

# Downtown Investment Plan

COORDINATED  
INVESTMENT ACTIONS  
FOR DOWNTOWN  
EDMONTON

OCTOBER 2024

CO-AUTHORED BY



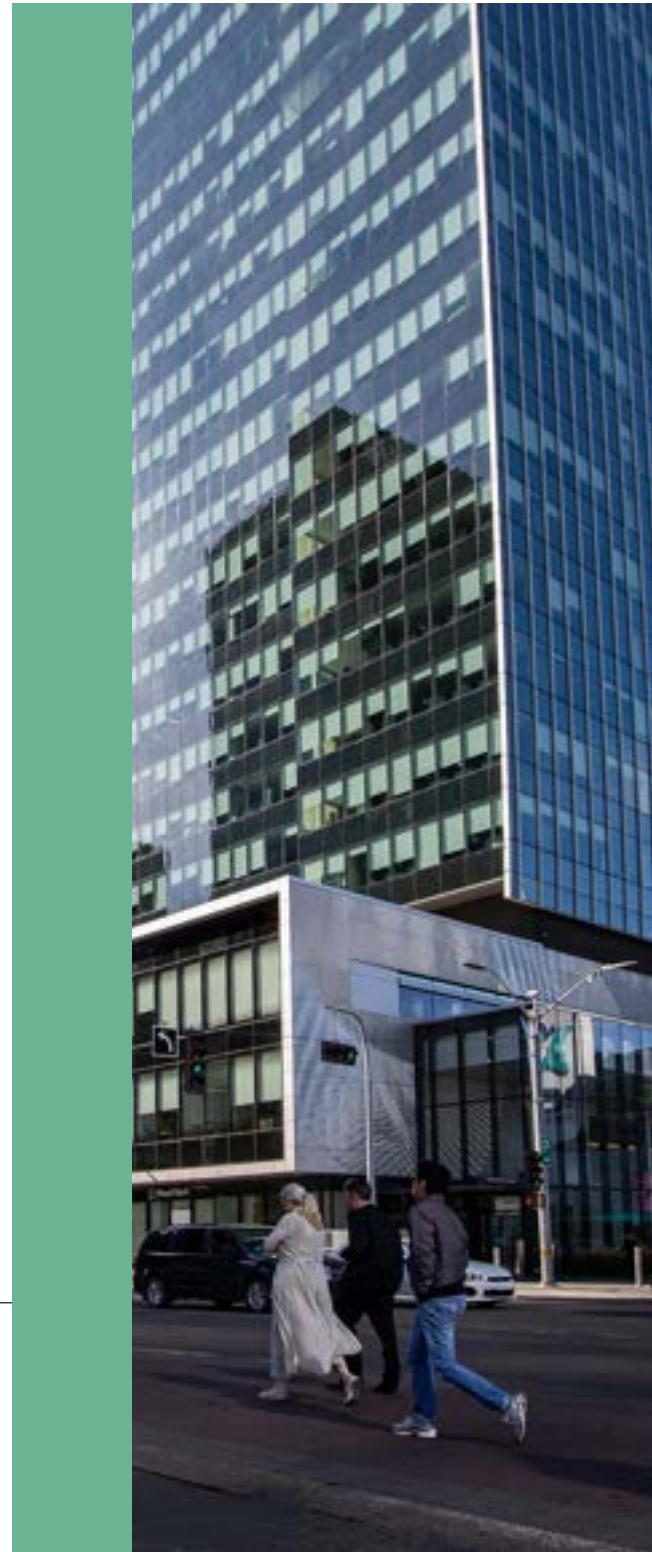
Building an inclusive and equitable city is a shared mission. We deeply appreciate the contributions of residents, community organizations, businesses, homebuilders, and developers who have offered their experiences and aspirations. Their efforts have been crucial in shaping a dynamic, competitive downtown that embraces residents, stimulates economic growth, and attracts tourism. The actions outlined in this plan are a direct result of their collective insights and commitment, and we look forward to advancing these goals together.

BILD Edmonton Metro, Downtown Revitalization Coalition, Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, Edmonton Downtown Business Association and NAIOP Edmonton respectfully acknowledge that we are located within Treaty 6 territory and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4 and Region 2. We acknowledge this land as the traditional home for many Indigenous Peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Dene, Saukteaux, Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant communities.



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# Downtown Edmonton Past, Present and Future



**Downtown Edmonton is the beating heart of our city, a vital hub for community, business, finance, education, professional services, entertainment, and government. As the seat of both the Alberta Legislature and Edmonton City Hall, it plays a critical role in shaping perceptions and fostering connections within our community.**

Currently home to 13,000 residents and a workplace for 60,000, Downtown Edmonton covers less than 1% of the city's geographic area yet once contributed a substantial 10% to the municipal tax base. However, this number now sits at 6.4%, as of 2024. Investments are urgently needed to ensure that our core remains a thriving centre of economic and social activity.

Across North America, downtowns are grappling with challenges in revitalizing post-pandemic, addressing safety concerns, and re-establishing themselves as vibrant centers of activity. The shift in work habits, increased focus on public health, and changing economic landscapes have compelled cities to rethink and reimagine their downtown cores. These challenges present both obstacles and opportunities for growth and innovation, with cities striving to create spaces that are inclusive, safe, and attractive for residents, workers, and visitors alike.

This report is written on the premise and foundation of basic principles that underpin thriving and successful public and private spaces:

- ✓ Clean and safe
- ✓ Focused and prioritized investment with a clear return
- ✓ Prioritized leadership and capacity
- ✓ Start with arts and entertainment
- ✓ Growing residential population
- ✓ Visible academic, research, and technology-focused uses
- ✓ Opportunities for play

In many ways, downtown Edmonton functions as the downtown for an entire region, acting as the central anchor for trade, education, healthcare, and culture in the North. By investing in our downtown, we are not just revitalizing a few blocks — we are enhancing the experience and access for countless people who look to Edmonton as their urban core. These challenges have underscored the need for a comprehensive and unified approach. BILD Edmonton Metro, the Downtown Revitalization Coalition (DRC), Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, Edmonton Downtown Business Association, and NAIOP Edmonton, has been diligent in trying to harmonize budget asks across industries.

Our intention is to proactively collaborate and centralize our thoughts and ideas on what is needed to secure the future of our downtown, and to have these inputs inform future planning and budgeting work. It is time that we all rally around our downtown's success.

The next decade promises to be transformative, with anticipated investments from all orders of government and the private sector, aiming to enhance the social, fiscal, and environmental value of our downtown core. Together, we can ensure that Downtown Edmonton remains a vibrant and essential part of our city's identity and economy, now and for generations to come.



# Downtown Context



While downtown once used to generate 10% of the city's tax revenues (2009), that figure has declined to 6.4% (2024).<sup>1</sup>



Edmonton's downtown is a bustling centre of major businesses and corporate headquarters, home to over 60,000 office workers. With approximately 261 jobs per hectare, it remains a key economic hub. However, the office vacancy rate stands at about 24%, one of the highest in the nation.



From 2001 to 2011, downtown saw a significant 61% increase in residential growth. Yet, this trend faced challenges during the pandemic as shifts in consumer preferences impacted residential attraction.



**801,446**

Downtown attracts 47 festivals and events annually, drawing 801,446 attendees.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, it hosts 47,000 students. These visitors, who are surveyed annually, point to the expectation for a clean, safe, and vibrant downtown.



**\$3.2b**

ICE District development, though impacted by the pandemic, has had a catalytic effect on downtown. The combined total visitor, capital and operational spending attributable to Phase I of ICE District, which excludes direct revenue to OEG, totaled at an estimate of \$3.2 billion.<sup>3</sup>

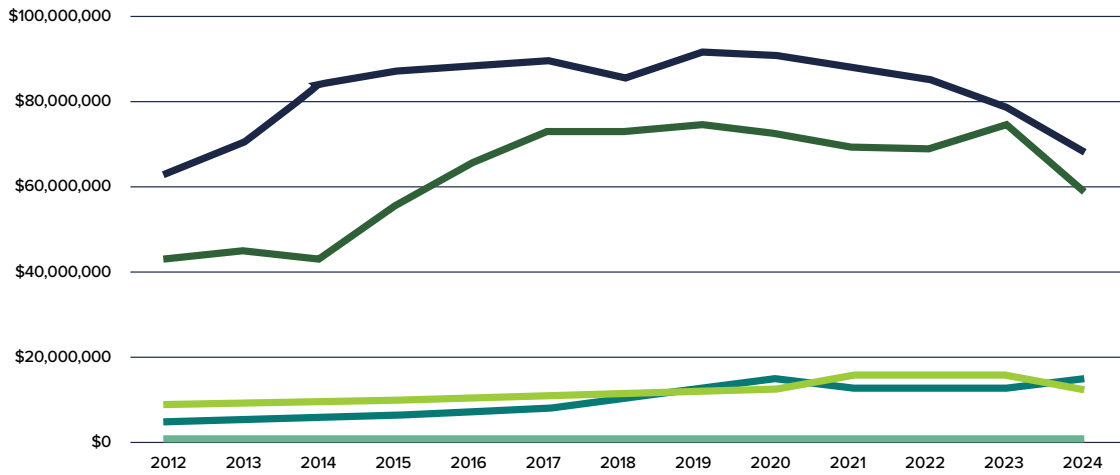
<sup>1</sup> Property Assessment Data, City of Edmonton (2024).

