

# What We Heard Report #2

Child-Friendly  
Civic Precinct  
*the addition of  
child friendly art*

Contact information  
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**Edmonton**

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## A. Project Overview

The City of Edmonton has a vision to create a vibrant, connected, safe, sustainable and welcoming city for all citizens. The City recognizes that a city that supports children is better for everyone. The Child Friendly Edmonton Initiative works with children, families and community organizations to welcome and involve children and youth, to promote their well-being and to build a child-friendly city.

In 2016, Council made a decision to renew the Civic Precinct District, which includes the renewal of key areas of the Civic Precinct, including the Civic Precinct Fountain and Surface Renewal and the Centennial Plaza Redevelopment. As part of the ongoing projects in the Civic Precinct, City Council passed a motion to include additional child-friendly elements in the Civic Precinct (in and around Churchill Square).

What are Child-Friendly Elements?

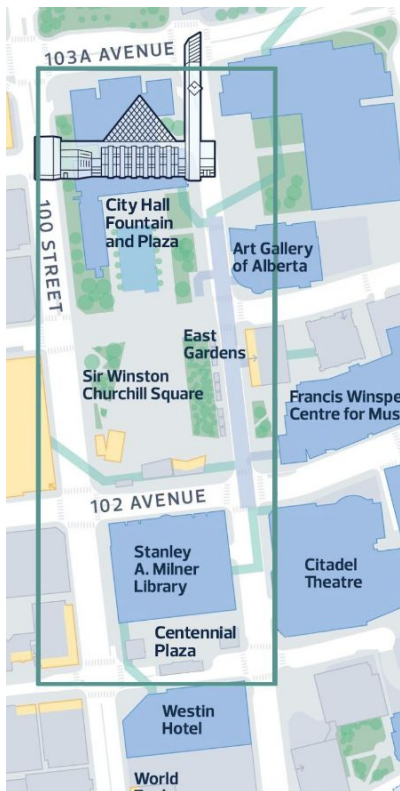
Child-friendly elements are features that have been intentionally created and placed for children of all ages to use, play and interact with, which support their learning, development and exploration. Child-friendly elements could include, but are not limited to:

- Play structures
- Surface designs
- Interactive seating
- Public art

Principles of child-friendly design strive for everyone to think about how we can engage children meaningfully, co-create accessible, welcoming and inclusive spaces and rethink the role of our urban public spaces with children in mind.

By thoughtfully designing and providing opportunities where children of all developmental stages, and their families, can interact and participate in multiple types of play, we create vibrant and inclusive public spaces.

The initiative began in 2018 with the objective to ensure a coordinated approach to include child-friendly elements in current Civic Precinct projects. In 2019, the concept grew to include the principle of using art as an approach to achieving the goals of incorporating child-friendly elements into the Civic Precinct.



*Civic Precinct Boundary*

## B. Public Engagement

There were three phases considered in public engagement for the Child-Friendly Civic Precinct Initiative.

- Phase 1 - Fall 2018: Gathered information on activities and themes regarding child-friendly opportunities in the Civic Precinct.
- Phase 2 - Summer 2019: Consulted with children on the creation of child-friendly art concepts.
- Phase 3 - Fall 2019: Explored art concept ideas with children and the public.

This report focuses on activities that occurred in phase 1, 2 and 3 of engagement, although engagement results primarily focus on phases 2 and 3.

### The Public Engagement Spectrum

In alignment with the City's Public Engagement Policy, this project used the engagement spectrum to identify the role of the public in the decision-making process. The level of engagement for this engagement was ADVISE for phase 1 and phase 2 and REFINE for phase 3.



### Phase 1 public engagement (2018)

Phase 1 public engagement was held in 2018 to **advise** on activities and themes regarding child-friendly opportunities in the Civic Precinct. The public engagement encouraged and included participation from ages 4 - adult.

