The Edmonton Chamber
Business Budget

# Let's Get Edmonton **Back on Track**

Fall 2026

EDMONTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce acknowledges that we conduct our business on Treaty 6 territory and the Métis Homeland, the ancestral lands of the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway, Saulteaux, Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others. These lands, known as ᐊᒥᐢᑲᐧᒋᐊᐧᐢᑲᐦᐃᑲᐣ/amiskwaciwâskahikan, have been a centre of trade and innovation for Indigenous peoples since time immemorial.

We honour the contributions of Indigenous entrepreneurs and are committed to fostering partnerships that recognize and respect Indigenous business practices. In the spirit of Reconciliation, we strive to include and empower Indigenous voices in our business community, building a strong and inclusive Edmonton together.

# Edmonton Chamber Fiscal Task Force Members

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This document was informed by the expertise and perspectives of Edmonton Chamber of Commerce members. The positions and recommendations presented are those of the Chamber and do not necessarily reflect the views of individual member organizations.

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# A Letter From Our President & CEO

I believe in Edmonton. I say it everywhere I go, and the numbers keep backing me up.

This region is the fastest-growing metropolitan area in the country. We added more than 50,000 people last year, and that is three years running now.[1] We are a post-secondary city: the University of Alberta, NAIT, MacEwan, NorQuest and Concordia graduate more than 40,000 students a year, several of them from campuses right downtown. Applied Pharmaceutical Innovation, working here on Canada's drug security, has a Nobel laureate as its Chief Scientific Officer.

We are poised to become a defence city, with federal and provincial money now flowing into defence innovation and manufacturing in this region, which is exactly where it belongs in the country's gateway to the North. And investors are choosing us. Meta broke ground this summer on a $13 billion data centre just northeast of the city, its first in Canada and the largest it has built anywhere outside the United States.

That is not an exhaustive list. It is just a small sample of what's to come, and the Chamber is betting on this city.

It is also a city adding the population of Grande Prairie every twelve months, and every one of those people needs roads, water, transit and more. Regional use of City of Edmonton services currently outpaces the region's financial contribution to them. **Costs are rising faster than revenue. Property taxes are climbing. Between now and 2030, City Council is going to have to make some genuinely hard decisions, and there is no version of this where everybody walks away happy.**

# What This Document Is

This document is the Edmonton Chamber's commitment to working with the City to make those tough choices, offering our recommendations, our insight, and our support for the difficult decisions to come. This is the business community's contribution to the 2027–2030 budget conversation, written for City Administration, for elected officials and for Edmontonians.

Here is what struck me most. After working through the Chamber's online surveys, the Chamber's City Councillor Roundtable sessions, working with the Chamber Fiscal Task Force, and sifting through the hundreds of pages of the City's own budget consultation summaries, what Edmontonians told the City aligns with what the Chamber told the City:[2]

- Fiscal responsibility was the single most common theme across every engagement method the City used.
- 80 per cent of Edmontonians want spending focused on maintaining and repairing what the City already owns, ahead of building anything new.
- More than half of Edmontonians would rather close a low-priority facility than raise taxes to keep everything open.
- Licences, permits, parking and recreation passes should be paid for by the people using them, rather than through the property tax levy.

## What Edmontonians are asking for is a budget that goes back to the basics. This document is how we get this city Back on Track.

# Why This Matters

Right now, Edmonton is paying for things it doesn't have the money to pay for and borrowing the difference. Governments must do that on occasion, but it cannot be the norm. As it stands, future taxes won't build anything in the future because they're caught up paying for the past.

Every dollar the City spends belongs to someone who earned it. That means every dollar must be a dollar well spent.

**Edmonton needs a budget it can afford.**

**That is why this budget is about fiscal responsibility, but it doesn't have to stay this way forever.** If we work together to get the budget back on solid ground over the next four years, we can protect the basics now while making room for the investments that make a city beautiful, vibrant and worth choosing. I want those things for Edmonton. I want them soon. But first, we have to be able to afford them.

**Why the Chamber**

**The City is not a business, and the value of public services cannot be measured in dollars alone.** But every well-run organization sets priorities, lives within its means and knows what its spending is achieving. That is the experience our members bring to this conversation, and we offer it in the spirit of partnership.

Nobody at City Hall is the opponent here. We know that Council, Administration, City staff and the organizations delivering public services all want a city that works.

## Our concern is with a budgeting approach that allows spending to continue or grow without sufficient prioritization, measurement or review of the value it delivers to Edmontonians.

# Our Three Questions

We tested every recommendation in this document the same way, asking three simple questions of every dollar, in order:

- **Should the City do it?** Is this the City's responsibility at all, or does it properly belong to another order of government?
- **Is the City the right one to do it?** If the private sector, a non-profit or another partner could deliver it better, why not work with them and **avoid duplicating the work?**
- **Is the result worth the cost?** Can the City show what its investment achieved, and is the price reasonable for what came back?

This is the method behind every recommendation we are putting to Council. It applies the same obligation to every decision, regardless of the amount or where the money came from. It works the same way on a $30 million fire hall as it does on a $300 grant, and it returns a “yes” at least as often as a “no.” Sometimes the honest answer is "not right now."

I spent years in elected office. I know what it feels like to be handed a set of options where every one of them costs somebody something, and to have to choose anyway, in public, knowing you will wear it. There is no version of this budget where Council makes everybody happy.

**But, that is the job.**

That is why we developed the Back on Track Budget: not to pretend these choices will be easy, but to offer a practical path through them. The Edmonton Chamber and our members are ready to work with Council and Administration to make the decisions necessary to build a stronger, more affordable and more investable Edmonton.

**Our ask is straightforward: build a city Edmonton can afford, and make every dollar count toward something Edmontonians can see, use and value. It is time to get Edmonton Back on Track.**

Thank you,

**Doug Griffiths**
President and CEO, Edmonton Chamber of Commerce

# Defining Core Services

Everyone in this conversation agrees Edmonton should focus on core services. Almost nobody agrees on what they are.

The City's own budget consultation found a consistent call to get back to basics, and no shared definition of what the basics are. What one participant called essential, another called wasteful. Some described roads and bridges. Others named fire, police, transit and libraries. Others counted pools and recreation centres. Edmonton Police Service (EPS) and Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) were both named top-five priorities, and both drew among the largest proposed reductions in the City's own budget tool.

So before we could say what the City should fund, we had to say what the City is legislated to fund. We worked from the *Constitution Act*, the *Municipal Government Act*, and the *City of Edmonton Charter* to separate municipal responsibility from provincial and federal, and defined core services as what the City is legislatively responsible for and what the City needs to function:

- **Municipal public transit**
- **Municipal policing and emergency services**
- **Permitting and licensing**
- **Municipal road services**
- **Municipal infrastructure and utilities**
- **Municipal parks and recreation facilities**
- **Urban planning**
- **Property assessment and taxation**

Defining what is core also defines what is not. Parts of Edmonton's homelessness response exist because another order of government left a gap and the City had to step in. Edmonton also absorbs disproportionate demand from health care, education and corrections release, among others, because it supports the region and the North. Some of those needs have to be met. But municipal property tax is the least appropriate instrument in the country for funding provincial health and social policy, and every dollar the City spends covering someone else's mandate is a dollar not spent on the list above.

**We see this as a four-year discipline rather than a permanent state. Funding core services properly now is what gives Edmonton the room to be ambitious again once its finances are on steadier ground.**

# From Principles to the Evidence

Each recommendation was identified with Council's four strategic priorities in view: Economic Development, Growth Management, Quality Services and Safety. Through our discussions, three clear categories emerged, demonstrating how the City needs to adjust its approach:

- **Right-Sized Spending**: spending the City should reduce, freeze or hold flat because it no longer matches actual demand or has drifted from its core purpose.
- **Revenue Generation:** changes that grow the tax base, bring in new revenue, or redirect existing revenue the City is currently leaving on the table, so less of what the City needs comes off the property tax levy.
- **Invest:** spending the City should direct or redirect toward what will grow the economy, returning that value to Edmontonians through jobs and opportunity.

**Each example that follows is tagged in three ways: the Chamber pillar it serves, the Council priority it speaks to and the direction we recommend.**

# Fiscal Opportunities at a Glance

We looked closely at a number of City projects and programs and put each one through our three guiding questions. The following pages show what we found and how we got there.

**Some of these recommendations ask the City to stop doing something, or to do less of it for now. Others ask for a different way of delivering the same service, often through a partner already equipped to do it. And some ask the City to spend, because the return is clear and because a growing economy is what pays for everything else in this document.** As we said earlier, these questions return a "yes" as often as a "no," and in several cases the honest answer was simply not right now.

This is not a complete list of what could be examined. These are the areas where we had evidence worth putting in front of Council, and where the numbers were large enough to matter to the budget. Every figure comes from the City's own reporting, from our members or from the public record.