<sup>2</sup> Edmonton Downtown Business Association (2023)

<sup>3</sup> Economic Impact and Public Benefit Study for Edmonton ICE District and Proposed Expansion, CBRE (2024).



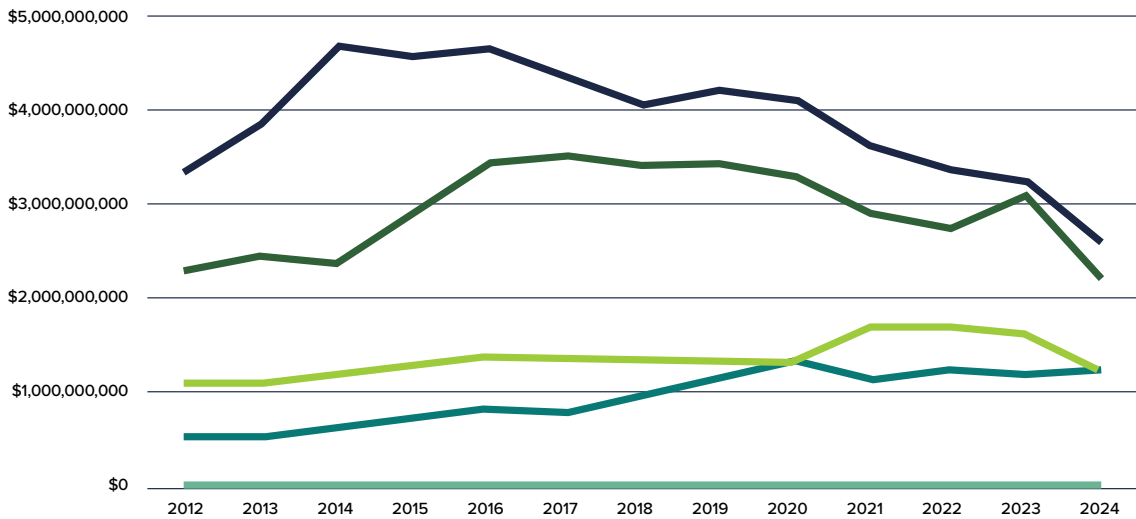
**Downtown Tax Take (2012-2024)**



The overall tax revenue for each asset type is charted above, with total tax revenue in 2024 of approximately \$155 million, and a peak revenue in 2018 of approximately \$191 million.

- Office Taxes
- Commercial Taxes
- Res Taxes
- Multi Taxes
- Other Taxes

**Downtown Assessment Base, Nominal Value (2012-2024)**

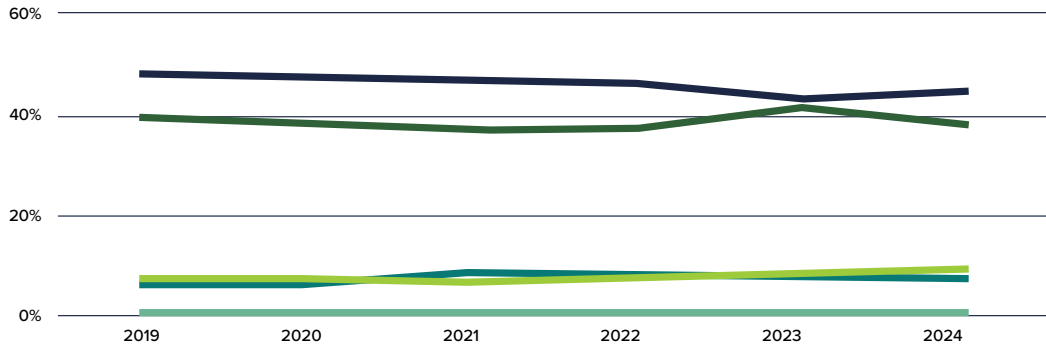


The combined assessed values of each asset type represent the overall taxable assessment base. As the chart demonstrates above, the overall combined assessment base has decreased significantly, with the largest shift being in the office sector.

- Office Sum
- Commercial Sum
- Res Sum
- Multi Sum
- Other Sum



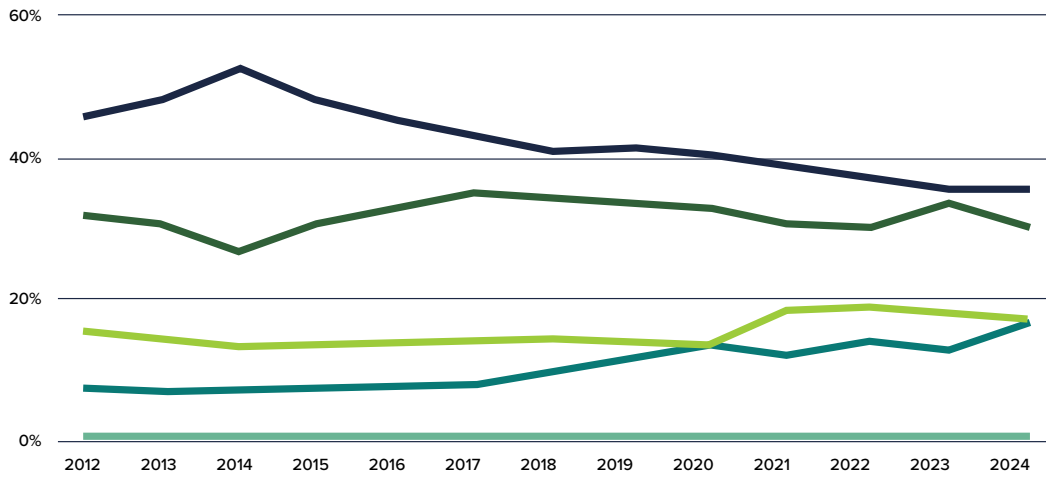
**Downtown Tax Take, Percentage of Total (2019-2024)**



Approximately 80% of all tax revenue for the downtown area comes from the commercial sector, with residential and multi-residential properties only representing approximately 10% each.

- Office Percent
- Commercial Percent
- Res Percent
- Multi Percent
- Other Percent

**Downtown Assessment Base, Percentage of Total (2012-2024)**



The overall decrease in office values from 2014 onwards has led to additional pressure from other sectors to support the overall tax base.

- Office Percent
- Commercial Percent
- Res Percent
- Multi Percent
- Other Percent

## Map 1

# Capital Projects

This map compiles all currently listed capital projects including those recently completed, projects which are planned and funded under current Capital Budget, and projects which are planned but not yet funded. These include:

### Recently Completed Projects

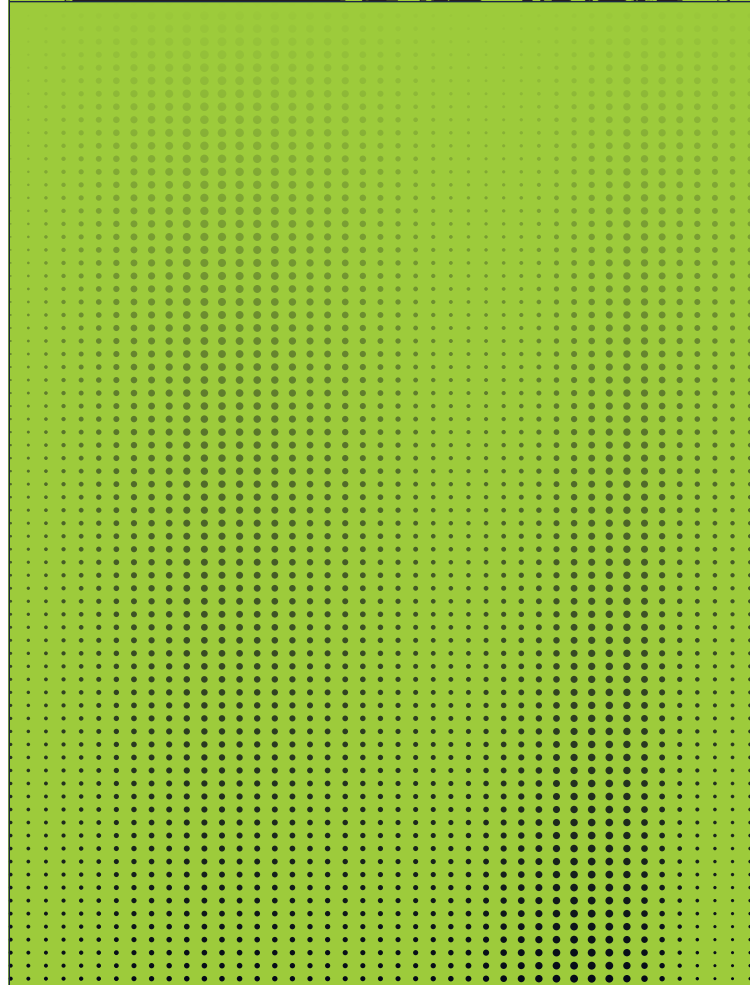
- ✓ Jasper Avenue from 97 Street to 100 Street Streetscaping
- ✓ 100 Street (east side only) from Jasper Avenue to Funicular Streetscaping
- ✓ 102 Avenue from 97 Street to 102 Street Streetscaping
- ✓ Centennial Plaza Redevelopment

