



# Stakeholder Consultation Findings

City of Edmonton  
*"The Way We Prosper"*  
An Economic Development Plan

April 2012





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## **THE WAY WE PROSPER**

### **Leadership Interview Program Report**

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For:  
The Way We Prosper Project Management Team

March 2012



W e s t e r n   M a n a g e m e n t   C o n s u l t a n t s

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The report summarizes results from the personal and small group interview tasks conducted for *The Way We Prosper*, Edmonton's economic development plan.

### 1.1 Background

In November 2011, Millier Dickenson Blais was retained by the City of Edmonton as the lead consulting firm for the preparation of Edmonton's economic development plan, *The Way We Prosper*. Western Management Consultants (WMC), as a member of the consulting team, was responsible for the engagement of community leaders through personal interviews of selected community leaders.

### 1.2 Approach

Reporting to the Project Management Team (PMT) through an interview scheduling matrix on a daily basis, WMC with advice from PMT developed a list of about 275 leaders in the community, organized by sector. Most of these targeted contacts were approached through the following process:

- A letter from the Mayor was sent out in advance to those interview targets who were also being invited to sit on the Business Advisory Council for the project;
- For all other targets, a letter from WMC introducing the project and the request for an interview was emailed to the potential respondent. This letter indicated that a person from WMC would phone them in the near future;
- WMC professionals phoned the potential respondent and arranged for a personal or telephone interview, which was then booked in advance and recorded on the matrix;
- A summary of the questions for discussion with the respondent were then emailed along with a confirmation of the time and place for the interview;
- One of three WMC senior professionals then conducted the interview with the respondent;



- Once completed, the WMC professional prepared a summary of the interview notes which were coded to ensure confidentiality; and
- Completed interview responses were coded with keywords, organized in matrix format, and were then summarized by the WMC lead consultant as content for this report.

### **1.3 Overall Results of the Interview Program**

The personal and telephone interview program with senior leaders in the community was highly successful. Community leaders were very enthusiastic about providing their time and insights, and the acceptance rate for interviews was very high with only a handful of respondents refusing to be interviewed.

WMC professionals conducted 118 personal and telephone interviews on an original target of 100 completions, so again this result was highly successful. In addition, WMC was invited to meet with two groups which together represented an additional 30 respondents, although these sessions were recorded as a single respondent in the notes. By the time of completion, WMC had connected with some 150 senior community leaders through this process. Millier Dickinson Blais completed a further 43 senior interviews, including interviews with economists, economic development officers, members of public sector development agencies and Mayor and Council.

A final question asked during the interview process was “Can you suggest other leaders who we should interview?” The result of this question was the identification of an additional 207 community leaders. These people were contacted by PMT and invited to participate in the online interview process, in one or more of the subsequent focus groups conducted by MDB, or they were included as personal interviews in the WMC consultation process.

Respondents were uniformly enthusiastic about the process and were highly encouraging of Mayor and Council to begin immediately to act on the results.

Appendix I contains a copy of the interview guide.



## 1.4 Overall themes

This section summarizes themes that cut across all respondents during the interview program.

### 1.4.1 Strengths

#### *Culture and Character*

Edmontonians are highly educated, employed, highly competent people who work together to get things done. We are quiet and unassuming, but highly accomplished. Our blue collar image has been expressed as “a white collar city lined with blue”, referring to our highly skilled labour force working in highly technical fields. Our key characteristic may be described as “quiet competency”.

We are entrepreneurial, having thousands of owner-operated small businesses that were started to respond to demands or opportunities locally, nationally and in some cases globally. We are a family-oriented city, and one of the greatest cities for K-12 education, advanced education, outdoor and indoor recreation, volunteerism, and community service.

We are diverse, egalitarian, and we are a city of newcomers. We are open and a meritocracy relative to other cities. We welcome all who are willing to work towards a better future.

#### *Quality of Life*

Edmonton’s key strength lies in the overall quality of life available here, with a focus on family life. Edmonton is the fifth largest city in Canada, and among those five large cities it has the lowest unemployment, the lowest cost housing, lower business startup and operating costs, and reasonable driving times to work and for recreation. It is also one of the safest cities in North America by most indicators.

Our recreation amenities are first class. We have unique financial arrangements that have stimulated, for example, the major indoor soccer complexes that simply do not exist at the same scale in other cities. Our festivals, many of which are best in class,





are almost continuous through the summer months. Our river valley, the envy of many other cities, is one of the largest urban parklands in North America.

We are one of the largest northern cities in the world. We have adapted to winter conditions and we thrive in winter. We have adapted or invented technologies for winter climates and we export them worldwide. Winter is part of our high quality of life, and we thrive in it.

Our strengths in education, research, applications research and development are a credit to our great centres of learning. These centres are a credit to a city of our size and a high potential economic generator for our region.

### *Economic Security*

In a world of economic uncertainty, Edmonton and Alberta's north is an island of security for the coming two decades. While geopolitics could impact the rate of growth, increasing demand for oil and value-added products from oil will drive the continued development of the oil sands of Alberta. This provides assured employment for skilled workers, and a future for our children. It also spins off entrepreneurial opportunities that stimulate business and export growth. Few other cities in North America are in such a preferred position.

### *Leadership*

Edmonton stagnated for many years due at different times to Municipal policy and to Provincial policy. The Mayor and Council are now leading us, and they have made both good progress and some excellent decisions. There is momentum and a desire to move forward – the Downtown, River Valley, Rosedale, airport lands, Royal Alberta Museum, Art Gallery, Arena and LRT were cited as momentum decisions.

## **1.4.2 Challenges**

### *Workforce*

We will not reach our potential in the next two decades unless we can attract highly qualified, trained and skilled workers. We cannot meet demand from internal



growth or training... we do not have the capacity. We must foster immigration and we must maximize the potential from our underutilized populations (e.g., Aboriginal).

High demand for labour increases the price of labour. High labour costs will limit the opportunities to grow other, emerging sectors of the Edmonton economy.

Labour competition is global. Other countries are targeting our skilled labour force in Alberta. Germany and Australia are examples globally, and Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia are both targeting their "ex pats" now living in Alberta to return "home".

### *Brand/Image*

While Edmonton is a great city, it is virtually unknown internationally, including throughout most of the USA. It is known in Canada, but the image of Edmonton is of a cold, industrial, blue collar city located far from mountains, lakes or other outdoor recreation amenities. This image is repeated in the media, and it makes Edmonton one of the least desirable major cities for people to "transfer" to in major companies.

The recent environmental campaigns against oil sands ("tar sands") developments, pipeline issues in the US, and the carbon footprint issues carried by the popular media have exacerbated this image issue. We have failed to respond adequately to this threat. Globally the organizations damaging us simply want our economy shut down, and they are invested in other energy solutions.

"Gateway to the North" is not a desirable image.... It says we are a minor stop along the way to where you are going. "Blue collar", "hardy winter people", "best medium-sized city" are also not good images. "Festival city" is local, not a Brand image.

In short, respondents do not know exactly what our Brand should be, and Brand needs to resonate internally if it is to sell externally. We need to work on this as a city.

In a Capital city, you need the Province on board to create/implement a significant image change.



### *Capitalizing on Core Sector Strengths and Value-Added Opportunities*

In Edmonton, we have not capitalized as we could on the value-added opportunities from our oil and gas core strength. We accept shipping our oil to USA instead of upgrading in our region, as one example. There are potentially hundreds of value-added products from oil and gas that would create growth in Edmonton and area.

A second aspect of this value-added capture would be capturing innovative technologies, developed locally to solve oil and gas issues, but then applied to other sectors and issues to create company growth and success. We have not done as well as we could do in this area.

Instead of shipping our unrefined product to Texas, we could capture the value-added here. Instead of commercializing innovation from oil and gas in Boston, we could incent value-added innovation here in Edmonton and create export businesses in our city.

### *Focus on Innovation and our Next Economy*

While we enjoy the boom in our oil economy, we have insufficient focus on the next economy that could keep Edmonton prosperous. A high percentage of our present economy is invested in construction, which makes us vulnerable to economic cycles.

Alberta's (and Edmonton's) very large technology/innovation is mostly small businesses that are not highly visible. Focusing on small and emerging technology business, focusing on capacity to create applications from research and innovation for those businesses, and focusing on helping them become global exporters would be a strong investment in our next economy.

We do not capitalize adequately on the new product innovation that could come from the oil and gas "mothership". If we could mobilize big oil "motherships" to help create innovation, and if we worked to apply that innovation to other sectors, we would grow our own new export-focused economy. This is "value-added" development from oil and gas, but it is more than that... it is innovation from oil and gas adapted to solve issues in other sectors. The resident capacity to innovate, create



products and applications, commercialize, and market small business is key to the next economy success. We are not focused well in this way at the moment.

### *Economic Development/Marketing Integration and Focus*

The challenge of our region is the integration of more than 20 independent municipalities around Strategic Priorities, Objectives and Tactics that will spell success for the whole region. While the situation has improved in the past few years, we spend a lot of our energy on trying to work together instead of a focus on selling and building. Our disaggregated approach places us at a disadvantage against other regions.

### *Organization for Delivery*

While respondents were informed that this assignment was not an organization review, many commented unprompted on organizations involved in economic development.

Many indicated that Edmonton Economic Development Corporation was less focused than they should be on some key functions: collection and dissemination of relevant business and economic knowledge; addressing fundamentals of business retention and attraction; assessing and positioning relevant economic clusters; focusing on local small business success and growth (95% of our business is small business); focusing on innovation and value-added development and attraction; focusing too much marketing messaging on family/quality of life as opposed to business fundamentals. Many thought EEDC was not well aligned with the City in its focus.

Sustainable Development was also singled out by many as an organization that inhibits rather than fosters good development. Suggestions that the approach of Sustainable Development was not visionary or creative, not supportive of innovation, slow and focused on regulation and poorly integrated with other departments were common.

Response to TEC Edmonton was more supportive by those who know this organization. However, TEC Edmonton, Flightpath, and Startup Edmonton were relatively unknown by these respondents.



### *Commercialization and Financing Innovation*

We are considered weak in the application of venture capital to small business opportunities, and particularly innovative small business. Some say all corporate vencap funders are in Calgary or elsewhere. Others say that money is available but in Edmonton, we do not have the ability to create the marketable products from the ideas and to take those products to market.

Most respondents recognize TEC Edmonton, Startup Edmonton and Flight Path as desirable innovations, and some indicated that Alberta Innovates and Productivity Alberta represent the Province moving in the right direction. However, focus and urgency is required. The time to market of these agencies is too slow.

There are models to look at such as the New Zealand Venture Investment Fund.

### **1.4.3 Opportunities**

#### *Capital City Centre: Edmonton's Downtown*

Build out the plans for Edmonton Downtown, including the major attractions such as RAM and the Arena. Incent housing development near the downtown. Create a walkable, safe, secure retail area with facades, sidewalk cafes and amenities that appeal to locals and visitors alike.



### *Edmonton's River Valley*

Develop the river valley as destination for locals and visitors alike, providing amenities for all types of people. Include cafes, rental places, food venue, and other amenities that the public desires.

### *Build on Education/Business Strengths*

Enhance ties between the University, research organizations, and businesses. Assess the Australian model of tying outcomes to collaboration between entities.

### *Authentic, Resilient Brand*

We can brand Edmonton authentically and effectively, focusing on themes of:

- Great place for small business to grow to large export business;
- Great place for CleanTech;
- Great Education Centre – U of A, NAIT, GM, Health, NanoTech, Engineering, etc.;
- Great Research/Business;
- Great place to raise a family – affordable etc.;
- Great place for cultural activities, recreation, festivals, etc.; and
- One of the greatest of circumpolar cities.

These overarching views are given more granular treatment in the sections that follow, based on the leadership interview base of about 150 respondents.



## 2.0 CURRENT SELLING FEATURES OF EDMONTON

Respondents commented on the following question: “What is the **ONE THING** you would say to a business owner (individual, Board) to convince them to consider Edmonton as a business location?”

Of the hundreds of positive comments, the following were most prominent:

- One of the best Quality of Life cities for families that one could find; safe, secure, welcoming, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural yet with no major class boundaries;
- A city with pretty much assured decades of growth ahead, acting as the service hub to an expansive, growing Northern region with billions of dollars in planned investment.
- Where oil and gas wealth, investment and growth drive the economy;
- A small town culture and convenience with big city amenities;
- An affordable community, where business and overall household costs are lower than major cities in Canada; a natural tolerance for business innovation;
- A community of highly educated, skilled and well paid workers with a great work ethic;
- An open, welcoming, supportive and entrepreneurial business environment where a new business can develop local relationships, grow and prosper; a City that supports entrepreneurial growth; a city of small business and entrepreneurial culture;
- A collaborative environment where people value cooperation;
- Great educational genes - from University to NAIT to our fine public school system; fosters innovation and growth;
- A City of recreation, with great indoor facilities and year round outdoor activities in a community with one of the largest (river valley) park systems in North America;



- A strong safety net and health care system;
- A passionate Mayor and Council focused on sustainable growth;
- A diverse community of arts, culture, multiculturalism, inclusiveness where you will be welcome/embraced at the neighbourhood level or at the city level;
- A central hub of transportation, for materials distribution;

### **3.0 VISION FOR EDMONTON AND AREA**

Respondents commented on their VISION for Edmonton and Area, and what we are known for in five or ten years.