**Getting back on track does not mean thinking small.** It means getting the fundamentals right first, so that Edmonton has the capacity to dream big again. That is what these recommendations are for, and we offer them as ideas rather than conclusions, in the spirit of partnership, expecting that the conversation with Council and Administration will improve them.

| ISSUE | HEADLINE FIGURES | SUMMARY |
|---|---|---|
| **Blatchford**<br>What the Delay Is Costing Edmonton | 28.8% of developable land complete after 14 years; current pace points to 2061, not the 2042 target; $75.2M–$79.0M in forgone tax revenue to 2042 | Since its plan was approved in 2012, Blatchford has completed about 2.1 percentage points of developable land a year. Meeting the City's 2042 target would take more than double that pace; at the current rate, completion slips to about 2061. That delay could mean $75.2 million to $79.0 million in forgone municipal tax revenue between 2026 and 2042. The City should sell more of its remaining land to experienced private developers, parcel by parcel, and revisit the requirements developers say make it too difficult and costly to build. |

# Fiscal Opportunities at a Glance

| ISSUE | HEADLINE FIGURES | SUMMARY |
|---|---|---|
| **Recreation Centres and the Zoo:** Who Should Pay to Keep the Doors Open | $49.0M a year in subsidy; cost recovery down from 69% to 52%. | Recreation costs taxpayers $49 million a year. In 2018, users covered 69 cents of every dollar; by 2024, they covered 52 cents. City staff costed a naming-rights plan at $21 million over 10 years, but Council rejected it. The City should reopen naming rights, test contracted and sponsorship-funded operating models, including for the Zoo, and introduce a non-resident rate so users from outside Edmonton pay a fairer share. |
| **Public Safety:** Safety Is an Economic Issue | 89,000+ central district workers; safety satisfaction down 7 points to 32%; 58% of downtown businesses feel unsafe operating | Forty-four per cent of businesses spent at least $500 last year repairing damage from vandalism, break-ins or shoplifting, money that could have gone to hiring and growth. The City's own consultation found safety decides whether a business can attract customers and keep staff. The City should consolidate enforcement by moving peace officers under the Edmonton Police Service, protect crisis diversion funding and call on the Province to fund the health and social services within its responsibility. |
| **Cleanliness and Beautification:** What People See Is What Keeps Them Away | 53% cite what they see; 13% cite violent crime. | Among Edmontonians who feel the city is unsafe, four times as many point to what they see on the street as to violent crime. Visible neglect is cheaper to fix than crime. The City should increase operating funding for the Capital City Clean Up Fund to deliver the daily basics downtown, set a published service standard for snow and ice clearing and evaluate all beautification spending on value for money. |
| **The Policy Premium:** When City Rules Drive Up Every Bill | City policies and standards are adding millions to the cost of essential infrastructure. Example: $8.0M premium per fire station, 58% above a minimum-code build. | For example, a fire station built to code costs approximately $13 million, compared with $21 million when built to the City's current standards. Across the four stations already planned, that difference is equivalent to the cost of two additional fire halls. This is one example of how City policies and standards can drive up the cost of essential infrastructure. The City should review the policies applied across its capital program so Edmonton can build what it needs at a price taxpayers can afford. |

# Fiscal Opportunities at a Glance

| ISSUE | HEADLINE FIGURES | SUMMARY |
|---|---|---|
| **Construction Disruption:** The Businesses That Don't Reopen | $17.0M in lost annual revenue from 2026 downtown closures. | Roughly 20 downtown businesses closed so far in 2026, taking an estimated $17 million in annual revenue with them. A business that closes during construction does not reopen when the road does. The City should build business protection into its construction contracts and make sure notice reaches the business itself, not only the property owner or the contractor. |
| **City-Owned Land:** Put It to Work or Let It Go | 18 City properties listed for sale; none have a sales plan | City-owned land is an asset that can be put to work rather than a liability to be managed or a resource that goes under-leveraged. The City should divest surplus lands to the private sector so they can be made productive by the market and generate a return for the City via tax assessment. |
| **Neighbourhood Renewal:** Stop Fixing What Isn't Broken | 80% want basic repairs before anything new. | For a defined period, the City should limit neighbourhood renewal projects to essential sidewalk, road and underground infrastructure needs. Any additional improvements should reflect the priorities of the community rather than being automatically added to advance broader City policy objectives, and the design standards that set the cost of each project should be reviewed. |
| **Stop Duplication:** Fund Each Job Once | Taxpayers should not pay twice for the same job. | Before the City builds or expands an internal function, it should confirm that no organization it already funds is doing the same work. Its recent place-branding exercise is one example of how overlapping mandates leave taxpayers paying more for duplicated work. The City should apply a duplication test before creating or renewing any program, and require a documented review of results before it increases funding on any line. |

# Fiscal Opportunities at a Glance

| ISSUE | HEADLINE FIGURES | SUMMARY |
|---|---|---|
| **Downtown:** Fund the Plans Edmonton Already Has | Two plans, neither fully funded. | Edmonton already has a City-approved Downtown Action Plan shaped by business and community input. What downtown lacks is not direction but funding and execution. The City should fund the highest-priority actions already identified and report publicly against the plans' established KPIs. |
| **Commercial Property Tax:** Stop Charging a Business Before It Opens | 2.5 times more tax per commercial property. | A major new development can begin attracting property tax before it has opened its doors or served a single customer. The City should defer the new municipal tax burden on major investments until the project begins commercial operations and starts generating revenue. |
| **South of 41st:** Annexed for Growth, Still Waiting | $7.13B in projected net benefit over 25 years, on land still taxed at county rates until 2068. | Right now, Edmonton is not actively planning the land it annexed in 2019 for 240,000 more people and an additional 63,000 jobs. Further, it cannot tax at city rates until the land develops. The City is the gatekeeper here, not the landowner. The City needs to activate South of 41st on a defined timeline and start collecting on the growth it annexed this land to capture and enabling the economic development opportunities and housing growth it was intended for. |
| **The Industrial Investment Action Plan:** Fund What the City Already Decided to Do | 230 hectares shovel-ready out of roughly 7,000 hectares of vacant, developable industrial land | Only 230 hectares of Edmonton's industrial land are ready to build on, out of roughly 7,000 hectares that are vacant and developable. When the non-residential share of the tax base shrinks, homeowners cover the difference. The City should fund its Industrial Investment Action Plan and report annually on the residential and non-residential shares of the assessment base. |

# Blatchford: What the Delay Is Costing Edmonton

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Growth Management & Economic Development

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: An Investable Edmonton

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Right-Sized Spending & Revenue Generation

## The Problem

### Understanding the City's Numbers

There are several different percentages being used to describe how much of Blatchford has been completed. They can sound contradictory, but they are measuring different things.
The City provided the Chamber with three numbers:

| CITY MEASURE | PERCENTAGE | WHAT IT MEANS |
|---|---|---|
| **Entire Blatchford site complete** | 25.32% | About one-quarter of the full 536-acre Blatchford site is complete. This calculation covers the entire site, including land used for roads, parks, open spaces and other public infrastructure. |
| **Developable land complete** | 28.8% | 28.8 per cent of the land available for development is complete. This removes land that will be used permanently for things such as roads, parks and public infrastructure. |
| **Developable land in some phase of development** | 66% | 66 per cent of the developable land is either being planned, under construction or already complete. This number therefore includes land where planning, rezoning or engineering work has started but construction may not yet be finished. |

**All three numbers can be correct at the same time because they answer different questions.**

For this report, the Chamber uses **28.8 per cent** when calculating Blatchford's construction pace because we want to know how much of the developable land has actually been completed.

We do **not** use the 66 per cent figure for that calculation because 66 per cent includes land that is still being planned or is under construction. That work is important progress, but it is not the same as completed development.

When we compare Blatchford with another neighbourhood, we use the **25.32 per cent whole-site figure** where necessary so that both developments are being measured using comparable definitions.

# Blatchford: What the Delay Is Costing Edmonton

## Is Blatchford on Pace for 2042?

Based on the City's current numbers, the pace of development will have to double if it wants to reach it's 2042 goal.

Blatchford's Area Redevelopment Plan was approved in 2012.

In the 14 years since then, **28.8 per cent of its developable land has been completed.**

That works out to:

- **28.8 ÷ 14 years = approximately 2.1 percentage points completed per year.**
- The City's target is substantial completion by 2042.
- That leaves 16 years to complete the remaining **71.2 per cent** of developable land:
- **71.2 ÷ 16 years = approximately 4.5 percentage points per year.**
- In other words, the City would need to complete developable land at **more than twice the average annual pace achieved since 2012** to meet its 2042 target.
- That does not mean the 2042 target is impossible, but it means that continuing at the pace achieved over the past 14 years would not get Blatchford there.

There is another reason Council should scrutinize the 2042 date. The target was previously 2038 and was moved to 2042 through a 2022 re-forecast. In 2024, the City Auditor reported that the Blatchford office could not provide documentation showing how its completion date had been determined or the source data supporting it.[3]

Council should therefore ask a simple question: **What specifically has to change for Blatchford to be substantially complete by 2042?**

# Blatchford: What the Delay Is Costing Edmonton

## Why Has Development Been Slow?

Building Blatchford was never going to be easy. The City had to redevelop a former airport, deal with existing infrastructure, prepare the land for development and establish a new district energy system.

The City has also pointed out that bringing Blatchford's first serviced land to market took approximately five years after the airport closed. BILD Alberta estimates that bringing a traditional new community to market can take between three and 10 years.

The issue is what happened after that initial work. The City needs private builders to buy parcels and build homes if Blatchford is going to become the community originally envisioned.

The City's own reports show that attracting those builders has been difficult.

In November 2025, Administration told Council that private industry was **"not interested in taking on this project under Council's current vision for sustainability, renewable energy, density, and active transportation."**[4] That is important because it identifies the problem directly: **developers have told the City that they are not prepared to take on the project under its existing requirements.**

The City received a similar warning from its own consultant. In 2023, Gettel Appraisals examined the market for Blatchford on behalf of the City.[5]

At the time of the study, Blatchford was selling approximately **32 single-unit lots per year**, which the consultant estimated was about **40 per cent of the typical pace in a greenfield development.**

The study also identified several requirements affecting development at Blatchford, including:

- Detached housing is not permitted;
- Density requirements range from 125 to 190 units per hectare;
- Connection to the District Energy Sharing System is mandatory and can add at least three months to construction; and
- Architectural requirements can add at least $10,000 per housing unit.

