



# **TOURISM MASTER PLAN**

## **EDMONTON 2021–2030**

**EXPLORE  
EDMONTON**





# LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Explore Edmonton respectfully acknowledges that we are located within Treaty 6 territory, and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4. We acknowledge this land as the traditional home for many Indigenous Peoples including the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Dene, Sauteaux, Anishinaabe, Inuit and many others whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence our vibrant community.



# STEERING COMMITTEE

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Explore Edmonton would like to recognize and thank these community leaders for the enormous contributions they have made as part of the Tourism Master Plan Steering Committee. Their guidance, leadership and support was critical in the development of this plan.

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## COMMITTEE CHAIR

### **Carmen Donnelly**

Director, Passenger Markets & Air Service Development,  
Edmonton International Airport

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## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### **Maggie Davison**

Interim Chief Executive Officer, Explore Edmonton

### **Erik Backstrom**

Senior Planner, City of Edmonton

### **Shae Bird**

Chief Executive Officer, Indigenous Tourism Alberta

### **Brent Collingwood**

Retired - Executive Director, River Valley Alliance

### **Susan Holdsworth**

RECOVER Project Manager and former WinterCity  
Edmonton Manager

### **Dale Kirkland**

Superintendent, Elk Island National Park

### **Blair Lebsack**

Chef, Owner, RGE RD

### **Grant McCurdy**

Area General Manager, Doubletree Hilton and  
Home2 Suites West Edmonton

### **Christy Morin**

Executive Director, Arts on the Ave Edmonton Society

### **Sheila O'Kelly**

President, World Triathlon Edmonton

### **Lynette Tremblay**

Vice President, Strategy & Innovation, Edmonton Global



# PROJECT TEAM

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Explore Edmonton would also like to thank the dedicated project team members who worked diligently to move this project forward, from concept to completion. We want to acknowledge the partnership with our external project partners, MMGY NextFactor, the lead agency on the project, working with Tourism Economics and InterVISTAS. The collaboration,

depth of knowledge and focus this team brought to the planning process was truly remarkable. This plan is, by design, a living document that will continue to deliver exceptional value to the community as we journey through the implementation phase and forge new partnerships along the way.

## EXPLORE EDMONTON

**Erica Hummel**

Director, Destination Strategy

**Nadim Chin**

Manager, Destination Development

**Kim Macmillan**

Destination Development Specialist

**Jason Letwin**

Research & Performance Specialist

**Tammy Forbes**

Director, Communications

**Dan St. Pierre**

Director, Government &  
External Relations

**Kaelyn Saunders**

Business Administration Manager

**Paul Ouimet**

President & CEO

**Jim McCaul**

Senior Vice President,  
Destination Stewardship

**Greg Oates**

Senior Vice President, Innovation

**Shirin Jafari**

Sustainable Tourism  
Development Specialist

**Cheryll Girard**

Project Team Coordinator

**Geoff Lacher**

Senior Economist

**Jordan Young**

Manager





# A MESSAGE FROM EXPLORE EDMONTON

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Explore Edmonton's job is to always be looking at the big picture, leading the way to promote our city as a four-season destination and developing the experiences and partnerships that will position Edmonton as a destination of choice, and we are fully aligned to increase the economic impact of the visitor-based economy in Edmonton.

Not only does the visitor economy create jobs and generate revenue, it also drives awareness to our amazing city, in turn, contributing to our city's local economic vibrancy, future prosperity and quality of life.

This plan provides direction, a shared idea of what we want to accomplish. We know where we're going (our vision), how we're going to get there (our guiding principles) and what we want to accomplish along the way (our strategic priorities).

The plan will help guide Explore Edmonton's experience development initiatives and enable the development of compelling tourist experiences that match visitor expectations and position Edmonton as a year-round destination of choice. Working together, we will continue to drive awareness of Edmonton as a desirable place to visit, live, work, play and learn.

## **WHY NOW?**

COVID-19 has had dramatic impacts on just about every aspect of life, including how individuals, businesses, and investors think about potential destinations. It is imperative that Edmonton enhance our position as a place to live, work, and visit if we are to forge a future of long-term stability, prosperity, and quality of life for residents of Edmonton and the region. Doing so requires investment in our experiential assets and core tourism industries, and this plan will allow us to be strategic in those investments and set forth a clear vision for the future of Edmonton as a destination.



**WITH A COLLECTIVE CONFIDENCE AND PARTNERSHIP WE WILL  
CONTINUE AS LEADERS THAT CONNECT THE VALUE OF THE VISITOR  
ECONOMY TO OUR CITY'S PROSPERITY AND OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.**



Short-term recovery and the survival of our visitor economy are absolutely critical for the future prosperity of our city and province. However, we must also utilize this time to think about how we can build back better and create a more resilient visitor economy. We have an opportunity to rethink the way we approach tourism to ensure that it will make Edmonton a more sustainable place, enrich the lives of all Edmontonians, and deliver a financially self-sustaining sector in the longer term.

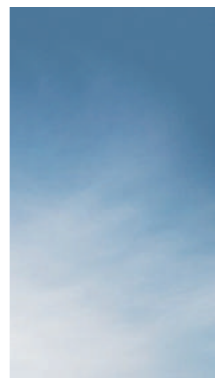
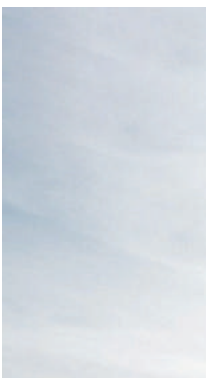
It is appropriate that this Tourism Master Plan is being released at the same time as the City of Edmonton's Economic Action Plan. Each complements the other and reinforces the roles that both tourism and economic development have a role to play in creating a more vibrant, prosperous and resilient Edmonton.

This plan is a starting point and an invitation - both to join us, and for others to invite us to support their efforts. So far, there has been tremendous support for this plan, as well as enthusiasm to collaborate on its realization. With a collective confidence and partnership we will continue as leaders that connect the value of the visitor economy to our city's prosperity and our quality of life.

We are inviting the world to experience more Edmonton!

**Maggie Davison**

Interim Chief Executive Officer  
Explore Edmonton Corporation





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Explore Edmonton is pleased to present our city's first Tourism Master Plan, a 10-year framework aimed at providing a common vision for growth and investment with tourism industry partners.

The visitor economy has become an inherent and integral part of our city's growth and future prosperity, requiring a more holistic approach to our thinking and planning. Tourism master planning is about taking a strategic, rather than organic, approach to defining an overarching vision and competitive positioning for Edmonton.

This plan will help guide Explore Edmonton's experience development initiatives and enable the development of compelling tourist experiences that match visitor expectations and position Edmonton as a year-round destination of choice.

