

Positioning Edmonton to Compete in the Global Economy as a Great Northern City
Message from 2010 Chair of the Board of Directors, Edmonton Chamber of Commerce

After a trying period during which Edmonton businesses experienced a serious cyclical correction to our economy, we enter 2010 with cautious optimism. There have been announcements of capital projects, proposals for bitumen upgrading under the provincial BRIC program have been made, the housing market seems to be recovering, and building permits for both residential and commercial are on the rise. Employment numbers seem to also be improving, and businesses that had to deal with empty order sheets in 2009 are looking at a return to busier times. We believe that we should look for improvements during the next cycle resulting in lessons learned over the past year.

But the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce believes the key to our collective success in the future remains a focus on the long haul – the positioning of Edmonton, the Capital Region, and Alberta for long term success in what will remain a tougher and more competitive economy. With that in mind, your chamber of commerce believes that in order to win in that competitive economy, we must be strategic and lever the strategic advantages that Edmonton has or can build.

The chamber will be supporting well-planned, well-executed development across the North of Alberta and Canada. Edmonton is part of that North and will support construction, supply and logistics, professional services, financial services, and health and education for the North. What is good for businesses in Fort McMurray or Yellowknife; Whitehorse or Iqaluit is also good for businesses in Edmonton.

You will hear the chamber speak of Edmonton as a Great Northern City. Edmonton must be able to attract investment, recruit talent, retain our skilled and well educated and trained young workers. We believe that to accomplish these goals, we must develop a uniquely Edmonton character that can stand on the world stage. This means developing expertise so that when the world thinks of northern planning, design, engineering and architecture, Edmonton comes to mind. This means developing the best opportunities to raise our children, and to educate them in world class facilities from kindergarten to post-doctoral studies. This means ensuring that Edmonton continues to be served by world class medical facilities staffed by world class health care deliverers. This means ensuring Edmonton has world class facilities for our population to “play” – whether that is enjoying sports, the arts, museums, or other cultural centres. This means ensuring we have safe and livable communities where people choose to live because they are great places to raise families.

You will hear us speak to the importance of developing the strongest, best trained, most productive workforce possible – ensuring, through training and education that we are developing a strong and well prepared workforce in the next generation, but also ensuring that through diversity and mentoring programs, and access to training, that all possible communities are involved as fully in the workforce as possible. Diversity is more than good policy – it is good business. A strong workforce will reduce capital costs through

efficiencies, and those reductions improve the competitiveness of the plants and other facilities we build.

You will hear the chamber speak vocally for the most effective planning for the Capital Region – ensuring that we plan for a diversified economy that builds on all of our strengths. This means that we will work to encourage effective land use and water use planning, working with the City of Edmonton, the Capital Region Board and the province on work to more effectively plan for the region – allowing business to prosper as we, hopefully, reduce the impact of artificial borders within the region. And it will mean watching, evaluating and responding to proposals by the province as the land use framework is developed. We will encourage diversification in every way possible, starting with the development of Port Alberta as a diversification tool that can enhance our ability to compete for value-added jobs that come with a fully effective road, rail, air and pipeline system that move goods and materials to, from and through Edmonton as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Finally, the chamber will carefully watch developments on key issues, especially those regarding the environment. We all live and work in Alberta and understand that together we must all ensure that development and operations of our industries are sustainable in the long term. This means, clearly, that we have to ensure proper and adequate protection of the environment in every respect. But sustainability also means that our ability to develop industry must be competitive - we have to be realistic and not allow ourselves to be led into rules, regulations and processes that are not effective and efficient. The current processes are cumbersome, costly, lengthy and, in many cases, it is difficult to predict outcomes so risk is unclear.

These are exciting times for Edmonton, and for the entire Province of Alberta. Big projects are in development and construction. Long term, great quality jobs are being created every day. Small businesses have learned from the past year or so and are positioned to take advantage of what is coming. Together, we truly can work to create the best environment for business in Edmonton. I am honoured and privileged to chair your board for this year, and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible to learn more about your businesses, your issues, and your vision for our Great Northern City.