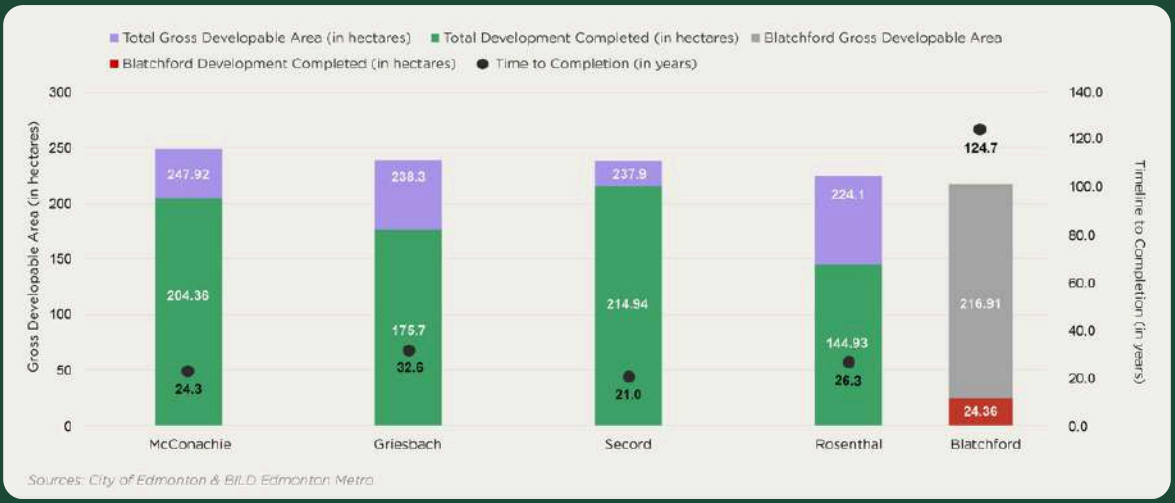
# Blatchford: What the Delay Is Costing Edmonton

Builders interviewed for the study asked for greater flexibility, including zero-lot-line homes, more flexibility in building materials and opportunities to build less expensive homes for buyers.
The report concludes with an acknowledgement that "Blatchford is a public policy guided development area. As such, development has proceeded under specific guidelines that are government imposed for societal benefit and that are not necessarily consistent with market demand."[6]

These findings are now three years old. Council should ask whether those barriers still exist and, if they do, whether they are still appropriate for the remaining development. **Council should also ask whether the City should be pursuing development goals that are not consistent with market demand.**

## What Can We Learn From Griesbach?

### Neighbourhoods Under Construction




Griesbach provides a useful Edmonton comparison. Like Blatchford, Griesbach was created by redeveloping former public land. The former Canadian Forces Base site is approximately 238.3 hectares, or about 589 acres, making it slightly larger than Blatchford's 536 acres. Its statutory plan was approved in 2002.

Today, approximately 74 per cent of Griesbach has been built, with full development projected to take approximately 33 years. Blatchford's current target would see it substantially completed approximately 30 years after its statutory plan was approved.[7]

The planned timelines are therefore similar.

That does not mean every difference between the two neighbourhoods can be attributed to the City. Blatchford has different infrastructure, environmental requirements, housing forms and development standards. But the comparison demonstrates that redeveloping a large former government site does not inherently require generations to complete.

# Blatchford: What the Delay Is Costing Edmonton

### What Is the Cost of Taking Longer?

There is a financial consequence when developable land remains undeveloped. A completed neighbourhood contains homes and businesses that have assessed values and pay municipal property taxes. Undeveloped land generates substantially less assessment.

Using assessed values from comparable Edmonton properties, the Chamber estimates that the undeveloped portions of Blatchford could represent approximately **$4.4 million to $4.6 million in municipal property tax revenue each year once fully developed.**[8]

If the remaining development does not occur until the City's 2042 target, the cumulative difference could total approximately **$75.2 million to $79.0 million between 2026 and 2042.**[9]

This figure is an estimate of **potential municipal revenue that would exist if development occurred earlier.**

It is not:

- money the City has already spent;
- an operating loss;
- money currently being charged to taxpayers; or
- a claim that every undeveloped parcel could be completed immediately.

The purpose of the estimate is to demonstrate that time has a financial value. Completing Blatchford sooner means homes and businesses begin contributing to Edmonton's assessment base sooner.

**~75M+**[10]

Estimated cumulative forgone tax revenue

# Blatchford: What the Delay Is Costing Edmonton

## Our Solution

The City should begin a structured process to **sell more of its remaining developable land to experienced private developers** and determine which existing requirements need to change to make those parcels financially viable to build.

That should happen parcel by parcel.

For each remaining City-owned parcel, Council should consider:

- **Can this parcel be sold to a private developer now?**
- **If developers will not buy it under the current requirements, which requirements are preventing the sale?**
- **Would changing those requirements allow the City to sell the parcel and have homes built sooner?**
- **Should the City finish servicing the parcel before selling it, or would a private developer be able to do that work more efficiently?**
- **What is the financial difference between continuing to hold and develop the parcel and selling it?**
- **Have we already spent money to develop the land, and if so, can that be reclaimed with the sale?**

This does not require abandoning Blatchford. It requires separating the parts of the original vision that are fundamental from requirements that are making development unnecessarily difficult or expensive. The City has already heard from private industry that the current approach is limiting interest. Its own consultant has identified specific requirements affecting the cost and pace of development.

Those findings should now lead to action.

Blatchford was an ambitious idea when Edmonton approved it. It can still become the neighbourhood Edmonton envisioned. But after 14 years, Council has enough information to ask whether the original development model is still the best way to finish it.
The objective should be simple:

**Get the remaining land developed. Get homes built. Get the City's capital back. Get Blatchford finished on time.**

# Blatchford: What the Delay Is Costing Edmonton

## Summary

The City of Edmonton plans to substantially complete Blatchford by 2042.[11] Based on the City's own numbers, meeting that target will require development to move at more than twice the pace achieved so far. **If development continues at its average pace since 2012, Blatchford would not be completed until approximately 2061, nearly two decades later.**

The Mayor's Office has reported to us that **28.8 per cent of Blatchford's developable land is complete**. Developable land means land that can be serviced and sold for development. It does not include land dedicated to roads, parks and other public infrastructure.

Blatchford's Area Redevelopment Plan was approved in 2012. In the 14 years since, an average of about **2.1 percentage points of developable land has been completed each year.** At that pace, completing the remaining 71.2 per cent would take roughly another 35 years, putting Blatchford's completion at approximately **2061.**

To meet the City's 2042 target instead, that remaining land would need to be completed in just 16 years. That requires an average pace of about **4.5 percentage points per year**, more than double the pace achieved since 2012.

Put simply: the City's target is 2042. Its historical pace points to 2061. Closing that 19-year gap will require a significant change in how quickly Blatchford is developed.

The question is: **what is holding Blatchford back?**

The City's own reports point to an important part of the answer. A 2024 audit by the Office of the City Auditor found that Blatchford's development pace has been slower than expected. The audit noted that actual land sales lagged the assumptions used in the City's forecasting model and that the Blatchford Redevelopment Office had not fully analyzed updated land-sales data when assessing timeline and profitability projections.[12] In an internal memo shared with us from November 2025, City Administration told Council that private developers were not interested in taking over Blatchford under the project's existing requirements for sustainability, renewable energy, density and active transportation.[13]

The Chamber recommends **selling more of the remaining City-owned, undeveloped land to private developers and reconsidering the requirements that are making that land difficult and costly to develop.**

The goal is not to entirely abandon Blatchford's vision.[14] It is to make sure Edmonton can actually deliver it. Fourteen years into the project, City Council should revisit Blatchford's original vision, determine what is working and what is holding development back and prioritize the changes needed to get homes built and Blatchford completed.

# Recreation Centres and the Zoo: Who Should Pay to Keep the Doors Open

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Quality Services

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: Budgets That Deliver a Return

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Right-Sized Spending & Revenue Generation

## The Problem

The City subsidizes recreation at $49.0 million a year.[15] At that rate, every 7.4 years Edmonton pays out the equivalent of building Clareview,[16] Terwillegar[17] and Coronation Park[18] all over again, without adding a single facility. Cost recovery has fallen from 69 per cent in 2018 to 52 per cent in 2024, meaning a growing share of every recreation dollar now comes from the tax levy rather than the person using the building.[19]

## Our Solution

**Our recommendation is to move to contracted-out and sponsorship-funded operating models where comparable cities have proven they work, reopen naming rights across the facility portfolio while retaining "City of Edmonton" in every facility name and reassess user fees so the people using these facilities bear a fairer share of the cost.**

Calgary's most recent four-facility procurement produced zero ongoing operating cost to the City, with three facilities going to YMCA Calgary and one to a for-profit operator.[20] Its Seton YMCA, a $193 million build, carries no City subsidy at all.[21] Its MNP Community and Sport Centre sits on City-owned land but is run by an independent non-profit board rather than the City, and recovered 40 per cent of its original construction cost through a single naming agreement.[22] Same climate, same construction market, same kind of facility. Calgary is not paying for it alone.

**In the City's own consultation, 59 per cent said recreation passes should be funded mostly or entirely through user fees rather than the property tax levy. The City has been moving away from user-pay at exactly the moment its residents asked it to move toward it.**

User-pay should also reflect who is using the building. Residents of neighbouring municipalities use Edmonton's recreation centres and attractions without contributing to the property taxes that subsidize them. A non-resident rate, checked with identification at the door, is a simple way to close that gap. The same principle applies to parking: where users drive in, a modest parking fee asks the customer, not the taxpayer, to cover the cost of the service. This is not about discouraging driving. It is about users paying for the services they use.