Children, childcare providers and members of the general public provided input through participating in engagement sessions and

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from completing an online public survey. For more information the Phase 1 What We Heard report can be found at [edmonton.ca/ChildFriendlyPrecinct](http://edmonton.ca/ChildFriendlyPrecinct)

The feedback gathered showed that all types of activities held importance, but the respondents identified different play activities that were appropriate within different areas of the Civic Precinct.

The East Garden was considered a location for more **passive activities**, while Centennial Plaza was preferred for **active or nature opportunities**.

From the survey, 49% of the respondents are **not satisfied** with the **existing** child-friendly opportunities in the Civic Precinct.

Of the 596 survey respondents, 70% either **strongly agree** or **somewhat agree** that **more** child-friendly opportunities are needed in the Civic Precinct.

Based on the input collected, the project teams within the Civic Precinct began to investigate child-friendly elements to incorporate the identified priority activities.

#### Phase 2 and 3 public engagement (2019)

In 2019, the City of Edmonton collaborated with the Edmonton Arts Council to develop child-friendly opportunities by engaging children on the development of public art pieces for the City of Edmonton's Civic Precinct.

From July 24 to September 14, 2019 the project received insights and feedback from 226 participants. The process was broken into two phases.

#### Goals for Phase 2 - ADVISE

- To understand how children see, interpret, enjoy, and imagine public art, while having a glimpse at the "why" behind those experiences.
- To try and identify what aspects of public artwork have the potential to engage with kids the most.
- To look for connections between formal aspects, playability, interactiveness, and imagination.
- To get leads (based on what children choose, say, and create during the engagement sessions) that can be used later on to build the art concepts.

#### Goals for Phase 3 - Refine

- Build awareness about the process and educate on the project timeline and findings to date.

- Gain feedback on the artist's concepts.
- Uncover which options evokes the most reaction and emotion from individuals.

Partnerships were crucial to carrying out the engagement work. The City connected with many groups and organizations to make these workshops and conversations happen and this engagement was successful due to the support and participation of Caraway School, Dickinsfield Amity House, the Alberta Art Gallery, Edmonton's Downtown Farmer's Market and the Edmonton Downtown Community League.

## **Phase 2 Engagement - Gathering information for the big idea (July/August 2019)**

### **C. How we engaged**

Phase 2 sought to test the relationship between children under 12 and public art in order to gain meaningful insight for the development of the art concepts. The City, through the Edmonton Arts Council, contracted two local artists to develop and implement engagement with children to inform a vision for the child-friendly art. They will then design and fabricate the art to be placed in the Civic Precinct.

The artists lead the engagement and used three methods to gather feedback with the children:

- Discussions reflecting on existing public art images
- Hands on activities
- Site visit to future location of the art piece

Facilitators were present to record comments and discussion with the children.

### **D. Who was engaged**

The artist team used three child workshops to inform their process (37 participants total across all three sessions).



- July 24, 25, 26, 2019 at the Caraway School (12 participants, 3 - 12 years)
- July 31, 2019 at the Alberta Art Gallery kids camp (11 participants, 6-9 years)
- August 1, 2019 at Dickinsfield Amity House (14 participants, 3-5 years)

## E. What we asked



*Alberta Art Gallery Workshop  
(July 2019)*



### 1. Discussion groups:

For each workshop, the children were first led through a discussion to share about and reflect on examples of public art.

The children were presented with a set of 15 images of different public art pieces for them to choose the ones they would like to find when they go to a park/square. They were allowed to choose as many as they wanted. They were asked to explain why they were choosing those specific installations. Specific questions included "why are these your favourites?" and "what do you like most about them?".

### **Favourite public art images**

When the children reviewed the public art images, the ones that had the most votes were those that include three key components :

- Fun - Allowed multiple possibilities for play - hiding, climbing , sliding , jumping, and going in and through the art.
- Unique - Have an unexpected or weird look. Attention grabbing. Distinct with shapes, bright colours, size and shine.
- Engaging - Elements of the art that pull children into their imagination.

