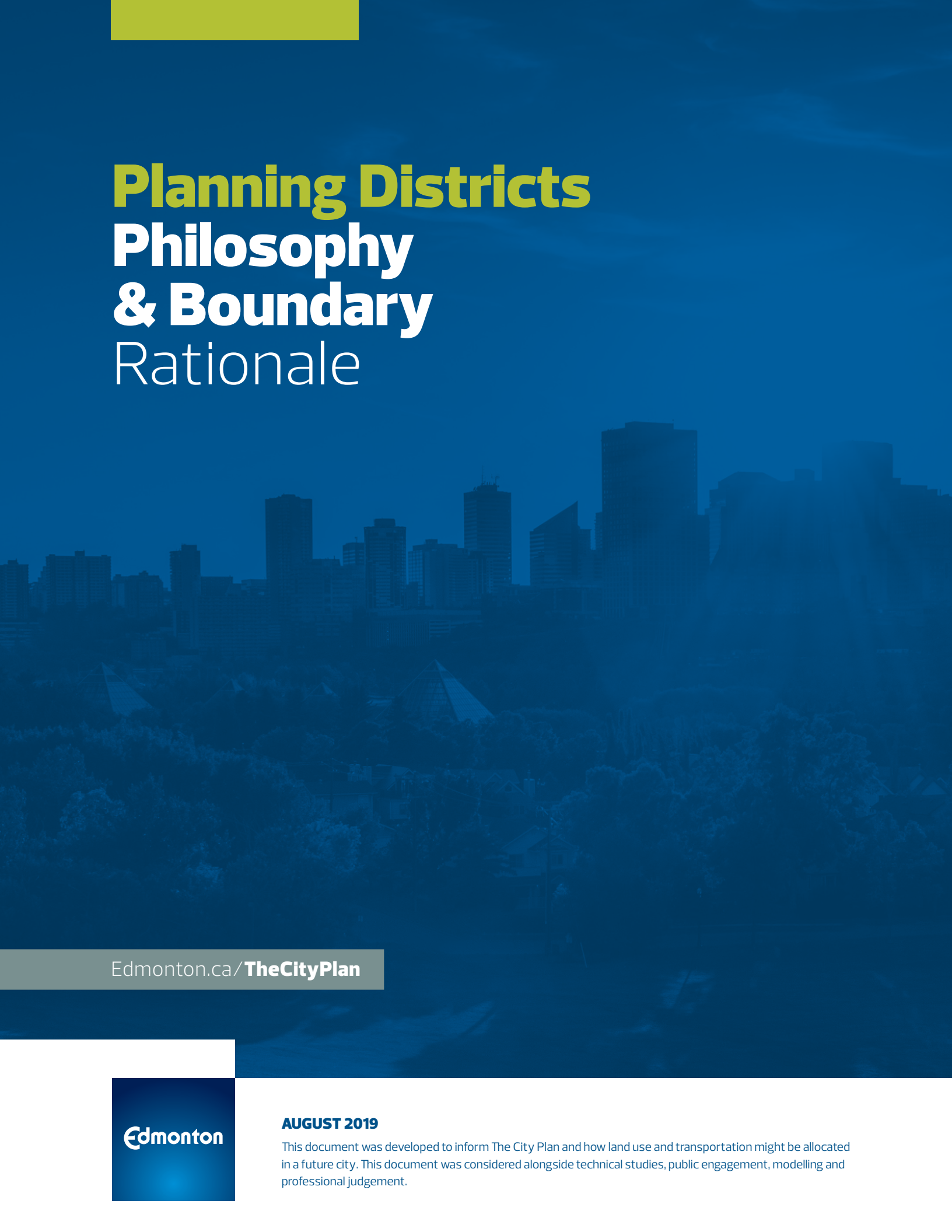


Planning Districts Philosophy & Boundary Rationale



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This document was developed to inform The City Plan and how land use and transportation might be allocated in a future city. This document was considered alongside technical studies, public engagement, modelling and professional judgement.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Edmonton's population increases towards two million people, there is likely to be a shift in perspective among Edmontonians from a city-wide view as a big small city towards a small big city composed of unique districts or sub-areas; this shift in thinking is typical as cities grow and change. The concept of the Planning District serves as a unit to facilitate collective future planning as City and community, helping us to feel more connected to place, as we act on policies and make investments to realize the City Plan's Big City Move Community of Communities. The geography of Planning Districts allows for a more equitable, integrated and holistic perspective with the ability to consider needs contiguous neighbourhoods may share, such as common opportunities and constraints, demographic or socio-economic trends, or urban features such as transportation routes, gathering spaces or economic activities.