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## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Five guiding principles provide the basis for all recommendations in the Tourism Master Plan. They provide a vision for a visitor economy which not only creates jobs and generates revenues, but also drives awareness to our amazing city, and in turn, contributes to our city's local economic vibrancy, future and quality of life. These guiding principles also provide the basis for all of the recommendations of this plan.

**1. A collaborative approach** - This plan recognizes that tourism by its nature involves the destination as a whole, not only industry businesses, but also its ecosystems, natural resources, cultural assets and traditions, communities, aesthetics, and built infrastructure. It will take a collaborative effort to successfully build and shape tourism in Edmonton, with equal participation by the government, private sector, and the community. This can only be accomplished by expanding our knowledge, presence, and relationships with each of Edmonton's distinct communities.

**2. A new paradigm for tourism in Edmonton** - The impact of tourism in Edmonton cannot be measured solely in economic terms. We must also measure success against the well-being of the city, considering nature, human health, and community identities. We must be thoughtful about how the quality of the visitor experience can be balanced with the quality of life for residents; about the types of visitors who would provide maximum financial value to our local communities while having the optimal social and environmental impact, and how we can responsibly grow our tourism industry for the benefit of all in our community.

**3. A more equitable, diverse, and inclusive visitor economy** - Tourism in Edmonton should contribute to both equity and economic growth. In fact, many of the cities with the strongest tourism industries are known for their diversity and inclusion. It is our goal that Edmonton's visitor economy will mirror our society by 2030. We will do so by recognizing and removing systemic barriers to marginalized and underrepresented communities and celebrating the broad range of human differences among us, while also embracing the commonalities we all share.

**4. A regenerative visitor economy** - Regenerative tourism addresses impacts holistically, from destination and community perspectives as well as environmental. We must encourage tourism policies and business practices that protect our unique sense of place and not only sustain, but benefit, both our natural and cultural assets. We will achieve this by following regenerative principles in tourism development, accepting scientific consensus on needed reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and integrating Indigenous values and knowledge with environmental management and stewardship practices.

**5. An expanded role for Explore Edmonton** - The social awareness regarding tourism is changing among travellers, residents, businesses, and government bodies. The next decade of tourism in Edmonton will require a different view and approach compared to the previous ten years. In addition to promoting the destination, we must invest more resources into developing and delivering year-round transformational visitor experiences. Doing so will allow us to achieve our mission of inspiring more people to visit Edmonton for exceptional experiences, while also enriching the quality of life for residents, and creating economic prosperity.

## STRATEGIC GOALS

The strategic goals provide the framework for decision making regarding efforts and investments to enhance Edmonton's visitor economy. These goals offer guidance on how to achieve the overarching vision and develop a competitive positioning for Edmonton as a destination.

1. Strengthen awareness and perception of the Edmonton place brand.
2. Support the development, enhancement, and stewardship of year-round visitor experiences
3. Activate the river valley to create a more vibrant destination and gathering place
4. Create a dynamic, well-designed, and accessible urban experience
5. Improve access, mobility, and connectivity
6. Utilize a holistic, innovative and personalized approach to visitor servicing
7. Expand tourism investment and regional collaboration





# STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Edmonton's visitor economy has experienced considerable growth over the past decade, with more than six million visitors coming to our city from around the globe in 2019. With this growth comes significant opportunities for local businesses, tax revenues for local and provincial governments, and new experiences that make our community a great place to live, work, play, learn, and invest.

From bricks-and-mortar stores to transportation services to activity centres, each rely on the tourism industry to draw visitors to our city who will, in turn, contribute to Edmonton's prosperity. More visitors means more dollars going into our local businesses. Not only does the visitor economy create jobs and generate revenue, but it also drives awareness to our amazing city, inspiring people to make it their home.

In 2020, however, Edmonton's visitor economy was decimated by the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. The impacts have hit Edmonton businesses hard, forcing many to make difficult decisions in order to maintain viability and relevance in the

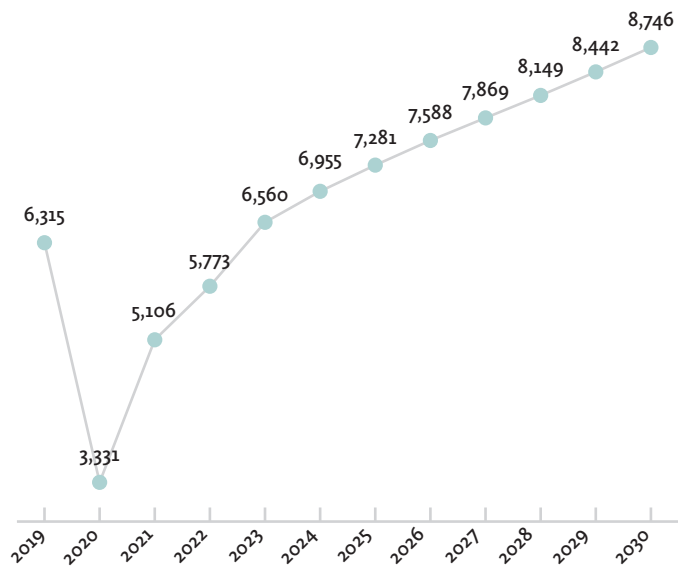


face of an uncertain economic outlook. In some instances, the immediacy and scale of the economic fallout has resulted in businesses ceasing to operate altogether.

Further challenges lie ahead in a highly constrained business environment with projections suggesting that a return to 2019 travel demand levels may not occur until 2023 / 2024, according to Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics company which developed a forecast for the next 10 years of travel to the city.

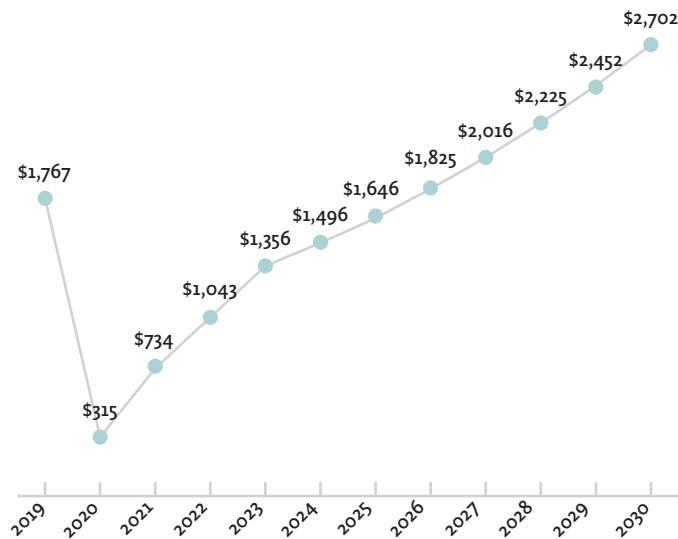
Over the ten-year period, nearly 40% growth over 2019 visitation levels is still expected despite the pandemic's impacts in the industry. Certain markets, including the travellers who are visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and leisure travellers, are expected to rebound quicker, while business and event travellers are expected to recover more slowly.