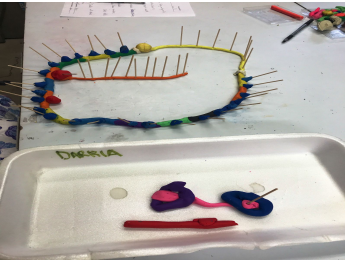


Images used for discussion:

The first five images took 54% of the total precedent image votes.

			These three images tied for first (most liked images.)
			Forth, fifth and sixth
			Seventh, eighth and ninth
			Tenth, eleventh and twelfth
			Bottom three - The first image there was indication that it was playful enough with its steep round edges. The other two were identified as not being colorful enough.





Alberta Art Gallery Workshop  
(July 2019)

## 2. Hands on feedback through creations

The second part of each workshop allowed the child to create their own piece of public art, modelling with plasticine and sticks. Further conversations followed around what they were making, the physical features and also the imaginative stories they were embedding in their own pieces.

The public art modelling activity was by far the most enjoyed by the children. They were eager to jump in and build an art piece suited to their style and taste. The kids took a lot of the aspects from the image precedents and incorporated it in with their own imagination. Two key themes stayed consistent through this activity: **there had to be lots of colour and there had to be a way to play/interact with it.**

The sensory elements from the precedent images really came through, with most kids speaking to climbing, jumping and sliding elements of their creations.

Children found these desired factors in art pieces greatly differed from each other in their subject, their formal treatment, and their narrative.

## 3. East Garden site visit

For the children who attended the Edmonton Art Gallery workshop, they were also able to visit where the public art is to be located (East Garden in Sir Winston Churchill Square). The children were asked to imagine, explore and reflect on what they saw, smelled and felt in the space.

Facilitators asked questions to the children such as:

- what would you like to see here,
- what would it look like, how big would it be,
- why would it look like that, etc.

Answers were recorded from the children on sticky pads.



*Alberta Art Gallery workshop, July 2019*

## F. What we heard

The information gathered through the three focus groups directly influenced the artists' design concepts, which was shared back with a broader audience in phase 3.

The themes of what the children found most engaging with public art installations included:

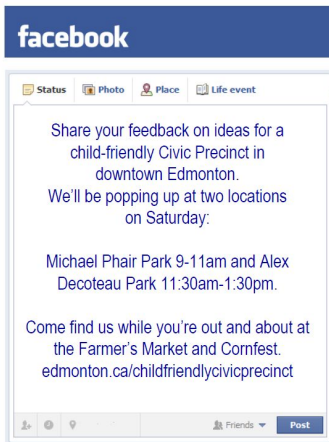
- Invited multiple ways of play (climbing, going through, going under, sliding, hiding, parkour).
- Appreciated an unexpected subject or form, or if the public art looks misplaced.
- Had a unique, weird, funny look.
- Appealed to their imagination.
- Challenged their perspective by distorting reality or bending accepted rules (a piece that defies gravity).
- Art that was colourful/bright/glowing.

## G. What happens next?

Following the children's lead, we developed the following child-friendly public art concept options with the mindset of offering children and stakeholders a wide spectrum of possibilities to choose from.

## Phase 3 engagement - Refining the Options (Fall 2019)

### C. How we engaged



The City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Arts Council and select artists worked together to include playful, child-friendly art in the Civic Precinct. The artists created concept options to gather feedback on. With the feedback gathered during engagement, one preferred option will be selected.

A childrens' focus group and the two public events were held to understand what children, parents and the general public thought about three prototype pieces of public art, and more importantly, to understand "why" they liked or disliked each piece. The artists also hoped to understand the perceived functionality, interest, excitement, fears, improvements, and general aesthetic preferences of the community.

This feedback would help decide and modify existing art concepts.

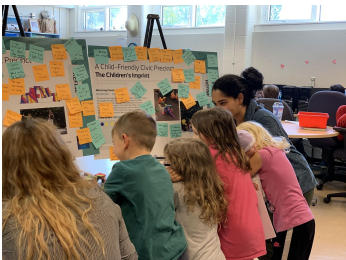
Each child and parent were able to see two maquettes (models) from each concept, as well as a concept drawing and a rendering of the art piece in the proposed garden. The facilitator asked adults and children to give their opinion on all three concepts.