#### **3.1 A Global City Of Energy**

Respondents felt that Edmonton is in the enviable position of facing ten to 20 years of steady economic growth due to its fortuitous location near the oil sands.

Extracting maximum benefit from this good fortune should be a focus in our future:

- Edmonton continues its strong leadership in oil and gas exploration, value-added development in our region.
- The oil sands remain the driver of the economy, and Edmonton is its high tech service centre, its manufacturer, its research partner, its environmental partner, and its main supply centre.
- Innovation in oil and gas is facilitated by closer relationships between Universities, NAIT, technology transfer organizations and the large oil and gas companies operating in northern Alberta.
- Key Issues are identified by government and companies; research and engineering research and development addresses these issues, and innovative solutions are migrated to other sectors by entrepreneurs in Edmonton and area.
- We work to resolve our “dirty oil” image; we embrace technology innovation to solve key issues; then we export that innovation globally.





- Edmonton is a centre for new energy exploration, development and operations, including solar, wind, biomass and other innovative energy subsectors.
- Our energy solutions are shared globally, and researchers and business interests come to Edmonton for solutions in science and in product development.
- We see ourselves as a city of global reputation, socially and culturally vibrant, and we bring in the world to create and enjoy a world-class city.
- Development, refining and production, but with increasing focus on internalizing

### 3.2 A Hub for Cleantech

Edmonton already has a strong Cleantech business complex, based on firms that have responded to development and environmental challenges in our economy. Building on this early stage strength will benefit the region:

- We build on our existing strengths in Cleantech to become a well-known centre of excellence for research and commercialization in a wide range of Cleantech sectors.
- We collaborate with each other to develop creative solutions across Cleantech sectors.
- Thriving Cleantech organizations and businesses share data bases, learning and solution development. Cleantech is an ecosystem that is so successful our city becomes recognized and branded around it.
- Nanotech is a core part and common to innovation in all sectors, but its application to Cleantech in our city, using NINT and partners, raises us to a world-class level and recognition.
- Edmonton becomes the world's leading energy/technology centre in 10 years. It is home to companies exporting energy technologies and services globally, and houses some of industry's leading intellectual property.



- We capitalize on our leadership in computer/electronics, paper and clothing recycling, methane generation and use.

### 3.3 Innovation, Growth, Productivity, Prosperity

Our character as a population is to work hard, solve real business problems and more forward. We can enhance this core nature to stimulate growth and prosperity for our region:

- Our key attitude in business and in life is, “We Get It Done”. This is the base for a vibrant, innovative and productive business community that grows and prospers.
- Our key players work together to foster innovation and business development, building on our core strengths.
- Business sees us as “the place to be” for energy innovation; we are seen as a city with a huge cluster of entrepreneurs and SMEs who welcome innovation and business development and success.
- The City ensures necessary business supports are in place, major partnerships (University, NAIT and business) work for business development.
- We work together to improve our productivity, as we are not the low cost centre in North America; our focus is on value added and speed to market.
- We are an economic hub that integrates urban Aboriginal people, women, its immigrant populations, older workers returning to the labour force and other segments into our highly-productive labour force, with a view of prosperity that values “leaving no one behind”.
- We attract and retain a young, educated, skilled (and unskilled) labour force who share the vision of productivity, hard work, growth and prosperity. We create employment for your young graduates and they stay to grow our city.
- We are an inland port, an international airport, a hub and a distribution centre.



- We are known as a confident, growing, forward-thinking city, a leading centre for science and research, health and wellness, higher education, and arts and culture.
- Our broad economic base and the growth-engine based on energy propels us to a lead economic role among cities in Canada.
- We are as much white collar as blue collar; what unites us is our no-nonsense approach to solving problems. Our white collars are lined with blue; executives still get their hands dirty here.
- Our vencap tools and connections ensure that early stage entrepreneurs have access to knowledge and investment that will help them grow in our city.
- We are the financial service centre of the West, a source of large (but quiet) equity pools.

### **3.4 A Diverse, Safe, Family-Friendly, Livable City**

Edmonton has a high quality life, particularly for families. This enduring feature of our economy will be better known in the future:

- Edmonton's high quality of life for families, its affordable and safe urban lifestyle, and its promising economy make it a magnet for in-migration.
- Our remarkable quality of life is known, and it attracts migrants and especially those with families. While we have a high performing economy, it is our management of quality of life that is remarkable. We measure quality of life and we respond to issues.
- Our culture remains humble and almost self-effacing; but we are a culture of transparency, openness, inclusivity, friendliness and respect, with a strong bias toward common sense and action.
- Our Communities are inclusive, engaged, consulted and involved; we have a grass roots approach to involvement, where every citizen counts; we are known for this approach and other cities come to see how we do it.



- We work together, through strong community support systems, to improve older neighborhoods, realize increased density, create adaptive reuse of schools and other public buildings, and foster neighbourhoods where people/families can age in place.
- Our communities are safe, walkable, known for local food and for their diversity.
- We are regionally integrated, sharing services and marketing our Brand collectively.
- We are a sustainable city, managing energy conservation and smart technology for our communities and fostering business opportunities for export of our knowledge.
- A vibrant and diverse cultural hub: our culture and entertainment sector is vibrant, with great diversity in restaurants, clubs, innovative live theatre, music, festivals, art galleries, public art, public radio, performing arts in a multicultural mix that is the envy of other cities.
- Our efficient road system and LRT links key economic nodes in the region, fostering the interactions that support innovation and growth.
- A city of year-round recreation, with a central river valley amenity that is the envy of the world. Recreation facilities are first class.
- We are well known as an excellent host city for international events, and event hosting is a key part of our strategy;

### **3.5 A Vibrant Downtown; a World-Renown River Valley**

We are moving forward on the downtown and the river valley. The next stage of our development will see us realize our dream of world class developments in both of these areas so critical to our enduring quality of life:

- Our downtown plan creates a livable downtown that is a magnet for citizens and visitors; arenas, museums, arts and culture, restaurants and entertainment, access to our river valley, festivals and events ensure that the thousands who live in or near the downtown have a walkable, active community around them.



- Our downtown is alive in the evening, weekdays and weekends.
- Our stable economy allows our downtown development to move forward with quality buildings, lasting architecture, and an end to mediocrity.
- Housing in the downtown area is diverse, creative, architecturally interesting and an example of high quality urban living. Hotels are world class.
- A transportation hub in the downtown connects easily to the Edmonton International Airport, West Edmonton Mall, the Universities and learning centres and to population nodes in the city and the region.
- Alberta's Capital city, our provincial government embraces and supports its role in our downtown, the capital precinct, and the need for government to be an active partner in city building.
- Education institutions, the asset management industry, and head offices of major corporations should be attracted to the downtown.
- Parks and trails throughout the city lead to the river valley. The river valley is a regional amenity and people place that fosters community connectedness.
- Our river valley is testament to our history as a gathering place of peoples, of tolerance and trade and economic growth in this land of opportunity.
- Today our River valley is preserved and cared for as a man-made public asset. It is a transportation corridor, with water taxis and trails and pedestrian friendly transport. It is a recreation corridor and gathering place for recreationists to enjoy the environment of outdoor cafes, rental places and ice cream service and other amenities that enhance the recreation experience for more people.

### **3.6 A City Where Education is a Key Driver the Economy**

Our city excels in the education realm, with a world class university, a national level technical institute and many other recognized higher education institutes.

Leveraging this core asset will help drive our economy in the future.



- We are a smart city, a knowledge economy where we conduct research and innovation and commercialize results through a broad, open partnership of institutions, business, and governments working together.
- We do not have private schools because we are known to have one of the greatest public school systems in the world.
- Northern Alberta Institute of Technology develops on an MIT model to become a renowned centre of technology innovation in Canada.
- University of Alberta continues to build its reputation as one of the top universities in North America.
- Universities and technical institutes become known for their energy-related research and knowledge – including non-traditional energy resources.
- U of A becomes known as a leader in environmental mitigation research and product development; this research is used by the City in its own operations, making Edmonton a leader among cities in environmental development; our NE industrial area is a shining example of application of eco-industrial methods.
- U of A's research role in nanotech, engineering, health sciences, agribusiness, cleantech and other areas helps create Edmonton-based business starts that move toward commercialization.
- We are a recognized leader in health care research and innovation; our University develops new products that are used in our health system; we are early adopters of innovation to improve outcomes and lower costs.

### **3.7 A Proud, High energy, Entrepreneurial City and Region of Confidence**

Our people are proud of our winter-city roots. We work together regionally to present ourselves as a major northern destination. We communicate our regional strengths to the benefit of all.

- We are proud to be a winter city, a northern city, and a place of innovation and productivity.



- We are confident, honest, sure of ourselves and our city.
- **Marketing:** We market our city honestly and openly as a multicultural centre of hard working people who love community, Nature, and values that are small town in origin. We value and support innovation, and we create jobs in SMEs through technology transfer. We are the urban centre of the North, servicing the economic and human needs of the north, supporting it with innovation, technology transfer, research and engineering.
- **Regional Outlook:** We are known for our effective regional coordination, inter-municipal cooperation and commitment to shared regional growth.
- **Tourism:** Our vibrant downtown core, outstanding river valley, reputation for hospitality, our festivals and our quality of life attract tourism interest and visits. We are the centre for “Meetings Simple”, where we make it extremely easy to meet in Edmonton. Our stakeholders work together to service meetings.

### 3.8 Conclusion

Vision is aspirational. This is who we want to be as a people and a city. It is attainable in the eyes of respondents, and in the following sections they identify the challenges and the opportunities that, if addressed specifically will bring us to realize this vision.



## 4.0 CHALLENGES TO ECONOMIC GROWTH IN EDMONTON AND AREA

Respondents were asked “What **THREE THINGS** do you see as the most important **CHALLENGES OR BARRIERS** to economic growth in Edmonton and Area in the coming three to five years?”

Respondents did not limit themselves to three challenges, and the summary of issues may appear daunting. However, in many cases respondents indicated that Edmonton is strong in an area but that we do not recognize it.

### 4.1 Challenge: Our View of Ourselves Can Improve

Many respondents felt that Edmontonians are self-effacing people who demonstrate an inferiority complex externally. There is no reason for this belief, and Edmontonians who experience our great quality of life need to stand up and be proud.

- As a population in Edmonton, we appear to lack self-confidence, talk about ourselves in a self-deprecating manner, and generally project an inferiority complex, a “glass half empty” population.
- This is not who we are – a strong, skilled, hard-working, talented people who are highly satisfied with our city and our overall Quality of Life (QOL).
- We apologize for our weather, yet we are a shining example of a people who have adapted to our environment, enjoy a robust outdoor life, and have grown one of the largest, most modern northern cities on the planet.
- We are a government and a university city, not a reason to apologize but rather to be proud.
- We have not educated people about the region, the city and its benefits compared with other places.
- We are viewed as left-of-centre politically, risk-averse, protectionist, which hurts us in this province.





- Our media (print primarily) is often negative, appearing to act as the self-appointed opposition; this is not healthy and the negativity is not accurate; “For Profit” is sometimes a negative term in our city, and this attitude is carried by the media.
- We do not act as a cohesive community or region, speaking with one voice; too often we work in silos, without communication.

**We should be:**

- Proud of whom we are...strong, talented, confident, positive and satisfied to be in one of the high QOL cities of the world.
- Our media, including our social media should project this attitude;
- Proud of our differences and our strengths; Celebrate Calgary, Celebrate Edmonton and Celebrate our incredible economic corridor in Alberta.

## **4.2 Challenge: Our Image and our Brand Must Be Improved**

Related to our view of ourselves, Edmonton’s image in key marketplaces makes it difficult to attract people, business or investment. While internationally awareness is low or non-existent, there is not a negative image. Within Canada and among Canada’s largest cities the view is more negative. It plays out in corporate transfers, according to respondents, when colleagues wonder what you did wrong to get transferred to Edmonton.

Those who have lived here have a completely different image... one of a safe, bustling, growing city with great amenities, a wonderful community spirit and a “get it done” attitude.

Some key challenges:

- Our negative weather image is that we are a cold, winter city; Media across the nation repeats this message, and our own citizens often mention the cold first;
- Some consider us a northern city which they interpret to be out of mainstream;



- Our image is of an industrial boom and bust city, dependent on extraction and a migrant population;
- Our attachment to the oil sands brings negative imagery outside Canada in the world today;
- We have experienced major business losses in the past few years, underlining key issues;
- Our media is often negative; they have no reason to be so. An academic comparison found Edmonton media was significantly more negative than media in other cities;
- Some say we process our issues very publicly, and this contributes to the negative view of our city;
- Externally the perception is that Edmonton has a low QOL;
- We have our share of racism, gangs, homelessness, mental illness, and recently many more murders than the average year; the publicity around these issues hurts our image;
- We lose some of our most creative and talented youth because they do not see the opportunity in our place; and
- We have declining conference markets due to some of these issues.