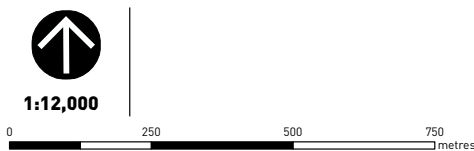
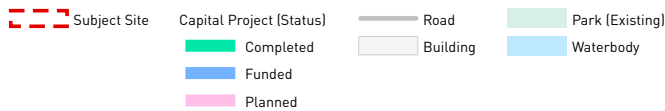
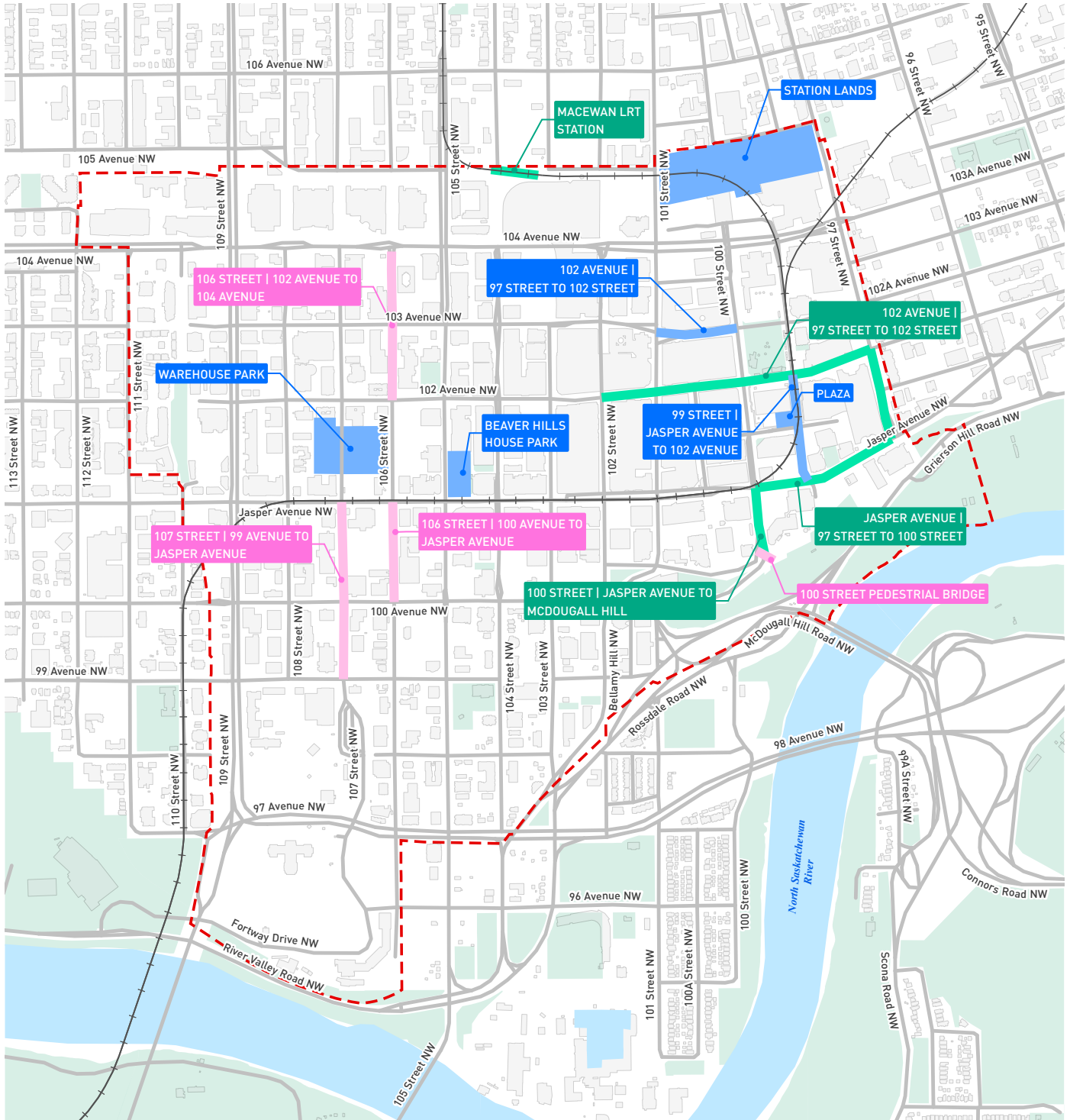
### Planned and Funded Projects

- ✓ 99 Street Streetscaping and Waterproofing Project
- ✓ Warehouse Park
- ✓ 103 Avenue Streetscaping
- ✓ Beaver Hills House Park and Michael Phair Parks
- ✓ Station Lands Pedway and Public Realm Improvements

### Planned, Not Funded Projects

- ✓ 106 Street from 100 Avenue to Jasper Avenue and 102 Avenue to 104 Avenue Streetscaping
- ✓ 107 Street from 99 Avenue to Jasper Avenue Streetscaping
- ✓ Funicular to MacDonald Drive Pedestrian Bridge





## Downtown Investment Plan

### Capital Projects



Downtown Edmonton  
October 2024

## Map 2

# Public Realm Investment Gaps (Current)

This map summarizes and evaluates existing infrastructure data to highlight the quality of the pedestrian and cycling experience throughout downtown. It focuses on key elements such as safe pedestrian crossings, separated bike lanes, and wide sidewalks, all of which are essential for creating an accessible and inviting public realm. While the map provides a clear picture of current conditions, it does not account for the age or condition of infrastructure, limiting its ability to identify areas where reconstruction or upgrades may be required.



The classifications for each category were determined as follows:

#### **Bike Racks**

- ✓ Determined by the amount of public bicycle parking available within the cell

#### **Streetlights**

- ✓ Determined by streetlight spacing along the streets within the cell

#### **Bus Stops**

- ✓ Defined by the frequency of bus stops within the cell

#### **LRT Stations**

- ✓ LRT station class was defined as medium for below-grade, and high for at-grade

#### **Bike Routes**

- ✓ Low classification for no bike route
- ✓ Medium classification for on-street, shared bike facilities such as painted bike routes
- ✓ High for dedicated active modes networks with delineation from vehicular travel

#### **Sidewalks**

- ✓ Low classification where sidewalks do not meet minimum accessibility and City design standards
- ✓ Medium where sidewalks are close to City design standards
- ✓ High where sidewalks have been increased to create an enhanced public realm and exceed all design standards

#### **Intersections**

- ✓ Intersection Types are defined by the ability, safety, and priority for pedestrians to cross

#### **Trees**

- ✓ Defined by the number of trees located within the street ROW within the cell

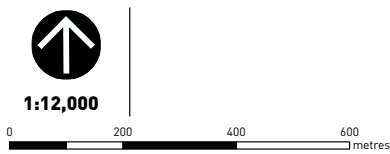
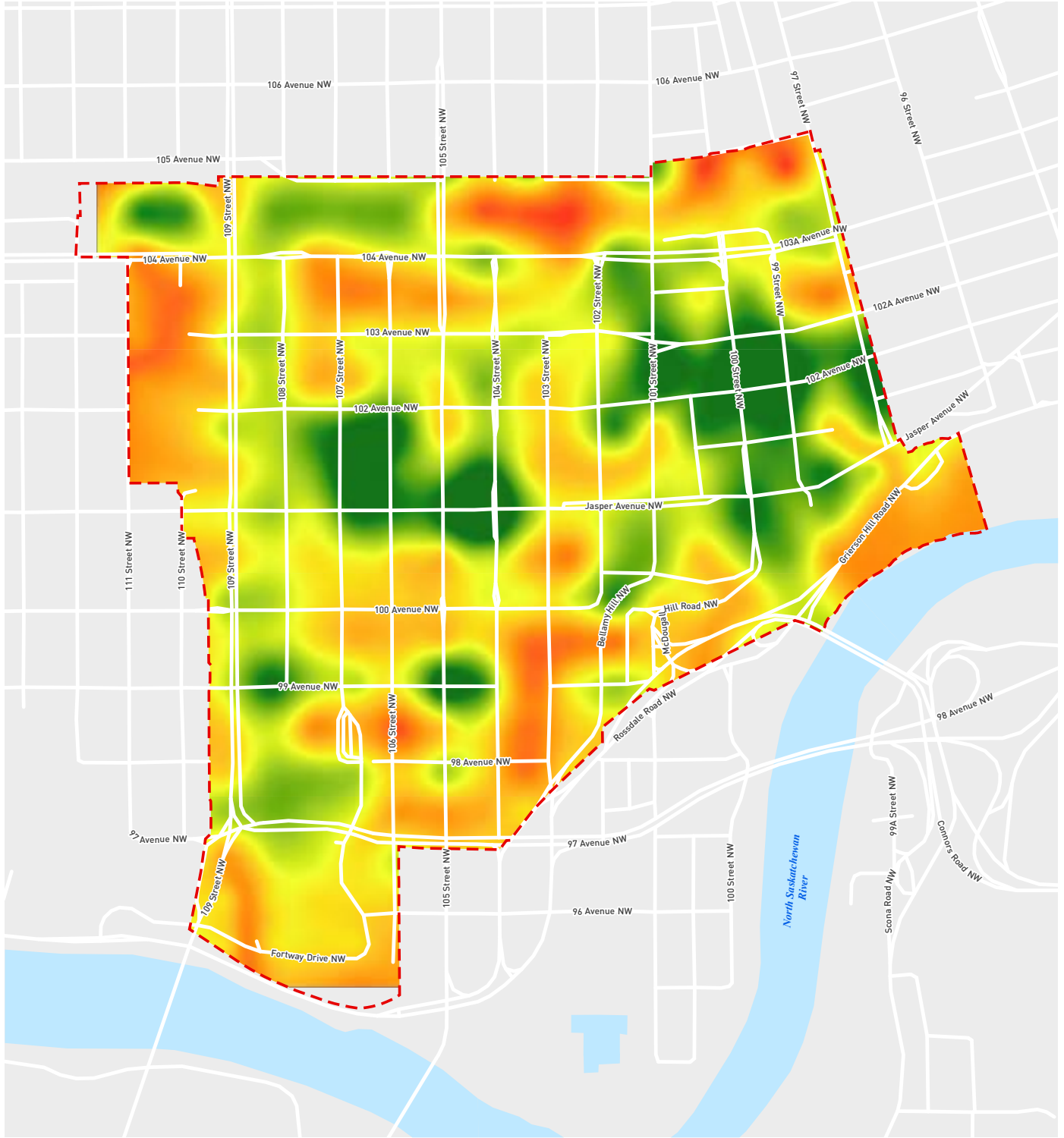
#### **Parks**