This technical document about how Planning Districts were conceived and defined for Edmonton will inform the development of The City Plan. Additional inputs to The City Plan include public engagement, policy review, land use and transportation modelling, and other technical studies.

The concept of Planning Districts is rooted in the idea of "functional regions" as geographic areas with features in common, and urban design concepts for defining edges to clarify a distinctive identity for one area of the city compared to others. Building on these philosophical approaches, a previous City Administration exercise that built collective internal knowledge across City departments and civic partners to better integrate decision-making (Stewarding Great Neighbourhoods, 2015-17) was leveraged to create the recommended Planning Districts

for Edmonton. The original exercise examined potential service area boundaries, researched other city approaches to define optimal size/scale, and developed criteria to evaluate different options or configurations for 'clusters' of neighbourhoods for internal planning and organizing. The original boundaries were co-created by department representatives across City administration and served as a key input; the boundaries were adjusted to include newer growth areas and additional land added to Edmonton in January 2019. Based on refinement, a set of 15 Planning Districts emerged. These Districts will help to balance the growth opportunities, act as service areas for node and corridor redevelopment and major growth areas, and support future implementation of The City Plan, using other tools and processes. The proposed Planning Districts are identified in the map below.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND NEED

The City Plan is about the people of Edmonton and establishing the kind of city in which they want to live as the community changes. As Edmonton's population increases over the coming decades, and ultimately doubles to two million people, there may be a shift in urban identity and activity from a city-wide perspective towards a more regionalized or district scale of sub-areas within the city. This is typical of very large cities, where there are boroughs (New York), or arrondissements (Paris), as types of municipal administrative divisions; in fact, arrondissement translates as a 'gathering up' of people or things¹.

District Planning is being considered as a process for preparing an integrated land, mobility, design, economic, social, and/or environmental plan at a sub-city geographic scale, for a group of contiguous neighbourhoods. As a form of secondary planning, **District Plans** may support the translation and implementation of The City Plan, providing locally-relevant, but also comprehensive planning direction. While historically this type of planning was completed at the single neighbourhood level, the geography of **Planning Districts** allows for a more integrated and holistic perspective and the ability to consider and address the needs contiguous neighbourhoods may share. These might include opportunities and constraints to growth and change, demographic or socio-economic factors, or urban network features such as transportation conditions and accessibility, gathering spaces and amenity areas, or economic and employment activities.

To be clear, this document will not cover specifics about the contents and process of District Planning. Discussion about District Planning as a tool – and its use and application in relation to other planning tools – will be provided in The City Plan's *City Wide Planning Framework*. The City Wide Planning Framework will accompany The City Plan and articulate a new hierarchy of plans for Edmonton.

The remainder of this brief does elaborate on the specific nature of the Planning District, the geographic unit within which the process of District Planning could occur. This introductory section continues with a brief exploration on the philosophy of districts as a geographic concept (1.2), while part 2 outlines the issues of district boundary alignment and presents a review of other jurisdictions. Part 3 provides a detailed overview of the criteria and process used to develop initial neighbourhood groupings or clusters. Finally, Part 4 outlines the final adjustments made to include all parts of the city of Edmonton into a system of 15 proposed Planning Districts.

