

Tip of the Iceberg: WinterCity Strategy 10-Year Report 2013-2023

September 2024

wintercity
Edmonton

Edmonton

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Land Acknowledgement

The City of Edmonton acknowledges the traditional land on which we reside is in Treaty Six Territory. We would like to thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries, such as nêhiyaw (Cree), Dené, Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Isga (Nakota Sioux), and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis homeland and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel.

This land is a welcoming place for all peoples who come from around the world to share Edmonton as a home. Together we call upon all of our collective honoured traditions and spirits to build a great city today and for future generations.

In 2019, Jacquelyn Cardinal of Naheyawin shared with WinterCity readers some of the nêhiyawêwin (Cree) words that relate to winter, as well as the deep connections local Indigenous peoples have with the land. In her blog, *nêhiyawêwin: A Song From The Land*, she explained the word for "city":

“ôôtênaw ᐃᐅᐱᐅ (oo-tee-now)

The nêhiyawêwin word for city is ôôtênaw which has the root words of otêh, which means 'heart', and ôta, which means "here". These hidden teachings share the true definition of ôôtênaw to be the 'heart of the people' or 'where the people are'."

We hope we have succeeded in keeping true to the spirit of ôôtênaw, to keeping people at the heart of all of the WinterCity work.



Executive Summary

For over ten years, the City of Edmonton has been working to embrace one of our city's greatest assets: winter. This report highlights the collaborative efforts of City staff, community leaders and residents to embrace and celebrate the season. It is a comprehensive look at where we started, where we are now, and where we want to go next.

One of the goals of the WinterCity Strategy was to create a culture shift that embedded a winter lens in all of the work the City of Edmonton does. This lens is now reflected in The City Plan, The Bike Plan, overall urban design, and City imagery. An Iceberg Model for Systems Change was used to guide our journey and measure where we started and where we ended up. This report shows that we are well on our way to achieving that goal.

The impacts of the WinterCity Strategy work were measured through data collected on a continual basis since the 2018 mid-strategy report, a 2023 City Insight Community survey, and interviews with internal and external stakeholders. Results showed that of the 64 actions of the WinterCity Strategy, 37 have created a lasting impact, 24 need a more sustained effort to create a long-term impact, and three are no longer needed. The overwhelmingly positive outcomes led to recommendations to not only continue the work but to:

1. Refresh the strategy
2. Continue to invest
3. Create an evaluation framework
4. Champion winter design
5. Capitalize on Edmonton's reputation

This report also includes a section on how Edmonton responded to COVID-19 restrictions in winter 2020-21. Through an Insight Community survey and interviews with stakeholders, we found that Edmonton was able to respond quickly and effectively to the closure of indoor venues. Edmontonians embraced being outside and used the many outdoor winter park amenities the City offered. Community leagues and festival producers were creative with their programming. Business owners and residents embraced the nascent winter patio culture. City staff showed leadership in the winter cities arena by sharing knowledge and expertise with other North American cities looking to create outdoor winter spaces.

A detailed report of the individual actions is found in Appendix A. Wherever possible, each action includes a description of the work done as well as statistics and quotes from the community about the impact of the actions. Appendix B provides a list of relevant resources.

"Edmonton is a winter city, and I think it's great we learn to embrace and celebrate it! All seasons have their reasons, we don't need to fight with winter."

2023 Insight Survey Participant



"The more things that can be done year round the better!! Winter should be enjoyed and celebrated. To sit on a patio in winter is awesome! To ski, run, bike etc in winter is amazing! Those things are gems and what will keep people healthy."

2023 Insight Survey Participant

Introduction

After Edmonton’s WinterCity Strategy was adopted by City Council in October 2012, almost a full year was dedicated to creating an implementation plan. The plan outlined details for 64 actions including desired outcomes, lead sponsors and suggested partners, timeframes, progress measures, and probable costs. The following ten years were spent executing that plan.

This document outlines the strides we’ve made in all four pillars of the strategy and makes recommendations for continuing efforts. It also reports on each of the 64 actions of the implementation plan. Scattered throughout the document are perhaps the most important measures of all: quotes from community leaders, partners and residents.

