengths of mature neighbourhoods and promote the benefits of vibrant and liveable communities.

Arguments and Actions:

- Support and promote local heritage as an attractor and community building agent
- Encourage mature neighbourhoods to undertake and support projects pertaining to vibrancy, walkability, density and public transit
- Engage and inform public about community innovations
- Develop and promote best community practices throughout the city
- Encourage in-migration and work to overcome negative perceptions regarding mature neighbourhoods

Considerations

- Costs and resources required to implement strategy include labour, advertising and web-site development

Recommendation 1.2:

Land use and transportation planning that reflects democratic processes and contributes to communities that are inclusive, cohesive, accessible and safe.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Lack of long term planning and vision
- Challenges related to climate and perception of Edmonton as a 'car' city
- Tendency to give priority to property owners without adequate responsibility
- Bylaws and boundaries are not conducive to curbing urban sprawl or encouraging increased density and 'smart' development
- Zoning that favours parking for cars over rooms for people

Strategy I.2-A:

Complete regular reviews of Area Redevelopment Plans (ARPs) and land-use zoning bylaws to ensure they continue to meet the needs of the community.

Arguments and Actions:

- Ensure that decision-makers maintain current understanding of challenges and opportunities
- Engage residents in public planning process

Considerations

- Increased bureaucracy
- Draws on funding and resources

Strategy I.2-B:

Implement proactive bylaw enforcement mechanisms that encourage good corporate citizens and developers.

Arguments and Actions:

- Promote quality development that considers and responds to the needs and desires of the community
- Change permit restrictions to take the needs, desires and considerations of unique neighbourhoods into account
- Establish and enforce standards for excellence in development projects
- Compel developers to contribute financially to the development of parks, schools and recreational facilities in new neighbourhoods
- Increase financial penalties for violating permit restrictions

Considerations

- Political and economic costs
- May handicap small contractors in competition with large developers

Strategy I.2-C:

Reduce the wasted space that creates unsightly conditions.

Arguments and Actions:

- Enforce the productive development of vacant sites
- Decrease space allocation for surface parking lots
- Encourage mixed residential and commercial development

Considerations

- Political and economic costs
- Owner reluctance to cooperate and/or 'off-shore' ownership
- Fewer parking spaces

Strategy I.2-D:

Encourage retail clusters, recreation and fitness centres, and arts and culture facilities within walkable distances.

Arguments and Actions:

- Contribute to the economic benefits of neighbourhood
- Facilitate community-building by providing social settings that bring residents together

Considerations

- Many risks involved with multi-use buildings, including potential for non-compatible uses

Strategy S.2-E:

Encourage mixed zoning to promote higher density throughout the City.

Arguments and Actions:

- Support high density housing options near transit hubs
- Revitalize communities

Considerations

- Infrastructure requirements will require public funding



Recommendation 1.3:

Integrate mature neighbourhoods more fully into the broader community by providing a safe, efficient and flexible transportation infrastructure.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Capital and Funding
- Inefficient structure, planning and use of existing transit system
- ‘Car culture’ and its impact on congestion, parking and perception of public transit
- Limited coverage by yellow buses
- Bike theft

Strategy I.3-A:

Delegate authority for sustainable transportation development to a regional body that cooperates with local neighbourhoods to capitalize on naturalized routes and catchment areas.

Arguments and Actions:

- Facilitate access to services and improve liveability through the provision of transit that integrates mature neighbourhoods more fully into the broader community
- Improve liveability by facilitating reasonable access to diverse services and programs

Strategy I.3-B:

Edmonton Transit System, in conjunction with other municipal transit organizations, assumes responsibility for school transit, consolidating Yellow Bus use with general public transit needs.

Arguments and Actions:

- Municipality gains greater ability to manage peak demand in pressure points of transit system

Considerations

- Infringes upon current business practice of private school bus operators

“Transportation design shall provide people with choice, flexibility and good connections for access to services, shopping, school and work. Alternate design for residents rather than cars is also an asset. Local business and infrastructures should design to serve local communities and development. Residences are easy to walk to or have easy access to the services provided.”

Henry Fung
Citizen Planning Circle Participant

Recommendation 1.4:

Empower communities through resources, support systems, and democratic processes that encourage, respect and validate citizen input.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Requires clarification of 'democratic process'
- Lack of decision-making authority and power at lower levels of governance
- Ensuring balanced input that is representative of the population may prove difficult
- Previous experience with process discourages citizen involvement

Strategy I.4-A:

Evaluate the role and structure of community leagues and consider options for increasing their responsibility and representation.