1.2 THE PHILOSOPHY OF DISTRICTS

The concept of Planning Districts as applied to Edmonton integrates concepts from two different aspects of philosophical thought:

- The geography of regions
- Urban design concepts of *district and edge*

Regional Geography was an approach to geographical study common until the mid-20th century, and revitalized in recent decades in the concept of the city-region and issues around global cities and economic competition. Regions are broadly defined as delineated geographic areas containing features or functions in common, such that they can be distinguished from each other. Two types of regions are sometimes described. Formal regions are those created by top-down factors such as government jurisdictions or international borders. Whereas *Functional Regions*² are identified by the presence of one or a few important and distinguishable places or features and the surrounding areas affected by them or considered within the sphere of influence. The latter type of region reflects collective perceptions of individuals or groups, and thus there are 'fuzzy borders' since while there might be broader agreement that some places are clearly within one region or another, there is less agreement about spaces between prominent features, with some considering them parts of adjacent regions.³

The perception of a region's borders or boundaries can be affected by the presence of hard edges, such as natural or human-made barriers (rivers, major elevation changes, highways, utilities, walls), which help solidify perception of one region's borders from the next and result in less 'fuzziness'. This concept of *edges* as helping delimit regional boundaries is shared with the urban design foundational literature on the *Image of the City* (Kevin Lynch), where edges are one of the defining features: path, landmark, edge, node and district, that establish the *image* or basic structure of urban spaces.⁴

1 <https://www.airtransat.com/experiencetransat/the-ultimate-guide-to-paris-neighbourhoods/>

2 MacLeod, G. and Jones, M. (2001): *Renewing The Geography of Regions*, Environment and Planning D, 16(9), pp. 672-4.

3 Lynch, K., 1959. *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, pp. 69-71.

4 Lynch, K., 1959. *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, pp. 69-71.

Of course also mentioned in this list of structuring elements for urban design is district. Districts are described in Lynch's work as:

*"... relatively large city areas where the observer can go inside of, and which have some common character. They can be recognized internally, and occasionally can be used as an external reference as a person goes by or toward."*⁵

Lynch's *district* has the quality shared with *functional regions* that they are related to individual and group perception about edges, rather than static boundaries defined from above. Conversely, the analog to *formal region* at the sub-city scale in Edmonton would be the ward or the neighbourhood, as these are jurisdictional and administrative boundaries and defined comprehensively by the city government.

The proposed Planning Districts of Edmonton are a hybrid of these two philosophical approaches, as they are regional geographic concepts translated to the scale of within-the-city, but also larger than the original concept of district described by Lynch, which as depicted could be smaller or slightly larger than an individual neighbourhood.⁶

⁵ Lynch, K., 1959. *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, p. 66.

⁶ Lynch, K., 1959. *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, pp. 66-8.

2. DEVELOPING THE PLANNING DISTRICTS

2.1 DISTRICT ALIGNMENT AND NETWORKS

The process to build the Planning Districts for Edmonton was undertaken by the City of Edmonton Administration. The ultimate use of the Planning Districts will be as a type of formal region for planning and administrative purposes. However, unlike some other boundary systems developed and used for civic purposes, driven by operational needs for service or infrastructure (such as Water Pressure Zones, Police Districts, or Traffic Analysis Zones), the lens applied to create these districts was both functional and integrative. It is also intended that in practice, the edges or boundaries of the Planning Districts will, by nature of our integrated city structure and city-building systems, require some fluidity and consideration of interdependencies amongst Planning Districts across their edges. That said, for administrative and planning purposes, lines had to be drawn somewhere as a starting point.

In considering where to draw these lines, an initial approach was to assemble an inventory of existing administrative boundaries in use in Edmonton below city scale, but larger than neighbourhood. Some of these boundary systems included:

Infrastructure-related:

- Traffic Districts (agglomerations of Traffic Analysis Zones, used for Regional Transportation Modelling)
- Recreation Master Plan Districts (used as the basis for the hierarchy of District Parks and major Recreation Centres, in relation to other recreation facilities and referencing access to scales of open space within catchment areas)
- EPCOR Water pressure zones
- Drainage Trunk Sewer catchment areas

Service related:

- Wards (for provision of political representation on an equal-population basis; also used for some other municipal service provision)
- Police Districts (for service provision of policing services)
- Neighbourhood Services Districts (a previous quadrant system used for assigning teams and resources for community building staff and some social workers)
- Current Planning Boundaries (broad geographic boundaries similar to quadrants, previously used for resource allocation of planning services)
- Waste Services boundaries (geographic areas used for allocating resources to provide weekly waste pickup)