- ✓ Where streets are adjacent to a park, a high classification is provided as it is assumed to provide an enhanced active modes connection and comfortable pedestrian experience

Once the classifications were defined, those values were weighted based on how much they contribute to the experience. This analysis was then combined with the completed and funded capital projects to provide an overall perspective and see how downtown has been positively transformed through capital investment and where gaps remain in the public realm. Streetscaping enhancements, improved pedestrian crossings, and the addition of separated bike lanes have made downtown safer, more accessible, and more enjoyable for residents, workers, and visitors. Revitalized parks and open spaces like Ice District plaza have successfully created vibrant hubs for community interaction, demonstrating the power of public realm investment to activate spaces and attract further economic activity.

However, despite these improvements, there remain significant gaps in the public experience of downtown that are impacted by a lack of investment in key areas. With various separate projects shaping the public realm in downtown, there is a lack of consistency, connectivity and an overall holistic approach to the public realm and pedestrian experience within the downtown. Several major streetscapes and public spaces have not yet seen the same level of attention, leading to uneven quality across the downtown core. While some areas have flourished, others still suffer from outdated infrastructure, limited pedestrian amenities, and a lack of inviting public spaces, which negatively impacts the sense of place. The success of well-funded projects clearly shows the potential for more engaging and active downtown spaces, but further investment is essential to bridge these gaps and ensure a cohesive, thriving public realm throughout the entire downtown.





## Downtown Investment Plan

### Public Realm Investment Gaps (Current)



Downtown Edmonton  
October 2024

Data Sources: City of Edmonton, GeoBase  
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## Map 3

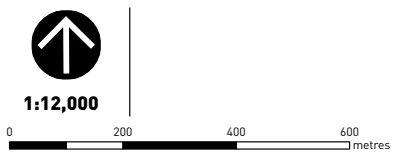
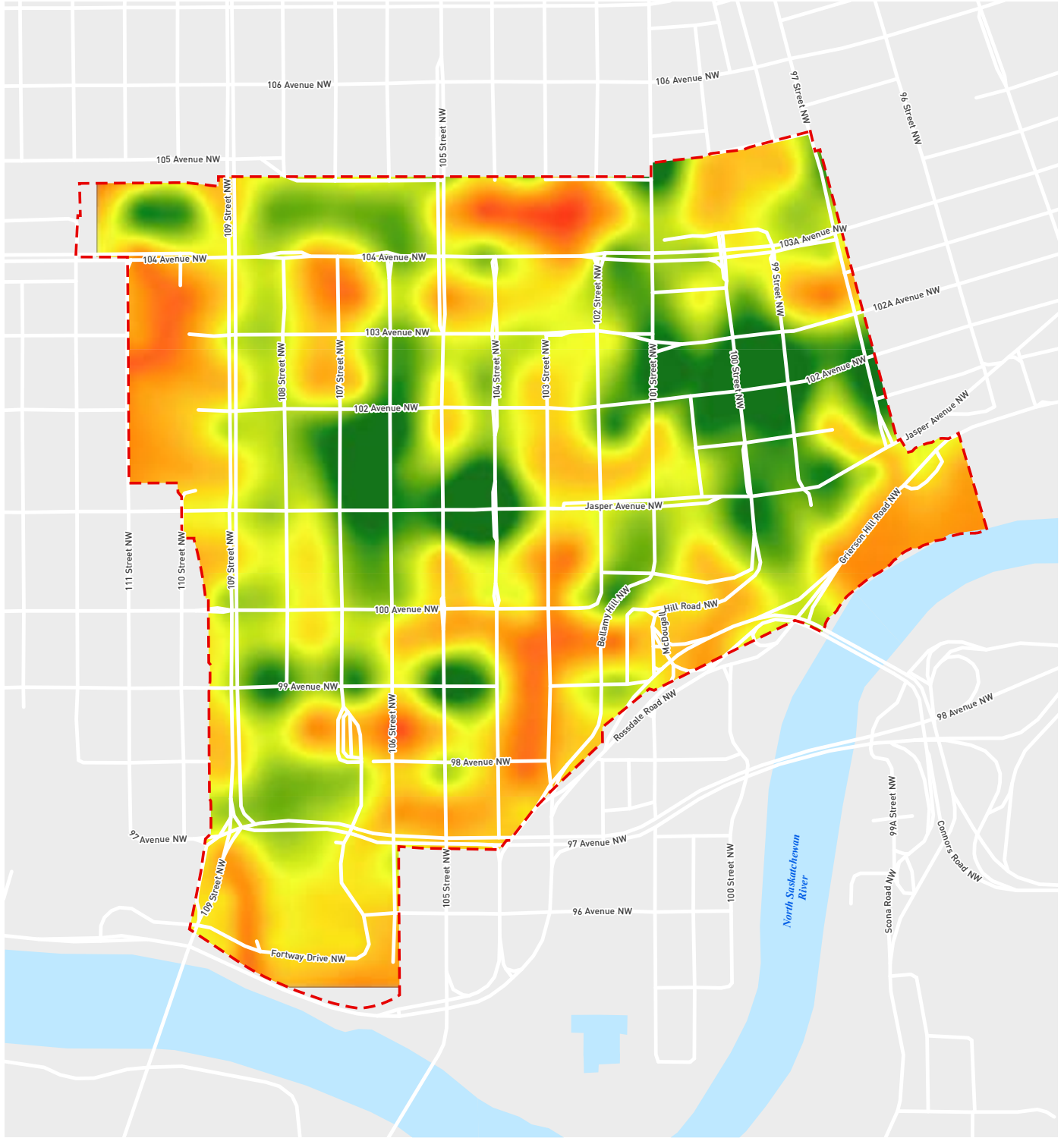
# Public Realm Investment Gaps (Projected)

Integrating the planned projects that are not yet funded provides an idea of the impact of funding currently planned projects through the next capital budget. This supplementary figure illustrates how completing these projects would make incremental progress in improving the overall downtown public realm and experience. By extending streetscaping, enhancing pedestrian connectivity, and filling in gaps in key corridors, these projects would contribute to a more cohesive and attractive urban environment.

However, the figure also highlights that while these planned investments would improve certain areas, there are still substantial portions of the downtown core that remain underfunded and underdeveloped. Without further investment, these areas will continue to lag behind, limiting the potential for a fully connected and vibrant public realm. The figure emphasizes that while funding the current projects would bring noticeable improvements, addressing the remaining gaps through future capital planning is critical for achieving a downtown that offers a consistent, high-quality experience across all areas.







## Downtown Investment Plan

### Public Realm Investment Gaps (Projected)



Downtown Edmonton  
October 2024

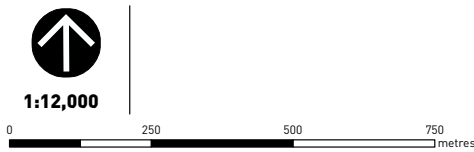
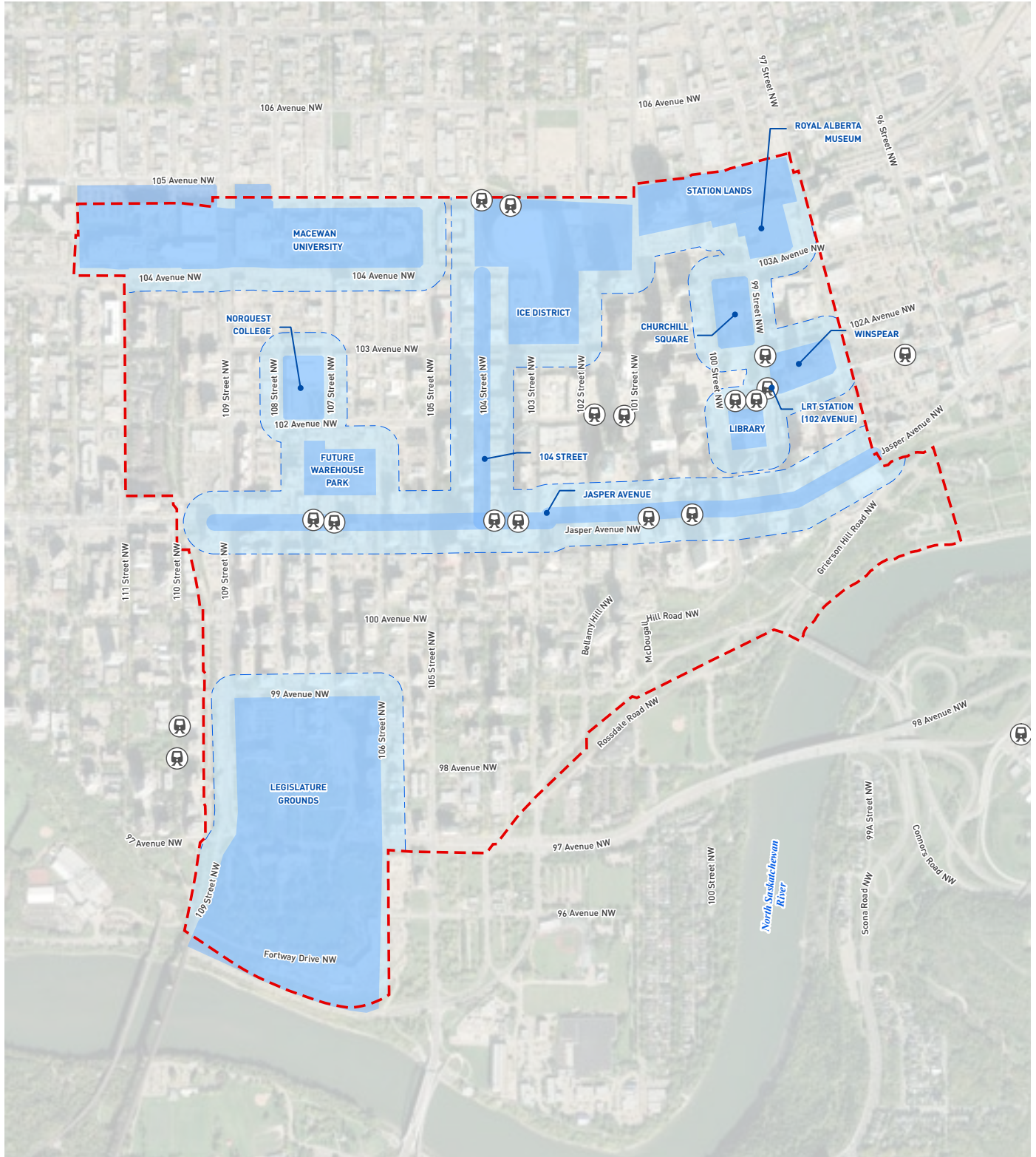
## Map 4