# Recreation Centres and the Zoo: Who Should Pay to Keep the Doors Open

On naming rights, the City has left confirmed money on the table. One agreement exists, at Terwillegar, worth $150,000 a year against a $106.4 million build.[23] City staff developed a framework to extend naming rights across 29 facilities, projecting $2.1 million a year, or $21.0 million over 10 years. Council rejected that framework on reconsideration on May 12, 2025.[24] A second agreement at Clareview was signed and never implemented. This is not a Chamber idea being imposed on the City. It is the City's own plan, costed by City staff, that we are asking Council to review again.

**The Zoo is the same argument one step further. Calgary runs its zoo through an independent society. Edmonton runs its own in-house.**

**Zoo Funding: Edmonton and Calgary**

| | Edmonton | Calgary |
|---|---|---|
| Revenue self-generated | Not calculable | ~87.9% |
| Operating cost from City grant | Not calculable | ~19.2% |
| Capital funded by the City | Not calculable | ~17.5% |
| Annual visitors | 370,000 | 1.4 million |

*Source: City of Edmonton, 2026[25]; City of Calgary, 2025.[26]**

Three rows in that left column read "not calculable," and that is the finding. Calgary can state what its zoo costs the City in any given year because the zoo is a separate legal entity that reports its own finances. Edmonton cannot, because the Zoo's operating cost is folded into a departmental line.[25] Edmonton cannot apply our third question to its own zoo, not because the answer is bad, but because the number does not exist in a form anyone can test.

The same test applies across all City attractions. Rather than designing a new governance model for each one, the City should ask the same question of all of them: could an experienced operator run this well, at less cost to taxpayers?


## Summary

Currently, it costs $49 million a year to keep the doors open at Edmonton's recreation centres. In 2018, users covered 69 cents of every dollar; today it is only 52 cents, and the difference comes off your tax bill. City staff costed a naming-rights plan across 29 facilities at $21 million over 10 years, but Council turned it down. The City needs to bring in sponsors and partners, and ask users to pay a fairer share so taxpayers aren't carrying it alone. This is especially true for users coming from the metro region to use facilities funded by Edmonton's taxpayers.

# Public Safety: Safety Is an Economic Issue

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Safety, Economic Development, Growth Management and Quality Services

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: A Safe and Vibrant City

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Invest & Right-Sized Spending

## The Problem

The City's own consultation put it better than we could. **Safety, its report found, was "directly related to a business or organization's ability to generate customers, serve their community, and ensure staff were willing to show up each day."** Participants described visible disorder, crime and drug use as significant barriers to economic activity, making safety one of the most frequently raised themes in the entire engagement.[27]

**The Cost of Feeling Unsafe: What Disorder Costs Downtown**

| Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Downtown business closures, 2026 year to date | **~20** |
| Businesses reporting feeling unsafe operating | **58%** |
| Businesses spending $500+ on vandalism or theft damage in the past year | **44%** |
| Businesses in Edmonton's central district | **5,500** |
| Employees in the central district | **144,000+** |

The economic impact of crime comes at a cost to our city, with:

- **44%** of businesses spending at least $500 to fix damages caused by vandalism, break-ins, or shoplifting,
- **24%** spending more than $2,500, money that could be invested into growing businesses, creating jobs, and invigorating our economy is spent on the consequences of crime.[28]

Funding and consolidating public safety efforts means restoring the vibrancy of our city and creating the conditions for investment that businesses need.[29]

## Summary

Right now, 89,016 people go to work in central Edmonton under the conditions described here.[31] Satisfaction with community safety fell seven points in a single year to 32 per cent, and 58 per cent of downtown businesses say they feel unsafe operating. The City's own report found that safety decides whether a business can bring in customers and whether staff are willing to show up. The City needs one enforcement team instead of two, and the Province paying its share.

# Public Safety: Safety Is an Economic Issue

Despite a growing number of business licences downtown, the number of stores closing speaks even greater volumes. We admire the entrepreneurs and business owners who choose to open downtown, but that progress is muted when so many close along the way. The conditions contributing to that regression are evident in the City's own surveys.

The City's own measures have moved one way over twelve months:[30]

- Satisfaction with community safety fell to **32%**, down seven points in a single year. Satisfaction with the homelessness response sits at **17%.**
- Only **53%** of Edmontonians agree this is a safe city. Among women, **48%**.
- The share of residents who see Edmonton as an attractive place to build a career or expand a business **fell eight points in one year**, from 61% to 53%.

Business and community organizations disagree on the remedy. Businesses lean toward more police presence; non-profits lean toward prevention. We are not asking Council to settle that argument in this budget. We are asking for measures both sides can accept.

## Our Solution

**Move peace officers under police.** The City added peace officers for patrol duties without redefining their roles relative to existing enforcement. Where two bodies patrol the same ground, the public pays twice for one result. Council should consolidate enforcement under a single, clearly defined structure and eliminate overlapping roles before adding any further capacity.

**Protect crisis diversion, and stop funding it alone.** Crisis diversion works, and cutting it creates a service gap the City pays for elsewhere within a year. It depends almost entirely on City funding, which makes it fragile in exactly the budget cycle where fragility is most dangerous. The City should fund crisis diversion wherever it lands in the budget, while pursuing provincial and private funding to reduce its own share, and confirm the current provincial contribution so any gap is visible rather than assumed.

# Cleanliness and Beautification: What People See Is What Keeps Them Away

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Economic Development and Quality Services

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: A Safe and Vibrant City

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Invest & Right-Sized Spending

## The Problem

The City's own survey asked the Edmontonians who say this is not a safe city to explain why. The answers are mostly about what they see: their perception. Someone who feels unsafe behaves exactly like someone who is unsafe: they park closer, they leave earlier, they stop coming down at all. Whatever the crime statistics say in a given year, perception is what shows up in a business's sales figures.

Four times as many Edmontonians point to what a street looks like as point to anything that happened to them. What is keeping people out of downtown is mostly not crime. It is neglect, and neglect is the cheaper problem to solve. Cleaning a street costs a fraction of policing one, and on the City's own evidence it does more to bring people back.

**Why Edmontonians Say They Feel Unsafe**

| Reasons given for feeling Edmonton is unsafe | Share |
|---|---|
| Seeing substance use or social disorder in public spaces | 53% |
| Seeing homelessness and encampments | 44% |
| Safety concerns on transit or LRT | 35% |
| Property theft, break-ins or vandalism | 32% |
| Experienced or witnessed violent crime | 13% |

*Source: City of Edmonton, City Services and Quality of Life Survey 2026. Base: residents disagreeing that Edmonton is a safe city, n=244.*

Fifty-eight per cent of downtown businesses report feeling unsafe operating,[32] and in a single year the share of Edmontonians who see this as a good place to build a career or expand a business fell eight points. The person signing a lease, the person taking a job downtown and the person deciding whether to walk over for lunch are all looking at the same sidewalk.

Edmonton already has a working example of what a consistent standard looks like. Within the same downtown, ICE District is maintained to one standard across the whole precinct. Cleaning, waste removal, landscaping, lighting and security are coordinated rather than divided among separate authorities, and the work is continuous. ICE District is a smaller, purpose-built area under single ownership with a direct commercial interest in how it looks, and a public downtown cannot be run the same way. But the principle is the same one behind centre city cleanliness.

# Cleanliness and Beautification: What People See Is What Keeps Them Away

## Our Solution

The City should increase operating funding for the Capital City Clean Up Fund, its program to keep Edmonton clean, safe and attractive, and use it to deliver the daily basics downtown: garbage cans emptied every day, sidewalks swept and street sweepers out every morning from spring through fall. Edmonton does not need another study to know its capital city should be clean. The business community is ready to do its part alongside the City. For five months of the year, the visible condition of an Edmonton street is snow. Winter maintenance is not a separate file from cleanliness; it is the same argument in January. What is missing is a published standard against which the money can be judged. The snow and ice budget should flex within a published range tied to a clear service commitment, such as a windrow collection timeline, so that any increase is visible and any shortfall is measurable. The City should test a hybrid public and private delivery model against that standard, and enforce the obligation property owners already carry to clear the sidewalks abutting their buildings.

All beautification and cleanliness investment should be evaluated on a value-for-money basis against comparable cities, so it is justified by measurable outcomes rather than funded outside normal budget scrutiny.

### Summary

Today, when you ask Edmontonians who feel unsafe why, 53 per cent point to what they see on the street. Only 13 per cent point to experiencing or witnessing violent crime. What people see is doing more to keep them out of downtown than what actually happens to them, and it is far cheaper to fix. The City needs to fund a coordinated downtown cleanup and extend it citywide as it proves out.

# The Policy Premium: When City Rules Drive Up Every Bill

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Safety and Quality Services

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: Budgets That Deliver a Return

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Right-Sized Spending

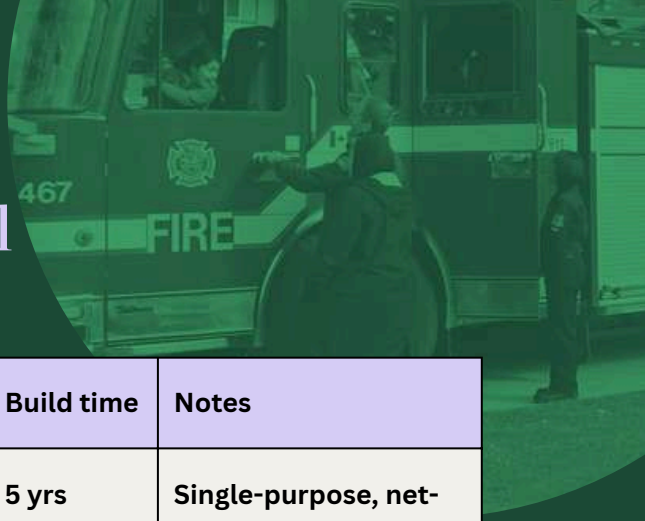
## The Problem

Policy that tells you exactly how to do something, rather than what you have to achieve, is expensive. Over the past decade, Edmonton has layered energy requirements, design and material specifications, accessibility provisions beyond code, procurement conditions and sustainability targets onto its own projects, each adopted separately and each for a reason Council found persuasive at the time. No single one of them is the problem. Together they add roughly 30 per cent to what a City building costs, and that total has never been put in front of Council as a number.