Initial comments were written down by staff on post-it notes, and attached to the appropriate boards. If the participants wanted to, they were invited to write their age on a sticker and to place the sticker on the participant's all-around favourite art concept.

### D. Who was engaged

For phase 3, the artists hosted one focus session and two public engagement events. 189 "likes" were received between the three concepts.

- September 13, 2019: Focus group at the Caraway School for 51 children, ages 5- 12 years.
- September 14, 2019: Two "pop-up" events at the 104



*Images from Caraway school workshop (Sept 2019)*



Images from Caraway school workshop (Sept 2019)

street Farmer's Market & the Downtown Cornfest (Alex Decouteau Park). Over 100 people of all ages stopped by the booth.

## E. What we asked

All three concepts were featured on a poster-sized board of information that highlighted the key features of the concept and digital renderings of the art pieces. Each concept was also represented in model form, referred to by the artist's as *maquettes*.

Facilitators asked the following question and asked participants to place a colored dot (with their age) on their favorite concept.

"Which is your preferred child friendly public art concept? Why?"

### Concept 1 - An Octopus

#### Key Features: SLIDING EXPLORING CLIMBING

## A Child-Friendly Civic Precinct A Page from a Children's Book

The City of Edmonton is exploring options for child-friendly public art in the Civic Precinct. We would like your feedback today!

#### An Octopus

KEY FEATURES: SLIDING EXPLORING CLIMBING

This fantastic creature has been a common theme in children's books for ages. The octopus is an animal that exists in two worlds: the real and the imaginary one. It is a creature that evokes a sense of fantasy and mystery. It appeals to our imagination. It is an invitation to dream about other worlds and possibilities.



#### THIS IS MY PREFERRED CONCEPT



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## Concept 2 - Multiverse

### Key Features: JUMPING HIDING PARKOUR

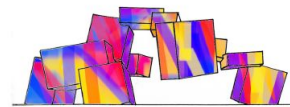
## A Child-Friendly Civic Precinct Multiverse

The City of Edmonton is exploring options for child-friendly public art in the Civic Precinct. We would like your feedback today!

### Geometric Volumes

KEY FEATURES: JUMPING HIDING PARKOUR

This concept presents a set of geometric volumes that are interconnected and placed in slightly different angles, creating a continuum space with movement and rhythm. The piece appears to be in motion, adding a sense of "risk" that kids will take as an invitation for exploring the piece. It will be possible to create these hidden-in-plain-sight territory for kids. The colourful and contemporary style of the surface is a reflection of the exciting urban life in Edmonton.



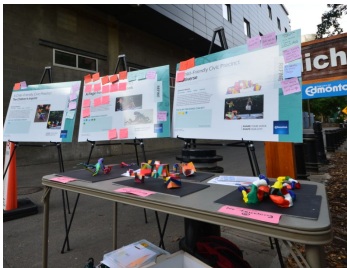
### THIS IS MY PREFERRED CONCEPT



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Images from 104 street Farmers Market (Sept 2019)

*This concept presents a set of geometric volumes that are interconnected and placed in slightly different angles, creating a continuum space with movement and rhythm. The piece appears to be in motion, adding a sense of "risk" that kids will take as an invitation for exploring the piece. It will be possible to create these hidden-in plain-sight territory for kids. The colourful and contemporary style of the surface is a reflection of the exciting urban life in Edmonton.*



## Key Features: CLIMBING HIDING EXPLORING

### Concept 3 - Mimicking Plasticine



## A Child-Friendly Civic Precinct The Children's Imprint

The City of Edmonton is exploring options for child-friendly public art in the Civic Precinct. We would like your feedback today!