Our response to these issues should be to:

- Embrace our place as one of the great northern cities of the world, an authentic, thriving metropolis of one million people who love their environment and are proud of their city;
- Address media negativity directly... challenge negative editorialist with facts and with strong reputation management;
- Proudly market our city: A positive, strong, consistent theme reflecting who we are, a four season northern centre with one of the world's highest QOL;



- Speak directly to issues in our marketing: QOL, winter activities, lots to do, creative hub, confident, proficient, hard-working;
- Celebrate our business and knowledge sector successes;
- Improve the physical appearance of the city:
  - Clean, pristine areas downtown where we can take potential investors;
  - Commitment to quality, long term buildings;
  - Improve our southern entrance to the city; upgrade Calgary trail; and
  - Improve infrastructure; it should be an enabler of development, and can be used to balance boom and bust impacts.

### 4.3 Challenge: Attracting Skilled and Unskilled Workers

The Edmonton area is in the challenging position of anticipating more growth than our existing labour force can manage in the foreseeable future. In fact, we will be short over 100,000 workers by most calculations.

A related challenge occurs in our education system, where the Edmonton area has the lowest post-secondary graduation rate in the country, essentially because jobs are plentiful.

Industry and government have formed task groups to address this challenge.

Related issues identified by respondents are as follow:

- Low graduation rates;
- Lack of affordable labour, as labour rates are bid up by excess demand;
- Aboriginal labour force has not been mobilized effectively to date;
- Productivity and work ethic has declined; worker attitude has declined.
- Edmonton's image works against attracting senior, highly skilled talent. Many examples of families unwilling to transfer to the region were cited;
- Edmonton's image impacts our resident population:



- Difficult to retain young people, especially creative, knowledge workers, IT workers;
- Up and coming young people are leaving;
- Immigration does not fill vacancies:
  - Issues with TFW and PNP programs need to be addressed;
  - Provincial and Federal intervention required; and
  - Supports for immigrant arrivals need to be put in place.

#### **4.4 Challenge: Edmonton's Economy**

Although it may seem counterintuitive, many respondents identified key challenges with our economy:

- Productivity, worker attitudes, labour retention are major issues;
- Dependency on one industry is an issue if we don't diversify during our boom periods;
- If pipelines are not built, oil will decline sooner than anticipated;
- Income disparity is an increasing issue, and social goals are not met;
- Focusing on large business attraction instead of local opportunities and managed sustainable growth means continued boom and bust cycles;
- We are not sufficiently focused on growing our innovative 10 and 20 person firms into major successes;
- We are not collectively focused on the few things that will bring us economic success in the longer run;
- Insufficient focus on value-added, especially in processing; we should create more products from oil rather than shipping raw product out;
- Port Alberta needs some urgency attached to it...private sector driver;



- We should do at least one showcase project each year as a municipality and a region: Arena, LRT, City Centre lands, etc. to underline our movement forward.

Edmonton's economy is viewed as a double-edged sword by respondents. However, most commented that our region is in a position enjoyed by few others, a leader in economic growth in the country for a decade or more to come. Respondents view this as a time of great opportunity, and our responsibility to do the right things now is also great.

#### **4.5 Challenge: Attracting and Developing Business**

The Edmonton region needs to focus more energy on supporting development of our indigenous business, especially SMEs, and on attracting new business.

Observations of respondents:

- We are leaking business opportunities to other cities;
- We lack coordinated incentives to encourage commercialization, supply chain development, service development by indigenous business;
- Tax situation is not attractive to business attraction or growth internally;
- Vencap money tends not to come north; angel money is here in our region but not heavily invested in indigenous business starts;
- Government incentive investment in technology innovation, product innovation, commercialization and entrepreneurship is limited;
- We do not commercialize innovation well, due to significant competition, lack of integration, and perhaps to the various "Way We" programs pulling in different directions;
- We have not addressed intellectual property issues in a way that fosters commercialization of innovation; our strong research sector therefore struggles to commercialize;
- Cost of Business in our region is high:
  - High labour costs, material costs, land cost, construction cost;



- High municipal taxes and fees; disproportionately high business taxes;
- Power costs are unjustifiably high;
- Industrial valuation and tax assessment is high;
- R&D costs are high; and
- Affordable housing is in short supply, so labour costs are high.

Our performance in developing and marketing clusters has not been strong:

- Cleantech is a strength but is disaggregated; and
  - NINT should be spinning off research innovation leading to innovative applications and commercialization; it remains focused on academia, publishing and retaining intellectual property.
- Diversification is not meeting the potential in our region:
- Boom and bust cycles are preventing the knowledge economy from creating diversification;
  - We are not supplying China as we might, with value added products; and
  - We are not using incubators, strategic sectors/clusters, and incentives to capture the economic spinoffs from our growth.
- Education could be a leader in fostering entrepreneurship, innovation and business development, but it fails to do so:
- K-12 level does not appear to be very business friendly;
  - We are not retaining post grads to build new enterprise in our city;
  - We do not have a “culture” of business building (see Stanford);
  - Government, City, University, NAIT are not aligned behind a strategic development plan;
  - We do not focus sufficiently on end user needs in education and training;



- We are losing scientists in favour of MBAs; and
  - We are not commercializing innovation well, and TEC Edmonton has no business people in it who could help.
- Environment: Our image is attached to Dirty Oil, and this limits our ability to attract some business:
- Environmental regulations are not balanced with growth aspirations and requirement.

#### **4.6 Challenge: Fostering Small, Local Business and Innovation**

There was a strong feeling among respondents that we could do more to encourage small business development and growth in the region. Key points:

- Our entrepreneurial pipeline is weak; entrepreneurs are invisible, yet we have more small businesses than major cities in Canada; small business is diverse, reliable, resilient;
- We don't showcase small business that is already here and successful; we are more dismissive than supportive of small business; we don't have good data on small business;
- Local business generates local economic impact, yet City competes for international labels that take profit out of the community; we need to see local SMEs as a solution for us;
- City procurement could support local SME development;
- Edmonton is not seen as business friendly relative to other places; Few small business people are in politics, a message that we are not friendly; Mayor and Council are starting to listen to SMEs and this is the right track;
- Examples of triple bottom line thinking, like Women in Business, should be followed;
- Incubating immigrant businesses should be a focus area; and



- We do not recognize and foster the contribution of the volunteer sector as well as we might.

#### **4.7 Challenge: Financing Business Growth**

While respondents offered a variety of assessments of the exact nature of the issues and how to resolve it, most agreed that Edmonton needs to continue to focus energy on ensuring capital for innovation, startup business, and business growth was available to qualified business in our city.

- Lack of tax breaks, incentives, kick start financing, angel investors and vencap money limits our ability to foster new business growth from within; we need to invest in commercialization;
- Ample private equity exists in the region, but it is not betting significantly on regional initiatives; why not?
- Access to capital is critical; TEC, Flight Path, Startup are good but limited financially;
- Per capita funded government systems put the City at a disadvantage, with only 800,000 of the regions 1.2 million people. More reliance on senior government results;
- Private sector investment is not coming to key projects like the Quarters – why not?
- More direct flights and air access would improve interest of outside investors; but the condition of the air industry will hurt Edmonton more than other stronger hubs if there are cutbacks;
- Lack of City investment to support growth means that industry pays for most infrastructure; this is not the case in other cities; and
- Could develop and use Genuine Progress Indicators (GPIs) to understand what is really happening in our region.





## 4.8 Challenge: Bureaucracy Limits Progress in the City

A strong voice from respondents indicated that our city is not as business supportive or responsive as other cities:

- In past years and decades, City Leadership lost focus; recently Mayor and Council appear to have regained Vision and Strategic Direction; they need to reorient the city administration to this Vision.
- City lawyers, red tape, bureaucracy make it very hard to do business relative to other cities.
- Planning and Development does not exhibit a passion for new, quality development, but is focused on regulation and mediocrity; the approval process is long, arduous and bureaucratic; regulation inhibits development in Edmonton, where it enables development in other centres.
- The City is often an inhibitor, not an enabler; it needs to be a catalyst for new ventures.
- While we talk of limiting sprawl, the reality is that we have approved (ASPs) sprawl out to 2040.
- Culture is change averse; little creativity in embracing NEW things.
- City lacks focus on what is most important in economic development – the Cluster approach of 2001 went nowhere in the City and became a waste of energy.
- Transportation system needs to be linked and integrated to create an efficient and effective system.
- In the Development realm, the following comments were made:
  - Small town thinking is a barrier; airport lands are a big idea that should move forward;
  - Black market construction must be addressed;



- Moving on so many development areas at once will ensure failure of many; need to focus; and
- High focus on sustainability is inhibiting affordable development.

#### **4.9 Challenge: Downtown Development is a Key Issue**

Respondents flagged Edmonton's downtown as a key issue limiting economic growth. They generally supported the recent movement in downtown development and encouraged Council to continue to move in this direction. Key points of issue:

- Our downtown is an embarrassment, lack of vibrancy, sprawled out, downtown dead;
- Downtown is a barrier to attracting new businesses and new residents;
- Disconnect between downtown business and industrial business communities;
- Downtown requires major new attractions (Arena, RAM etc.), new housing, green space, parking, hotel capacity near the convention centre, entertainment, fewer panhandlers, and
- Transit development is a key part of the solution, and must link to other nodes in the city; lack of LRT to WEM remains an issue; and
- The World Trade Centre lobby does not instill a feeling of a world city in any way.

#### **4.10 Challenge: Regional Collaboration Could Improve**

Respondents thought that we could do much better with regional collaboration efforts, noting that we have made positive progress in recent years:

- Lack of regional cooperation and collaboration has caused loss of business to other cities; we need to work together and with the Province to build the capital region;
- A regional Vision is required; Organization and action can follow; do not ignore the CRB Road Map;



- Each area needs to check its individual goals in favour of collective regional goals, plans, and in some cases regulations;
- Lack of common business and land data base limits our ability to act collectively;
- Coordinated regional transit, transportation, linkages to airport are required;
- Coordinated regional awareness and positioning should be an outcome; Sales activities can be competitive between communities;
- A regional economic development organization may be required;
- Work together to improve air access, direct flights as a critical regional priority; and
- Everything is tougher in a region with 24 communities; but the returns from working together once you get it going are immense and worth the effort.

#### **4.11 Challenge: Leadership and Vision**

While Council is showing leadership now, focused, consistent, visionary leadership that we stick to over the long term is required for success:

- A compelling regional Vision is needed; regional collaboration needs to follow;
- City can lead in regional collaboration efforts, but must do so as an equal partner and not a dictator;
- Improved collaboration with the Province is needed to succeed; and
- EEDC, or the regional collaborative economic development organization that succeeds EEDC, needs to be brightest and best of business community.... Movers and shakers, so when visitor comes we show our strength.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

Respondents identified a large number of areas which represent challenges for our City and our Region. These are all challenges that we can act on, improving our outcomes in the future.



## 5.0 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS IN THE EDMONTON REGION

The fifth question asked “What do you consider to be the **THREE GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES** for Edmonton and Area to stimulate economic growth and business investment in the coming 3-5 years?”

Respondents had a great deal to offer to this question. Much of the commentary was the reverse of the “issues” identified earlier.

### 5.1 It is Time to ACT: A City with a Bias to Action

Respondents were confident that the Mayor and Council were aligned, understood key issues and were ready to act. With this belief in mind, they were prepared to support The Way We Prosper and the initiatives that come out of it.

Significant frustration was evident among a number of respondents, who indicated that enough study had been done on many fronts, and it was time to act. The City, they felt, was in a perfect position to act boldly and with confidence, and they encouraged it to move ahead in this way.

### 5.2 Opportunity: Address the Regional Labour Shortage

One of our biggest opportunities is to creatively address the labour shortage issue we face. The returns from resolving that issue will be spectacular growth and prosperity without an unacceptable inflation of labour costs.

- **Immigration:** Work with Province (TFW, PNP), industry, regional organizations (ERIEC, MCN) to optimize immigration and the smooth transition of immigrants into our community and our labour force. Through province, work with Federal Government to target skilled worker immigration to our region. Technical language training, ESL, and support for immigrant families (spousal work visas, day care, housing, etc.), networking. Open doors to skilled immigration from the USA.



- **Urban Aboriginal workers:** Work with area agencies (Wichitowin) to support Aboriginal labour force trade skill development, youth skill development, networking with EEDC and other agencies, job matching, and Aboriginal businesses as suppliers in the value chain. Increase the feeling of enfranchisement, promote networking and understanding, and support Aboriginal business growth.

### 5.3 Opportunity: Build on our Existing Oil & Gas Strengths

Respondents were very clear that the Edmonton region enjoyed its present economic growth and success squarely to the oil and gas sector and particularly to the oil mining industry and the oil sands development in northern Alberta. While view varied, most thought that Edmonton has from one to four decades to enjoy this economic strength.