A case in point: Edmonton builds its fire halls to a higher environmental standard than the code requires. A fire station built to code costs approximately $13 million, compared with $21 million when built to the City's current standards. That is a premium of $8 million per station, or 58 per cent above a minimum-code build.[33] Across the four stations already planned, the difference is equivalent to the cost of two additional fire halls.

Edmonton needs those fire halls, and nothing here argues for fewer stations or slower response times. Fire halls are in this document because their costs are public in a way most City construction is not, which makes them the clearest place to show what the premium looks like. The same stack is paid on recreation centres, libraries, transit facilities and every other building in the capital plan. Edmontonians were never asked whether they would rather have the standards or the stations, because the question has never been put to them in those terms.

A controlled comparison holding the design brief and construction year constant found that Edmonton's own bylaw and policy stack adds $8.0 million, or 58 per cent, to a single fire hall over a minimum-code build. Same building, same year, same market.[34] The only variable was the policy.




# The Policy Premium: When City Rules Drive Up Every Bill

**Comparing Fire Hall Builds Across Alberta**

| Fire Hall | Jurisdiction | Cost | Build time | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Station 31, Windermere** | **Edmonton** | **$15.6M–$18.29M** | **5 yrs (2017–22)** | **Single-purpose, net-zero, LEED Silver** |
| Cornerstone Phase 1 | Calgary | $16.0M | 1.3 yrs (2024–2025) | 2-bay + hazardous waste drop-off, no net-zero |
| Varsity Station 17 | Calgary | $53.5M final (up from a $33.5M initial 2022 budget) | 3 yrs (2022–2025) | Bundled with 48-unit housing, hazardous waste drop-off, and commercial space; station cost not broken out separately |
| Walden Station + Library | Calgary | $30.2M | Not disclosed | Bundled with a library; station cost not broken out separately |
| Station 9 | Leduc County | $5.7M | 1 yr (2023) | Single-purpose, minimum code |

In June 2025, the Mayor moved that Administration amend the climate policy driving these costs.[35] More than a year later, on August 18, 2026, Council approved a $2.5 million climate resilience retrofit at Station 22 in Wîhkwêntôwin, on an 11–2 vote.[36][37] Council directed that a policy be changed and then funded a project under the unchanged policy.

For example, as Edmonton Fire Rescue Services expands, new stations can be designed to house other emergency services alongside them, including police, so the cost of land, servicing and construction is shared across more than one service.

**None of this is an argument for abandoning environmental standards in Edmonton. It is the answer to the third question we asked ourselves: Is the result worth the cost? Can the City show what its investment achieved, and is the price reasonable for what came back?**

**Our answer is not right now.**

# The Policy Premium: When City Rules Drive Up Every Bill

## Our Solution

Before the capital budget is approved, the City needs to price the full stack of standards Edmonton applies to its own buildings and its land sales, and present it to Council as a single figure. Then rewrite the standards that prescribe a method into standards that state an outcome, so a builder can meet the City's objective at whatever price the market can actually deliver it for. Apply that consistently across every City building and every land sale, rather than revisiting it project by project.

## Summary

The City's design, environmental, accessibility, procurement and material requirements add a significant premium to its capital projects, but their cumulative cost has never been clearly priced or presented to Council. The City needs to quantify that policy premium across its capital plan, simplify its standards and decide publicly which requirements deliver enough value to justify their cost.

# Construction Disruption: The Businesses That Don't Reopen

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Economic Development, Safety & Growth Management

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: A Safe and Vibrant City

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Invest

## The Problem

Edmonton's downtown lost roughly 20 businesses to closure in 2026 year to date, representing close to $17.0 million in lost annual revenue on a conservative sector-average estimate.[38] On Stony Plain Road alone, disruption has already run five times as long as the national average tracked by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, with no confirmed completion before 2028.[39]

**Satisfaction with traffic safety and flow posted the steepest single-year drop of any City service, with residents naming construction and road closures as the leading cause.[40]** Poor sequencing carries its own bill: newly planted trees in Glenora were removed shortly after planting for LRT construction, and decorative streetlights there sat unused for roughly a decade.

A business that closes during construction does not reopen when the road does. The tax-base loss is permanent and caused by a City decision the business had no part in making.

The cost is not only commercial. Detours, lane closures and staging slow emergency response, which adds operational pressure on police, fire and ambulance services and carries a public safety cost.

# Construction Disruption: The Businesses That Don't Reopen

## Our Solution

The City must build business-protection obligations directly into City construction contracts, the same way the City's Tree Protection Plan and Preservation Plan obligates contractors to protect City assets on-site, requiring them to coordinate with affected businesses, maintain clear signage and preserve access throughout the project.[41] Coordinate construction staging citywide so multiple projects are not opened on the same streets or nearby large roadways simultaneously, and publish an accurate timeline showing when access will be restored. Notice should reach the tenant running the business, not only the property owner or contractor, and for work already planned for next season, affected businesses should know this winter how their access will change and for how long.

### Summary

In 2026 to date, roughly 20 downtown businesses have closed, taking about $17 million in annual revenue with them. On Stony Plain Road, disruption has lasted five times the national average with no confirmed end before 2028. Construction is how a growing city keeps working, and some disruption comes with it. But a business that closes during construction does not reopen when the road does, and that tax base loss is permanent.

# City-Owned Land: Put It to Work or Let It Go

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Growth Management and Economic Development

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: An Investable Edmonton

**FUNDING DIRECTION**: Revenue Generation

## The Problem

The City currently lists 18 properties for sale citywide, with no disclosed listing date and no defined point at which an unsold property must be sold, leased or redeveloped. A property can sit indefinitely without anyone having decided that it should. It also raises a more basic question, the first of our three: should the City be in the land development business at all?

## Our Solution

Set a maximum holding period for underused City land. When a property reaches it, the City sells it, leases it, commits it to a defined use or reports to Council on why it is still being held. Complete the land value audit already identified, and make return on investment a recurring measure rather than a one-time exercise.

The City's own interest holders described City land as something managed like a liability rather than an asset, and proposed the same fix independently: partner with the private sector to turn idle land into a revenue generator rather than a carrying cost.

The City should treat its land assets as strategic opportunities to unlock economic growth potential in concert with its needs and/or divest of them to the private sector so the land can be put to productive use and realize an economic return for Edmontonians via the tax base.

## Summary

The City owns land it is not using, and it has 18 properties listed for sale with no deadline attached to any of them.[42] A property that has sat on the market for years is not a property nobody wants. It is a property nobody wants on the terms being offered. It is important that the City divest surplus lands so they can be made productive by the market. The City needs to put idle land to work instead of holding on to it forever.

# Neighbourhood Renewal: Stop Fixing What Isn't Broken

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Quality Services and Growth Management

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: Budgets That Deliver a Return

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Right-Sized Spending

## The Problem

Neighbourhood Renewal is among the largest recurring commitments in the City's capital program in part because its engagement process consistently produces a larger project than the neighbourhood requested. Residents looking for sidewalk repair and safety improvements are instead shown costly renewal options they didn't ask for that expand the project's scope, which is then recorded as community demand and priced accordingly.

The program's design makes it difficult for a neighbourhood to simply ask for less. There is no version of neighbourhood consultation process in which residents can directly say "we want the necessary safety and repair improvements made, not elaborate redesign that tries to fix what isn't broken."
Edmontonians have said this themselves in the City's own survey. **Eighty per cent want spending focused on essential maintenance and rehabilitation of what the City already owns**, while barely a quarter support new quality-of-life capital projects.[43] Edmontonians are asking for streets that work over ones that look better.

**This is not an argument against Neighbourhood Renewal. Edmonton needs it.** Traffic safety is a documented driver of the program's design choices. The Edmonton Police Service's traffic branch has publicly stated that speeding and careless driving are consistently among the top neighbourhood complaints it receives, and safety measures built in at the time of renewal cost meaningfully less than retrofitting them later. The concern is scope added for environmental or aesthetic reasons beyond what a street's condition and safety record justify, and renewal happening ahead of when a neighbourhood's infrastructure requires it.

The City's own condition data show that spending for road renewal in the last five years has not worked down the backlog, with the poor and very poor share of the road network held at 11 per cent since 2020 as the network's total value grew by $870 million, emphasizing the need to sequence renewal as required. Enhancements that reduce future operating costs are welcome, but they don't result in savings if they involve tearing down existing infrastructure that has plenty of life left. The cost question sits in the design standards. Council sets the program, but the standards each project is built to set the price, and those standards leave little room for a neighbourhood that wants the basics or wants its historic character left as it is. Safer streets matter, and there is more than one way to calm traffic. Residents should be able to choose the approach that fits their street.

# Neighbourhood Renewal: Stop Fixing What Isn't Broken

## Our Solution

**The City should pause the program's growth, review the design standards applied to renewal projects and change the engagement model so a repair-only scope is a genuine option neighbourhoods can select.** What residents ask for should be what gets recorded. Where an added element lowers long-term maintenance costs, the City should show that saving so residents can weigh it. Going forward, the Neighbourhood Renewal team should start by prioritizing strict renewal necessities, just as businesses must when working with restricted budgets. Elements that improve safety outcomes or defer future operating costs should stay in scope by default, whereas environmental or aesthetic additions beyond that standard should not be added as part of a broader package. The basic package should be the renewal model for the next several years, until Edmonton can reasonably afford greater renewal ambitions.