Community based:

- Edmonton Federation of Community League Districts (a multiple league geographic area, part of the governance model for providing individual Community League input into EFCL decision-making)

2.2 PRACTICE REVIEW FOR PLANNING DISTRICTS AND EDMONTON RESPONSES

Another area of inquiry was to review a sampling of other cities both on the scope and scale of integrated plans intended to translate MDP (or Official Plan)-level policy to the next level of policy planning. The research question was: *Is there evidence of Planning Districts as a geographic feature in the planning of other cities? If so, how are these delineated and what size or scale are they?*

It was determined that a number of other municipalities apply the scale of neighbourhood groupings to help identify and plan priorities to address growth and change, usually in an effort to achieve community sustainability goals (e.g., Auckland, Calgary [part of MDP implementation], Ottawa [pilot approaches were being explored], Saskatoon [sector-based planning]). Cities employing this approach usually emphasize the identification of priority land use planning areas and are driven by growth coordination policy which identifies specific population growth targets to be allocated in built-up areas, in an effort to manage new growth at suburban edges. Some also integrate physical infrastructure needs and resulting capital projects.

In terms of scope of content, other cities (e.g., Seattle, Toronto, Ottawa, and Winnipeg) use the scale of individual neighbourhoods and approach neighbourhood-scale municipal planning by considering not necessarily solely land use and physical infrastructure, but rather social infrastructure and service

delivery priorities in some cases. This is similar in approach to Edmonton's original Area Redevelopment Plans in the late 1970s through mid-1980s, as well as subsequent tools like Community Plans⁷. These neighbourhood-based but comprehensive approaches have met with varying success as the broad scope and in-depth process had high resource requirements and there were lacking implementation tools to address needs beyond traditional land use planning⁸. Some approaches which have detached future growth and land use from social development and poverty reduction have had some success⁹, however the integration of goals is limited.

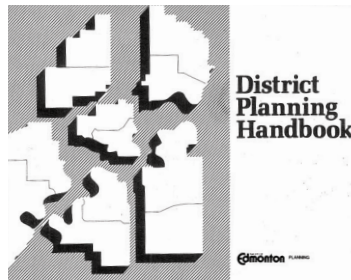


CHART 1: PRINCIPLES FOR THE TECHNICAL PROCESS	
1.	Obtain a comprehensive and consistent data base which can be maintained feasibly on a yearly basis.
2.	Prepare a Development Evaluation Assessment Model.
3.	Assess environmental characteristics to determine expected and actual "satisfaction" of the public as is feasible within the resources of the program.
4.	Identify and evaluate common goals, based on views and submissions from various interest groups and citizens-at-large.
5.	Develop operational standards or detailed descriptions by which goals and objectives can be developed into implementable policies or actions.
6.	Develop logical, internally consistent and meaningful alternative concept plans for identified goals and objectives.
7.	Evaluate alternative concept plans in relationship to stated objectives.
8.	Develop alternative policy statements for the chosen concept plan.
9.	Review alternative policy statements and select a set of policies for the district plan.
10.	Undertake final preparation of a district plan for submission to City Council.

FIGURE 1: District Planning approach for Edmonton in the 1980s

In 2013, Edmonton began work to adapt the learning from the practice review to develop an issue-identification and action planning tool known as Stewarding Great Neighbourhoods (SGN). In part, this higher-level approach, while not providing for a full planning process, was a reaction to the challenges of prior statutory planning such as ARPs, as well as to internal reactions and concerns associated with an experiment with something known as "District Planning" in the 1980s (see Figure 1).¹⁰ In reviewing the lessons learned, this era of planning focussed on deep quantitative analysis of current condition and community-led engagement approaches (community councils) which caused processes to be quite lengthy and reduced confidence in the products to proactively guide change. This experience also co-occurred with a period of economic decline in Edmonton in the mid-1980s, when the ability to prescribe development became politically challenging and the perceived value of planning was diminished.

⁷ Abbotsfield Rundle Heights Community Development Plan, 1996 is an example.