**VISITS TO THE CITY OF EDMONTON (000'S)**



Visitor spending levels in Edmonton, however, are not expected to reach pre-pandemic levels until 2026. This is due to the fact higher spending market segments such as business travellers and international travellers are expected to recover more slowly. Nevertheless, visitor spending is still forecast to grow by more than 50% above 2019 levels by the end of decade.

**VISITOR SPENDING IN THE CITY OF EDMONTON (CAD, MILLIONS)**



“The recovery is going to take time, there’s no question. We don’t expect international travel to fully recover until 2025,” says Adam Sacks, Tourism Economics president. “However, domestic travel and regional travel should recover more quickly. We’re basically at a plateau right now; we’re not going to see any real acceleration and travel gains until the second half of 2021, when – through a combination of policy measures, therapeutics and a vaccine - we’ll hopefully see some containment of the virus. It’s at that point we will start to see significant recovery.”



# POLICY CONTEXT

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The Tourism Master Plan was created within the context of existing City plans, policies, and regulations. We recognize and respect the work already done and consider it a strong foundation to build on.

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## CONNECTEDMONTON

ConnectEdmonton is Edmonton's Strategic Plan for 2019-2028. It sets the direction for our future and charts how Edmonton will build for a future city of two million people.

ConnectEdmonton is inspired by a simple idea: to achieve what we set out to do, Edmontonians are better together than we are alone. The unifying principle of the plan, Connected, captures this idea.

That unifying principle was the driving force behind the development of Edmonton's first tourism master plan. The plan seeks to develop the same sense of alignment among the many diverse stakeholders, industry partners and private businesses who collectively comprise the tourism ecosystem in the city.

Collectively, thousands of Edmontonians provided input and shared what's important to them as they imagined the future of Edmonton's visitor economy. The vision, goals, and recommendations of this plan are based directly on the feedback gathered by talking to Edmontonians and are aligned with the four strategic goals outlined in ConnectEdmonton:

1. Healthy City
2. Urban Places
3. Regional Prosperity
4. Climate Resilience

## EDMONTON CITY PLAN

The City Plan sets strategic direction for the way Edmonton grows, its land use, mobility systems, open spaces, employment, and social networks, generally touching on most aspects of life in Edmonton.

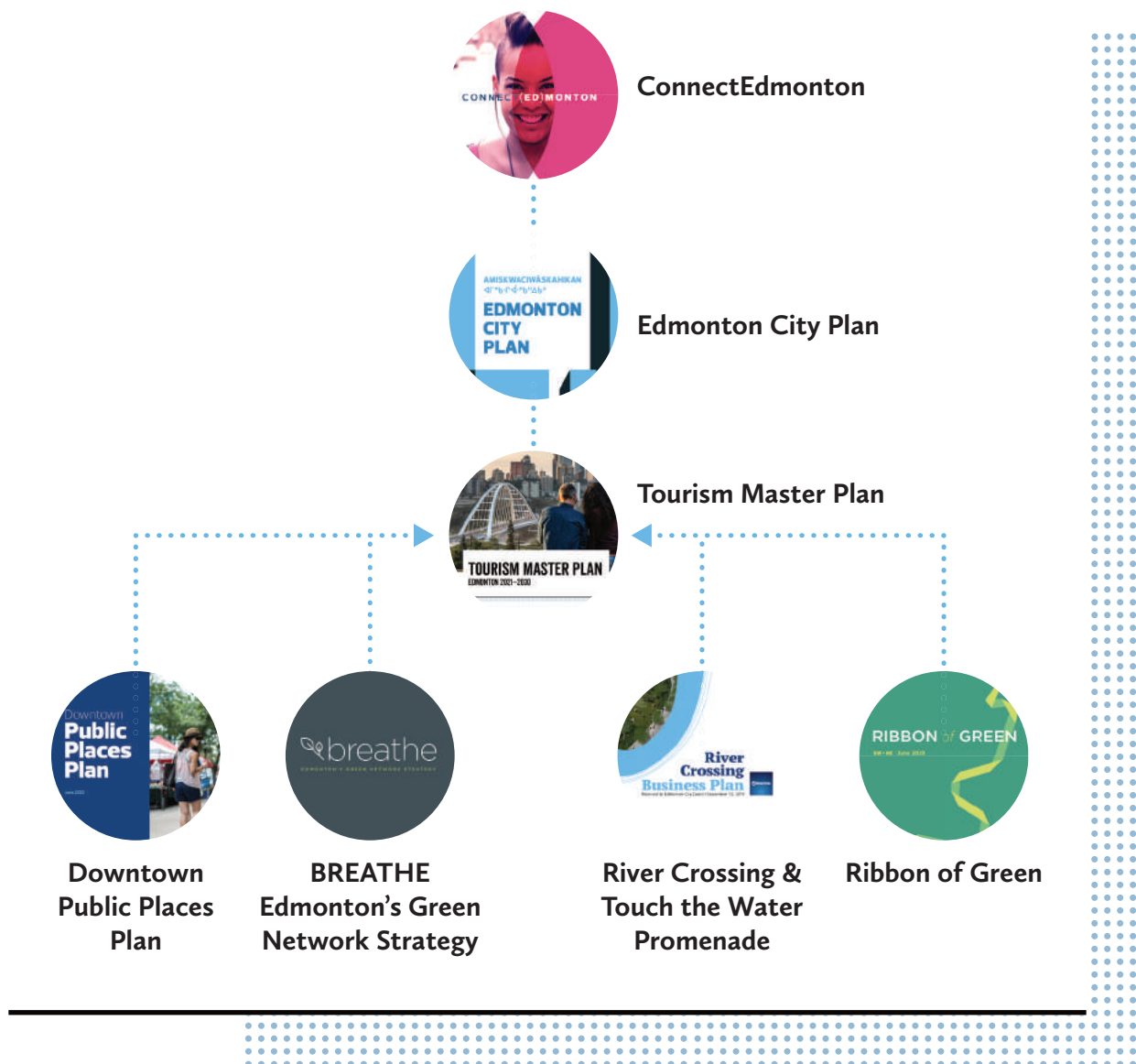
The City Plan asks, "what choices do we need to make to be a healthy, urban and climate resilient city of two million people that supports a prosperous region?" The Tourism Master Plan considers the more than 8.5 million annual visitors who are expected to come to Edmonton by 2030. It prioritizes the efforts and investments which will address the triple bottom line: delivering on the needs of the people (visitors and residents); the planet (developing tourism experiences in a responsible, sustainable, and regenerative manner); and profit (economic growth).

