

Speaking Notes - Mayor Amarjeet Sohi

State of the City Speech - Edmonton

“The Change is Here: Edmonton’s Story of Growth”

May 10, 2024

Thank you, Ryan, and thank you to the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce for hosting us today in the heart of our city.

I would like to thank Elder Irene Morin for sharing her voice and prayer with us. And reminding us of our collective responsibility to advance reconciliation.

Land acknowledgements do not exist in the past tense, they are about today, and the future we want to build together.

This is Treaty 6 Territory—the traditional gathering place and meeting ground of the Cree, Blackfoot, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe, and many others. We acknowledge this land is also within the historical Northwest Métis Homeland.

Indigenous peoples are an integral part of our story - both our past, and our future. One of the first names for this land was Amiskwaciwâskahikan...

Today, Edmonton has many names. We are the Festival City, the City of Champions, River City, Gateway to the North, E-town, Alberta's Capital City...

...We are Oil Country and home of the Edmonton Oilers!

Each name tells a story. What story does Edmonton tell you?

I asked that question to some of my young friends from city hall school, and they shared what they love about our home...

Today, I want to tell you the story I see in Edmonton. A story about how we're investing in this city together. And how those investments are paying off.

More people are choosing to build their lives in Edmonton. Our story is about growth, and all of the reasons people choose to move or stay here: like affordability, access to quality services, community, opportunity and a good quality of life.

The Province said, "Alberta is Calling..." Well, Edmonton is the answer.

Our city is growing faster than we planned. More than 100,000 people have moved here since 2022.

While population growth means more revenue for the provincial and federal governments, it means more expense for the city.

100,000 new people means an additional 40,000 new households that need municipal services. And 65,000 vehicles, which would fill the West Edmonton Mall parking lot, the world's largest parking lot, three and a quarter times.

It means we need to invest in services that keep us safe, like police and fire. Services that help us move, like roads and transit. Services that help us live well, like libraries, parks and recreation centres.

It also means we need to invest in the hard-working people who deliver these quality public services every day.

Growth is good for our city. It expands our economy. It brings new opportunities and new ideas. And it brings diversity and vibrancy. And to accommodate this growth, we must invest now.

I know the people in this room see the value of economic indicators in our story. Let me give you some numbers.

Our region added over 42 thousand new jobs between 2022 and 2023, and we're expecting another 23 thousand jobs next year.

In 2023 alone, we saw an increase of 13% in the number of new businesses incorporated in Edmonton.

Now for Hockey-related reasons, let me tell you how Edmonton is better than Vancouver.

Just like the Oilers will beat the Canucks in the playoffs, Edmonton's GDP growth of 3.0% beat Vancouver's 1.6%. That means Edmonton's growth is almost double.

We also beat Vancouver in the Canadian Home Builders Association 2022 ranking of municipal affordability and permitting. Vancouver placed 12, while Edmonton was #1... Just like our powerplay!

People are choosing Edmonton because they can see we are on the right track.

We also have big wins for our Team Edmonton partners.

The Edmonton International Airport has seen a 28% increase in travelers since 2022. And WestJet's largest-ever expansion in YEG includes new service to Atlanta, Minneapolis, and Seattle.

In 2023, over 1,300 innovators worked with Edmonton Unlimited. Those start-ups are creating jobs 20 times faster than the national average.

This year, Explore Edmonton generated \$329 million dollars in economic impact from events it attracted and produced, and Edmonton Global supported 14 investments, totalling over \$250 million dollars in capital expenditure and creating almost 600 jobs across the region.

These numbers tell the story that the change we were planning for is already here. And it's fuelling our economic growth.

Your City Council is responding by closing the funding gap for core municipal services.

Our investments are achieving results:

Edmonton's bus ridership was the first in Canada to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels. Because our Council refused to back down on supporting a core service that moves 53.5 million riders a year.

As a result, ETS ridership has grown by 27% over 2023. Just think of the traffic gridlock and pollution if those 53.5 million riders used personal vehicles! These investments help everyone.

We have increased base funding for snow clearing by 20% and we're clearing the most-used roads and pathways faster. Want proof? You

can follow *Amarsleet Snowhi* and the other plows around the City online. That plow works even longer hours than I do!

Infrastructure investments in projects like Yellowhead Trail, Terwilliger Drive, and 50th Street Rail Crossing are spurring economic growth by facilitating the movement of people, goods, and services.

And yes... this includes investments in active modes of transportation like bike lanes... because everyone in this city deserves to have a safe and affordable way to move around.

Catching up on core services also means consistent funding for public safety and well-being.

Since taking office, this Council has increased the Police budget by nearly 20%.

We also added over 50 new peace officers, doubled our transit outreach teams, and funded 24/7 Crisis Response teams who have interacted with over 55,000 Edmontonians, diverting many from costly emergency services.

I stand behind these investments because I firmly believe that every Edmontonian deserves to feel safe in our city.

We have also taken significant strides toward advancing anti-racism and reconciliation work, recognizing the importance of justice, equality, and healing in our collective journey toward building an Edmonton for all of us.