⁸ This issue was covered in greater depth in a Discussion Paper for the Sustainable Neighbourhoods (later Stewarding Great Neighbourhoods) program, produced internally by the City of Edmonton, 2012.

⁹ An example is Strong Neighbourhoods, Toronto's planning for 31 neighbourhood improvement areas <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/research-reports/social-reports/toronto-strong-neighbourhoods-strategy-2020/>

¹⁰ The topic of risks or challenges with existing or legacy planning policy tools such as ARPs will be addressed more comprehensively in the City Wide Planning Framework, one of the key deliverables of The City Plan in 2020. A more detailed review the 1980s/90s-era District Planning approach is expected as part of the scoping for District Planning, a specific piece of the City Wide Planning Framework project.

Intentionally through SGN, the focus (Figure 2) was on broad context setting, translation of existing city wide policy to understand local opportunities and gaps, and identifying targeted actions that could be based on sets of existing tools and programs within specific topic areas (e.g., corner store program, active modes planning, neighbourhood social planning and revitalization, neighbourhood infrastructure renewal). The goal of SGN was to build better informed, collective internal knowledge across City

departments and civic partners to better integrate operating and capital budget decisions about growth and change in core, mature and established neighbourhoods (the residential and industrial areas largely built up before 1995). This offered to deliver more efficient and strategic use of the City of Edmonton's limited resources, respond effectively to neighbourhoods, communities and citizens and advance the City's strategic directions.

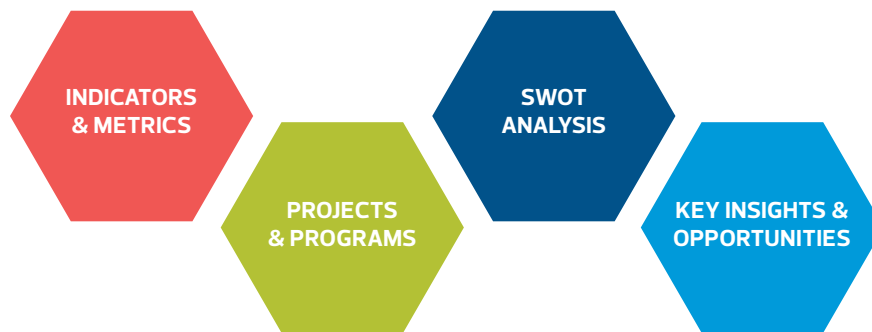


FIGURE 2: Stewarding Great Neighbourhoods – Overview of content and analytical focus

Initial results in 2017 indicated that an integrated approach to issues identification, while also reconciling and rationalizing existing plans, studies and guidelines, would be required to advance SGN ideas into a full-scale secondary plan tool.

This work helped develop functional regions appropriate for issues identification and define working boundaries or geographic Clusters (see Figure 3). The cluster language acknowledged the somewhat flexible nature of boundaries, and the actual fluidity of city-building features and issues across the boundaries. Nevertheless, creating boundaries served the functional purpose of setting the scale at a manageable level to allow for strategic conversations to occur at a broad scope. These working boundaries provided a useful tool as a translation scale between city-wide policy, and local plans, investment tools, and service delivery mechanisms at the scales of nodes, corridors, neighbourhoods, and sites.



FIGURE 3: Stewarding Great Neighbourhoods (2015–17) – Neighbourhood Clusters concept

3. CREATING DISTRICTS FOR EDMONTON

The creation of the neighbourhood clusters for Stewarding Great Neighbourhoods serves as the basis for the definition of Planning Districts for Edmonton.

Based on work undertaken as part of the building the SGN program, a framework was developed for considering boundaries of neighbourhood groupings. This included considerations like population and social trends, similarity of challenges and opportunities, age of development, timeframes for municipal investments, location pattern of existing anchors like major civic facilities, future growth expectations, cultural connections, and more. In addition to these broader considerations for where to draw edges, some other criteria based on other cities' experience and the practicalities of size and shape of Edmonton's mature and established neighbourhood area determined the general scale and overall number of desirable groupings.

- A maximum of a dozen groupings was considered manageable in terms of time commitment for the proposed process.
- A high-level target of 50,000 people served as a rough guideline for the overall scale and number of neighbourhoods in each group¹¹.
- Major human or natural barriers played a large role in framing layout of neighbourhood groupings; this included rivers, creeks, highways, and major rail corridors.