The Tourism Master Plan seeks to be thoughtful about how the quality of the visitor experience can be balanced with the quality of life for residents by aligning with the Guiding Values and many of the specific policy statements in the City Plan.



## OTHER EXISTING PLANS

The Tourism Master Plan aligns with and is informed by a multitude of existing plans including the Downtown Public Places Plan, BREATHE: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy, River Crossing, Touch the Water Promenade, Ribbon of Green, and more.





# MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

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The future success of Edmonton's visitor economy — and the growth of direct and indirect benefits it provides for the local economy — depend on the public and private sectors collaborating to ensure the long-term viability of Edmonton. It requires leaders co-developing a shared vision for the future that supports managed visitor growth while continually enhancing the destination as a healthy, dynamic, and productive place for all residents to live, work, and play.

We know that successful tourism master planning requires the participation and alignment of not only industry stakeholders, but those of the local community as well. As such, the process was designed to not only consult, but also engage and collaborate with tourism stakeholders, community stakeholders, and Edmontonians.

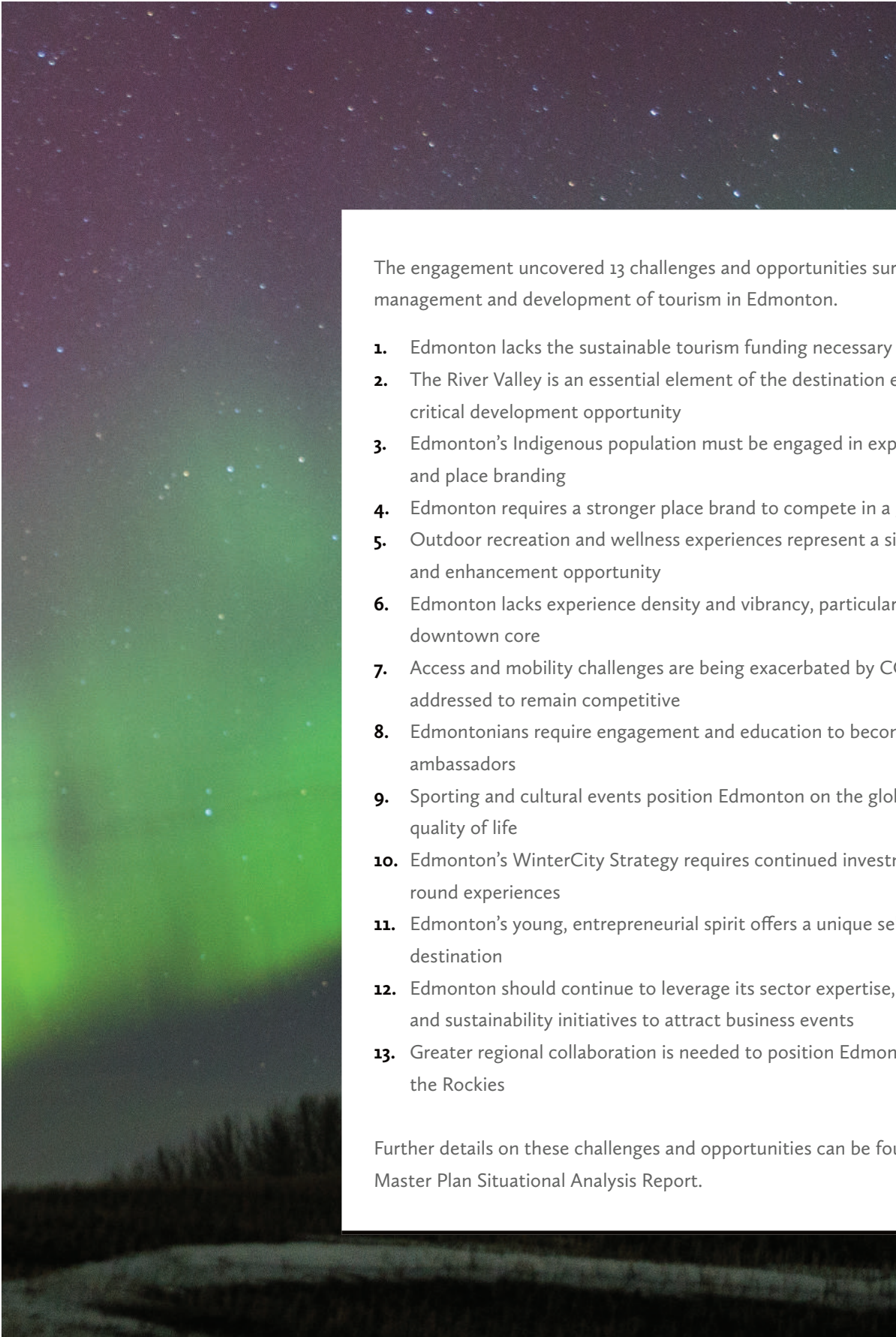
## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

MMGY NextFactor met with more than 150 stakeholders through a series of focus groups and one-on-one interviews during the month of November 2020. The primary purpose of these discussions was to identify critical issues and opportunities for the future of Edmonton as a destination for visitors and a place for residents to live, work, and play.

Focus groups included stakeholders from the following sectors:

- Hotels and Accommodations
- Arts, Culture, and History
- Attractions and Operators
- Culinary and Agritourism
- Festivals, Meetings and Sporting Events
- Learning Institutions
- Tourism Industry/Economic Development
- Makers, Entrepreneurs, Retailers and Young Professionals
- Indigenous Leaders
- Transportation, Infrastructure, and Government
- Explore Edmonton Staff





The engagement uncovered 13 challenges and opportunities surrounding the management and development of tourism in Edmonton.

- 1.** Edmonton lacks the sustainable tourism funding necessary to remain competitive
- 2.** The River Valley is an essential element of the destination experience and a critical development opportunity
- 3.** Edmonton's Indigenous population must be engaged in experience development and place branding
- 4.** Edmonton requires a stronger place brand to compete in a global marketplace
- 5.** Outdoor recreation and wellness experiences represent a significant development and enhancement opportunity
- 6.** Edmonton lacks experience density and vibrancy, particularly in areas of the downtown core
- 7.** Access and mobility challenges are being exacerbated by COVID-19 and must be addressed to remain competitive
- 8.** Edmontonians require engagement and education to become better destination ambassadors
- 9.** Sporting and cultural events position Edmonton on the global stage and improve quality of life
- 10.** Edmonton's WinterCity Strategy requires continued investment to deliver year-round experiences
- 11.** Edmonton's young, entrepreneurial spirit offers a unique selling point for the destination
- 12.** Edmonton should continue to leverage its sector expertise, learning institutions and sustainability initiatives to attract business events
- 13.** Greater regional collaboration is needed to position Edmonton as a gateway to the Rockies

Further details on these challenges and opportunities can be found in the Tourism Master Plan Situational Analysis Report.