Arguments and Actions:

- Support community leagues to become more diverse and representative of their unique constituencies
- Develop leadership capacity
- Provide adequate resources and implement procedures to ensure accountability
- Encourage small, adjoining community leagues to amalgamate in order to improve governance and strengthen programs
- Capitalize on community leagues as an established space for building community and entry point for citizen engagement

Considerations

- Augmented role and responsibility may be perceived as a threat to City Council and administration
- Resistance from community leagues perceiving strategy as an increased workload

Strategy I.4-B:

Conduct regular external reviews of City governance and operations, including decision-making process.

Arguments and Actions:

- Adhering to external standards (e.g. International Standards Organization) contributes to broad-based recognition of City endeavours to achieve excellence
- Increase efficiency and effectiveness of tax revenue usage
- Increase standards and accountability
- Improve citizen satisfaction with governance processes

Considerations

- Contributes to bureaucracy and discourages a simpler process
- Increases stress
- Time consuming

Strategy I.4-C:

Institute regular information and education sessions for multilevel stakeholders, including citizens and decision-makers.

Arguments and Actions:

- Ensure current understanding of community realities, democratic processes, options for action and best practices
- Provide decision-makers with current information on complex realities facing diverse neighbourhoods throughout the city
- Engage a broad cross-section of decision-makers, including City Councillors, Sub-Division Development Appeal Board and Development officers
- Enhance potential for citizen engagement by improving understanding of government processes
- Improve results of planning by increasing awareness and instituting a better decision-making process

Considerations

- Cost of programming within budgetary constraints
- Limited availability of staff
- Encouraging enrolment



Recommendation 1.5:

Promote diverse communities with a healthy combination of ages, cultures and incomes.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Negative perception of people living in some mature neighbourhoods
- Perception of aboriginal and immigrant populations as problematic
- Inequitable distribution of resources and representation between communities
- Over-concentration of social services in certain neighbourhoods
- Economic incentives and demographic trends favour living and building in the suburbs

Strategy I.5-A:

Change and enforce improved development standards and regulations to require minimum mixed-use housing for low income and family-sized units.

Arguments and Actions:

- Promote healthier communities and prevent polarization across the city
- Attract more families to mature neighbourhoods to reduce schools closures
- Attain environmental benefits via a reduction in materials usage
- Increase cost efficiency

Considerations

- Resistance from powerful stakeholders in the local development industry; e.g. Edmonton Chapter of the Canadian Homebuilders' Association
- The City of Edmonton would need to lobby the Province of Alberta to revise the Municipal Government Act

Strategy I.5-B:

Provide a variety of incentives - including financial - to encourage the relocation of young families to mature neighbourhoods.

Arguments and Actions:

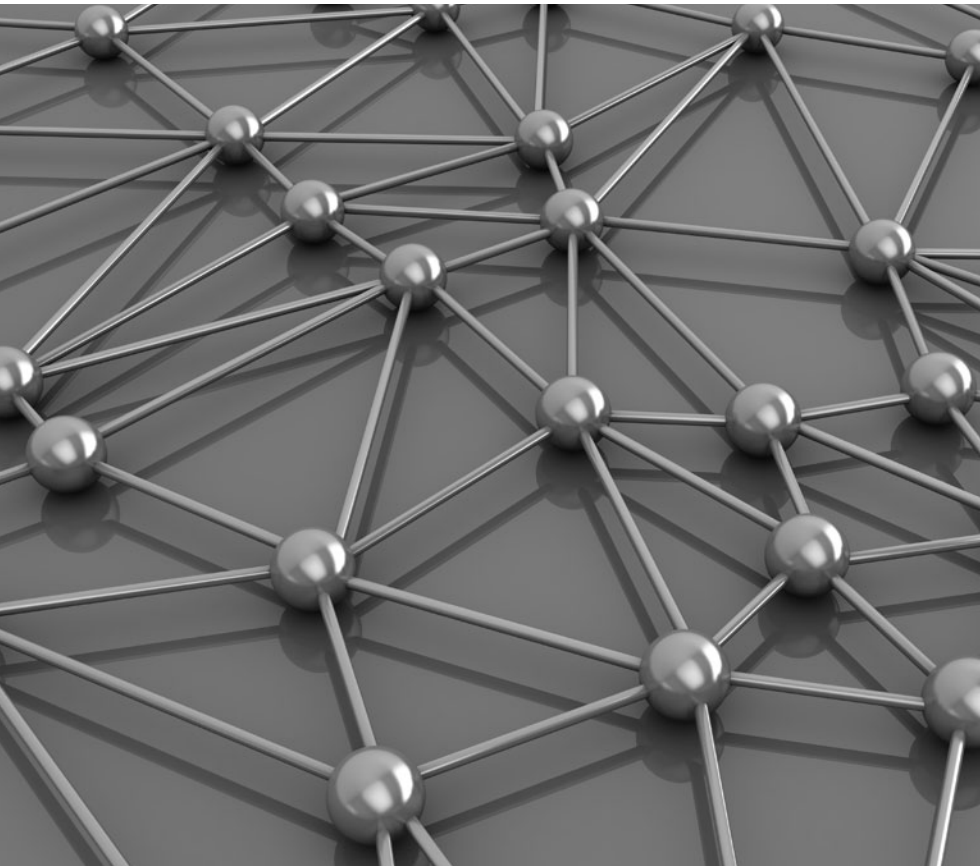
- Plan for the long-term succession and sustainability of mature neighbourhoods
- Address the problem of school closures - a critical issue for mature neighbourhoods