Respondents thought that we as a region could do a great deal more to ensure that the value added opportunities from oil and gas sector growth would accrue to the region. From value-added downstream activity to supply chain support activity to innovative technologies for mitigation, the region can benefit a great deal from learning what is required and incenting our knowledge centres and businesses communities to respond. Key points:

- Oil sands, oil and gas, and all its economic value-added will remain a main driver of our economy for decades to come. This presents a once in a lifetime opportunity to diversify within the energy sector and to use the oil and gas “mega-demand” from this sector to create Edmonton’s next economy. Work with the many organizations (OSLI, etc.) to focus demand for innovation and business opportunity on Edmonton organizations.
- Help industry build our link to China to diversify our markets;
- Assist industry to coordinate procurement requirements, and assist regional industry to increase their capacity to supply all along the value chain;
- Work with industry to identify value added areas that could be supplied from the Edmonton region; mobilize area service industry to work on solutions;



- Foster technology Innovation in Oil and Gas by working with the University of Alberta, Industry, and area technology firms to ensure entrepreneurial responses to innovation are commercialized rapidly for use in the sector;
- Assist entrepreneurs to apply oil and gas innovations to other sectors as rapidly as possible;
- Work with AIHA to foster further upgrading, refining and value added product development from oil and gas; and
- Attract head offices and major Branch offices in the oil sands services space.

#### **5.4 Opportunity: Beyond Oil and Gas: A Global Energy Centre**

Many respondents felt that the opportunity is here for Edmonton and area to build on its expertise in providing innovation and service in one energy realm to become and expert centre for global energy solutions and applications:

- Beyond oil and gas, use our knowledge and innovation to become a global energy centre, focusing on green energies, energy conservation, and new technologies in energy management.
- Intentionally support innovation in sustainable energy technologies and business startups and growth in emerging energy sectors and supply chains:
  - Cleantech – a broad category, with a large number of small Edmonton businesses working.
  - Greentech – innovation in buildings, processes, transportation and any other areas where the result improves. Be a leader in developing and migrating (to other applications) migrating green technologies from extractive industries.
  - Nanotech – Actively support innovation across all sector by foster commercialization of nanotech innovation and the employment in our region of nanotech scientists educated locally and from around the world. Support NINT and commercialization of its innovations in our region. Foster growth of small to medium companies to provide employment in nanotech applications to innovate in all sectors.



- Watertech – leverage our water technology expertise to support enterprise develop and rapid dissemination of new technologies.
  - Wastetech – leverage our leadership in waste management technologies to create business opportunities for existing and new enterprises.
- Foster innovation in new energy sectors, including biomass, wind, and solar energy.

## **5.5 Opportunity: Leverage Our Knowledge Advantage to Diversify our Economy**

Edmonton is a centre of knowledge in many fields. Our University of Alberta is one of the largest and most renowned universities in Canada and a leader globally in some areas. NAIT is a leader in applications of knowledge. Grant MacEwan University, Concordia, Norquest, Kings College provide advanced education, research, and knowledge development and application. Our public school system is one of the best in the world, and we can attract students from around the world first to study here and ultimately invest in our region.

Edmonton's 11 or more research institutes make it a centre of innovation and knowledge creation.

Edmonton as safe haven economically in turbulent world with a decade of growth anticipated. Its skilled, hardworking, blue/white collar population can move us toward diversification.

In the next period, we will take that knowledge generation capacity and turn our region into one which leverages knowledge and innovation to create business opportunities and growth:

- Become a region and an environment of early adopters, where we rapidly translate innovation into business applications, product development and testing and ultimately local business growth.
- Focus on value added processing or manufacturing in all sectors, so we capture more of the value chain in our region.



- Become a leader in Health care, medical innovation and research, medical engineering and transitioning this to business solutions.
- Leverage our engineering capabilities to develop new applications and solutions.
- Reverse declining ICT enrollment, and foster leading edge development of applications to problems in our region. Build on digital gaming expertise.
- Reverse declining enrollment in computing by illustrating area opportunities.
- Attract young people to come and stay because of our education and innovation focus. Address entitlement mentality in our youth by attracting young, energetic and hard-working peers from around the world.
- Address U of A dependency on license revenue. Develop a new model for Intellectual Property that fosters product creation and commercialization using the University/City TEC partnership to help.
- Build agribusiness, agri processing, agrifood, value chain and shipping capacity.
- Exploit our location as a circumpolar city and our expertise in materials management and logistics through our growing transportation hub role. Port Alberta is the lead in this area.
- Develop or enhance support systems to foster application development, product development and commercialization:
  - Foster spinoffs from research centres to business commercialization;
  - Super angel investment pool developed using City seed funding to create \$100m fund focused on innovation/commercialization (see New Zealand examples);
  - Deal generator mechanisms to put ideas and money together; and
  - Incentives to move SMEs along the value chain.
- Focus on LOCAL economic develop opportunities and SMEs that will grow local economic impact; build on incubators and startup Edmonton to support small





business growth; provide knowledge and support for small business on product development, expansion, and commercialization;

- Provide incentives (regulatory support, competitive taxes, financial incentives, marketing support) for small and local business; and
- Use City Centre Lands to stimulate small business startups with subsidized facilities.

Learn from other centres about diversification, especially Houston, Dallas, Austin. Knowledge of University research/commercialization from New Zealand and Australia would also be useful as models.

## 5.6 Opportunity: Focus on Building Our Dream of a Vibrant Downtown and River Valley

The river valley is a world class asset that is underdeveloped. The downtown has the potential to be the vibrant hub of one of Canada's major cities, and has yet to realize this goal. Respondents generally believed that the Mayor and Council have taken the bold steps necessary to create the vision and belief in both the downtown and the river valley. Now it is time to act:

- Develop Downtown and River Valley, and link them... pedestrian, bike, funicular, people Pods in river valley.
- **Downtown:** Continue with Capital City Boulevard, arena, entertainment district, Citadel, RAM, AGA, Winspear, U of A collection and other downtown initiatives. Complement this with a range of downtown housing types (Quarters, Airport lands, downtown condo subsidy). Then reimagine the downtown with cafes, music, chamber festivals, and ongoing activity.
- **River Valley:** Make the River valley a people place, while protecting its integrity. Light the bridges create nodes for cafes, rentals, small retail, and accessibility. Foster unique architecture, public art, and interest areas. Develop the Rossdale concept, and continue the river valley plans linking Devon and Fort Saskatchewan.



- **Convention Centre:** Its concept of becoming an indoor funicular, linking the river valley (Louise McKinney) to downtown is an opportunity that should be considered.
- **Downtown Accessibility:** Ensure high frequency, quality public transportation links our downtown to key areas and population nodes in the city.
- **Head Office Attraction:** Will be possible if we get the rest of the downtown right.

## 5.7 Opportunity: Create a New Image, a New Brand and New Marketing Approach

Respondents felt that the past branding as gateway city, winter city, festival city, and “best mid-size city” were off the mark. Consensus expressed favoured a message that we are one of the major northern cities in the world, a great, growing city where families can prosper in a secure environment with a superb education and innovation system. Key messages:

- Build on the Alberta brand.
- **Primary Brand Attributes:** A growing city of knowledge-based innovation, small business growth, entrepreneurship around a world class education hub in U of A (Research) and NAIT (application).
- **Secondary Brand Attributes:**
  - A great northern, circumpolar urban hub and service centre;
  - A city of small business success, where ideas thrive and are converted to application and business opportunities in a low tax, supportive environment;
  - A great city for families to thrive, educate, work and play;
  - A cultural centre of arts, entertainment, festivals, major events;



- A city experienced at welcoming the world by hosting successful international events;
  - A proud, skilled, hard-working, respectful people;
  - Focused on value-added entrepreneurial development, leveraging our major economic strengths; and
  - A city connected to the world, a logistics and transportation hub with world class air service.
- **Market the Brand:** Create awareness and call to action in targeted markets:
- Aggressive marketing of circumpolar city, a city of skilled, hardy families, authentic, confident, accomplished, proud of our work ethic, and proud of our city;
  - One of the best places in Canada to raise a family, Quality of Life, quality of education, family safety, economic prospects, quality of leisure life;
  - A city of business innovation, knowledge-based sectors and early adoption.. an incubator of ideas;
  - Blue/white collar city... address it directly; and
  - Service centre for the great northern regions of Alberta and Canada's Western Arctic.

Strong media support for the brand and marketing approach should be encouraged from the outset.

Obviously, detailed study of the brand attributes must be completed, and creative response to existing perceptions both within and outside Edmonton must be addressed.



Edmonton was identified as a growth pole by the Globe and Mail in 1995. Recently (2011) more jobs were created in Edmonton than in Vancouver and Calgary combined.

## 5.8 Opportunity: Collaborate Regionally to Succeed

Respondents were clear that regional rivalries were dysfunctional and unproductive and should be replaced with regional cooperation and collaboration. Many favoured a regional economic development function/organization to market the region in a professional but equitable manner. There was little patience offered for political infighting over economic development. Many felt that the region has recently begun moving in the right direction in regional collaboration and should continue on this productive path. Key points:

Align agendas, build partnerships, and develop a world scale regional cooperation model of our own; reverse the “ME FIRST” attitudes in favour of collaboration:

- Consider a joint economic development authority or a new partnership for regional economic development;
- Define and build on regional economic clusters; Foster building of collaborative networks within clusters; link educators into these clusters to promote R&D and technology transfer;
- Support Port Alberta as our logistics hub for resource industry, an inland port and circumpolar transportation hub;
- Coordinate to build common data base of companies, lands, availability on a regional basis; provide open data to rid ourselves of the regional silos;
- Work more closely and collaboratively with Calgary and communities in the Alberta Corridor to grow opportunities for all;
- Coordinate to provide high quality regional transportation, LRT, transit service through the region, and to ensure labour mobility;
- Work with AHS and AH&W to plan effective, coordinated health care delivery and transportation systems and processes;



- Continue to support accessibility of the region through support for the Edmonton International Airport; Consider European hub models such as Holland; Become the hub for value-added agricultural cargo shipping;
- Air Access: continue to increase direct flights to Edmonton. Develop the airport lands with high end business parks and with community design that provides a statement and leadership among northern cities. Redevelop the muni airport lands so we can move on from this issue; and
- Collectively address improved alignment, relationships and services to Alberta's northern communities and economic growth areas. Consider and support improved rail service to Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Kansas City is one example of regional cooperation that is being used as best practice in many locations. Some respondents offered that if Kansas City can bring together 30 municipal partners to work together, Edmonton could surely bring together 24 municipal partners in a new and creative world class model of equitable sharing, collaborative work and mutual success. This is the goal of collaboration for regional economic development.

## **5.9 Opportunity: Create Great, Enduring Communities within the Edmonton Region**

Our anticipated future growth provides our region with opportunities other regions don't have. We have the opportunity to design and create great communities that will be examples for other cities to follow for years to come. Some key points:

- Develop City Centre as an exemplary, sustainable urban community on the threshold of downtown;
- Celebrate and communicate our ethno-cultural diversity as a strength of our city - Chinatown, little Italy, etc.;
- Build family friendly, (people, family, communities) communities, leveraging our strong community spirit, passion;
- Development: We have a great deal of land for development, but we need to avoid sprawl. Build compact communities with more density, viability,



sustainability. Redevelop older neighborhoods. Ensure LRT, transportation development occurs simultaneously;

- Ensure development occurs in stepwise fashion, so that all approved areas are not developing at the same time; and
- Livable, walkable, bicycle-oriented systems must be built along with community development.

At the end of the day, Edmonton could become famous for its sustainable community planning and development.

## 5.10 Conclusion

While respondents were asked to offer the three highest priority opportunities, there are nine areas of focus based on the collected responses of some 150 leaders. All nine areas are inextricably linked - we need to act on all of them. The interrelationships between these opportunities and the time required to develop them individually will determine the linkage between and the timing of the nine areas of focus going forward.



## 6.0 POTENTIAL THREATS TO SUCCESS

While our opportunities are very strong, factors outside our control can impact Edmonton's potential to succeed. Threats are considered to be factors outside our region and about which there is little we can do as a city. The specific question asked of respondents: "What **THREE** significant **THREATS** (i.e., external issues that we can't do much about) may compromise our ability to succeed in the coming 3-5 years?"