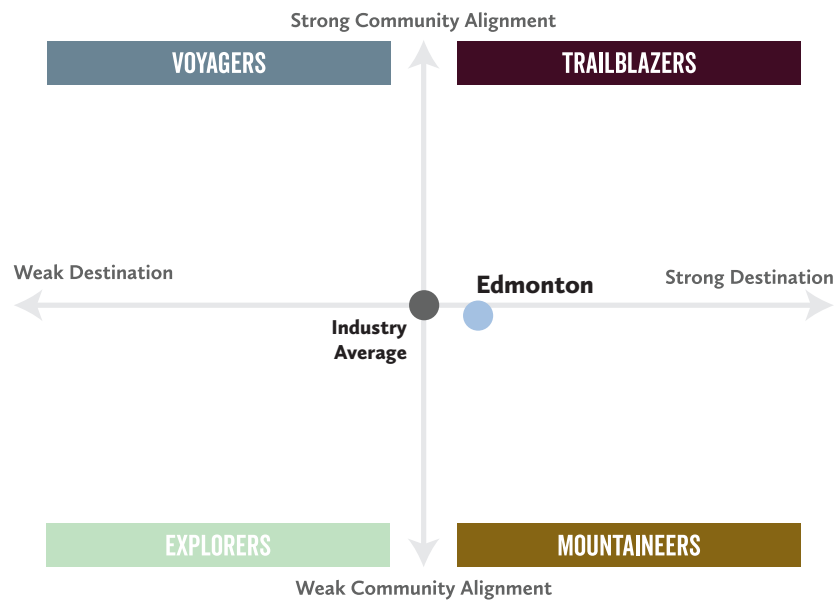


DESTINATION ASSESSMENT

MMGY NextFactor conducted a detailed assessment of Edmonton’s visitor economy, utilizing a comprehensive stakeholder survey that measures destination strength and community engagement, based on a series of 20 variables. The results were then used to plot Edmonton into a Scenario Model, which shows the specific opportunities for Explore Edmonton and their partners to build upon.

From a destination strength perspective, Edmonton outperformed the industry average, posting the highest scores in the areas of Outdoor Recreation and Sports Facilities, Attractions and Entertainment, Events, and Accommodation. The lowest scores fell in the categories of International Readiness, Mobility and Accessibility, and Place Brand.

From a community engagement perspective, Edmonton fell just below the industry average. Edmonton’s highest scores were in the areas of Sustainability, Hospitality Culture, Partnership Strength, Workforce and Regional Collaboration. Its lowest scores were in the categories of Tourism Funding and Local Community Support.



RESIDENT SURVEY

In consultation with Explore Edmonton staff, MMGY NextFactor developed an online survey to identify and gauge residents’ perceptions on a variety of key characteristics with

respect to livability, culture, economy, and sense of place. More than 800 residents of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region participated in the survey.



Roughly 9 in 10 (87%) residents agree that tourism is good for the city of Edmonton and more than 80% of Edmonton residents agree that tourism creates opportunities for local businesses and that tourism creates employment opportunities for residents.

Three-quarters agree that tourism brings in new amenities and attractions that local residents can also enjoy; nearly 75% agree that tourism generates tax revenues for national, provincial and local governments; and similarly, nearly 75% agree that tourism helps create positive ambiance/vibe in the local community and is an important factor in making our community a great place to live.

Other key findings include:

- When asked for the top three words or phrases that come to mind when thinking of Edmonton, the most common responses from residents were: “River Valley,” “Festive,” “Cold,” “Friendly,” and “Winter”.
- Nearly 9 in 10 Edmonton residents feel that nature and parks are important to their quality of life, followed closely by health and wellness, outdoor activities, festivals and events, dining/culinary/restaurants.
- Festivals and events and nature and parks were rated by Edmonton residents as the highest-quality experiences in the city, followed by dining/culinary/restaurants, outdoor activities and shopping.
- Parks/outdoor space/natural scenery were rated as the best thing about living in Edmonton by residents, followed by friendly people, quality and number of local restaurants, easy access to quality healthcare and access to entertainment/arts/culture.
- Road/street quality, homelessness and climate were listed as the least liked aspects of living in Edmonton.
- While more than 60% of residents indicated they are likely to encourage friends and family to visit the city, less than 20% of Edmontonians agree that Edmonton is a destination people want to visit.
- Two-thirds of residents feel that Edmonton should be attracting more visitors, while 17% feel the number is just right. Less than 1% of residents surveyed indicated that Edmonton is currently attracting too many visitors to the destination.

Further details can be found in the Tourism Master Plan Resident Survey Report.



## VISIONING WORKSHOP

The results and insights gleaned from these research activities were then used in a visioning workshop with the Steering Committee and Explore Edmonton leadership to envision the future of Edmonton’s visitor economy and develop priorities to be addressed by the project.

## VALIDATION SESSIONS

The results of the workshop were then compiled into a Draft Recommendations Report, which was presented to the Steering Committee, Explore Edmonton leadership, and key stakeholders for feedback and validation.

## IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION PLANS

A long-term plan such as this can be overwhelming when taken as a whole. It is for this reason that an Implementation Plan and a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan are being developed in conjunction with this document to guide Explore Edmonton and its partners in developing plans, partnerships, and resources necessary to move this plan forward to implementation.



# VISION

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Our vision is our aspiration for Edmonton's visitor economy in the year 2030.

In 2030, Edmonton is...

## A VIBRANT DESTINATION DRIVEN BY OUR SPIRIT, CULTURE AND UNIQUE BLEND OF URBAN AND WILDERNESS EXPERIENCES.

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In 2030, Edmonton is a vibrant urban centre serving up the perfect blend of big city vibes and exhilarating outdoor adventure. It's a destination of choice, beloved by travellers from near and far who come to delight in the unexpected. For them, Edmonton is an opportunity to be a part of something and discover something about themselves.

There's uniqueness to how we do ordinary things. Edmonton offers the opportunity to connect with nature within an urban environment and experience the cultural and spiritual connection with the land that local First Nations, Métis, and urban Indigenous Peoples continue to practice today. For those looking for a cultural adventure, Edmonton is vibrant, dynamic, and yet accessible and discoverable, offering a sense of wonder and inviting exploration for those who wish to uncover its rich cultural diversity. It's a spirit that you'll only appreciate once you've visited Edmonton

Above all, there's the shared values of the place, and the traveller feels them throughout their individual experience. There's the passionate creativity, the fearless entrepreneurial spirit, the playful quirkiness, and the disarming openness. These values are inspired by our rich and diverse heritage which continues to guide our way.