## Summary

Eighty per cent of Edmontonians want the City to fix what it already owns before it builds anything new. But neighbours who come asking for sidewalk and pipe repair get walked through a menu of things they never raised, and the larger project is then recorded as what the community asked for. There is no way to ask for less. The City needs to make repair-only an option a neighbourhood can choose, and review the design standards that set the price of every project.

# Stop Duplication: Fund Each Job Once

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Quality Services and Economic Development

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: Budgets That Deliver a Return

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Right-Sized Spending

## The Problem

Recently, Council made a hard call on its own committees. Seven advisory bodies were sunset in April 2026. **Council's actions were not easy, but they were the right thing to do.** Council set a standard that a committee must demonstrate a clear and necessary purpose, alignment with Council priorities, and value that is not duplicated elsewhere.

That is the same discipline the City should apply across its operations. Before the City builds or expands an internal function, it should confirm that the work is not already being done elsewhere within the City, by an organization it funds, or by an existing private-sector or non-profit partner. Before it increases funding on any line, it should be able to produce a documented review of how the existing dollars performed.

The City's own enforcement structure is an example close to home. The City added peace officers for patrol duties without redefining their roles relative to existing police enforcement, so two bodies now patrol some of the same ground and the public pays twice for one result. Council should consolidate enforcement under a single, clearly defined structure and eliminate overlapping roles before adding any further capacity to the peace officer or traffic safety programs.

For example, the City delivers events programming internally at Churchill Square and Commonwealth Stadium. Explore Edmonton, which the City funds to attract visitors and events, delivers events at the Edmonton EXPO Centre and Edmonton Convention Centre. Explore Edmonton has proven it can attract events and visitors, raising a reasonable question: why would the City build parallel capacity instead of working through the partner it already funds?

Economic development is heading in the same direction. The City has examined taking on investment-attraction work that Edmonton Global, another organization the City funds, is already mandated to do. If the City wants more from that work, the answer is a conversation with Edmonton Global about mandate, capacity and expectations, not a second team inside City Hall.

# Stop Duplication: Fund Each Job Once

## The Problem Cont'd

The newest example is the City's own brand. In January 2026, Council's Executive Committee approved a Place Brand Framework naming the City as the strategic steward of Edmonton's brand. The City ran a place-brand strategy from 2021 to 2023, and Edmonton has been through roughly a dozen branding efforts since the mid-1980s. None of them stuck.

Council has already established the right standard. Tourism, economic development and brand strategy are three areas where it should apply that standard next. Duplicating money and effort diminishes the return. Let the organizations already funded and best positioned to deliver the work do their jobs.

## Our Solution

**The City should** apply a duplication test before building or expanding any internal function. That test should determine whether the work is already being done elsewhere within the City, by an organization it funds, or by an existing private-sector or non-profit partner. Where another organization has the mandate and capacity to deliver, the work and funding should be consolidated there. The City should also require a documented effectiveness review before approving any funding increase and freeze increases on lines that have not demonstrated results.


### Summary

The City should eliminate duplication both across its own departments and between City operations and the external organizations it funds. Before creating, expanding or renewing any program, it should identify who is already doing the work, assess what existing funding is delivering and consolidate overlapping mandates. This same test should extend beyond City operations by asking whether an existing private-sector or non-profit partner could deliver the work more effectively. Taxpayers should fund each job once through the organization best positioned to deliver measurable results.

# Downtown: Fund the Plans Edmonton Already Has

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Quality Services and Economic Development

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: An Investable Edmonton

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Invest

## The Problem

Downtown has been through waves of development activity over the decades. About 13,000 people live downtown today, against a target of 24,000, and Edmonton will only reach that target by 2030 if the City's development incentives continue. They should continue, and the case for continuing them is strong: the Downtown Housing Reinvestment Program has returned $11 in private construction investment for every $1 the City put in.[44] **Residential growth belongs in Edmonton's downtown strategy both immediately and over the long term.**

Housing is essential, but it does not tell the full economic story of downtown, and at the moment it is close to the only part of the story being told. Residential growth, housing starts, housing incentives, housing affordability and residential targets are all tracked, reported and debated. Business confidence, business investment, employer decisions, daytime population, commercial activity and downtown's contribution to the tax base receive far less attention. That imbalance matters because downtown's office assessment base fell 45 per cent between 2014 and 2024, from $4.677 billion to $2.592 billion, and that is the tax base that pays for the services 24,000 downtown residents will need. The reverse is also true, and it is measurable. Every one-percentage-point reduction in downtown office vacancy would generate roughly $1.7 million a year in additional property tax revenue.[45]

**The Downtown Action Plan identifies downtown as both a vibrant neighbourhood and a key economic engine for Edmonton. Downtown is more than a neighbourhood, and the plan needs to be funded on both counts.**

# Downtown: Fund the Plans Edmonton Already Has

## Our Solution

The City should fully fund the two or three highest-priority opportunities already identified in the Downtown Action Plan. **Measure every investment against the key performance indicators already identified in the plans and report progress publicly. These should include downtown jobs, businesses, office vacancy, assessed property values, tax revenue and residential growth.**

## Summary

The success of downtown Edmonton's revitalization now depends on a single question: will the City appropriately fund and execute the plan it committed to? The Downtown Action Plan, the City's own five-year roadmap comprising of eight priority actions and roughly $553 million in identified investment, remains only partially funded. That plan exists in part because the business community built the case for it first with the Downtown Investment Plan, which named the opportunities and led the argument that pushed the City to act. The City should now close that gap and fund the highest-priority opportunities the Downtown Action Plan identifies.

# Commercial Property Tax: Stop Charging a Business Before It Opens

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Economic Development

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: An Investable Edmonton

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Revenue Generation and Invest

## The Problem

Edmonton's commercial properties generate roughly 48 per cent of property tax revenue against 50 per cent from residential, while paying about 2.5 times more per property. Rising assessments hit commercial properties harder. The structure also punishes exactly the projects Edmonton is competing to attract. A major capital investment is taxed as commercial property from the day it is built, before it generates a dollar of revenue to cover that cost. The City is charging for the privilege of not being open yet.

For example, Scandinave Spa's Edmonton facility, approved after a rezoning debate at City Hall and opening in 2028, is projected to generate roughly **$121 million in economic impact and $18 million in tax revenue over its first 10 years**, with 330 construction jobs and 52 permanent positions.[46] Edmonton competed for that investment against every other city Scandinave could have chosen. Under current policy, the tax clock starts before the doors do.

## Our Solution

The City should adopt a non-residential tax deferral policy for major capital investments above a defined dollar threshold, deferring property tax until the project begins generating revenue. The threshold should be high enough to capture transformative investment rather than routine new business. Pair it with the derelict property subclass the City already has authority to create, applying a higher rate that reflects the cost these properties impose. Treat the commercial and residential tax split as a structural issue to correct in any broader tax framework discussion, rather than a fixed feature of the system.


## Summary

Right now, a business pays roughly 2.5 times more property tax per property than a home does, and a new building starts paying the day it is finished, before it serves a single customer. Scandinave Spa, opening in 2028, is projected to bring $121 million in economic impact and 52 permanent jobs to Edmonton. We competed for that investment against every other city it could have chosen. The City needs to stop taxing a new business before it opens its doors.

# South of 41st: Annexed for Growth, Still Waiting

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Growth Management and Economic Development

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: An Investable Edmonton

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Revenue Generation

## The Problem

Edmonton annexed 8,260 hectares from Leduc County in 2019 on a straightforward premise: the city needed room to grow, and this was where the growth would go. At full buildout, that land is projected to generate $309 million a year in tax revenue against roughly $23.7 million a year in City maintenance costs, a cumulative net benefit of $7.13 billion over 25 years.

**None of that has started.**

Council authorization to begin planning is required. The City does not own these lands, so this is not a question of selling property. It is a question of permission. Development here depends on City planning decisions: what land uses are allowed, when servicing arrives and how the area structure planning proceeds. Landowners and builders cannot move until those decisions are made, and while they wait, nothing gets built.

The City is not missing the point here. Its own Industrial Investment Action Plan sets out to grow and diversify the industrial tax base, and it tracks the right things: the share of available industrial land that is shovel-ready, annual land absorption, industrial development permit timelines and changes in industrial assessment value. Those are the correct measures. The problem is that a plan to attract industrial investment needs industrial land ready to receive it, and the largest opportunity Edmonton has is sitting in planning limbo.

That waiting has a price the City pays directly. Under the annexation agreement, much of this land continues to be taxed at reduced county-level rates through 2068. Edmonton took on the land, the planning responsibility and the eventual servicing obligation, and in return it is collecting county revenue on a city-sized asset. Every year the land sits undeveloped, the City carries the responsibility without the return.

This is the opposite of growth paying for growth. The land was annexed precisely so that new development would fund the infrastructure supporting it. Instead, existing taxpayers are carrying a growth area that is not yet generating growth.

# South of 41st: Annexed for Growth, Still Waiting

## Our Solution

The City should activate South of 41st on an accelerated timeline. That means authorizing and completing the statutory planning work required to make development possible, setting clear and predictable land-use direction so builders can commit, and sequencing servicing to phases with confirmed demand so infrastructure follows development rather than preceding it.

Growth should not be delayed in this area any longer. Land annexed for growth and then left in planning limbo is a decision with a cost, and right now Edmontonians are paying it without anyone having chosen to.

### Summary

Right now, Edmonton is not actively planning the land it annexed from Leduc County in 2019 for 240,000 more people and 63,000 jobs. Those lands are projected to deliver $7.13 billion in net benefit over 25 years, but until they develop, they stay on county-level tax rates through 2068. The City is not the landowner here. It is the gatekeeper, and nothing moves until its planning decisions let it. The City needs to activate South of 41st on a defined timeline and start collecting on the growth it annexed this land to capture.