The threats of greatest concern to respondents in approximate order are as follow:

- **Global Economic Uncertainty or Decline:** continued or increasing US economic decline while we are highly dependent on the US for exports; European crises continuing; China slowdown are all factors that will affect the demand/supply characteristics of oil;
- **Environmental Image and Performance:** If the "dirty oil" environmental lobby impacts Edmonton's image, we will not perform as anticipated; if a negative international image impacts Alberta it will spill over to Edmonton;
- **Reliance on Oil and Gas:** Many respondents addressed our major strength also as our major weakness. While we prosper from oil, it is a global geopolitical resource which is impacted by issues, policies, and agreements well beyond our control in Edmonton. Our dependency on one industry is the issues, and diversification our economy is the response desired;
- **Labour Force Attraction and Retention:** High demand for skilled and unskilled labour for years to come, if it is not met, will impact our growth. Labour productivity, work ethic issues, immigration policy, training, education, labour legislation, and other factors impact labour attraction and retention;
- **A High Cost Urban Centre:** High cost of living relative to other cities, caused by boom cycle overheating; resulting lower competitiveness and productivity; high infrastructure costs; whether the cause is increasing taxes, demand pressure, deflation in competitive jurisdiction, if our relative cost is high our economic potential will be impacted; continued boom and bust cycles and the associated Dutch disease could result in our not meeting our economic potential;



- **Changes in the Energy Economy:** Whether alternative energy, new discoveries, new technologies, new processes, market accessibility changes or other factors, changes in the energy landscape could threaten Edmonton's position and future prospects;
- **Lack of Senior Government Support:** Whether in the form of regulations, public policy, ideology, or financial constraints, lack of Federal and/or Provincial government support will limit our potential. For example Federal Policy is not aligned in Cleantech, Nanotech, NINT, and lack of funding, lack of cluster development, and lack of coordination will limit Edmonton;
- A good example lies in the Immigration approach of our governments. A second example might be **lack of funding** by senior governments, particularly for infrastructure required to support our growth potential, will impact our potential; lack of Federal support for the Expo 2017 bid is another example offered;
- **Access to Capital:** We need ready access to capital in order to grow; if we lack of access to financial and equity markets because they are not here in Edmonton, growth will suffer;
- **Innovation and Technology Weakness,** if we do not switch focus to nanotech, health, ICT, Cleantech and related sectors, or if we do not stay competitive in these areas while we are in a strong economic position to do so, we will not meet our potential; and
- **Additional Threats** were identified, but less frequently than those above:
  - Decline in small business strengths due to incoming national/chain businesses who are here in the good times only;
  - Growing independence of Fort McMurray may reduce supplier and service role of Edmonton;
  - Air industry financial challenges globally, causing continued lack of good air access;
  - Limited access to international markets, specifically logistics;





- High speed rail service between Edmonton and Calgary, which is not in Edmonton's interest in the short term;
- Competition from Calgary and other major urban centres;
- Rising health care costs relative to other places;
- Underutilized and increasingly frustrated urban Aboriginal population; and
- Oilers franchise could move.



## 7.0 CONCLUSION

These results from the leadership interview program reflect significant consensus in a number of areas. However, they also reflect the range of thinking we have around some of the major issues and opportunities.

The leadership engagement process will not singularly drive the strategy, nor is it the only engagement process.

Results from this interview program will be assessed along with a number of other engagement processes within The Way We Prosper, including:

- Approximately 50 interviews conducted by Millier Dickinsen Blais senior professionals with thought leaders in the academic, economic and political realms;
- Five focus groups with a range of invited participants, comprising input from an additional 75 or more participants;
- An online survey of Edmontonians conducted from The Way We Prosper website;
- Input from sessions of the Business Advisory Council; and
- Input from sessions of the Corporate Action Team.

While the engagement process was undertaken, Millier Dickinson Blais was also conducting separate analyses of the Edmonton city and region:

- A baseline assessment of our economy and sectoral situation; and
- A comparative analysis of leading sectors in our economy relative to other cities.

The engagement process will be one main input into the development of the SWOT assessment by Millier Dickinson Blais – the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats for Edmonton in the coming three to five years. It will add depth and support to the economic analyses being conducted.



# APPENDIX I

## Interview Guideline



## THE WAY WE PROSPER: An Economic Development Plan for Edmonton Interview Guideline

### *The Way We Prosper Privacy Statement*

*Millier Dickinson Blais and Western Management Consultants have been retained by the City of Edmonton to prepare an Economic Development Plan. This information is being collected under the Authority of Section 33 (c) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act and may be used for THE WAY WE PROSPER Project. Your personal information is protected by the privacy provisions of FOIP. If you have any questions about the collection, use and disclosure of your personal information, contact Mr. Raja Bajwa, Senior Business Consultant, The Way We Prosper, City of Edmonton, 780.496.5017, [raja.bajwa@Edmonton.ca](mailto:raja.bajwa@Edmonton.ca) , 11th Floor HSBC 10250 - 101 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 3P4.*

When you respond to the following questions, please consider the whole city and area economy and all its communities. You have been identified as a community Leader, and we value and would like to hear your perspective on “The Big Picture” for Edmonton and Area.

- 1.0 Please consider your longer term VISION for Edmonton and Area. What is Edmonton KNOWN FOR in five to ten years from now?
- 2.0 Please consider in **what way and why business has thrived** in Edmonton and Area?
  - a) What is the **ONE THING** you would say to a business owner (individual, Board) to convince them to consider Edmonton as a business location?
- 3.0 What **THREE THINGS** do you see as the most important **CHALLENGES OR BARRIERS** (usually considered to be internal to our region, things that we can affect through action) to economic growth in Edmonton and Area in the coming three to five years?
- 4.0 What **THREE** significant **THREATS** (ie external issues that we can't do much about) may compromise our ability to succeed in the coming 3-5 years?
- 5.0 What do you consider to be the **THREE GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES** for Edmonton and Area to stimulate economic growth and business investment in the coming 3-5 years?
- 6.0 What should Edmonton **focus resources on in the next 18 months**? Who should be involved?
- 7.0 Our final question: Can you suggest two or three community Leaders who we **really must engage** in this process, with email and phone numbers if possible. Think of emerging sectors as well as the strong areas of our economy if possible.

**THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND INSIGHTS.**

Additional information can be found at [www.edmonton.ca/thewayweprosper](http://www.edmonton.ca/thewayweprosper)



# Summary of Findings – Edmonton Business Survey

The Edmonton Business Survey was conducted in conjunction with the City's development of The Way We Prosper Economic Development Plan. The focus of the survey was to obtain feedback from Edmonton's business community as to their perspectives of the strengths and weaknesses of the local economy and the challenges that must be addressed in moving forward with a new economic development agenda.

The information obtained from the survey will assist the City of Edmonton in the delivery of its economic development services and programs and in its support of the growth of local business and investment. The survey also represents a benchmark to assess future economic development across the region and other City-led business related initiatives.

## 1.1 Methodology

Links to the online survey were provided through the City of Edmonton's website and efforts were made to have the survey distributed through a wide variety of local partners.

The online survey targeted senior representatives and stakeholders of Edmonton's business community and the results represent a random and representative sample of businesses across the City of Edmonton.

The survey was administered between January and March 2012. In total 159 respondents completed the survey. It should be noted however, that respondents may not have completed all questions. The responses collected for each question are indicated.

## 1.2 Respondents Profile

More than half of the respondents (58.2) to the survey employed less than 50 people in their Edmonton operations and the majority (75.4%) had been located in the City of Edmonton for more than 10 years.

Survey respondents were drawn from a wide range of industry sectors with business and financial services providing the most noted concentration. There were a significant number of respondents (24.6%) of respondents that classified their industry sector as something other than the identified North American Industry Classifications (NAICs). Respondents in this 'other' category were largely comprised of government and not-for-profit sectors.

The largest percentage of respondents (28.4%) was small business owners or senior executives within their organization. Of those that classified their roles within their organization as 'Other', these respondents were largely comprised of management and administration.

When asked about the performance of their business or organization over the next 12 months, 56.3% of respondents expected a much stronger or somewhat stronger performance as compared to the performance in the previous 12 months. Only a third (32.5%) of respondents expected the same level of performance as the previous year.

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF EMPLOYEESS (TOTAL RESPONSES – 134)

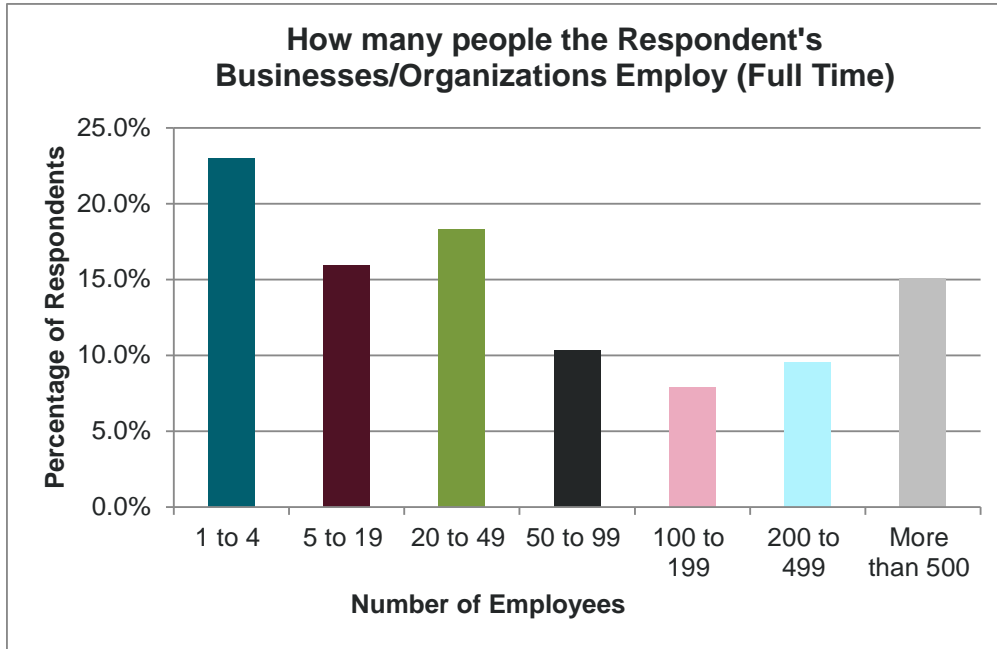


FIGURE 2: INDUSTRY SECTOR (RESPONSES – 134)

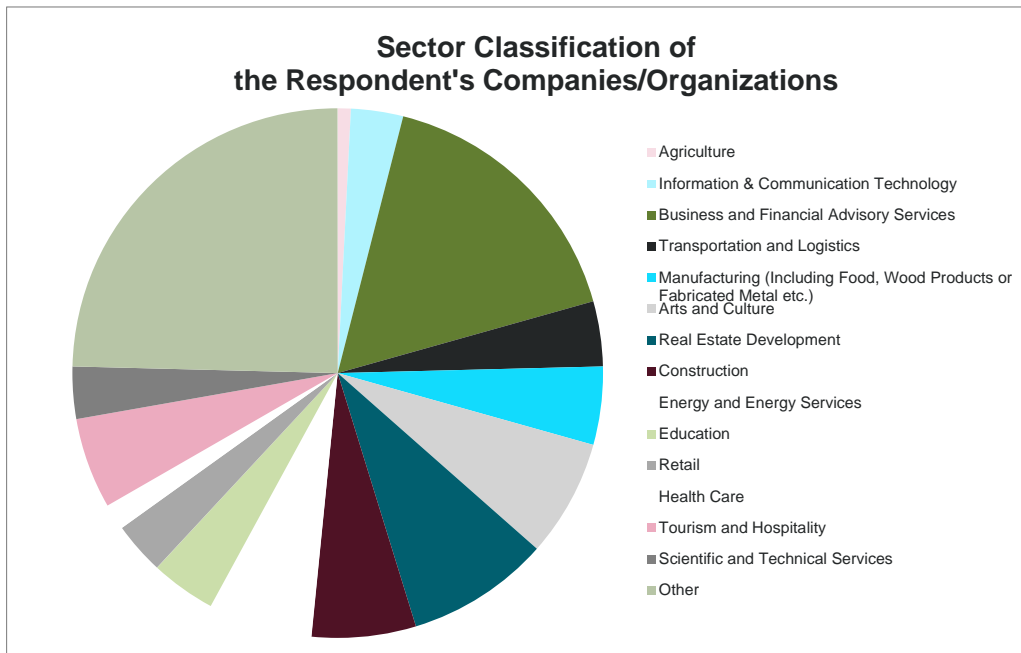


FIGURE 3: ROLE IN ORGANIZATION (RESPONSES – 134)