Three additional drivers for building cluster boundaries were identified:

1) Investments

Clustered areas of capital and other civic investments. Greater opportunities for alignment and integration of projects might be achieved by drawing boundaries according to geographic concentrations of upcoming capital and operating projects by the City and partners

2) Future Development

Clusters centred on major redevelopment opportunities. There are advantages to drawing boundaries so future nodes/transit-oriented development can act as anchors, providing a sense of identity to surrounding neighbourhoods, rather cutting nodes across boundaries.

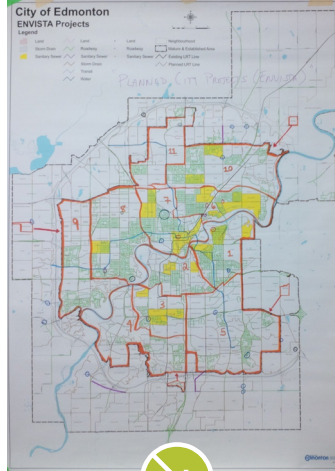
3) Geographic Communities

Community league and EFCL area council boundaries. Using these existing boundaries as a proxy could help the cluster boundaries be more relevant to the way Edmontonians already delineate their city into functional regions.

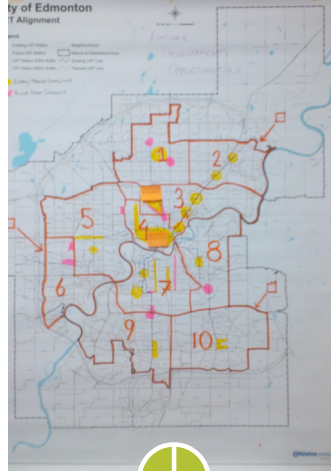
¹¹ This population criteria was used as a very rough guideline only, as ultimately some clusters had much more than this, such as Mill Woods with almost 100,000, while some were smaller, in the range of 35,000–40,000. The 50,000 criteria reflected experience of some cities through the research.

PLANNING DISTRICTS PHILOSOPHY & BOUNDARY RATIONALE

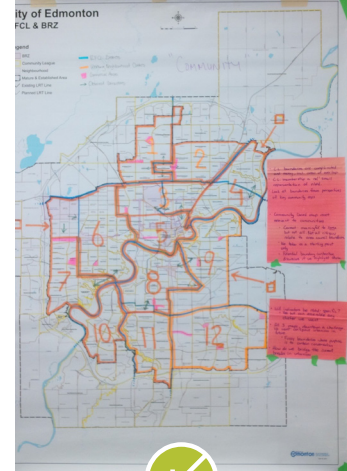
INVESTMENTS



FUTURE DEVELOPMENT



COMMUNITIES



INTEGRATE & CONSIDER COMMON BOUNDARIES

A working set of boundaries was drawn up for each lens and reviewed by a cross-disciplinary group of Administration to consider how to best integrate the three perspectives (Figure 6). By group consensus, a hybrid set of cluster boundaries was the result and was used for SGN.



