

Community Safety and Crime Prevention

While there have been some progress in reducing the incidence of crime in recent years, community safety continues to be a top of mind concern for most Edmontonians. To reduce crime, an emphasis is needed on both enforcement and preventing crime.

Neighbourhood Empowerment Teams (N.E.T.) are an Edmonton Police Service, United Way, and Family Centre led initiative that combines crime reduction and prevention with capacity building among residents. N.E.T. teams are currently in place in six high needs neighbourhoods. Under the current funding model, neighbourhoods lose N.E.T. after a period of two to four years and resources are transferred to other high needs neighbourhoods. The new City Council must ensure that sufficient resources are made available to allow for a gradual expansion of the number of neighbourhoods with N.E.T. without the corresponding loss of the teams from neighbourhoods where they are currently in place.

REACH Edmonton is a city-wide collaboration that coordinates community partnerships - focusing on preventing gang violence, sexual exploitation, and youth addiction. City Council needs to commit to stable, multi-year funding so that REACH can reach its full potential.

Healthy and Inclusive Neighbourhoods

The greatest disparities in socio-economic status are not between different provinces or regions, but rather between neighbourhoods in our own city. Edmonton City Council can do more to adopt policies promoting healthy, inclusive, mixed income neighbourhoods.

Rather than concentrating affordable housing in a relatively small number of neighbourhoods already facing significant social challenges, a better distribution of affordable housing in all neighbourhoods is needed. One solution is to build affordable housing on 20 vacant school sites that have been declared surplus by Edmonton School Boards and turned over to the City. Many of these surplus school sites are located in neighbourhoods with little or no affordable housing at present.

The Office of Great Neighbourhoods has good potential to be a vehicle for neighbourhood revitalization. The new City Council must ensure that the office is adequately resourced and its neighbourhood revitalization efforts strengthened.

A More Compact, Livable City

Curbing urban sprawl is key to saving energy, expanding public transit and protecting prime farmland. While the City's new land use plan (The Way We Grow) is full of good intentions, the actual policy directions work against achieving a more compact city. The new plan allows for all remaining reserve land in the southwest, southeast and northeast corners of the City to be opened to residential, commercial and industrial development. Yet there are over 40 Edmonton neighbourhoods that are undeveloped or only partly developed. The Council should amend the land use plan to restrict new development to already approved neighbourhoods for at least the next 10 years.

Another obstacle to increased density is the widespread perception that residential multi-unit buildings are not family friendly. Developers reinforce this perception by designating many multi-unit buildings as adult only. More family friendly multi-unit housing is badly needed in all areas of the City which incorporate amenities for children and teens. The new City Council should consider a bylaw that would prohibit the development of adult-only buildings except those tailored to seniors.

Affordable Housing

In 2008, 3079 people were found to be homeless in Edmonton. Temporary remedies such as shelters often require individuals to leave in the morning and to return later in the day. Problems precipitate if daytime safe spaces (i.e drop-in centres) are non-existent in the area or lack adequate resource and capacity. Under such circumstances, open public spaces are the only sites for a range of activities such as eating and sanitation, which would happen if they had homes. Programs such as *Housing First* aims to lift people out of homelessness by housing them, followed by offering appropriate social support as a way to recover and rebuild their lives. Since April 1, 2009, 888 people have found housing through the Housing First program, 85 % of whom remain successfully housed.

Affordable housing is not only needed for people who are homeless, but is also important for low-wage income families and new workers coming to Edmonton who find it difficult to find a place to live. There families who are caught in the cycle of making 'too much' at low-paying jobs to qualify for assistance programs, yet are making 'too little' for a down-payment on a house. After a lengthy consultation process with citizens, civil society, and stakeholders, the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness presented a 10 year Plan to End Homeless. It represented a paradigm shift from 'managing' to 'ending' homelessness. Since the release of the report in January 2009:

- 424 supported housing units secured, far exceeding the target of 150 units set for 2010
- A Pathways to Housing program has been developed, helping people with the most challenging and complex needs find a safe home
- A Rapid Exit Program has been established at one shelter, where support workers help people in need find secure, stable housing
- A Housing First Action Centre has been established to coordinate program delivery. The Centre negotiates with private landlords for provision of units throughout Edmonton. No more than 20% of the units in any one building are to be set aside for the program
- Edmonton's first furniture bank has been established

The City needs to continue supporting the objectives of the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness, help facilitate non-market housing in all neighborhoods across the City, and foster understanding within communities that are unsure about the value of non-market housing.

Affordable Recreation and Public Transit

The City's Leisure Access Program provides low income Edmontonians with free or low cost access to City recreation facilities and attractions. This is an excellent program which needs to be safeguarded by the new City Council.

Many low income Edmontonians do not have cars. They rely heavily on public transit to get them to school, work, shopping or for access to recreation. Continued improvement in transit service especially in the evenings and late at night is needed. The City currently provides reduced transit fares to students, seniors and disabled residents. The City of Calgary goes a step further and offers a universal low income transit pass to all of its low income residents. Edmonton should follow suit and provide a universal low income transit pass. Instead of a separate application process, Edmontonians who qualify for the Leisure Access Program should also be eligible for reduced transit fares.