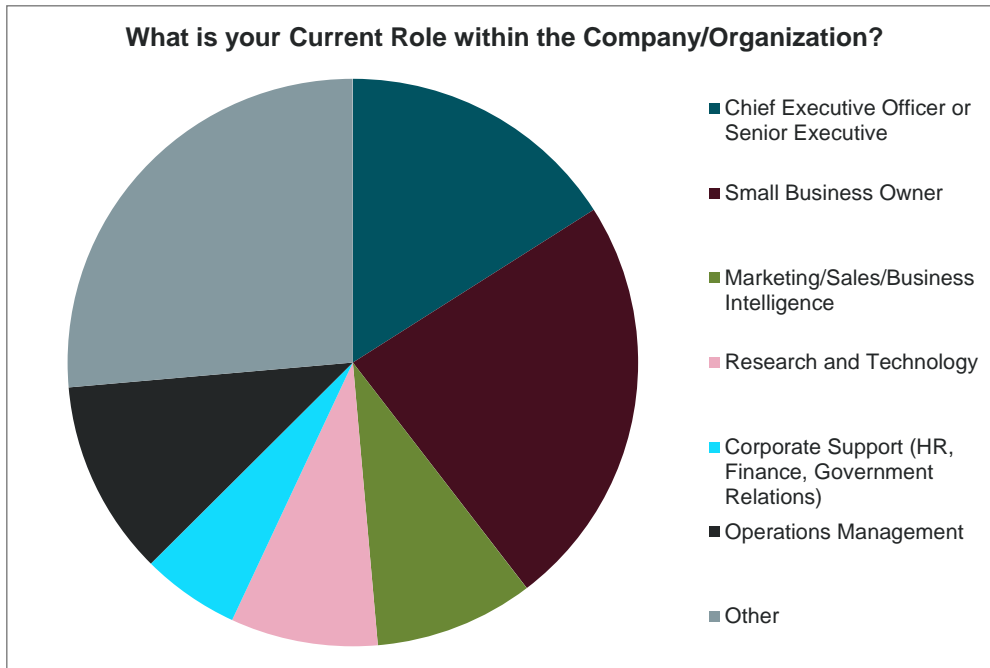
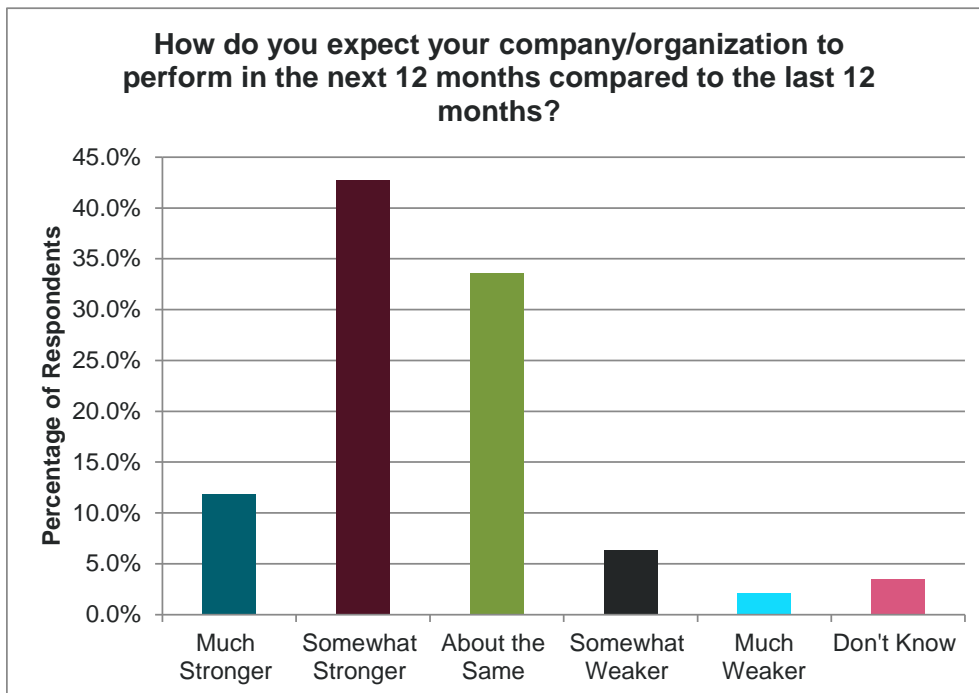


FIGURE 4: COMPANY PERFORMANC IN NEXT 12 MONTHS (RESPONSES – 143)



# 1.3 Economic Development Priorities

In addition to the closed questions survey respondents were asked to identify the **top three** issues facing the growth of Edmonton’s economy. Based on 148 individual responses the following issues emerged:

1. **Labour Force Shortages, followed by** Dependency on Energy and Strategic Planning
2. **Infrastructure and Transportation Investment, followed by** Labour Force Shortages and Affordability
3. **Effective Strategic Planning, followed by** Confidence in the Economy and Infrastructure

# 1.4 Factors Ensuring Growth

In response to a select number of criteria, respondents were asked which factors were important to ensuring the growth of their business in Edmonton over the next 3-5 years. Survey respondents ranked the following criteria as being **VERY IMPORTANT**.

- **The availability of a skilled and semi-skilled workforce (50.3%)**
- **The transformation of the urban core (42.6%)**
- **Promoting economic diversity by encouraging the growth in a number of industry sectors (41.1%)**
- **An efficient regional transportation system (40.5%)**
- **Access to quality post-secondary education, skills development and training (40.5%)**

Figure 5 illustrates the weighted mean average results for each criterion. Based on these results the following criteria ranked as being the most important to survey respondents:

- **The availability of skilled and semi-skilled workforce**
- **Promoting economic diversity by encouraging growth in a number of sectors**
- **Efficient regional transportation infrastructure**
- **Access to quality post-secondary education, skills development and training**
- **Transformation of the urban core**



FIGURE 5: FACTORS IMPACTING GROWTH OF BUSINESSES IN NEXT 3-5 YEARS (RESPONSES -148)

|  | 1.00 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 4.00 | 5.00 | 6.00 | 7.00 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Availability of land or buildings  |      |      |      |      | 4.85 |      |      |
| Affordability of land or buildings   |      |      |      |      |      | 5.68 |      |
| Availability of a skilled and semi skilled workforce                                       |      |      |      |      |      |      | 7.00 |
| Access to quality post secondary education, skills development and training                |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.59 |
| Availability of quality high-speed telecommunications                                      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.42 |
| Transformation of the urban core   |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.53 |
| Marketing of the City of Edmonton to a prospective workforce                               |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.17 |
| Marketing of the City of Edmonton to prospective tourists/visitors                         |      |      |      |      | 5.19 |      |      |
| Promotion of the Greater Edmonton Region to prospective business community and investors   |      |      |      |      |      | 5.81 |      |
| Competitive wage rates   |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.14 |
| Competitive tax rates  |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.28 |
| Affordable energy costs  |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.46 |
| Affordable and efficient waste management  |      |      |      |      |      | 5.90 |      |
| Availability of affordable housing options   |      |      |      |      |      | 5.92 |      |
| Promoting economic diversity by encouraging growth in a number of sectors                  |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.73 |
| Support and assistance in export development   |      |      |      |      | 4.90 |      |      |
| Networking or relationship brokering opportunities for business                            |      |      |      |      |      | 5.47 |      |
| Access to financing  |      |      |      |      |      | 5.82 |      |
| Low cost facilities in which to start-up businesses  |      |      |      | 4.52 |      |      |      |
| Passenger Air access (incoming and outgoing)   |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.24 |
| Efficient regional transportation infrastructure   |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.66 |
| Transportation and logistics in accessing export markets                                   |      |      |      |      | 5.27 |      |      |
| Streamlined development approvals process (for expansion approvals, new development, etc.) |      |      |      |      |      | 5.79 |      |
| Arts, entertainment and cultural facilities  |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.26 |
| Attracting and hosting major events  |      |      |      |      |      | 5.89 |      |
| Quality of place factors such as shopping and restaurants, schools, parks and recreation   |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.44 |

Survey respondents were also asked to rate their current level of satisfaction with the same range of criterion. In terms of those factors considered very important survey respondents provided the following scores.

- **The availability of a skilled and semi-skilled workforce (scored 5.02 / 7.0 weighted average)**
- **The transformation of the urban core (scored 4.38 / 7.0 weighted average)**
- **Promoting economic diversity by encouraging the growth in a number of industry sectors (scored 4.0 / 7.0 weighted average)**
- **An efficient regional transportation system (scored 3.95 / 7.0 weighted average – LOWEST RANKING IN SATISFACTION)**
- **Access to quality post-secondary education, skills development and training (scored 5.73 / 7.0 weighted average)**

Survey respondents suggested their highest level of satisfaction related to:

- **Availability of quality high-speed telecommunications (scored 5.81 / 7.0 weighted average – HIGHEST RANKING IN SATISFACTION)**
- **Affordable and efficient waste management (scored 5.5 / 7.0 weighted average)**

- Availability of land and buildings (scored 5.35 / 7.0 weighted average)
- Arts, entertainment and cultural facilities (scored 5.30 / 7.0 weighted average)
- Quality of place factors (scored 5.14 / 7.0 weighted average)

In addition to the foregoing, the lowest level of satisfaction for respondents related to:

- Promoting economic diversity by encouraging growth in a number of sectors (scored 4.0 / 7.0 weighted average)
- Affordable energy costs (scored 4.06 / 7.0 weighted average)
- Low cost facilities in which to start-up businesses (scored 4.1 / 7.0 weighted average)
- Streamlined development approvals process (for expansion approvals, new development, etc.) (scored 4.13 / 7.0 weighted average)
- Marketing of the City of Edmonton to a prospective workforce (scored 4.21 / 7.0 weighted average)

FIGURE 6: LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH FACTORS IMPACTING GROWTH OF BUSINESSES (RESPONSES 143)

|  | 1.00 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 4.00 | 5.00 | 6.00 | 7.00 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Availability of land or buildings (e.g. office, retail, industrial)                        |      |      |      |      | 5.35 |      |      |
| Affordability of land or buildings (e.g. office, retail, industrial)                       |      |      |      | 4.75 |      |      |      |
| Availability of a skilled and semi skilled workforce                                       |      |      |      |      | 5.02 |      |      |
| Access to quality post secondary education, skills development and training                |      |      |      |      |      | 5.73 |      |
| Availability of quality high-speed telecommunications                                      |      |      |      |      |      | 5.81 |      |
| Transformation of the urban core   |      |      |      | 4.38 |      |      |      |
| Marketing of the City of Edmonton to a prospective workforce                               |      |      |      | 4.21 |      |      |      |
| Marketing of the City of Edmonton to prospective tourists/visitors                         |      |      |      | 4.28 |      |      |      |
| Promotion of the Greater Edmonton Region to prospective business community and investors   |      |      |      | 4.23 |      |      |      |
| Competitive wage rates   |      |      |      |      | 5.03 |      |      |
| Competitive tax rates  |      |      |      |      | 4.89 |      |      |
| Affordable energy costs  |      |      | 4.06 |      |      |      |      |
| Affordable and efficient waste management  |      |      |      |      |      | 5.50 |      |
| Availability of affordable housing options   |      |      |      | 4.25 |      |      |      |
| Promoting economic diversity by encouraging growth in a number of sectors                  |      |      | 4.00 |      |      |      |      |
| Support and assistance in export development   |      |      |      | 4.58 |      |      |      |
| Networking or relationship brokering opportunities for business                            |      |      |      | 4.46 |      |      |      |
| Access to financing  |      |      |      | 4.62 |      |      |      |
| Low cost facilities in which to start-up businesses  |      |      | 4.10 |      |      |      |      |
| Passenger Air access (incoming and outgoing)   |      |      |      | 4.48 |      |      |      |
| Efficient regional transportation infrastructure   |      |      | 3.95 |      |      |      |      |
| Transportation and logistics in accessing export markets                                   |      |      |      | 4.48 |      |      |      |
| Streamlined development approvals process (for expansion approvals, new development, etc.) |      |      |      | 4.13 |      |      |      |
| Arts, entertainment and cultural facilities  |      |      |      |      |      | 5.30 |      |
| Attraction and hosting major events  |      |      |      | 4.22 |      |      |      |
| Quality of place factors such as shopping and restaurants, schools, parks and recreation   |      |      |      |      |      | 5.14 |      |

## 1.5 Barriers to Attracting Business and Investment

In response to a select number of factors, survey respondents were asked to identify the most significant barriers to attracting new business and investment to the City of Edmonton. In this instance respondents felt that **international perception of the energy industry** was the biggest barrier (scored 6.02 / 7)

followed by the **supply of labour and the cost of labour**. The availability of serviced industrial was rated the least significant barrier to attracting business and investment to the City of Edmonton (scored of 3.81 / 7.0) based on respondents to the survey.

On the issue of supply of labour, 75.7% of survey respondents suggested that it is the **availability of skilled workers** that is most relevant to the expansion of their business. Slightly less than half of respondents (48.4%) suggested that it was the availability of semi-skilled workers.