DRAFTING THE FINAL CONCEPT FOR CLUSTER BOUNDARIES

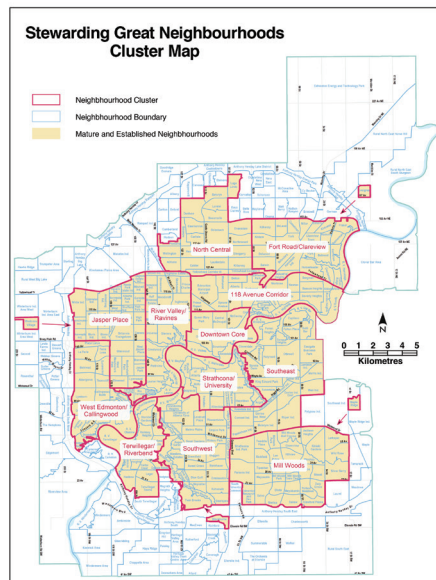


FIGURE 6: Conceptual process to develop the working cluster boundaries

4. BOUNDARY ADJUSTMENTS AND THE PROPOSED PLANNING DISTRICTS

As The City Plan project advanced during 2018, it became clear through administration's work on the City-Wide Planning Framework, the [Infill Roadmap 2018](#) actions, and political discussion that the concept of neighbourhood groupings as a structure for intermediate planning and infrastructure alignment would be pursued to help implement The City Plan, including as a means to action some of the [Big City Moves](#) (e.g., Community of Communities). Since the intentions for this level of policy development are consistent with the initial work of SGN, the SGN cluster boundaries were relied upon as a base for The City Plan's proposed Planning District boundaries.

The SGN boundaries were originally applied to core, mature and established areas as defined in [The Way We Grow](#), as well as to adjacent industrial areas. Thus, to apply Districts to the entire City including the January 1, 2019 [annexation](#) required extending the boundaries to cover developing suburbs and undeveloped areas. To do this, additional processes were undertaken:

1) Some existing clusters were extended to include adjacent lands towards the City of Edmonton boundaries.

- This was done first by including adjacent neighbourhoods in the same ASP or other policy area.
- Then, adjacent neighbourhoods were also included up to major human or natural edges (as in the original SGN boundary delineation exercise).
- In some cases this created Districts that were too large and this new large District was subdivided to create two Districts, using similar principles as in the original SGN.
- In some cases, this resulted in slightly different boundaries as compared with the original SGN clusters (e.g., in southwest Edmonton, where the new boundary was drawn between north and south of Whitemud Drive).
- In other areas, the developing and undeveloped areas were large enough in scale and expected population base that entirely new Districts were formed (e.g., areas west of Anthony Henday Drive, the newly annexed lands in the southwest).

2) Further, some additional boundary adjustments to both original SGN clusters and newly added Districts were made to better align to Edmonton's Traffic District boundaries.

- This was done to proactively support modelling being done for The City Plan
- The impact of these changes was minor, and mostly affects undeveloped or non-residential areas that have moved from one District to an adjacent one.

The refined boundaries for **15 Proposed Planning Districts** are depicted in Figure 7.

These are designed to cover all parts of Edmonton in The City Plan.

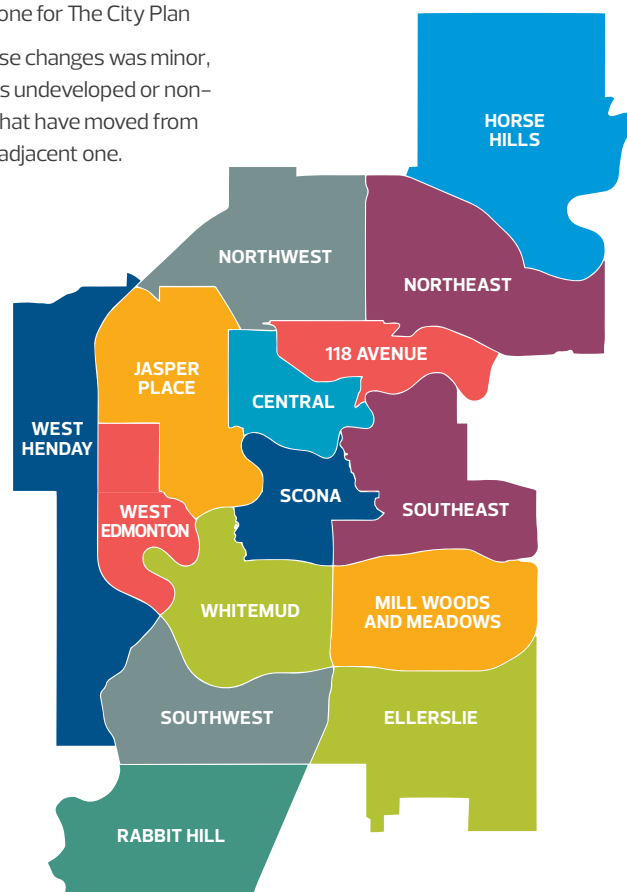


FIGURE 7: Proposed Planning Districts for The City Plan



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