# Downtown Catalysts

Throughout downtown, key areas of activity, investment, development, or concentrated uses act as catalysts, significantly impacting the development potential of surrounding sites. These catalysts—such as major public projects, commercial hubs, or cultural institutions—generate increased foot traffic, stimulate economic activity, and enhance the overall appeal of their surrounding areas. The map identifies these points of interest and the broader area of development influence they create, which is likely to experience higher interest from developers and investors.

To fully capitalize on these opportunities, the City must strategically leverage these catalysts by aligning public investment in infrastructure and public realm improvements with private development momentum. Enhancing streetscapes, creating accessible pedestrian routes, and investing in green spaces can attract further private investment, encouraging higher-quality development and densification. By prioritizing funding and support in these clusters, the City can amplify the impact of private projects, fostering vibrant, economically resilient neighborhoods that benefit the broader downtown area.





# Downtown Investment Plan

## Downtown Catalysts



Downtown Edmonton  
October 2024

Data Sources: City of Edmonton, GeoBase  
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# Project Goals



## Goal

To develop a well-researched and impactful plan that outlines a comprehensive strategy for Downtown Edmonton to accommodate the demands of growth and investment over the next decade. This plan focuses on creating the infrastructure, policies, and initiatives needed to support increased economic activity, residential growth, and cultural vibrancy.

## Objectives

- ✓ To fortify a diversity of stakeholders to develop practical solutions
- ✓ To guide City of Edmonton budget and governance decisions
- ✓ To identify catalyst projects for downtown and priority areas for investment
- ✓ To inspire and sequence strategic public and private sector investments

With a diverse range of private sector and community partners, the Downtown Investment Plan identifies challenges and opportunities around the following themes:

- ✓ Residential Attraction
- ✓ Infrastructure and Servicing
- ✓ Business Retention and Economic Investment
- ✓ Placemaking and Programming

# Methodology

To support the development of targeted actions for investment in key places and infrastructure, we employed a comprehensive approach involving planning, design, and engagement strategies. This process aimed to gather valuable research, insights, and perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders and community partners.

## **Data Analysis:**

We conducted an in-depth examination of various thematic areas, including streetscapes, developments, business activity, demographics, land use and zoning, mobility, and travel modes, among others. This data dive provided a robust foundation for identifying critical areas for investment.

## **Policy Review:**

We assessed existing local and national policies to uncover constraints and opportunities, shed light on previous actions and ideas, and identify potential areas for innovation.

## **Stakeholder Engagement:**

We engaged with industry and business leaders to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing downtown. This dialogue helped pinpoint actionable strategies to enhance residential attraction, improve infrastructure and servicing, stimulate business and economic investment, and advance placemaking and programming efforts.

## **Community Involvement:**

We actively involved the community in reviewing and refining the proposed actions to ensure their alignment with local needs and to support the effective implementation of the plan.

# Findings



# Policy Review

We conducted a thorough policy review to evaluate the City of Edmonton’s stance on infrastructure and investment in downtown. This review specifically examined existing policies and prioritized actions. Key documents referenced include the Capital City Downtown Plan, its Update, the Capital City Downtown Community Revitalization Levy Bylaw, the Downtown & The Quarters Streetscape Design Manual, the Downtown Public Places Plan, The City Plan, the Downtown Vibrancy Strategy, and the Downtown Public Art Guide and Initiatives.

**The review revealed several key challenges and opportunities, highlighting areas where strategic improvements can be made to enhance downtown development.**

## Challenges

- Several City documents express different versions of statements related to “downtown vision”.
- Municipal downtown plans and strategies, since 1997, have been inconsistently funded and resourced.
- Priorities for downtown infrastructure and investment have changed overtime, and it is unclear which ones should be invested in and when.
- Recent plans have not been measured for their impact, and Administration reported that they would require a thorough review around this time.
- Plans articulate competing targets.
- Investment in downtown infrastructure has been intermittent and not coordinated as part of a large formal network.
- Lack of clarity on who champions or in charge of the downtown portfolio.

## Opportunities

- Unify plans around one central vision for downtown, with buy-in from all stakeholders.
- Leverage post-secondary educational campuses as the presence and impact of students, faculty, and staff have expanded since the first Capital City Downtown Plan.
- Review Catalyst Projects and their impact on the downtown, and identify new opportunities for investment.
- Analyze the social and economic impact of downtown investments, as plans rely on outdated statistics.
- Coordinate funding asks between industry, business, and community leaders for municipal, provincial, and federal governments.
- Assess if the Capital City Downtown Plan goals for residential units, commercial and office space are still relevant in our current context.
- Provide detail on the level of investment in downtown infrastructure, post 2021.
- Provide clarity on how the downtown is advanced by City Administration from a planning, design, and investment perspective.

## Other Learnings

- In 2010, the University of Alberta, MacEwan University, and NorQuest College were identified in the Capital City Downtown Plan as institutions either expanding or considering significant consolidation in Edmonton's downtown. These institutions have since demonstrated substantial growth, presenting a valuable opportunity to leverage their presence and explore potential partnerships.
- The 1997 Capital City Downtown Plan was developed with input from a diverse Steering Committee, including councillors, business leaders, residents, and representatives from economic development and arts organizations. The 2010 update built upon this foundation by incorporating members from the development industry and highlighting the successes achieved since the 1997 plan.
- The effectiveness of the plan was initially measured by practical indicators such as tax revenue, housing starts, vacancy rates, employment levels, and residential population. Other benchmarks included the number of parking meters installed and trees planted. More broadly, success was defined by the creation of a vibrant downtown with a strong sense of place, community, and lively street activity year-round. (Capital City Downtown Plan, 1997)
- The Downtown Housing Reinvestment Program, which allocated \$4.5 million in grants for the first 1,000 units, catalyzed a significant surge in residential construction, leading to the development of over 4,000 units. Historical data from the Downtown Housing Reinvestment Program demonstrated that each dollar of public investment generated \$11 in private investment, underscoring the program's impact. (Capital City Downtown Plan, 2010)
- The 2010 update envisioned a downtown that would be more sustainable, vibrant, well-designed, and accessible by 2025.