FIGURE 7: BARRIERS TO ATTRACTING BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT (RESPONSES 138)

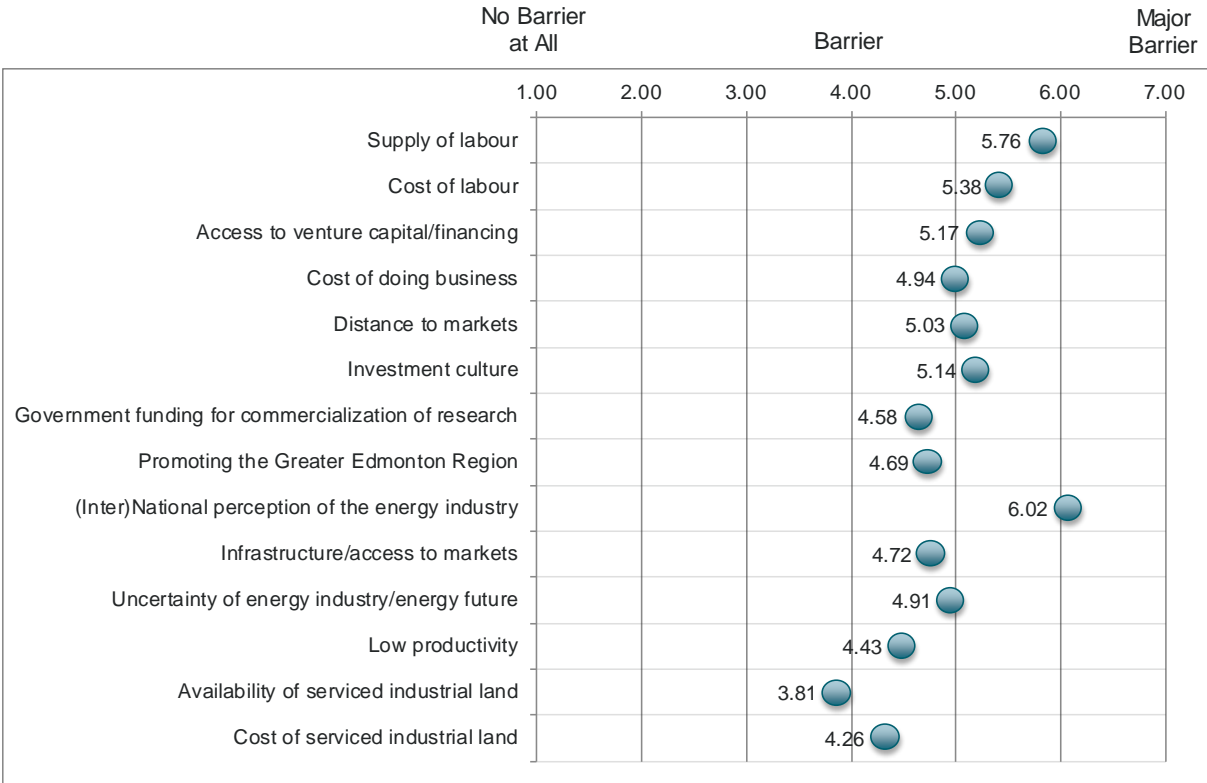
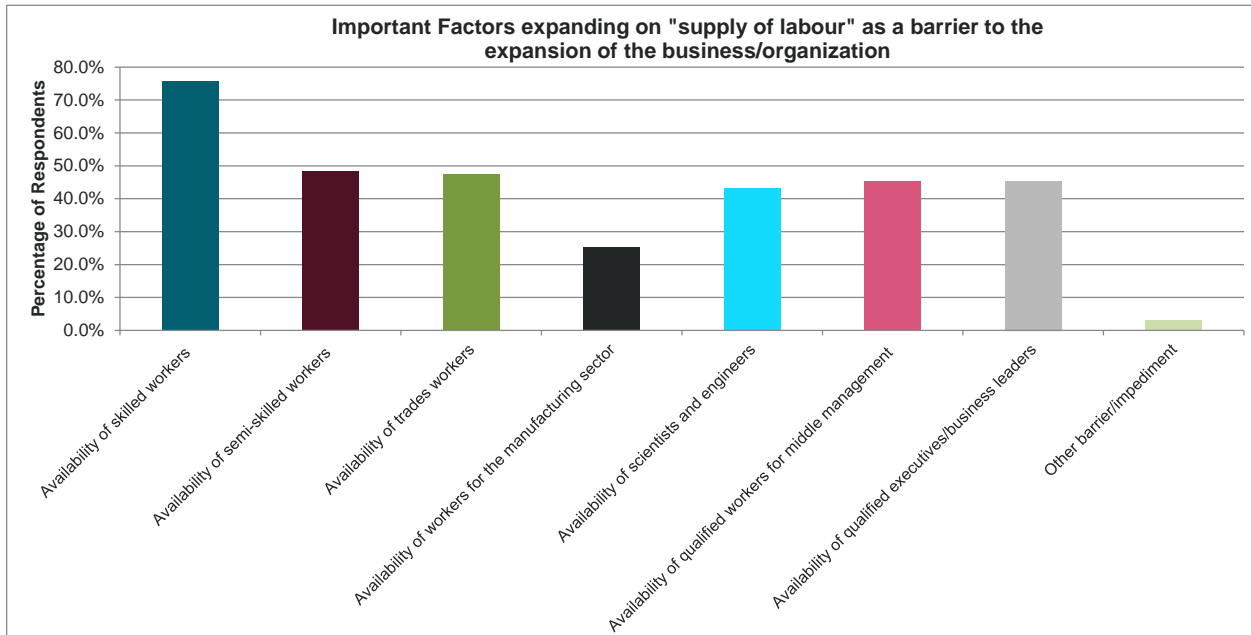


FIGURE 8: EXPERIENCED LABOUR FORCE SHORTAGES (RESPONSES 103)



## 1.6 Programs and Services to Assist Business

Based on a select number of criteria, survey respondents were also asked to indicate which range of programs and services would assist business in Edmonton. Based on these factors **workforce development** was seen as being the most beneficial to business (scored 6.14 / 7.0) followed by **start-up assistance (business planning), workforce attraction, business retention and expansion efforts and marketing and promotion of Greater Edmonton area.**

FIGURE 9: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES OF BENEFIT TO BUSINESS (RESPONSES 133)

|  | 1.00 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 4.00 | 5.00 | 6.00 | 7.00 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Research and Development   |      |      |      |      | 5.60 |      |      |
| Commercialization assistance of primary research and development |      |      |      |      | 5.27 |      |      |
| Business Retention and Expansion                                 |      |      |      |      | 5.80 |      |      |
| Marketing and Promotion of Greater Edmonton Region               |      |      |      |      | 5.77 |      |      |
| Business Directories   |      |      | 3.39 |      |      |      |      |
| Economic Forecasting   |      |      |      | 4.71 |      |      |      |
| Export Development   |      |      |      | 4.62 |      |      |      |
| Business Incubation  |      |      |      |      | 5.19 |      |      |
| Trade Missions   |      |      |      | 4.30 |      |      |      |
| Sector specific support programs                                 |      |      |      | 4.87 |      |      |      |
| Labour Market Information  |      |      |      |      | 5.09 |      |      |
| Workforce Attraction   |      |      |      |      |      | 5.89 |      |
| Workforce Development  |      |      |      |      |      | 6.14 |      |
| Small business mentoring   |      |      |      |      | 5.31 |      |      |
| Start-up assistance (business planning)                          |      |      |      |      |      | 5.90 |      |
| Lean Manufacturing/Productivity Improvements                     |      |      |      |      | 5.21 |      |      |

## 1.7 Opportunities for Growth

In addition to the closed set of questions contained in the survey, respondents were also provided with the opportunity to share their opinions and views on a series of open-ended questions.

### ***Question 8: What do you think could be done or needs to happen in the next three years to positively influence the business climate in Edmonton?***

Based on the 101 individual responses received, four primary themes emerged.

- **Create a Liveable City**
  - **The needs to be less sprawl**
  - **Need to create a lively downtown core starting with attracting investment to the core**
  - **Provide walkable, liveable communities even in the downtown**
  - **Affordable housing options**
  - **Stronger arts community**
  - **Investment in transportation infrastructure**
  - **Create a built environment that attracts and retains young professionals**
  - **Enable people to live in the downtown**
  - **Target businesses for the downtown**

- **Focus on diversification**
  - Devote efforts to grow and support sectors outside of the energy sector and provide the money and resources to enable this to occur
  - Attract investment geared to the environmental sustainability of oil sands mining and production
  - More of focus on technology and incubation of start-ups
  - Incubation and promotion of information/knowledge sectors and sustainable energy industries
  - Pick two or three key industry sectors which are not linked to energy (even indirectly) and invest to become a world leader in those sectors.
- **Improve City's image**
  - Need a business brand
  - Need a brand other than energy
  - Need to be seen as a small, big city
  - Demonstrate that we are forward thinking with actions, not words
  - Demonstrate the culture of entrepreneurship
  - Build on the strong relationship with business, support for business
  - Marketing that leverages the top 10 CEOs in the city to promote the city
  - Communicate that there are jobs and careers in Edmonton, not just northern Alberta
- **Create a more business friendly environment**
  - Shorten approval times and permitting process
  - Create more transparency for business in terms of permitting
  - Retain and grown local businesses of all sizes
  - Listen to business more
  - Provide more of a focus on small business
  - Promote available
  - programs and services to business more effectively
- **The sustainability of oil sands**
  - Secure investment by industry to overcome dirty oil image
  - Attract greater value added production activity to Edmonton
  - Provide a strong, balanced regulatory and tax regime
  - Establish the "actual" reasons for Oil and Gas industry not setting up headquarters here, e.g. ask them, and to get to move here

**Question 9: Looking towards the future, what do you think are some of Edmonton's major opportunities for growth, change and/or business development over the next five (5) years?**

Based on the 94 individual responses received, the following primary themes emerged.

- **Creative economy**
  - Support development of creative economy including patents and technology transfer
  - Use nanotechnology to shift focus from energy
  - Interactive digital media, digital technology
- **Downtown development**
  - Attract businesses to the core
  - Encourage an emotional investment in neighbourhoods like Whyte Avenue
- **Focus on a select number of sectors**
  - Transportation, logistics
  - Energy research, alternate energy
  - Biotechnology
- **Investment in infrastructure**
  - Leverage the Alberta advantage
  - Construct the ring road
- **Better define who we are**
  - Attract and retain larger number of people in the professional and creative class to ensure competitive wages for SMEs
- **Keep top achievers in all fields**
  - Workforce retention needs to be a priority
  - Need a brain trust that can assist with workforce attraction and retention
- **Reduce the bureaucracy**
  - Reduce the costs that are downloaded to developers, business owners
  - Reduce the timing to get approvals through the city
- **Provide services and products to energy sector**
  - Leverage the wealth and prosperity that results from the energy sector to drive support for other sectors
  - Leverage the wealth to build a sustainable economy

**Question 10: Is there anything else you'd like to say about doing business in Edmonton and/or the state of Edmonton's economy?**

Based on the 63 individual responses received, the following primary themes emerged.

- **Need to develop civic pride**
  - Be proud of what Edmonton is
  - Talk about more than the river valley
  - Edmonton is a high tech, educated city – make it known
  - Calgary has developed a strong and green lifestyle message – need to do the same
- **Eliminate the bureaucratic ‘muddle’**
  - Business Associations, EEDC, Councils, Mayor’s office - everyone has their hand in it
  - Do things better without losing capacity to get things done
  - Simplify the bureaucracy
  - more dialogue with business, post-secondary institutions
- **Grow Leaders and Leading Companies**
  - Support and promote our entrepreneurs
  - Edmonton Chapter of the Entrepreneurs Organization is most successful chapter worldwide
  - Encourage small business startups
- **Prospering is more than just business success**
  - Consider the whole community
  - Move forward with downtown revitalization, create a hub for activity of all kinds
  - More of a focus on human capital development – aboriginals, new immigrants, young professionals
  - Address threat of urban sprawl
- **Diversification is key**
  - Lead the charge to support and grow alternative sectors while we can
  - Leverage the current oil based economy
  - Draw qualified workers here to maintain the standard of living we have
  - We could be a creative hub focused on technology and media
  - Can’t have all the eggs in one basket
  - We live a boom bust cycle but never seem to deal with the impact



- **We are a reactive community – need to be more proactive**

## 1.8 Conclusions

The results of the business survey demonstrate a range of thinking as it relates to the issues and opportunities facing the city of Edmonton. The results also suggest considerable consensus in a number of areas that are consistent with the findings that have emerged through the other elements of the public consultation process.

While the business community survey will not singularly drive the development of the plan, the opportunity to engage with the city's business community in the development of The Way We Prosper has been considered a success and the city should use this initiative to regularly engage the broadest range of business interests as it moves forward with the implementation of the economic development plan.

The findings from the survey will be used in the completion of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) assessment report together with the input gathered from stakeholder interview program and focus groups and the results of the economic analysis contained in the Technical Report.

# Summary of Findings: Focus Groups

## Group 1: Providing a Competitive Business Environment

### 1.1 Elements of competitive business environment

The elements of a competitive business environment that were identified include: Talent, Access to Capital and Resources, Quality of Life, Infrastructure & Transportation, Cost Competitiveness and City Branding.