Considerations

- Perception and potential costs involved
- Potential pushback regarding perceived favouritism and a desire for equity across communities.

Recommendation 1.6:

Collaboration is commonplace among various levels of government, departments, stakeholders and citizens.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Jurisdictional issues, including historic ‘silos’ between municipal and provincial governments
- Difficulty bridging diverse stakeholder interests, philosophies, values and structures
- Lack of communication between city departments and between the City of Edmonton and other levels of government
- Need to balance conflicting interests, e.g. developers versus communities

Strategy I.5-A:

Mandate collaboration and consultation across all levels of government and between government departments.

Arguments and Actions:

- Improve communication to enhance results at all levels
- Coordinate resource allocation and use to increase long-term cost effectiveness

Considerations

- Delays to decision-making process
- Competing interests may stagnate the process or lead to in-fighting
- Strong facilitation required to manage bureaucratic obstacles and divergent philosophies and values





LOCAL BUSINESS IN MATURE NEIGHBOURHOODS

VISION

Viable, vibrant and diverse businesses that support, encourage and strengthen neighbourhoods and communities.

ISSUES

Because the challenges facing local business in mature neighbourhoods are deeply connected to the **global market**, they can be particularly difficult to counter: to be successful, small business ventures must be competitive with big business, and for Edmonton's mature neighbourhoods, this means competing with the **box stores** that congregate on the outskirts of the city, where developments are able to plan for them.

Consumer behaviour, including a tendency to research purchases online and a **perception** that it is more expensive to shop locally, favours large retail chains over the independent businesses that are unable to maintain a strong web presence and provide the same consistency in product quality, pricing and reliability.

Forced to compete beyond the borders of their communities, small businesses in mature neighbourhoods are further hindered by the inherent restrictions of those communities, and often struggle with **infrastructure** and **accessibility**: a lack of incentives for upgrading means that the buildings housing local businesses often fall into disrepair, and restricted access - like parking availability and requirements - negatively impacts consumer traffic.

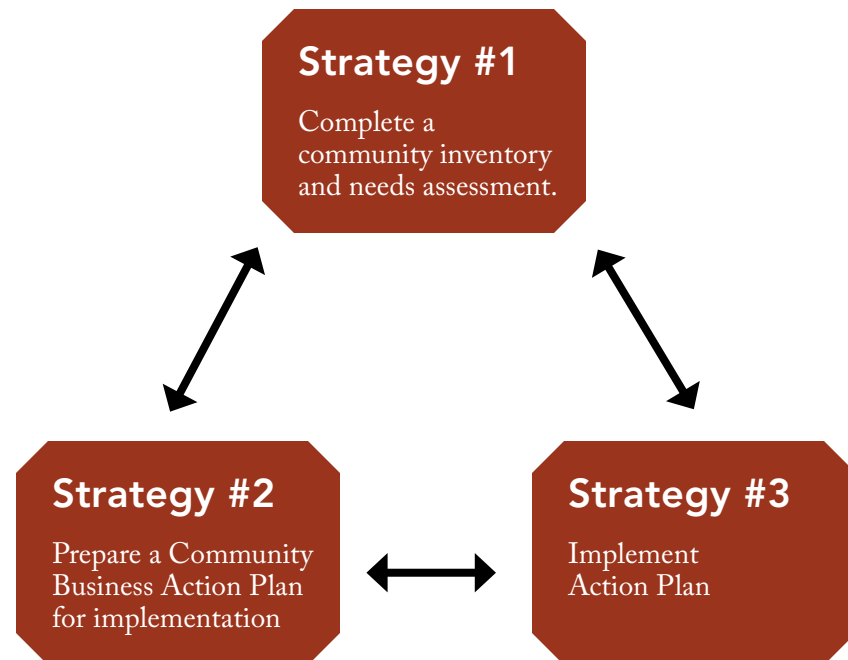
Because Edmonton is a winter city, accessibility is central to local business vitality, and must be central to any research, planning and action related to the issue of business in mature neighbourhoods.