Aging Population

In keeping with global and national trends, the number of seniors living in Edmonton is on the rise. In 1986, 17% were 55 or older. This demographic increased to 21% in 2006 and is projected to grow to 32% by 2041.

Within the senior population, the most dramatic growth will happen in the 80-plus age group, which is expected to increase by as much as 266%. The number of people aged 55-64 is projected to increase by as much as 104%. Working with other orders of government, the new City Council must ensure a variety of affordable housing choices, including single detached homes, secondary suites, rental units, condos, town homes, assisted living and continuing care facilities. After housing, community support and health services help seniors be socially engaged, active in recreation and civic life, volunteer in the community, and possibility for employment. Moreover, the new Council needs to address transportation concerns since mobility around the community is critical in maintaining an independent and healthy lifestyle. On average, only about 46% of seniors drive. The challenges of getting between places are particularly acute for older adults with medical conditions and physical disabilities.

Food Security in Edmonton

As the Food Bank provides free, nutritious food to individuals and families suffering from economic hardship, food bank usage is a good indicator of financial hardship on individuals and families and the rising costs of food. According to the Edmonton Food Bank, usage has risen 61% from March 2008 to March 2009 with 78% of all food banks in Edmonton reporting increased usage.

While Alberta Works provides a core food benefit of \$143/month/1-adult household, \$137/month/2-adult household, and \$83/month/child, (43% of food bank users are children), increased food bank usage demonstrates the inadequacy of Alberta Works Food Benefit.

According to the 2006/07 taxfiler data for the City of Edmonton, about 106,680 people in Edmonton live in poverty. Of these, 33,330 are children, representing 21% of all children in the City of Edmonton. Food insecurity is not just experienced by Edmontonians on social assistance programs (32%) but include, as noted above children (43%), low-wage earners (27%), receiving EI (5%) and the disabled (12%).

Multicultural Communities

Edmonton is a multicultural city. According to Statistics Canada, the diversity of Canada's population will continue to increase over the next two decades, especially within metropolitan areas. By 2031, between 25% and 28% of Canada's population could be foreign-born. About 55% of this population would be born in Asia. The visible minority population is likely to increase rapidly among the Canadian-born, many of whom are children and grandchildren of immigrants. In the recent 2006 census, immigrants constituted 26% of Edmonton's population. Origins of immigrants in Edmonton are:

- Asia, Middle East, and Oceania: 46%
- Europe: 36 %
- Africa: 7%
- Caribbean, Bermuda, Central and South America: 7%
- United States: 4%

City policies should anticipate the demographic shifts and provide services that will enable newcomers to belong and participate in the social, economic, cultural, recreational, and political life of Edmonton, while at the same time assure an immigrant's sense of origin and identity. Studies show that the ability to identify with and respect one's cultural origin helps foster personal resilience and improve the likelihood of success in Canadian society.

Aboriginal Issues

Between 2001 and 2006, the population of Aboriginal Edmonton increased by more than 25% (about 8,000 persons), compared to non-Aboriginal growth estimated at about 9%. Métis represent the largest group of Aboriginal residents, followed closely by First Nations. Aboriginal residents are much younger than non-Aboriginal residents, with a greater percentage of households with children. Moreover, Aboriginal Edmontonians are more likely to be single than non-Aboriginals, and are twice as likely to live in a common law relationship than by legal marriage.

While there still is a gap in education and training levels between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals, there has been an increase over the past 5 years, namely in apprenticeships and trades among Aboriginal men, and sales and services among Aboriginal women. Although unemployment rates have been dropping, they remain much higher – particularly for First Nations residents – than the rates of non-Aboriginals. 40% of Aboriginal residents live below the low income cut-off rate (poverty line), while the median income is only two-thirds that of non-Aboriginals.

The new City Council needs to continue to strengthen the Urban Aboriginal Accord and the Aboriginal Relations Office, as well as supporting Aboriginal organizations and the Witchitowin civic process.

October 18 - Get Out To Vote

Voter participation has been markedly low in recent municipal elections - 52% (1992), 50% (1995), 36% (1998), 35% (2001), 42% (2004), and 27% (2007). Considering these worrying trends, the foundations of liberal democracy would continue to erode since it assumes that the electorate knowingly and willingly elects their governing representatives. We encourage all Edmontonians to attend public forums, deliberate with candidates, and make an informed choice on election day (October 18). Polls are open from 9AM to 8PM. Visit http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/edmonton-elections.aspx for more information on forum locations, candidates, and polling locations.

(Sources: City of Edmonton; Edmonton Elections 2010; Edmonton Gleaners Association; Government of Alberta; Homeward Trust; Statistics Canada; Steinhauer, P.D. 1998; and the World Health Organization).