All of it—the spirit, the values, and the culture—are a product of the people of Edmonton. Edmontonians are progressive thinkers, creators, risk takers, and community neighbours. Our people and their stories have shaped Edmonton into an inventive, courageous, and welcoming place. They are the soul of our city. That's what people come for, to be the kindred spirits of Edmontonians.





# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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to our amazing city, and in turn, contributes to our city's local economic vibrancy, future and quality of life. The guiding principles also provide the basis for all of the recommendations of this plan.

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## 1 A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

This plan recognizes that tourism by its nature involves the destination as a whole, not only industry businesses, but also its ecosystems, natural resources, cultural assets and traditions, communities, aesthetics, and built infrastructure. It will take a collaborative effort to successfully build and shape tourism in Edmonton, with equal participation by government, the private sector, and the community. This can only be accomplished by expanding our knowledge, presence, and relationships with each of Edmonton's distinct communities.

## A NEW PARADIGM FOR TOURISM IN EDMONTON

The impact of tourism in Edmonton cannot be measured solely in economic terms. We must also measure success against the well-being of the city, considering nature, human health, and community identities. We must be thoughtful about how the quality of the visitor experience can be balanced with the quality of life for residents; about the types of visitors who would provide maximum financial value to our local communities while having the optimal social and environmental impact, and how we can responsibly grow our tourism industry for the benefit of all in our community.



### **A MORE EQUITABLE, DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE VISITOR ECONOMY**

Tourism in Edmonton should contribute to both equity and economic growth. In fact, many of the cities with the strongest tourism industries are known for their diversity and inclusion. It is our ambition that Edmonton's visitor economy will mirror our society by 2030. We will do so by recognizing and removing systemic barriers to marginalized and underrepresented communities and celebrating the broad range of human differences among us, while also embracing the commonalities we all share.



### **A REGENERATIVE VISITOR ECONOMY**

Regenerative tourism addresses impacts holistically, from destination and community perspectives as well as environmental. We must encourage tourism policies and business practices that protect our unique sense of place and not only sustain, but benefit, both our natural and cultural assets. We will achieve this by following regenerative principles in tourism development, accepting scientific consensus on needed reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, and integrating Indigenous values and knowledge with environmental management and stewardship practices.



### **AN EXPANDED ROLE FOR EXPLORE EDMONTON**

The social awareness regarding tourism is changing among travellers, residents, businesses, and government bodies. The next decade of tourism in Edmonton will require a different view and approach compared to the previous ten years. In addition to promoting the destination, we must invest more resources into developing and delivering year-round transformational visitor experiences. Doing so will allow us to achieve our mission of inspiring more people to visit Edmonton for exceptional experiences, while also enriching the quality of life for residents, and creating economic prosperity.



# STRATEGIC GOALS

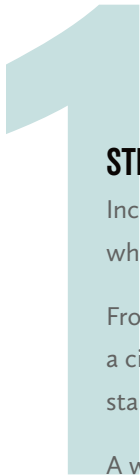
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The strategic goals provide the framework for decision making regarding efforts and investments to enhance Edmonton's visitor economy. These goals offer guidance on how to achieve the overarching vision and develop a competitive positioning for Edmonton as a destination.

1. Strengthen awareness and perception of the Edmonton place brand
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7. Expand tourism investment and regional collaboration







## STRENGTHEN AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF THE EDMONTON PLACE BRAND

Increasingly, reputation, quality of place and the perceived brand of a city is determining where talent, capital and tourism flow.

From Nashville’s “Music City” to Austin’s “Keep Austin Weird,” place brands communicate a city’s values, offerings, and identity to the world. Effective place brands bring diverse stakeholders together, building local community and external awareness.

A well-articulated place branding strategy strengthens a community’s sense of place, because it creates alignment between the language and messages created for and by business, community, and visitors. Therefore, communities must take care to cultivate a brand that is consistent across life, work, and travel.

Much work has been done in Edmonton over the past several years to build the foundation for a place brand strategy that is authentic to the community rather than one that is merely aspirational and unlikely to be sustained or successful over time. However, activating the place brand strategy and communicating Edmonton’s unique story requires an ongoing, participative effort from a multitude of stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. Only by working in a constant and coordinated manner will we be able to build a reputation that gives added value to all residents of the city and positions our city as a desirable place to live, work, visit, learn, and invest.

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Articulate Edmonton’s unique sense of place through the co-creation a common storytelling strategy for the city
2. Integrate the river valley into Edmonton’s brand identity
3. Reflect the ongoing contributions of our Indigenous peoples, culture, and history in Edmonton
4. Promote and celebrate the distinct communities that contribute to Edmonton’s brand story
5. Engage partners and stakeholders to implement and manage the Edmonton brand strategy
6. Activate citizens, creatives, entrepreneurs, and influencers, curating and promoting their passionate and authentic stories
7. Further invest in attracting and hosting festivals and events that position Edmonton on the national and global stages and demonstrate alignment with Edmonton’s place brand



## SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT, ENHANCEMENT AND STEWARDSHIP OF YEAR-ROUND VISITOR EXPERIENCES

Experiential travel isn't particularly new. There's been a growing demand around cultural exploration and activity-based travel experiences for a number of years. But the demand for experiential travel shows no signs of slowing down.

Travellers today want more than a simple visit to a new destination or days spent relaxing on a beach. Instead, the travel they are seeking is an experience of the world that goes deep—one that changes them in ways they may not even be aware of. Our research unveiled opportunities to enhance and develop tourism experiences within Edmonton that meet the needs of these contemporary travellers.

Today, tourism experiences that best exemplify this transformative travel experience meet at least one of the following criteria: they integrate multiple areas of tourism (such as cultural tourism, adventure tourism, culinary tourism, etc.); they have a hands-on learning aspect; and they are social.