### 1.2 Assessment of programs and services currently provided

In all, participants were asked to assess whether 14 services, programs and business supports activities offered by Edmonton are delivered effectively. Of the 14 services surveyed, 11 were assessed by the group as having better than neutral effectiveness. On average respondents felt that Edmonton offers above average support for the education sector in the form of loans and grants to help with workforce development and that the local government does work hard to support business and growth. Despite approval for the local government’s support of business, participants felt that not enough is being done to provide start-ups with the funding they need. The table below summarized the voting results for each service category

#### Voting Results

Agree/Disagree (5-Point) (Allow bypass)

Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD)

Number of ballot items: 15

Total number of voters (N): 15

| Program/Service                                  | Mean |
|--|------|
| Strong/ diverse educational institutions         | 4.5  |
| Business Support by Elected Government Officials | 4    |
| Access to Real Estate at Reasonable Rates        | 3.86 |
| Support Housing Accessibility                    | 3.79 |
| Public Tenders                                   | 3.71 |
| Overall Focus on Economic Development            | 3.71 |

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Willingness to Listen to Concerns of Businesses | 3.71 |
| Business Revitalization Zones                   | 3.64 |
| Environment for New and Emerging Talent         | 3.43 |
| East of Setting Up a Business                   | 3.36 |
| Attracting & Recruiting Talent                  | 3.29 |
| City Transparency                               | 3.29 |
| Effective Property Tax Assessment Process       | 3.14 |
| Funding of Start-ups                            | 2.86 |

### 1.3 How to create a more business friendly environment

Participants were asked to vote on seven ideas to make Edmonton more business friendly. The top five ideas were:

1. Find a new reason for putting Edmonton on the map that is not the West Edmonton Mall or the Arena
2. Era of new leadership with new ideas.
3. A planning and development process that is investor friendly and continues with the current pro-business attitude of the City.
4. Commitment to a timely approval process.
5. Improve the City’s attractiveness to the families of new talent

*Group 2: Capitalizing on our Economic Strengths*

### 1.4 What are our economic strengths?

The group identified 20 characteristics of Edmonton that make it a distinct and unique City. The attributes, while distinct share common themes. According to the group the following characteristics of the City define Edmonton’s economic strengths:

1. **Talent** – Edmonton has an educated population with world class post-secondary institutions and the necessary technical skills for employers.
2. **Energy Sector and Supporting Industries** – The proximity to abundant energy resources supports a range of other activities including construction, fabrication, logistics and engineering
3. **Business Environment** – Edmonton is a City with a strong work ethic that is stable, business friendly and entrepreneurial
4. **Quality of Life** – New immigrants are attracted to Edmonton. The City is culturally diverse and offers a variety of arts, cultural and recreational activities.

# 1.5 What positive development have you seen in Edmonton in the last 2-3 years?

Over the last two years there have been a number of positive developments in the City of Edmonton according to the group. In general they were enthusiastic about major improvements in the City’s transportation infrastructure, having recently completed the LRT and major new roadways. Participants also expressed approval of the Industrial Heartland Partnership, the Downtown revitalization and the decision of AIMCO to establish its headquarters in the City.

# 1.6 What opportunities are there to support existing businesses and industry sectors? What is the role of the City?

The group put forward a number of great suggestions. The voting on the opportunities revealed that Attracting & Retaining Talent, Planning and Red Tape were seen to be the biggest opportunities.

|                                    | <b>Opportunity</b>   | <b>Role of City</b>   |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Attract &amp; Retain Talent</b> | The City should continue to focus on quality of life. Quality of life is viewed as key to retaining talent after they arrive for a new job. To improve quality of life in Edmonton the group thought it was important for the City’s older areas to be preserved alongside new development. They also emphasized the importance of maintaining the affordability of housing for younger and immigrant workers. | The city should focus on improving quality of life by upgrading infrastructure, providing recreational activities and filling potholes. |
| <b>Planning</b>                    | Ensure access to reasonably priced inputs such as power, water and natural gas.  | Edmonton should be a partner in the planning process by anticipating demand and efficiently allocating areas as service corridors.      |
| <b>Red Tape</b>                    | There is a belief that much can be done to speed up the development approval process and reduce duplication across the City.   | City should be providing a single point of entry that is simple for business. Each account should be assigned a manager.                |

*Group 3: Advancing our Emerging Industries*

# 1.7 What positive development have you seen in Edmonton in the last 2-3 years?

The responses to the question focused around positive developments in specific sectors such as education and partnerships.

- **Sectors** – Nanotech, Digital Media, Gaming, Waste Management, Oil sands
- **University** – Emerging research centers of excellence for medical, nanotech, medical devices, energy, carbon capture and waste management.
- **Partnerships** – There is a perception that the local governments are getting along better. The funding of programs, Port Alberta and the Alberta Roadmap for Innovation were cited as examples of better alignment among the various levels of government.

# 1.8 What are Edmonton’s unique location advantages?

Edmonton possesses a number of unique locational advantages. The group identified 23 characteristics that differentiate the City. The top 5 were:

- Proximity to the Oil Sands
- Research capacity at universities, research parks and incubators
- Technology commercialization
- Fund management
- Quality of life

# 1.9 What are Edmonton’s emerging industries and sectors?

|                                 |                             |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Nanotechnology                  | Electric – smart grid       |
| Energy including oil and gas    | Nutraceuticals              |
| Medical devices and diagnostics | Value-added for oil and gas |
| ICT                             | Agriculture                 |
| Clean technologies              | Travel/Tourism              |
| Water treatment                 | Film                        |

# 1.10 What can the City do to lever these emerging industries?

The group provided valuable insight into what the City of Edmonton can do to lever these emerging industries. First and foremost they saw marketing Edmonton locally, nationally and internationally as necessary to inform citizens and potential investors about the business opportunities in the City. Secondly, they saw an opportunity for the City to provide more opportunities for technology to be developed by creating linkages between industry and academia through partnership and more effective use of online communications. Finally, they believe that the City can play an active role through the planning process to ensure that the built environment is attractive to business.

## Group 4: Attracting High Quality Talent

# 1.11 What are the key factors in attracting talent to a region?

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Quality of Life</b> – recreation, cultural amenities and education | <b>Infrastructure</b>  |
| <b>Job Opportunities</b> – availability of professional opportunities | <b>Cultural Diversity</b>  |
| <b>Access to Post-secondary Education</b>                             | <b>Economic Stability</b>  |
| <b>Cost of Living</b> – affordable housing                            | <b>Entrepreneurial Opportunity</b> – environment that support start-ups and new business |

# 1.12 What specific opportunities are there to attract and retain skilled and educated workers? What is the role of the City?

|  |                    |                     |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|
|  | <b>Opportunity</b> | <b>Role of City</b> |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Marketing</b>                        | Coordinated marketing effort with universities, companies and other institutions to promote Edmonton as a multicultural city. Suggestions were made that improving the EEDC website and attracting more international events would be positive steps in the right direction. | Leader   |
| <b>Programs for New Immigrants</b>      | Eliminating barriers for new immigrants so they get accreditations and welcomed into the city.   | Leader in program development. City needs to support programs and advocate on behalf of the City to Provincial and Federal governments |
| <b>Facilities for Commercialization</b> | Support small business and commercialization by improve academic linkages to the business community, expanding ARC and provide networking opportunities.   | Create ways for local businesses to share best practices   |
| <b>Coordination</b>                     | Economic development agencies in the Capital Region need to do a better job of coordinating their activities   | Support EEDC   |

***Group 5: Participation in Regional Partnerships & Collaboration***

### 1.13 How can Edmonton provide value to its regional partners?

Everyone needs to work together to brand Edmonton. The branding effort according to the group should align with already existing initiatives related to Canada, the West and Alberta. This process of branding the region will allow partners to leverage regional advantages and coordinate regional initiatives in a way that allows everyone to prosper. Two themes emerged around the responsibilities of each partner and Edmonton to reorganize their own internal structure to allow a major rethink of the regional structure.

## 1.14 How can Edmonton increase its influence at the provincial, federal and global level?

- **Regional Voice**
- **Awareness** – better marketing and communication strategies
- **Service** – focus on servicing local industry to increase GDP
- **Coordinated Regional Approach** – use size of region to lobby government

## 1.15 What should be the City's role in effectively positioning the region in a global marketplace?

When the group voted on which areas the City could effectively improve the positioning of the region four ideas emerged as the dominate positions:

1. **Regional Marketing Strategy** – development of customized messaging for targeting industries
2. **Regional Economic Development Agency** – the City has the opportunity to take the lead in forming a regional economic development agency
3. **Value Proposition** – Edmonton can work with local partners to identify competitive strengths and refocus efforts.
4. **Investment Attraction** - Refine the protocol for handling investment leads with regional partners.

### *Group 6: Advancing our Emerging Industries (arranged by TEC Edmonton)*

## 1.16 What positive development have you seen in Edmonton in the last 2-3 years?

- Strong visionary institutional leadership from universities and other academic institutions leading to:
  - **Increased entrepreneurial attitudes from institutions**
  - **More tangible innovation (UAlberta) in areas of engineering and agriculture, cell therapy, medical devices, fusion energy and ICT analytics**
  - **MacEwan, NAIT and Athabasca are just getting going in the area of tangible innovation)**
  - **Increased partnerships between institutions eg. MacEwan and Royal Alex hospital**
  - **New programs are being designed for emerging markets (specialized training)**
  - **Creation and upgrading of education and research institutions for emerging industries**
- City is taking a role and bottom up approach eg. Start-Up Edmonton, Refocus of the research parks to support early stage company development (expanding south research park and mercier building incubator area), TEC Edmonton, goal of supporting local, moving to open source and innovations in open data



- Edmonton is viewed as a leader in new tech business formation exhibited in the growth in medical devices and increased technologies and companies in Edmonton
- All the physical and capital development in Edmonton and changing of the urban feel to the Downtown and expansion of UAlberta
- Renewed focus of the province and the creation of Alberta Innovates Technology Futures and the CRB
- Formulation of community driven business networks and advocacy and a renewed focus on associations operating in tech space with innovators supporting their own groups (the end of super groups) resulting in:
  - **Higher profile is being gained for emerging market companies**
  - **Tech competitions are being held attracting media and broader range acceptance**
  - **More resources are being applied to emerging industries**
  - **Mentorship programs**
  - **Development of Start-up Edmonton**
- Influx of new immigrants (global and national) arriving to join the tech sector increasing the number of immigrant entrepreneurs
- Improvements in air travel

## 1.17 What are Edmonton's unique location advantages?

- Good market access to Europe, Asia, California (SV and Hollywood) with an expanding airport and more flights to important markets
- Edmonton is a major logistic hub of moving goods services and raw material
- Corridor to Asia – Ties lead by the province
- The resources of one of the best research universities in Canada (UAlberta) and other academic/training institutions
- People who are well trained, highly qualified, hard-working, multicultural
- Culture of risk takers and entrepreneurial spirit
- A city with small town personal connections
- High quality of life
  - **High net wealth and spending power**
  - **Ability to attract best people from around the world**
  - **Creative town and mindset (arts, theatre, festivals, original...)**
  - **Clean air, environment, we have very good environment**
- Northern location and specialization in northern planning, development and construction
- Lower operating costs compared to competitors (although this is eroding and there needs to be a focus on productivity and innovation) – costs are rising in part because of robust economy
- Lower tax environment (provincial benefit)

- Robust economy is attracting people and new businesses with oil and health acting as anchors and investing in new technologies
- Growing critical mass of early stage companies
- Alberta Health Board is big potential advantage

## 1.18 What can the City do to lever these emerging industries?

Groups were asked to prioritize their comments. Priorities identified included:

- Attract people and families through quality of life – unique Edmonton, beautiful city, form clusters with multiple employment options across sectors, events promotion, fun hip and cultured life
- Keep what is working: people, talent, companies, business support
- Partner with Universities for development
- Support the incubation of ideas through infrastructure (labs and facilities) to create a foundation for the industry
- Lobby the City and Province for incentives: investment wealth fund for software development, understand the possibilities of incentives, education and awareness raising to gain buy in
- Strengthen local procurement programs to support a growing industry
- Create a real economic development organization (not EEDC)
- The City and all the departments within the City should think like entrepreneurs

Additional comments included:

- Land subsidies/something to encourage major companies to move here (eg Bioware moved to Montreal because of subsidies)
- Need an anchor
- Dubai is a tax free zone – they use oil money to build infrastructure
- Infrastructure that ties to productivity (LRT, airport) – currently need car to access 'hubs' in the city. Eg. Connect century park LRT with Millwoods Research and Tech Park
- Create hubs – similar companies grouped together/new business district
- Office space changing to hoteling
- Flexible access to office space
- Not always create new things, look at what the city is already doing well eg. Tec Edmonton
- Leveraging tech expertise locally program – re-instate

- Supporting solutions for commercialization and groups like TEC Edmonton
- Focus on small business
- Attract investors – bring them to Alberta
- Have VC look to Edmonton
- Establish a community bond program
- Competing with Oil and Gas – prioritize
- PR need better alliance (like Oil and Government)
- Reverse trade missions
- More risks
- Engage City, Alberta Health as customers. Grow here then expand
- People (garbage, potholes and sidewalks) attraction (beautify city, design for beauty, enhance river valley)
- Provincial immigrants invest in local companies
- City of Edmonton should walk the talk with open source, social media, local procurement and educating bureaucracy of the benefits of emerging industries. City of Edmonton should be the first customer for local companies but need procurement rules and be able to track and monitor purchases. Have a dedicated office for procuring local. Influence other orders of government to do the same.
- Advocate: sell and brag about what we have
- Facilitate transit outside the core and extend the LRT to community revitalization quarters and technology campuses
- Define diversification and commit to long term region vision
- Edmonton Economic Development Corporation carry out their mandate