# The Industrial Investment Action Plan: Fund What the City Already Decided to Do

**COUNCIL PRIORITY:** Economic Development & Growth Management

**CHAMBER PILLAR**: An Investable Edmonton

**FUNDING DIRECTION:** Invest

## The Problem

Edmonton's property tax bill is shared between residential and non-residential property. **When the non-residential assessment base shrinks, homeowners and other taxpayers carry more of the cost of delivering the same services.** Expanding that base is one goal in this document that homeowners and business owners have an identical interest in fixing.

**Industrial land is one of the most effective opportunities available.** It is assessed at non-residential rates, it brings jobs with it, and it does not create the same demand for parks, transit, recreation and other services that comes with residential growth. Every hectare that moves from vacant to occupied generates revenue that does not have to be collected elsewhere.

The City knows this and is already doing the work through the creation of the Industrial Investment Action Plan. As mentioned in our "South of 41st: Annexed for Growth, Still Waiting" section, it measures the right things: the share of available industrial land that is shovel-ready, annual land absorption, industrial development permit timelines and changes in industrial assessment value. Edmonton now guarantees a 40-day approval timeline for qualifying industrial proposals, and the City has built a regional program with 12 partners to share the cost and the revenue of servicing sites.[47]

**Both are exactly what the business community has been asking for, and both should be said out loud more often than they are.**

# The Industrial Investment Action Plan: Fund What the City Already Decided to Do

What the plan does not have is enough serviced land to deliver on it. As of the City's 2025 update, 230 hectares of Edmonton's industrial land were shovel-ready, compared with roughly 1,150 hectares that were partially serviced and approximately 7,000 hectares that were vacant and developable. **A company choosing between Edmonton and Leduc County is not comparing tax rates in the abstract. It is asking how long until the doors open, and that answer is largely determined by whether the land is serviced before the company ever calls. Right now, the answer is usually no, and no strategy fixes that without money behind it.**

That gap is not a failure of strategy. It is a servicing gap, and servicing costs money. A plan the City writes but does not resource spends the credibility the next plan will need.

## Our Solution

The City must fund the Industrial Investment Action Plan in this budget cycle at a level that meaningfully increases the amount of shovel-ready industrial land, and report publicly against all 10 of its measures every year so Edmontonians can see what the investment bought.

### Summary

Edmonton has roughly 7,000 hectares of vacant industrial land that could be developed, and only 230 hectares of it are shovel-ready. The City already knows this, because it wrote the Industrial Investment Action Plan[48] and made shovel-ready land the first measure it holds itself to. The City needs to fund that plan and report against all 10 of its measures every year.

# Appendix A: **Our Methodology**

We built our Back on Track Budget on six bodies of work: a clear definition of which responsibilities and services fall under City jurisdiction; the formation of a Fiscal Task Force of Edmonton business leaders; a full reconciliation of the City's fiscal baseline; direct roundtable discussions with City Councillors; multiple rounds of business member survey data; and a review of the City's own public budget consultation.

## 1. Defining Core Services

Before we could say what the City should fund, we had to say what the City is legislated to fund. We worked from the *Constitution Act*, the *Municipal Government Act*, and the *City of Edmonton Charter* to separate municipal responsibility from provincial and federal, and defined core services as what the City is legislatively responsible for and what the City needs to function:

- **Municipal public transit**
- **Municipal policing and emergency services**
- **Permitting and licensing**
- **Municipal road services**
- **Municipal infrastructure and utilities**
- **Municipal parks and recreation facilities**
- **Urban planning**
- **Property assessment and taxation**

We see this as a four-year discipline rather than a permanent state. Defining what is core also defines what is not. Parts of Edmonton's homelessness response exist because another order of government left a gap and the City had to step in. Edmonton also absorbs disproportionate demand from health care, education and corrections release, among others, because it supports the region and the North. Some of those needs have to be met. But municipal property tax is the least appropriate instrument in the country for funding provincial health and social policy, and every dollar the City spends covering someone else's mandate is a dollar not spent on the list above.

# Appendix A: **Our Methodology**

## 2. Building the Fiscal Task Force

We recruited Task Force members from our own membership to represent a cross-section of Edmonton's business sectors. Before any discussion began, members adopted a Terms of Reference setting out their mandate, membership and confidentiality. Over the summer, the Task Force reviewed input from business stakeholders, weighed Council's four stated 2027–2030 priorities, ranked the fiscal priorities we wanted this budget to advance, and tested every draft recommendation against real member experience.

For every area of City spending we examined, members worked through three screening questions:

- **Should the City do it?** Is this the City's responsibility at all, or does it properly belong to another order of government?
- **Is the City the right one to do it?** If the private sector, a non-profit or another partner could deliver it better, why not work with them and avoid duplicating the work?
- **Is the result worth the cost?** Can the City show what its investment achieved, and is the price reasonable for what came back?

## 3. Establishing a Fiscal Baseline

To focus our work, the Task Force went through the City's 2023–2026 Capital and Operating Budgets and asked one question of each area of spending: could Council actually change this in the next budget, or is it already spoken for? Some of it is locked in by contract, by law or by decisions Council has already made.

We worked from public budget documents and we were not trying to redo the City's own accounting. What this baseline gave us was a sense of where the room to make edits actually is. Every recommendation in this document stands on its own numbers, drawn from City reporting and the sources cited alongside it.

# Appendix A: **Our Methodology**

## 4. Roundtables with City Councillors

While the Task Force deliberated, the Chamber convened members of the business community to meet directly with City Councillors through our City Budget Engagement Roundtable Series. Councillors emphasized basic infrastructure and road access, the conditions required for business growth and a strong return on every dollar the City invests. Three themes came through consistently and shaped the Task Force's work:

- **Build a City Edmontonians Can Be Proud Of.** Well-maintained infrastructure and a strong arts and culture scene were raised as drivers of economic growth, not simply quality of life. Civic pride was described as an economic asset.

- **Build a Business-Friendly Environment.** Red-tape reduction was raised more often than any other single priority. Councillors and members alike returned to permitting, process and predictability.

- **Build a City That Feels Safe.** Safety, both real and perceived, was named as a direct factor in investment decisions, downtown activity and business confidence.

## 5. What We Heard from Our Members

We surveyed our membership multiple times, through both qualitative and quantitative surveys. The first round mirrored the structure of the City's own public survey. What came back was consistent and blunt:

- **90%** are dissatisfied with the services they receive for the municipal taxes they pay
- **73%** believe municipal taxes should fund only what falls within the City's own mandate
- **68%** say a significant property tax increase would harm their business's economic success
- **48%** are comfortable only with an increase tied to inflation
- **41%** want a return-on-investment section built into every Council report
- **34%** are delaying or scaling back investment in Edmonton because of rising non-residential property taxes
- **Emergency services and winter road maintenance** matter most to members on a day-to-day basis. Environment and climate change, arts and culture and public libraries matter least to their operations.

Together, these results set the standard we held every recommendation to: spend within the City's mandate, hold the line on taxes and demonstrate return on investment.

# Appendix A:
# Our Methodology

## 6. The City's Own Public Consultation

On August 27, 2026, the City published its What We Heard reports on the 2027–2030 budget. Between April and May, it ran a resident survey, an interactive budget tool that asked people to build a balanced budget themselves, ward-level in-person sessions and interviews with interest holders across the business, housing, tourism and non-profit sectors. More than 11,700 inputs came back.

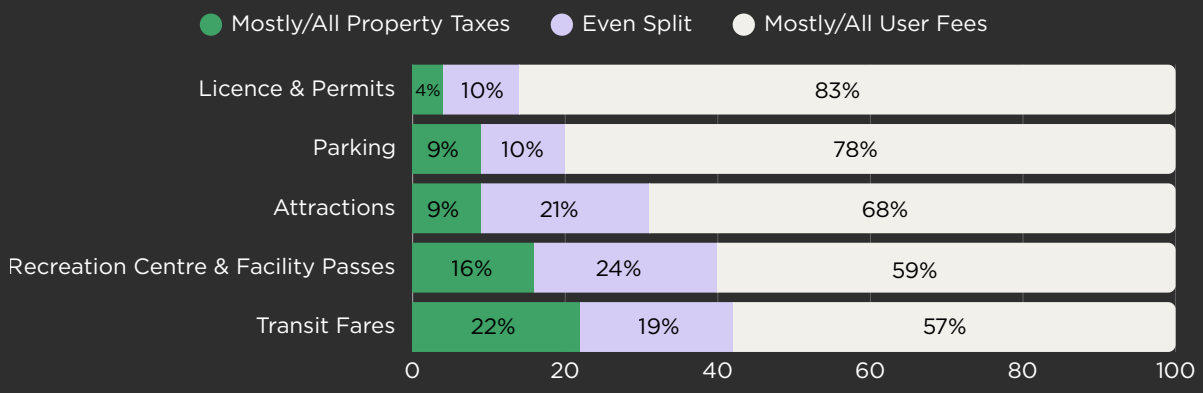
**In summary: Edmontonians and businesses are more aligned than not.**

### Fiscal responsibility was the loudest theme

It was the most common qualitative theme across every method the City used. It was the top theme in the resident survey (23%), top theme in the budget tool (23%), and one of the two most common answers in person (11%).[49] Participants asked for a more disciplined approach and a reduction in what they themselves called wasteful spending or "pet projects," so the City could stay within its existing budget rather than raise taxes or cut services.