And we have intensified our efforts in combating climate change, revamping zoning regulations to foster growth that is denser, more inclusive, and more financially and environmentally sustainable.

As we fund immediate priorities, we are also building the Edmonton of the future.

The City of Edmonton issued over 15,000 building permits in 2023, resulting in over \$3 billion dollars in construction activity.

Red tape reduction efforts have saved customers and businesses time and money - to the tune of over \$5 million dollars, and over 67,000 days of processing time annually. This is a good story that I am sure Minister Nally will appreciate!

We are also making progress in tackling the housing and houselessness crisis in our city.

When I was elected two and half years ago, we were getting \$14 million dollars less annually for wrap-around services and our shelter capacity was only one-third compared to Calgary.

I am proud to say that due to my persistent advocacy and Minister Nixon's support, we are going into the winter with an adequate number of permanently funded shelter spaces. Our capacity has increased from 700 to 1700 spaces.

Those shelters are open 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. This includes transitional beds run and led by Indigenous providers.

City Council has also approved an investment of \$183 million dollars for affordable housing development. We are leveraging those resources with federal, provincial and community dollars.

Last month I was proud to announce the first project funded by the City of Edmonton's new Indigenous Affordable Housing Investment Grant: A new seniors housing development in northeast Edmonton to be built by Métis Capital Housing Corporation.

I believe that collaboration is the key to success.

My recent meeting with Provincial Minister Jason Nixon, Federal Minister Sean Fraser and Treaty 6 Grand Chief Cody Thomas is an

example of the collaboration necessary to reduce barriers and build affordable housing in response to Edmonton's unique housing needs.

And today, I am so pleased to announce another important collaboration: let me introduce you to our Community Mobilization Task Force on Housing and Houselessness.

This multidisciplinary group will be working on ways to cut through bureaucratic roadblocks and seek market-ready solutions to the housing emergency.

Members of the task force, please stand as I introduce you:

- My Council colleague Erin Rutherford
- Former Edmonton City Councillor Michael Phair
- Dinika Matychuk, Leston Holdings
- Doug Griffiths, Edmonton Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Joshua Evans, University of Alberta
- Glori Sharphead, Enoch Cree Wellness
- Gord Johnston, Civida
- Jim Brown, Sherrick Developments
- Keri Cardinal, Niginan Housing Ventures
- Margo Long, Youth Empowerment and Support Services
- Mike Saunders, Qualico Developments
- Murray Soroka, Jasper Place Wellness

- Nick Lilley, HomeEd
- Omar Yakub, Islamic Family and Social Services Association
- Rob Yager, United Way
- Tina Thomas, Edmonton Community Foundation

Living through the pandemic, our community has gone through a lot. That is why it is so important that we continue to invest in things that bring hope, joy and optimism.

Local festivals, events, theatre, arts and culture are the heartbeat of a city. They create economic growth and help build a vibrant community.

That's why we are continuing our support for the Edmonton Arts Council, stabilizing Screen Industries and Explore Edmonton funding, and providing additional support to attract more local, national and international events to our city...

...Events like the first WNBA game Edmonton hosted. And we sold it out!

Through safety, housing, culture and more: we are investing in Edmonton.

However, as we invest back in underfunded core services, we also face new financial pressures, like the rising costs of inflation, energy, fuel and labour. These pressures have required property tax increases.

We take this increase very seriously. We have also worked hard to reduce spending and find efficiencies.

Since 2015, these reductions and efficiencies have resulted in cumulative savings of almost 2 billion dollars.

And we are not done yet.

In April, City Council approved my motion to take an unprecedented look at our finances.

City Administration, led by our interim City Manager Eddie Robar, will assess our finances from top to bottom, including revenue opportunities, tax rates, service levels, and capital and operating expenditures.

However, the financial challenges we are facing cannot be fixed by local governments alone. We need all levels of government to step up, instead of stepping in.

In early April, I wrote a letter to Premier Smith outlining nine ways the Province can better support Edmontonians.

This includes restoring per-capita infrastructure grants, covering emergency medical services currently funded by property taxes, And ensuring the Province pays its fair share of property taxes on buildings which require municipal services.

I discussed these priorities with Minister McIver this week, and I remain encouraged that they will work with us to resolve these concerns.

I welcome your support and advocacy on these issues as we work together to build a strong and prosperous city.

The growth and change we are experiencing in our City, and our region, is exciting. Our story is exciting.

Edmontonians have a lot to be proud of - and we all must share our story of positive growth with the world.

The people in this room and beyond are capable of tackling the challenges that growth brings. We have done this in the past, we are doing it now, and we will do it into the future.

Just like hockey, building this city is a team sport. And just like hockey, Edmonton's team is up to the challenge!

I know we are ready to embrace the future with hope, compassion, and the collaborative spirit our city is known for.

To everyone in this room and to every Edmontonian who is helping build a resilient, vibrant, future-focused city, you are making this city an Edmonton for all of us.

Thank you.