Year	Document	Vision Statement	Sample of Priorities	Assumptions Made
1997	<a href="#"><u>Capital City Downtown Plan</u></a>	Downtown Edmonton is a place where people linger after work. Where seniors gather. Where families meet. Where artists live and work. Where five diverse neighbourhoods provide so much life and activity that people come downtown, just to be downtown.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create five distinct neighbourhoods: Commercial/Cultural Core, Warehouse District, Jasper Avenue West, McKay Avenue Area, and Capital City Precinct</li> <li>▪ Develop a Downtown Research Centre and leverage the business and community sector to implement the plan.</li> <li>▪ Create an Arts District around Sir Winston Churchill Square</li> <li>▪ Provide \$4,500 for each new housing unit developed (to a maximum of 10% of the value of construction)</li> <li>▪ Encourage residential conversion of heritage buildings</li> <li>▪ Create pedestrian-friendly streets and zones, and implementing distinctive streetscape improvements for Rice Howard Way extension, 108 Street, 107 Street, 104 Street, 102 Avenue, and 101 Street</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Edmonton's most valuable piece of land (\$2.2 billion in real estate)</li> <li>▪ 6,300 residents, 50,000 employees, 2,220 businesses</li> <li>▪ In 1996, downtown generated \$62 million in taxes</li> <li>▪ "With reinvestment, downtown will capture new development, particularly housing. This in turn will increase Downtown's population base, attract new business and investment to the core, and increase tax revenues."</li> <li>▪ Budget for this plan was \$30 million, or \$6 million per year over five years.</li> <li>▪ "The City form partnerships with the provincial and federal governments to fund certain programs and projects as identified in the Downtown Plan."</li> </ul>
2010	<a href="#"><u>Capital City Downtown Plan (Update)</u></a>	Edmonton's new Capital City Downtown Plan is built upon the goals of The Way Ahead to create a vision for Edmonton's Downtown that is sustainable, vibrant, well-designed, and accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Central Warehouse Housing Incentive (\$10,000/unit grant for first 1,000 new housing units built in the Central Warehouse Area)</li> <li>▪ Warehouse Campus Central Park</li> <li>▪ Jasper Avenue New Vision</li> <li>▪ River Valley Promenades</li> <li>▪ Integration of at-Grade LRT</li> <li>▪ High Profile Bikeway System</li> <li>▪ Central Gathering Place for McKay Avenue</li> <li>▪ Green Building and Development Strategy</li> <li>▪ Green and Walkable Downtown (20% increase in canopy coverage in 10 years)</li> <li>▪ Capital Boulevard Upgrade</li> <li>▪ Legislature Grounds Redevelopment</li> <li>▪ Expansion of Downtown Universities and Colleges</li> <li>▪ Potential New Sports and Entertainment District</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ By 2009, 11,000 people were identified as living in the downtown area.</li> <li>▪ Over 63,000 people live in 10 neighbourhoods surrounding the downtown.</li> <li>▪ Implementation of the updated Capital City Downtown Plan would result in 12,200 new residential units, 2.35M sq. ft. of commercial space and 2.25M sq. ft. of office space.</li> </ul>
2013	<a href="#"><u>Capital City Downtown Community Revitalization Levy Bylaw</u></a>	The goal of the Community Revitalization Levy Plan is to contribute to the creation of a sustainable, vibrant, well designed, and accessible community; improve the quality of life for existing residents, workers, and visitors; and attract new residents and businesses to the area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The purpose of this bylaw is to impose a levy in respect of the incremental assessed value of property in a community revitalization area to raise revenue to be used toward the payment of infrastructure and other costs associated with the redevelopment of property in the community revitalization levy area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Community Revitalization Levy plan area is comprised of 135 ha of land (52 blocks). In 2013, 52% of the plan area was underdeveloped with 32% vacant and 20% underdeveloped.</li> <li>▪ CRL catalyst projects have spurred more than \$4 billion in new development that is completed or under construction.</li> </ul>

<p>2019</p>	<p><b><u>Downtown &amp; The Quarters Downtown Streetscape Design Manual</u></b></p>	<p>The goal of the Community Revitalization Levy Plan is to contribute to the creation of a sustainable, vibrant, well designed, and accessible community; improve the quality of life for existing residents, workers, and visitors; and attract new residents and businesses to the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The mandate of the Green + Walkable Downtown Street Design Manual is to establish design guidelines that will promote a sustainable, cohesive, and pedestrian-friendly public realm in order to enhance the identity of Downtown, The Quarters Downtown, and their respective neighbourhoods, increase functions for street-front retail, patios, and other public realm amenities, create predictability for adjacent private improvements to the sidewalks, and balance the aesthetics and pedestrian amenity with maintenance and cost efficiency.</li> <li>▪ Provide direction on elements found in the pedestrian realm, such as street furniture, utilities, planting and paving, as well as mobility elements including sidewalk and crosswalk specifications.</li> <li>▪ Create hierarchy for the streets in the downtown</li> <li>▪ Create predictable outcomes for street design</li> <li>▪ Create predictable expectations for developers and the public to support downtown investments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Should be reviewed every five years to confirm consistency with other policy, standards, and guidelines.</li> </ul>
<p>2020</p>	<p><b><u>Downtown Public Places Plan</u></b></p>	<p>The goal of the Community Revitalization Levy Plan is to contribute to the creation of a sustainable, vibrant, well designed, and accessible community; improve the quality of life for existing residents, workers, and visitors; and attract new residents and businesses to the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “The Plan aims to create a greener, healthier, and more family friendly Downtown for residents, workers, and visitors alike through a connected network of high quality public places.”</li> <li>▪ Safe and inclusive</li> <li>▪ Public access and connectivity</li> <li>▪ Linked to the River</li> <li>▪ Vibrant and livable</li> <li>▪ Green and sustainable</li> <li>▪ Celebration</li> <li>▪ Cohesive public realm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Acquire 2 hectares of public land to provide new City-owned public places and expand existing public places</li> <li>▪ Increase urban tree canopy of the plan area to 15% coverage by 2040</li> <li>▪ Identifies several “big moves” including Warehouse Campus Park, South Edge Promenade, and renewal of Beaver Hills House Park and Michael Phair Park.</li> <li>▪ “Despite recent investment and development Downtown, the provision of public places in the core has not increased significantly. Downtown public place projects have focused on one area at a time instead of broadly examining the whole network and developing accordingly.”</li> </ul>
<p>2020</p>	<p><b><u>The City Plan</u></b></p>	<p>The goal of the Community Revitalization Levy Plan is to contribute to the creation of a sustainable, vibrant, well designed, and accessible community; improve the quality of life for existing residents, workers, and visitors; and attract new residents and businesses to the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Urban design contributes to welcoming and attractive places that connect buildings, sidewalks, streets and local areas that build on authentic cultural and historical spaces and buildings. It also involves reimagining and rebuilding these areas and the spaces between them with a wide diversity of buildings and comfortable, durable, animated and beautiful public spaces that knit areas together.</li> <li>▪ Centre City is well served by all modes of transportation including the convergence of mass transit, cycling and walking routes. It is a destination for all Edmontonians and a special destination for those visiting the city.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Centre City: business, cultural, and mixed-use residential hub of the city and metropolitan region, comprised of a wide variety of land uses and destinations at high densities</li> <li>▪ Advanced education, research and technical institutions linked by mass transit and located within and connected to Edmonton’s expanded Centre City are identified as an innovation corridor.</li> <li>▪ By two million people, we will have over 550,000 jobs in nodes and corridors with a strong concentration in the expanded Centre City.</li> </ul>

<p>2020</p>	<p><b><u>Downtown Vibrancy Strategy</u></b></p>	<p>The goal of the Community Revitalization Levy Plan is to contribute to the creation of a sustainable, vibrant, well designed, and accessible community; improve the quality of life for existing residents, workers, and visitors; and attract new residents and businesses to the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Housing grant incentive to support office retrofits</li> <li>▪ Support downtown developers through a streamlined development process</li> <li>▪ All season patio opportunities</li> <li>▪ Closing roads on a regular basis for pop-up or ongoing events</li> <li>▪ Dedicated retention and expansion supports for downtown businesses</li> <li>▪ Develop models to test how economic scenarios downtown impact city-wide property taxes</li> <li>▪ Dedicated funding source for fun tactical urbanism</li> <li>▪ Enhanced lighting and security in publicly accessible spaces</li> <li>▪ Align public and private resources to coordinate snow removal, street cleaning, and litter collection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This is a 2-year strategy that outlines steps and actions that can be taken in the short term to promote vibrancy in our downtown.</li> <li>▪ This strategy is meant to be agile and nimble and should be stewarded between the City and a number of organizations and entities downtown.</li> <li>▪ “The City’s commitment to investing in downtown remains strong in 2020/21, with \$42 million invested in improvements to Jasper Avenue, Green and Walkable projects in the Ice District, pedestrian wayfinding and Kinistinaw Park. A \$22.9 million grant project was established for developments that started residential construction in 2021.”</li> </ul>
<p>2022</p>	<p><b><u>Downtown Public Art Guide and Initiatives</u></b></p>	<p>The goal of the Community Revitalization Levy Plan is to contribute to the creation of a sustainable, vibrant, well designed, and accessible community; improve the quality of life for existing residents, workers, and visitors; and attract new residents and businesses to the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Expand public art in downtown laneways.</li> <li>▪ Downtown mural pilot program</li> <li>▪ Expanding recognition programs in the public realm</li> <li>▪ Expand Neon Sign museum</li> <li>▪ Art on construction hoarding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Partners include Edmonton Arts Council, Arts District, and Arts Habitat</li> <li>▪ Public art establishes unique and active spaces. It can build an iconic reputation for a city, and transform urban spaces into vibrant expressions of human imagination.</li> </ul>



# Best Practice Scan

A review of local and national downtown strategies was conducted, with a focus specifically on how municipalities and other orders of government, along with private and public institutions, are finding unique ways of addressing investment shortfalls and opportunities. Cities across North America are grappling with similar issues in their downtowns, therefore, we can learn from their collaborative and focused approaches.

The plans that we assessed included:

## **International Downtown Association**

- “Attracting Commercial Development: Tools and Case Studies.”
- “Partnerships for Urban Place Management.”
- “Public Safety Initiatives.”