### Mimicking Plasticine

KEY FEATURES: CLIMBING HIDING EXPLORING

This concept was suggested to us by the children's creations during the engagement. Many of them tended to connect the strips of modelling clay while twisting and modelling them to create colourful intertwined organic forms. Pressing, rolling, twisting the plasticine seemed to be the way for them to make their mark on the material. This concept was suggested to us by the children's creations during the previous engagement activities.

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## F. What we heard



Images from Cornfest (Sept 2019)

Using the findings from phase 1, the artist team designed and visualized three public art concepts for the City's Civic Precinct. These three designs were strongly influenced by the feedback shared by the children and were reflective of their preferences and creations.

When the three concepts were presented back to the public in phase 2, the most preferred concept of the three was the

Octopus within 'A Page from a Children's Book.' The table below indicates the number of votes each concept got, broken down by child and adult respondents.

Concept	Votes from Children	Votes from Adults
A Page from a Children's Book	33	48
Multiverse	28	29
A Child's Imprint	17	17
*Children represent those who attended at the Caraway school session are included as well as those from the Farmer's Market and Cornfest who appeared to be under the age of 18.		

From the comments received from the participants, four main themes emerged: **familiarity, function, colour/pattern and general aesthetic.**

#### CONCEPT 1: A Page from a Children's Book

**Familiarity:** Participants often pulled reference to the familiarity of the octopus. It's real.

**Function:** Previous feedback on use of the art surfaced again with the octopus, seeing opportunities to jump, climb, sit and hang off it.

**Colour and pattern:** Participants clung to the multi-coloured and polka dot facets.

Overall, the aesthetic of this piece was well received and many respondents thought it was unique. Participants particularly liked the flow of the tentacles, the smoothness of the structure, and the natural aesthetic.

#### CONCEPT 2: Multiverse (Boxes)

**Familiarity:** The Multiverse was noted as familiar due to its similarity to the box shape of downtown's architecture. Participants referred to this concept as boxy and generic, and reminiscent of other boxy art and structures they have seen before.



Function: Potential use was very obvious to participants, opportunities mentioned included - climbing on and under, sitting on, jumping around, jumping off, photographing, posting on social media, and sitting under this piece.

Colour and pattern: Colour was mentioned most often with the boxes, many cited they liked the colours and the graffiti aesthetic.

#### CONCEPT 3: A Child's Imprint

Familiarity: The child's imprint was related to a series of different objects and locations, including: the Edmonton Art Gallery, glaciers/icebergs, Northern Canadian Art, bones and worms. The abstract nature of the piece made it relatable to many different themes and emotions.

Function: In addition to climbing, sliding and hiding the piece was also mentioned to spark imaginations as it could be interpreted as anything.

Colour and pattern: Where the others were favoured for their colour, this piece was described as too dark and that the colours made them like it less. Others did approve of the sharp paint lines and colours.

## G. What happens next?

### Developing a preferred concept

In November, the City Project Team reviewed the three options and information presented by the artists. Each concept was reviewed using criteria considering City Policies, a technical review, stakeholder feedback and public art requirements. The elements within the concepts that were considered critical to inform the preferred option were:

- Permanence/longevity of the artwork
- Developed in collaboration with children
- Fluid/connecting the two locations
- Nature and whimsical imagery
- Constructability
- Colorful, vibrant, joyful
- Play elements that function to allow climbing, balancing, exploring and imagination
- Safety

**As a result, what has changed in the project?**

The development of a child-friendly art concept for the Civic Precinct considers site constraints and opportunities while considering the needs of citizens, site users and children. The information that children, the public and stakeholders provided informed the artist team in the development of a preferred design for the child-friendly artwork in the Civic Precinct.

Citizens can continue to be involved with a Child-Friendly Civic Precinct by checking the project webpage for more updates [edmonton.ca/ChildFriendlyCivicPrecinct](https://edmonton.ca/ChildFriendlyCivicPrecinct)

Thank you for participating in sharing your voice and shaping our city.

For more information on City of Edmonton public engagement, please visit [edmonton.ca/publicengagement](https://edmonton.ca/publicengagement)