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Indigenous Tourism** Showcase Edmonton's Indigenous history and heritage by sharing, developing, or incorporating authentic Indigenous cultural elements into the visitor experience (e.g. River Crossing Heritage Interpretive Plan)
- 2. Cultural Tourism** Dig deeper into Edmonton's DNA to better understand what differentiates Edmonton's cultural experience from that of other cities, and support the creative, collaborative undercurrent which drives the city's cultural identity (West Anthem Music Strategy)
- 3. Culinary Tourism** Leverage Edmonton's inventive and thriving culinary industry to develop a fully integrated culinary tourism experience and showcase an authentic taste of place from the farm up
- 4. Festivals & Events** Support, reimagine, and leverage Edmonton's wide range of signature and community festivals and events
- 5. Outdoor Adventure** Support and promote more products and experiences that emphasize engaging with the region's parks and outdoor spaces
- 6. Sports Tourism** Explore opportunities to develop and enhance facilities and better utilize public spaces to capitalize on the growing sports tourism market and in turn, support a more active and healthier Edmonton (e.g. Northside Sports Complex)
- 7. Winter Experiences** Support Edmonton's identity as a winter city by providing more opportunities for winter experiences
- 8. Shopping** Support the development of local retail establishments, products, and services

## ACTIVATE THE RIVER VALLEY TO CREATE A MORE VIBRANT DESTINATION AND GATHERING PLACE

The North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System is Edmonton's greatest natural asset and a significant contributor to the quality of life of Edmontonians. Long established as a gathering place for Indigenous Nations, Edmontonians continue to value the protection and celebration of the natural and cultural heritage of this area. Its unique character makes it foundational to the story and identity of Edmonton and Edmontonians.

Today the Ribbon of Green is the largest urban park in Canada, with more than 160 kilometres of maintained trails and 20 major parks. The Ribbon of Green offers a range of opportunities for solitude and celebration, for people to connect with nature and each other while respecting the health of the ecosystem. The existing parks within the System attract thousands of people annually who use these spaces for recreation, celebration, reflection, appreciation, education, and relaxation.

Access to natural settings is especially critical for cities, where green space is at a premium. Canada is becoming increasingly urbanized, with over 80% of Canadians now living in cities. As this urbanization trend continues, the protection of the System as a natural asset within an expanding urban area will become even more important as will the desire for these types of experiences.

Three in four Canadians say time outdoors is even more important to them now than it was before the pandemic according to a survey conducted by Nature Conservancy Canada. Edmonton has an opportunity to promote, develop, and program the river valley as a unique, world-class natural destination that offers a diversity of year-round experiences. And we can do so while ensuring that Edmonton's most treasured outdoor space remains healthy, accessible, and celebrated for generations.

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Support the development and implementation of the Ribbon of Green plan, River Crossing initiative, Touch the Water Promenade, and other existing plans and initiatives
2. Provide opportunities for low-impact tourism businesses to operate within select nodes of the river valley and parks system
3. Provide enhanced recreational opportunities on the North Saskatchewan River and encourage the use of North Saskatchewan River as a connective network
4. Support the development of the Prairie Sky Gondola as an anchor attraction and direct connection between Downtown, West Rosedale, and Old Strathcona
5. Implement a continuous trail system that ties together destinations, neighborhoods, and adjacent municipalities, and provides a range of recreational trail opportunities
6. Utilize creative and collaborative programming to bring residents and visitors into the river valley
7. Implement a unified system of wayfinding to support exploration and enhance visitor experiences by telling people where they are, where they can go, how they can get there, and how far it is to key destinations
8. Recognize and promote the Indigenous history of the North Saskatchewan River, River Valley and Ravine System, and their ongoing importance to Indigenous people through educational and interpretive materials, programming, and design



## CREATE A DYNAMIC, WELL-DESIGNED AND ACCESSIBLE URBAN EXPERIENCE

Vibrant cities attract people to visit, live, work, or invest in them. Urbanist Richard Florida argues that “quality of place is a key driver of the wealth and prosperity of communities and cities in the 21st century.” In *Rise of the Creative Class*, he defines quality of place as a set of “territorial assets”:

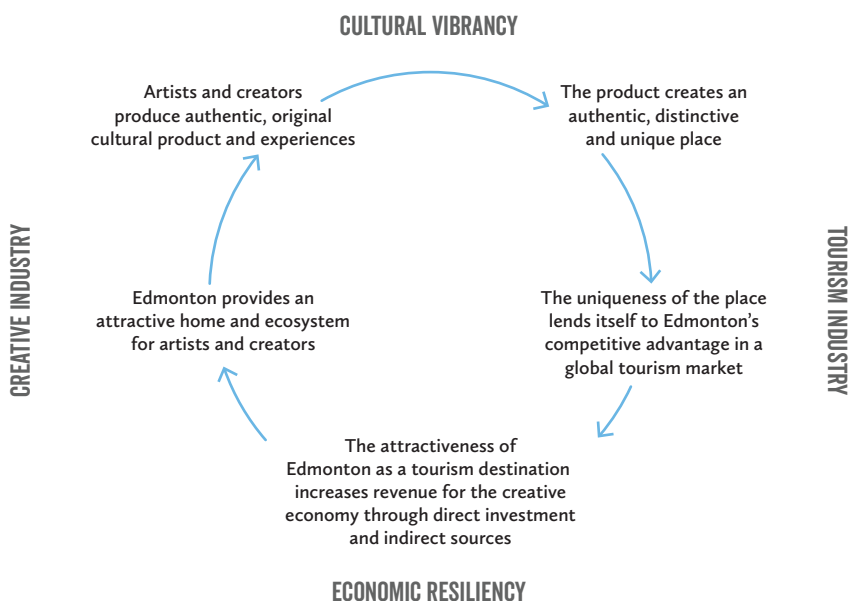
**What’s There:** The combination of the built environment and the natural environment... a stimulating, appealing setting for the pursuit of creative lives.

**Who’s There:** Diverse people of all ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and sexual orientations, interacting and providing clear cues that this is a community where anyone can fit in and make a life.

**What’s Going On:** The vibrancy of the street life, café culture, arts and music; the visible presence of people engaging in outdoor activities—altogether a lot of active, exciting, creative goings-on.

The process of creating a dynamic, well-designed and accessible urban experience in Edmonton requires both ‘hardware’ – landscaping, lighting, parks, planting, street art; and ‘software’- the all-important programming of activity that attracts people to spaces and brings them to life.

This is an opportunity to invest in the excellence of Edmonton’s own unique characteristics of place, and from there continue to build an attractive, unique, and resilient destination. Creating this uniqueness of place will provide a competitive advantage for Edmonton in a global tourism marketplace, which will further enhance the vibrancy of the destination.



## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Encourage and support the use of public spaces in formal and informal ways throughout the year
2. Animate open spaces at all scales through programming, activities, and events that encourage daily and all-season use
3. Connect public places to surrounding areas with sidewalks and pathways to increase pedestrian and cyclist mobility and public access
4. Consider sensory elements in the design of public spaces, engaging the five senses in a positive way for people in downtown or activated areas
5. Utilize art and placemaking to create urban places that demonstrate local culture, characteristics, and values
6. Set forth a clear vision and direction for the development of Edmonton’s night-time economy
7. Adopt street transformation policies that create shared stewardship of public spaces and repurpose streets to be more active, accessible, and safe
8. Incorporate the City of Edmonton’s Winter Design Guidelines into the design or redesign, programming, and maintenance of public places
9. Support initiatives to improve residents’ and visitors’ sense of safety and security
10. Ensure the visitor perspective is considered in urban and regional planning and alignment occurs with the recommendations of the Tourism Master Plan



## **IMPROVE ACCESS, MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY**

As Edmonton's visitor economy grows to its anticipated level of over 8.5 million visitors by 2030, how those visitors move around our city needs to evolve to meet the needs of travellers and respond to changing contexts and technologies.

A vibrant visitor economy must contain connections that are equally vibrant. These connections should create a sense of continuity of the visitor experience from one destination to another.

We must ensure that the visitor perspective is considered in transportation planning, including:

- connectivity between the destination and the rest of the world, including air access as well as rail and road;
- connectivity between visitor activities within a destination; and
- the modes of transportation that help visitors connect to places and to one another.

## **STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Support the creation of an air service development fund necessary to provide incentives for new nonstop service
2. Continue to develop and expand partnerships with regional destinations to support air service development
3. Work with Regional Airports Authority to change federal 4-airport policy for international flights and other policies which hinder competitiveness
4. Improve multi-modal connectivity to, from, and within the Edmonton Metropolitan Region
5. Utilize lessons learned during the pandemic to more comprehensively reimagine Edmonton's streets and mobility networks
6. Increase visibility for brand and industry signage throughout the destination, particularly at major city entrances
7. Collaborate with regional destinations (e.g., Highway 16 corridor) to better connect and develop more tourism products and experiences
8. Ensure the visitor perspective is considered in transportation planning and alignment occurs between transportation master plans and the Tourism Master Plan

## UTILIZE A HOLISTIC, INNOVATIVE AND PERSONALIZED APPROACH TO VISITOR SERVICING

When we think about visitor servicing, we need to think about the whole journey – not just the point of engagement in a welcome centre. We need to better understand how visitors to Edmonton experience the destination and provide them with personalized information in real-time. We can also utilize this information to better understand the visitor experience and manage tourism in the destination more effectively.

Amsterdam, for example, is already experimenting with displaying wait times at top visitor attractions on its website. The city has also created an app that sends push notifications to users warning them of long queues and suggesting alternatives. Visitors can even download an artificial intelligence–powered service that suggests off-the-beaten-path destinations based on their social-media profiles. On a pre-emptive basis, Amsterdam is developing dashboards to forecast overcrowding in specific locations. The traffic department and other agencies are exploring how to track people through movement detection cameras and mobile-phone data. Combined with data analytics, this information can help the city optimize maintenance and cleaning schedules and determine infrastructure needs.

## STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop new tools for obtaining, managing and displaying information (big data and AI etc.) to improve knowledge of visitor activities and manage the visitor experience more efficiently
2. Utilize innovative, new approaches and technologies to deliver real-time visitor servicing and engage with visitors at the right time, in the right place with the right information
3. Utilize alternative models for delivering in-person visitor information which inspire visitors and help them discover more of Edmonton including co-location with high-volume businesses, pop-up visitor centres, mobile visitor centres, etc.
4. Expand the awareness of and participation the YEG Expert program to provide visitor-facing employees and residents with the knowledge, tools and resources they need to be ambassadors for the city
5. Develop campaigns and messaging encouraging residents to invite friends and family to visit Edmonton
6. Educate visitors on how to be responsible in protecting and preserving our natural and cultural resources when visiting Edmonton





## **EXPAND TOURISM INVESTMENT AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION**

Tourism is a vital engine for economic growth in Edmonton, contributing billions of dollars to the local economy. However, Edmonton lacks the stable and sufficient investment in tourism necessary to remain competitive and relevant in an increasingly competitive marketplace. At the same time, developing nuanced plans for the future of Edmonton's visitor economy is challenging if investments beyond the next funding cycle remain uncertain.

Tourism helps shape the perception and reputation of Edmonton, which is critical to our city's economy. It is the front door to economic development. Our future prosperity depends on a thriving visitor economy. Therefore, investment in tourism must be a priority moving forward.

Guided by this plan, Explore Edmonton will continue to collaborate with our regional partners to advance our collective goals. Ultimately, the success of this plan will come from meaningful, mutually beneficial participation and alliances with regional stakeholders and industry partners. By working together, we will achieve more for the benefit of the Edmonton metropolitan region.

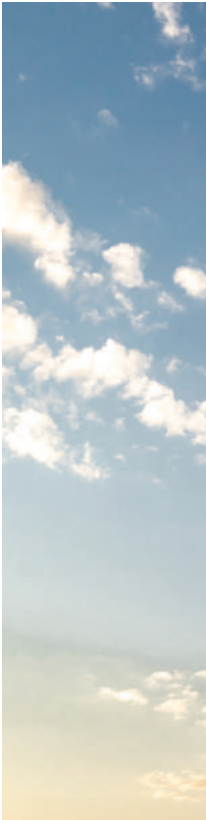
## **STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Explore and advocate for the development of sufficient and sustainable funding sources for tourism and events
2. Support the development and implementation of a destination development grant program for proposals and initiatives that promise or currently exhibit significant potential for destination development in Edmonton
3. Communicate and consistently reinforce the value of tourism to elected officials, stakeholders, and residents
4. Encourage other regional municipalities to participate in a Regional Tourism Master Plan
5. Build a network of "big thinkers", innovators, and researchers who will work with Explore Edmonton to bring meetings and conventions to the region



# NEXT STEPS

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Throughout the planning process, our community demonstrated an overwhelming willingness to come together and develop a shared vision for Edmonton's visitor economy. That collaborative spirit will be needed once again as we aim to bring this vision to life. No single individual or organization will be able to implement this plan alone. It will require the support of a broad reaching group of contributors and a 'Team Edmonton' philosophy.

Explore Edmonton will champion this strategy, at times leading initiatives, at times supporting others in their pursuits and at all times advocating for the strategic development of our visitor economy for the benefit of Edmontonians and visitors.

When appropriate, project teams will be recruited and tasked with developing strategic initiatives and collaborative metrics, guiding and aiding implementation, reviewing success measures and ensuring the lasting relevance of the work.

Many of the strategic initiatives resulting from this plan will be incorporated into Explore Edmonton's annual business plans, ensuring the work plan becomes a natural part of the organization's values and operations, not a one-time activity.

With a collective confidence and partnership, we will continue as leaders that connect the value of the visitor economy to our city's prosperity and our quality of life.

We invite the world to experience more Edmonton!



# **EXPLORE EDMONTON**

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