## **Canadian Urban Institute**

- “The Case for Conversions.”
- “Unboxing Uptown: The transformation of a main street from the inside out.”
- “Rapid Placemaking to Bring Back Main Streets”

## **The City of Calgary’s “Calgary’s Greater Downtown Plan”**

## **The Government of Alberta’s “Edmonton Metropolitan Region Economic Recovery Working Group (EMRER): priorities and recommended actions.”**

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### **The review confirmed the challenges outlined in our municipal policy assessment and stakeholder consultations. Our evaluation also identified several strategic opportunities:**

- Diverse housing options and amenities can invigorate downtown areas and attract new residents and businesses.
- The Downtown Calgary Development Incentive Program offers financial incentives for converting office spaces into residential units, addressing high vacancy rates and contributing to downtown revitalization.
- Expanding parks and green spaces enhances environmental resilience and promotes a healthy urban environment.
- Designing streets to prioritize pedestrians and cyclists while also supporting a variety of transportation options.
- Encouraging innovation, adaptability, and speed in urban planning and development can address future challenges and ensure that downtown areas remain resilient and forward-thinking.
- Addressing regulatory hurdles and promoting flexible zoning can facilitate successful office-to-residential conversions, and other mixed-use developments.
- Understanding and leveraging favorable market conditions, alongside supportive policies, can enhance the viability of conversion projects.
- Strategic investments in the built environment can support important outcomes like improved perceptions of safety, connection, and belonging.

# Stakeholder Engagement

We engaged a diverse group of stakeholders—including land developers, homebuilders, investors, educational institutions, arts and cultural organizations, building operators, businesses, and community advocates—through one-on-one meetings and focus groups. While their perspectives vary by group, there is a notable convergence around several major themes, highlighting common priorities and areas for improvement.

Stakeholder Group	Challenges	Opportunities
<p><b>Developers and Builders</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Jasper Avenue New Vision” has not been fully implemented, and has resulted in non-contiguous streetscape and poor pedestrian experience</li> <li>▪ Poorly planned renewal of streetscape infrastructure like trees, sidewalks, wayfinding, banners, and streets</li> <li>▪ No new development permit for high-rise residential since 2021, and no key strategy to welcome economic investment or to stimulate housing development</li> <li>▪ Many sites in the downtown are in a derelict or underused state, and key municipal infrastructure like LRT entrances have not been repaired or restored in quite some time</li> <li>▪ Lack of marketing and wayfinding of key districts downtown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Double the population to 25,000 residents</li> <li>▪ Leverage the activity of post secondary educational institutions</li> <li>▪ Light up the night-time economy with businesses and a quality public-realm</li> <li>▪ Support the technology sector</li> <li>▪ Build on the LRT investment downtown</li> <li>▪ Identify another catalyst project like Warehouse Park and tether those types of investments to stimulate private-sector</li> <li>▪ Incentives to support housing development, to address derelict or underutilized sites</li> <li>▪ Explore office-tower conversions</li> <li>▪ Develop a neighbourhood renewal initiative dedicated solely for downtown</li> <li>▪ Ensure investments to downtown are coordinated as part of a formal network, and not intermittent</li> <li>▪ Make transit attractive</li> </ul>
<p><b>Investors</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Similar to Calgary, Edmonton has seen significant increases in office vacancies, particularly in older buildings, which could deter new investments without targeted incentives.</li> <li>▪ The drop in downtown’s contribution to the municipal tax base from 10% to 6.4% reflects declining land values, making the area less attractive for investment.</li> <li>▪ Edmonton’s downtown market conditions are less favorable compared to cities with more aggressive revitalization programs, like Calgary, where substantial public investment has catalyzed private sector participation.</li> <li>▪ Concerns about crime and public safety can deter investment, as these issues impact the attractiveness of downtown for residents and businesses alike.</li> <li>▪ A downtown core with fewer cultural, recreational, and retail amenities may struggle to attract both residents and businesses, reducing investor confidence in the area’s potential for growth.</li> <li>▪ Aging infrastructure and the high costs associated with upgrades or retrofits may be a deterrent, especially when compared to the potential returns on investment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ With the right public and private investments, there’s significant potential for downtown Edmonton to become a vibrant hub, especially with underutilized office spaces that could be converted into residential or mixed-use developments.</li> <li>▪ Ongoing or planned improvements in infrastructure, including public transit, could enhance the attractiveness of downtown for residents and businesses.</li> <li>▪ Potential future incentives or policy shifts aimed at revitalizing the area could provide financial benefits, making investments more attractive.</li> </ul>

Stakeholder Group	Challenges	Opportunities
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Issues related to crime and public safety could deter students, staff, and families from engaging fully with downtown campuses or educational facilities.</li> <li>▪ A lack of nearby amenities like affordable housing, grocery stores, and recreational spaces can make it less attractive for students and staff to live or spend time in the downtown area.</li> <li>▪ While some improvements are underway, gaps in public transit or infrastructure could make commuting to and from downtown educational institutions less convenient.</li> <li>▪ If the downtown core is perceived as declining or less vibrant, it may struggle to attract students, faculty, and partnerships with businesses or other institutions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Proximity to government offices, businesses, and cultural institutions offers opportunities for collaboration, internships, and research partnerships.</li> <li>▪ The downtown’s diverse population can enrich the student body, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment.</li> <li>▪ An opportunity to coordinate with the private-sector to develop on post-secondary educational institution lands</li> <li>▪ Post-secondary educational institutions are expected to increase their student, faculty, and staff population in the tens of thousands over the next few decades</li> </ul>
<b>Arts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Both operations and building maintenance require ongoing private and public support.</li> <li>▪ Perception of safety could deter new and returning patrons.</li> <li>▪ Capital funding can be inconsistent year to year, limiting long term planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical mass of people and energy in and around the arts district.</li> <li>▪ Arts District branding and Downtown Vibrancy Fund has, and can continue to, provide opportunities for community engagement and partnership.</li> <li>▪ Re-opened and new outdoor spaces (e.g., Churchill Square, Michael Phair Park, Warehouse Park) can be further enhanced with semi-permanent infrastructure (stages, speakers, lights, ticket-sale/bar areas)</li> </ul>
<b>Small, Medium and Large Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is not a cohesive vision</li> <li>▪ The downtown is too large to make a significant difference without a few large investments</li> <li>▪ Physical connection to link the whole downtown together</li> <li>▪ It is ugly. People would come downtown if it looked nicer.</li> <li>▪ Hoarding is making the downtown feel unsafe.</li> <li>▪ Lack of government investment makes it undesirable to invest private funds.</li> <li>▪ Political climate is unfriendly to investors</li> <li>▪ It is complicated to get in and out of the downtown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wayfinding signage</li> <li>▪ Architectural guidelines</li> <li>▪ YEG, Whyte Ave, EIA Connector Bus</li> <li>▪ Lighting in all areas of transit</li> <li>▪ LRT accessibility</li> <li>▪ Bring a larger mix of residential units. The city should use the Calgary model to create a desire to invest private dollars.</li> <li>▪ Use store-front improvement grants to build blade signs and awnings</li> </ul>
<b>Community (residents, advocates, community organizations)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Specific streets or areas feel unsafe, particularly at night, due to visible crime or lack of adequate lighting and policing.</li> <li>▪ Ongoing construction projects and heavy traffic result in constant noise, affecting quality of life.</li> <li>▪ The cost of living downtown can be high, with limited affordable housing options, particularly for larger units.</li> <li>▪ Issues like vandalism, car break-ins, and theft make daily life stressful and erode the sense of security.</li> <li>▪ Lack of community policing leaves many feeling alone and unsafe moving and living in the core.</li> <li>▪ Lack of street trees can exacerbate ‘heat island’ effects felt through a changing climate, and makes downtown feel less attractive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Living close to major employers, government offices, and cultural venues reduces commute times and offers easy access to entertainment and dining options.</li> <li>▪ As the downtown area revitalizes, early residents might benefit from rising property values and improved amenities over time.</li> <li>▪ Address climate change goals through streetscape renewal that incorporates trees; opportunity to reach the goal of planting 2 million trees.</li> </ul>







# Actions

Based on all of the above sources of information, we have developed a list of actions that we could work on with all orders of government, along with the private and community sectors, over the coming months and years to implement this shared vision for downtown infrastructure investments. By highlighting these, we want to communicate to the city and the community that these should be priority actions for initiatives and investments going forward.

## Timelines

- Short-term**                      6 months to 1 year
- Medium-term**                      2 to 5 years
- Long-term**                      6 to 10 years

## Investment Areas







-  Residential Attraction
-  Infrastructure and Servicing
-  Business Retention and Economic Investment
-  Placemaking and Programming

## Significance and Support

-  Civic
-  Provincial
-  National







# Short Term

Action	Investment Area	Significance and Support
Invest <b>\$3 million</b> annually to expand the City of Edmonton's cleanliness initiatives (e.g., Centre City Optimization program)		CIVIC
Invest <b>\$30 million</b> over three years to develop a dedicated Neighbourhood Renewal Program for downtown, including elements such as: trees, roads, sidewalks, curb cuts, benches, lighting, and more.		CIVIC
Invest <b>\$250,000 thousand</b> to prioritize the update of a Capital City Downtown Plan		CIVIC
Partner with Oilers Entertainment Group Sports and Entertainment (OEGSE) on the expansion of ICE District through infrastructure and unique entertainment and community event space investments		CIVIC PROVINCIAL
Invest <b>\$100 million</b> to support a Downtown Attainable Housing Fund		CIVIC PROVINCIAL NATIONAL
Invest <b>\$5 million</b> in wayfinding and marketing tactics to promote downtown districts		CIVIC NATIONAL