### Fund It With User Fees, Not Property Taxes

**Resident participant preferences for funding municipal services through property tax and user fees**



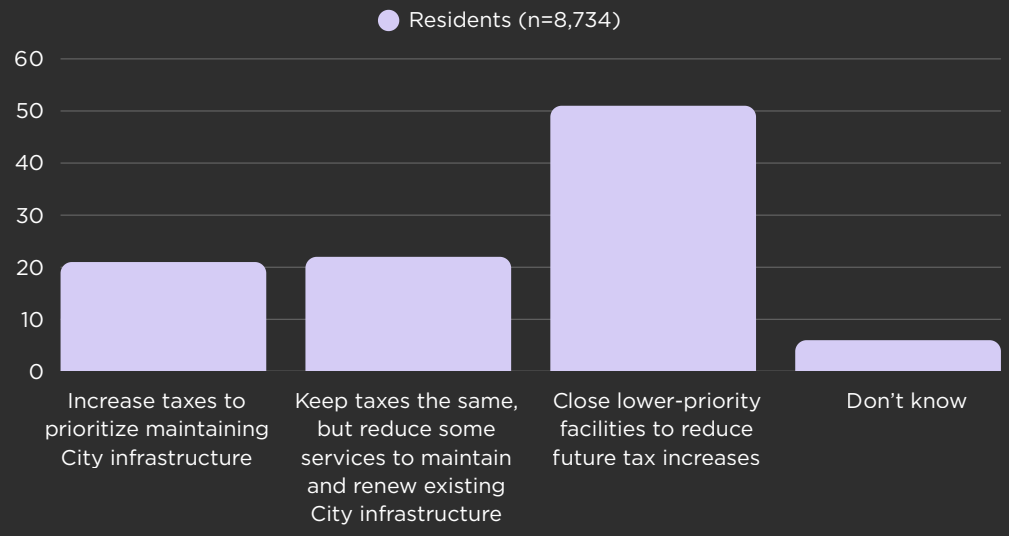

*Source: City of Edmonton, 2027–2030 Budget Public Engagement, What We Heard Report, Figure 3 (page 35, Attachment 1). Base: Edmonton resident participants, online survey, n=8,734.*

Licences & permits (83%), parking (78%), attractions (68%) and recreation passes (59%) were all rated as services that should be funded mostly or entirely by the people who use them rather than through the property tax levy.

# Appendix A:
# Our Methodology

### Close What's Not Working Before Raising Taxes Further

**Resident participant preferences for maintaining City infrastructure**

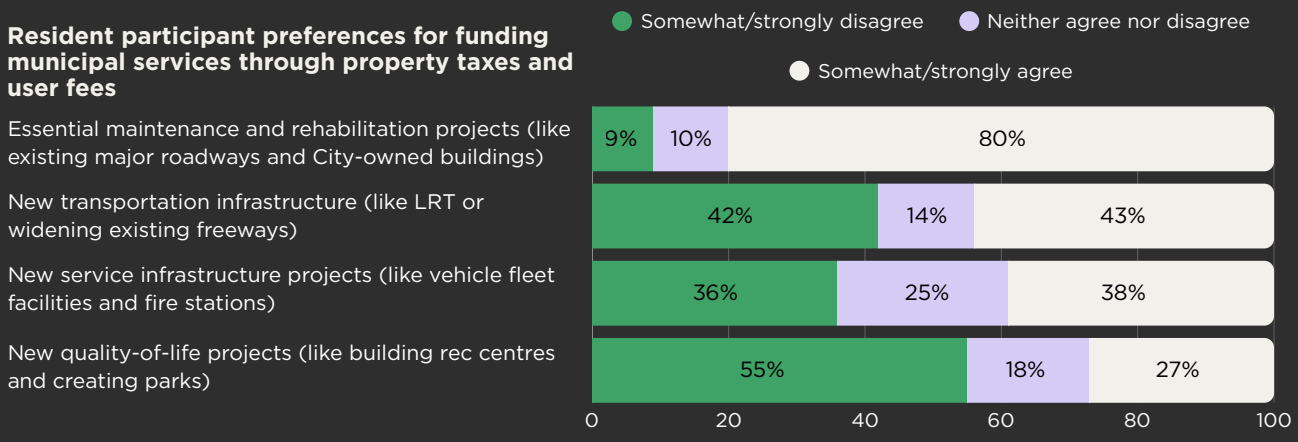



*Source: City of Edmonton, 2027–2030 Budget Public Engagement, What We Heard Report, Figure 6 (page 46, Attachment 1). Base: Edmonton resident participants, online survey, n=8,734.*

Asked how the City should maintain its infrastructure, 51% chose closing lower-priority facilities to reduce future tax increases. Only 21% chose raising taxes to keep everything open.

### Fix What's Already Built Before Building Something New

**Resident participant preferences for funding municipal services through property taxes and user fees**




*Source: City of Edmonton, 2027–2030 Budget Public Engagement, What We Heard Report, Figure 7 (page 46, Attachment 1). Base: Edmonton resident participants, online survey, n=8,734.*

80% want spending focused on essential maintenance and rehabilitation of roads and City-owned buildings. New "quality-of-life" projects such as recreation centres and parks drew agreement from barely one in four.

# Appendix A:
# **Our Methodology**

### Safety is an economic issue

Community organizations were twice as likely as residents to name community safety and social development a top-five priority (45% versus 23%). Renters (72%) and women (69%) were considerably more likely than owners (58%) and men (53%) to call it important to daily life. Indigenous interest holders pointed to poverty as the root cause of much of what shows up as safety and social disorder, arguing for prevention over intervention alone.

### Downtown is the economic engine

Downtown barely registered in the general online engagement, where residents focused on their own neighbourhoods. But interest holders across business, housing, tourism and non-profit sectors singled out restoring downtown as a revenue generator for the City (7% of comments), describing it as both an economic engine and a marker of the city's overall health. Business respondents separately named improving downtown public safety as a top-three investment for their own operations. Low engagement for downtown in the survey results means more education needs to take place to ensure Edmontonians understand the economic value of a downtown, how tax revenue is generated and who pays for a downtown in decline. The answer: everyone.

### Nobody agrees what "core" means

In the City's own words, a consistent call to focus on core and essential services emerged across all engagement methods; one of the most common themes was a desire for the City to get back to basics with this budget. However, there was no universal definition of "core services." What one participant saw as essential, another saw as wasteful. Some described roads and bridges. Others named fire, police, LRT and libraries. Others still considered pools and recreation centres core. EPS and ETS were both listed as top-five priorities, yet each received among the largest proposed budget decreases in the budget tool.

That gap is what the core services definition in our methodology is built to close.

# Appendix B: **Blatchford Calculations**

The below table presents 2026 assessed values for ten sample parcels of land in Edmonton, drawn from the City of Edmonton's Assessment Maps,[50] and the average land values per acre used to estimate the value of undeveloped land in the area.

| EVIDENCE | CLASS | AREA (ACRES) | ASSESSED VALUE | $/m² | $/ACRE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 101 Airport Rd | Non-Residential | 357.19 | $32,508,000 | $22.49 | $91,020 |
| 20 Airport Rd | Non-Residential | 2.35 | $5,619,500 | $591.65 | $2,394,353 |
| 11710 Kingsway | Non-Residential | 0.45 | $2,064,000 | $1,142.28 | $4,622,300 |
| 2650 Blatchford Rd | Non-Residential | 16.06 | $413,500 | $6.36 | $25,748 |
| **Non-Residential Subtotal** | | **376.05** | **$40,605,000** | **$26.69** | **$107,978** |
| 7008 Fane Rd | Other Residential | 1.7 | $2,855,000 | $415.00 | $1,679,412 |
| 2180 Champion Rd | Other Residential | 1.79 | $2,976,000 | $411.87 | $1,666,293 |
| 2704 Blatchford Rd | Other Residential | 0.68 | $1,303,500 | $476.75 | $1,928,825 |
| 6632 Alpha Blvd | Other Residential | 0.66 | $1,204,500 | $453.85 | $1,836,704 |
| 6755 Alpha Blvd | Residential | 0.064 | $151,000 | $580.53 | $2,348,600 |
| 5229 Biplane Lane | Residential | 0.068 | $138,000 | $499.78 | $2,020,633 |
| **Residential Subtotal** | | **4.962** | **$8,628,000** | **$430.72** | **$1,738,814** |
| **Total (All 10 Parcels)** | | **381.01** | **$49,233,000** | | |

# Appendix B:
# Blatchford Calculations

*Approximately 66% of Blatchford's developable land is in some phase of development, leaving an estimated 34% with no development underway. Because separate figures are not available for each land class, this 34% is applied equally to both residential and non-residential areas.*

### Land Value Calculations

- $107,978/acre (average non-residential land value per acre) x 34% x 260 acres (total non-residential area in Blatchford) = **~$9,545,255** (total non-residential land value)
- $1,738,814/acre (average residential land value per acre) x 34% x 276 acres (total residential area in Blatchford) = **~$163,170,306** (total residential land value)
- $9,545,255 (total undeveloped/not planned non-residential land value) + $163,170,306 (total undeveloped/not planned residential land value) = **$172,715,561**, roughly **$172.7 million (total undeveloped/not planned land value in Blatchford)**

### Forgone Municipal Tax Revenue Calculations[51]

- **Forgone Municipal Tax Revenue per year** (Residential Area alone, at current rate 6.9%) = **~$1,263,248–$1,339,041**, depending on classification split between residential and other residential area
- **Forgone Municipal Tax Revenue per year** (Non-Residential Area alone, at current rate 6.9%) = **~$240,747**
- **Total Forgone Municipal Tax Revenue per year** = **~$1,504,000–$1,580,000**
- **Forgone Municipal Tax Revenue from present till estimate project deadline** (2026 - 2042 Total inclusive of 2026 and 2042, assuming current property tax rate) = **~$25,568,000–$26,860,000**

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