And beyond seeking benefits to business, an action plan in this area must overcome disengaged business interests and support companies - big or small - that contribute to the community and improve its health and well-being, providing needed services in a way that is **environmentally responsible**.

Finally, it is important to consider that while the issues related to local business and community vitality are largely inter-related, they are necessarily very context specific: each neighbourhood will have different needs, assets and desires. Any attempt to address these issues will require a strong understanding of the area, an ability to draw upon all stakeholders, and identify areas of action for all actors.

Recommendation B.1:

Create a comprehensive strategy for revitalizing business that uses research, planning and action to ensure that responsibility for success is shared between stakeholders and all actors remain accountable to the community.



BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Unsupportive and/or disengaged business interest
- Existing laws, bylaws and requirements, e.g. regarding parking
- Big box store mentality
- Cheap energy facilitates travelling outside of community to shop
- Lack of support for innovation and risk involved when developing independent business – including government, banks, venture capital

Strategy B.1-A:

Complete a community inventory and business needs assessment that evaluates the needs and assets of a community.

Arguments and Actions:

- Draw upon the resources of community leagues and local business associations to identify community leaders, consider local power structures and examine environmental conditions
- Highlight the role of all sectors of society in improving business vitality and provide an opportunity for multiple voices to be heard
- Refine the issues by seeking out the right questions
- Draw upon the resources of community leagues and local business associations, like the Business Revitalization Zones
- Use the process to build community solidarity and increase awareness of existing services and programs

Considerations

- Potential for process to be co-opted by negative controlling interests
- Potential for special interest groups to overshadow minority views
- May highlight internal community conflicts
- Cost and lack of government support
- Needs assessments are useful tools but do not create the conditions for local business to thrive

Strategy B.1-B:

Develop a Community Business Action Plan that brings together action-oriented members from communities, business and government to create a plan for improving the business area.

Arguments and Actions:

- Develop a plan that fosters innovation in local business development and encourages collaborative business development between neighbourhoods
- Reflect the needs and assets of individual neighbourhoods
- Provide a strong mechanism for community input
- Delegate responsibility for success to a range of actors beyond business itself
- Organize services and initiatives to avoid repetition and maximize resource use
- Chart a collective vision for moving forward
- Foster and support innovation while minimizing risks

Considerations

- Developing the plan could be an expensive and time consuming process
- Difficulty getting buy-in from community and support from “big box” stores

Strategy B.1-C:

Develop an implementation strategy for the Community Business Action Plan that draws upon the wealth of opportunities best suited to the community.

Arguments and Actions:

- Support social enterprise and essential services, and provide preferential status for residential consumer services
- Promote mixed-use infrastructure, and apply world-wide best-practices to the Edmonton context
- Develop mechanisms to better connect multi-nationals with local needs, e.g. encourage mini-version of big box stores locally
- Provide financial incentives and tax concessions for small, local business
- Create a consumer portal to link consumers with businesses via an online Neighbourhood Skills and Business Directory
- Remove restrictive covenants preventing redevelopment of vacant sites
- Raise consumer awareness of the benefits of shopping locally vs. cost of leaving the community
- Limit franchises and reduce risk to small business through incubators and planning and zoning supports
- Invest in urban farming to support local economic development
- Provide incentives to renovate buildings

- Increase the role of the Municipal Development Authority in recruitment and retention of business
- Improve transit links to local business
- Advocate for increased population density
- Control the range of businesses and types of businesses
- Use pointed action to move neighbourhoods closer to desired results and revitalizes business

Considerations

- Inability to please all people all of the time
- Costs may outweigh benefits
- Actual improvements may not meet expectations set during planning
- Time required to realize change may lead to loss of interest
- Ultimately, any change will depend on the actions of the consumer and the entrepreneur – pointed efforts will be required to meet their concerns

Acknowledgements

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“Community life is not static. Edmonton communities established prior to 1970 might be considered mature, but we cannot paint them all with the same brush. Although community sustainability is gaining attention, it warrants recognition that renewal in a number of mature communities is taking place driven by sundry social and economic factors. Where this is happening local citizens and groups are actively involved, if not actually driving the process. There are good news stories to be told about renewal. It is happening and we can learn from it.”

Baldwin Reichwein
Citizen Planning Circle Participant