# Medium Term

Action	Investment Area	Significance and Support
Invest <b>\$25 million</b> to redesign and rejuvenate downtown LRT entrances		CIVIC PROVINCIAL NATIONAL
Invest <b>\$50 million</b> in funding to the Infill Infrastructure Fund to supplement and expand the eligible area around downtown		CIVIC
Invest <b>\$25 million</b> in 24/7 Community Hubs / Crisis Centres to relieve pressure on emergency centres and first responders		PROVINCIAL NATIONAL
Invest <b>\$10 million</b> to install accessible turnstiles in LRT terminals		CIVIC PROVINCIAL
Invest <b>\$20 million</b> to revitalize and complete Jasper Avenue's streetscape (100 to 109 Street) as Alberta's Boulevard		CIVIC PROVINCIAL
Invest <b>\$10 million</b> to service and develop infrastructure to support redevelopment around NorQuest and MacEwan University to unlock the potential of the Education District		CIVIC PROVINCIAL
Invest <b>\$4 million</b> to stabilize and grow existing 24/7 crisis diversion program (e.g., REACH)		PROVINCIAL
Invest <b>\$15 million</b> to develop the 100 St Pedestrian Bridge and premier entryway into the city's core		CIVIC NATIONAL

# Long Term

Action	Investment Area	Significance and Support
Invest <b>\$25 million</b> to explore a direct rail transportation connection between the Edmonton International Airport to downtown		PROVINCIAL
Invest <b>\$25 million</b> to support a national attraction downtown		NATIONAL
Invest <b>\$30 million</b> to transform and revitalize derelict sites for other uses		CIVIC PROVINCIAL NATIONAL
Invest <b>\$50 million</b> in a multi-year Indigenous-led economic development and investment strategy for downtown		NATIONAL

# Other Opportunities



**Below is a list of additional actions and ideas that our partners consider important to explore further. We recommend validating these with a detailed investment proposal.**

### **Develop a Downtown Development Corporation**

The proposed shift of the Edmonton Downtown Business Association (EDBA) from under the City's purview to an independent entity could be a transformative move for the downtown area. By establishing a public-private partnership (P3) similar to the model used by the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC), Edmonton can unlock the potential for a more agile, innovative, and business-driven approach to downtown revitalization. A dedicated downtown development corporation, separate from municipal governance, could more efficiently attract private investment, develop key infrastructure, and facilitate partnerships between stakeholders. Such a move would allow the City to focus on policy and governance while empowering the corporation to act swiftly and strategically in revitalizing Edmonton's core.

### **Leverage Post-Secondary Educational Institutions**

- MacEwan and NorQuest College are interested in, and in general, would support programs that incent the development of affordable housing through collaborative arrangements. MacEwan and NorQuest support initiatives that increase access to affordable housing for our students.
- MacEwan and NorQuest are interested in increased investment in safety in the downtown and proximal LRT stops for our students, faculty and staff.
- While MacEwan is excited to see investment in Edmonton's downtown through capital projects, and are making their own contribution through the School of Business building, they believe there needs to be better and more integrated planning for downtown construction. In particular, it's important that projects support traffic flow that is aligned with our growth projection through to 2030.
- NorQuest plans to expand its downtown campus with a major capital project for a Career Skills Centre, addressing growing enrollment demand and contributing to a vibrant Education District in downtown Edmonton.

### **Extending the Community Revitalization Levy**

Extending the Community Revitalization Levy (CRL) presents a significant opportunity to continue the momentum of downtown Edmonton's growth and transformation. By continuing the CRL, the City can leverage future tax revenue increases to fund critical infrastructure projects and improvements that will enhance the vibrancy, safety, and economic appeal of the downtown core. This mechanism allows Edmonton to attract private investment by reinvesting incremental tax revenue into key development areas, creating a ripple effect of economic growth without immediate increases to taxpayer burdens.

The extension of the CRL would ensure that projects initiated under its funding continue to thrive, supporting urban density, revitalizing underutilized spaces, and improving essential services. Furthermore, it enables a focused approach to addressing ongoing challenges like public safety, transportation, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. With downtown becoming a central hub for business, entertainment, and culture, extending the CRL would provide the financial tools necessary to meet the growing demands of this critical area, securing Edmonton's future as a competitive, livable, and thriving city.

# Return on Investment

These 18 strategic actions are designed to revitalize Edmonton's downtown and would ultimately deliver a compelling return on investment at all levels and ensure sustainable growth for years to come. By enhancing the attractiveness and functionality of the downtown core, we can expect a **notable increase in the proportional share of the overall municipal tax base for the area**. While it is difficult to determine a quantifiable return for each action, several examples were selected to illustrate the positive return on investment of the proposed initiatives.

The closure of the Edmonton City Centre Airport in 2013 corresponds with the peak of the overall peak of the office inventory assessment base at \$4.677 billion in 2014. In the following decade, the overall office inventory assessment base has dropped by 45%, resulting in a total assessment base in 2024 of \$2.592 billion. The reduced accessibility caused by the closure of a downtown or central airport has widely been accepted to have a significant negative impact through increased vacancy as businesses consider the impact of diminished air access. The proposed investment of **\$25 million to support a direct transportation connection between the Edmonton International Airport to downtown** would mitigate some of these access concerns. This, coupled with the proposed actions to invest \$25 million in government buildings to encourage provincial workers back as well as **partnering with Government of Alberta and Oilers Entertainment Group Sports and Entertainment (OEGSE) to further expand ICE District** would lead to increased vibrancy and activity within the downtown core and reduce the overall vacancy rate within the office inventory.

For context, with all other variables remaining constant, for a typical "AA" office building every 1% that the vacancy rate is reduced would result in an increase in value of 2.8%, which if extrapolated over the inventory would result in an **increased annual tax take of approximately \$1.7 million**. This does not consider the potential for either stronger rents or better performing capitalization rates, both factors seen in healthier downtowns throughout the country.

While the multi-residential assessment base has continued to grow over the past decade, the development of new construction has stalled, with less than 10 new single title projects being completed since 2020. The proposed **action to invest \$100 million to support a Downtown Attainable Housing Fund** would see immediate benefits. As of 2024, the average tax take per suite for a newly constructed high-rise exceeds \$4,000 annually. If this program led to the development of 1,000 new attainable housing units, **the net result would be in excess of \$4 million in annual tax revenue**. This does not consider the added benefit of increased population in the central core on the surrounding businesses that would support these new residents. Compare this to the Housing Capital Initiative in Calgary which approved \$60 million in funding over 3 years, which would have a significantly reduced impact when compared to this proposed action as the average tax take per suite for a newly constructed high-rise in Calgary is only \$1,800 annually.

# Implementation

A plan is only as effective as its execution. In crafting this strategy, we have identified a diverse group of partners to advance each action and are collectively dedicated to collaborating with all orders of government to engage, support, and drive progress. We are enthusiastic about mobilizing various sectors and industries to ensure our downtown remains a competitive, dynamic, and vibrant hub. This plan focuses primarily on the built environment and infrastructure. However, addressing safety and social issues is crucial for the success of the proposed actions.



# Acknowledgements



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### **BILD Edmonton Metro**

BILD Edmonton Metro is the voice and expert resource for the real estate development industry in the Edmonton Metro Region. Our more than 500+ member companies are from all corners of the industry – home builders, real estate developers, renovators, financial and professional service organizations, trade contractors, and manufacturers and suppliers of all types of commercial and home-oriented products. BILD Edmonton Metro is a non-profit organization that works to shape and build sustainable and prosperous communities throughout the entire region. We collaborate with municipal governments on issues affecting the real estate sector, providing key insights and expertise on policies, processes, and timelines.

### **BOMA Edmonton**

Building Owners and Managers Association of Edmonton (BOMA Edmonton) is a membership-driven industry association for companies and professionals involved in commercial property ownership and management, operations, and service provision in the Edmonton Metropolitan Region, Central and Northern Alberta, NWT, and Yukon. Real estate – residential and commercial – is the second largest contributor to Alberta's GDP after oil and gas and is a major contributor to municipalities.

### **Downtown Revitalization Coalition**

The DRC came together during the pandemic with a mission to return Edmonton's downtown to its pre-COVID state after the tremendous impact that the pandemic had on Edmonton and the economy. Throughout 2022 and 2023, our group advocated for enhanced safety and security and improved cleanliness and infrastructure maintenance, as well as supporting transformational projects in the core.

### **Edmonton Chamber of Commerce**

The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce is one of the longest-running and most influential business organizations in Canada. We're part of a robust business community that extends regionally, provincially, nationally, and around the globe within the Chamber and World Trade Centre Networks. For over 130 years, we've contributed to ambitious, foundational projects that have helped build Edmonton into the city it is today. Our track record of success has made us the sought-after voice of business in Edmonton. Our member companies represent small, medium, and large businesses, and every sector of the economy, from heavy industry and manufacturing to retail and non-profit organizations. We are proud of our work and our members. We are unwavering in our commitment to using our powerful voice to champion Edmonton and the entire region as a great place to live, work, and do business.

### **Edmonton Downtown Business Association**

The Edmonton Downtown Business Association (EDBA) is an independent body from the City of Edmonton and is responsible for the Edmonton Downtown Business Improvement Area (BIA). As the lead activator and advocate shaping Downtown Edmonton, we work on behalf of our member businesses to support and deliver a vibrant and remarkable downtown experience, rooted in inclusion, diversity, prosperity, and resilience.

### **NAIOP Edmonton**

NAIOP, the Commercial Real Estate Development Association, is the leading organization for developers, owners and investors of office, industrial, retail, and mixed-use real estate. NAIOP comprises 21,000+ members and provides strong advocacy, education, and business opportunities through a powerful North American network.

# Downtown Investment Plan

COORDINATED  
INVESTMENT ACTIONS  
FOR DOWNTOWN  
EDMONTON