“A strategy is only as good as the execution that follows it.”
Brian Tracy, Author and Motivational Speaker

The Four Pillars:

- Winter Life
- Winter Design
- Winter Economy
- Our Winter Story

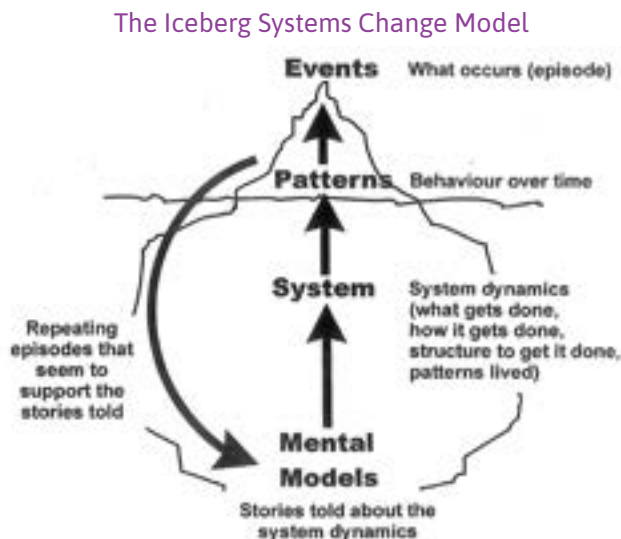
The Iceberg and Systems Change

A systems change approach was used to develop the WinterCity Strategy. As stated in the 2012 [Edmonton WinterCity Strategy Consultation Summary](#):

“At the core of our challenge was to try to figure out how to shift our culture so that the stories we tell ourselves about our lives in Edmonton could change to be more positive, more embracing of this important and challenging season. The iceberg model for change shows the multiple levels that we looked at and knew we had to try to impact.”

The ultimate goal of the strategy was to move from having a few winter elements in our city, those very visible activities such as cross-country ski trails and festivals, to ultimately embedding winter into our mental models. We wanted a winter lens to be applied to City planning, policies, programming and budgets. The iceberg model was referred to throughout the development and implementation of the WinterCity Strategy.

Over the last ten years, we have been chipping away at the iceberg, changing our patterns, supporting systems and mental models. The systems within the iceberg model refer to structures that support the patterns and events. In other words, what gets done, how it gets done, and the policies and procedures that support the overall events and patterns. The iceberg will be used throughout this report as a visual representation of where we started and where we have ended up.



“The Winter City Strategy has really impacted how I think about living in Edmonton in the winter months. Would love to see more low-cost and free opportunities for children and youth to learn basic winter recreation activities: skating, cross-country skiing, etc.”

2023 Insight Survey Participant

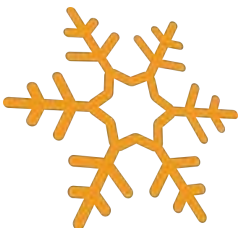


Snapshot of Where We Started and Where We Are Now on the Iceberg



When the WinterCity Strategy work began in 2013, very few systems were in place to support winter-related events, patterns and trends. The mental models of Edmontonians around winter were overwhelmingly negative.

Over the past ten years, we have chipped away at the iceberg, strengthened supporting systems, and altered the mental models. The patterns and trends around outdoor winter activities have changed, and we see more visible evidence of Edmontonians embracing and celebrating winter.



2013

Events

- Festivals & events

Patterns & Trends

- Some residents using the parks in winter (walking, skiing, skating)

Systems

- Cross-country ski trails in river valley parks
- River valley trails are cleared for winter use
- Urban Parks Management Plan 2006-2016 requires amenities to support summer & winter activities

Mental Models

- Festival & patio seasons were considered to be summer only

Residents' comments:

- *Our northerness is a liability.*
- *Winter is something to be endured.*
- *Winter is boring, there's nothing to do.*
- *It's -30C for six months of the year.*



2023

Events

- More festivals & events
- Winter patio events
- Winter bike ride events

Patterns & Trends

- More residents using the parks in winter (walking, skiing, skating & cycling)
- More cyclists riding year-round
- Winter images in City documents are standard
- Growing number of winter patios

Systems

- More cross-country ski trails in river valley parks & in some district parks
- River valley trails are cleared for winter use
- More skating rinks & trails
- Bike lanes are cleared for winter use (Winter Priority Route)
- The Bike Plan is designed to support cycling in all seasons
- Patio permits & guidelines consider all four seasons
- Winter Design Guidelines & Policy adopted
- City budget includes allocations to winter activities & a Winter City Planner
- The City Plan embraces Edmonton as a winter city
- Play Streets and Block Parties guide include winter information

Mental Models

- Festival & patio seasons are considered to be all seasons
- Winter considerations are part of everyday City work

Residents' comments:

- *We are a winter city! Let's get everyone outside and enjoy it.*
- *You can love this city so much more when you have something to do in the winter.*
- *Winter activities help the winter go by quicker and be more pleasant.*
- *Getting outside in the winter has really improved my quality of life.*

Alignment with City Strategic Goals and Plans

In order to change City systems and mental models, one of the Winter Design actions calls to “incorporate winter design guidelines into new and, as opportunities arise, existing City of Edmonton governance framework and associated operations and maintenance approaches.” Since the WinterCity Strategy was written in 2012, the City of Edmonton has developed three significant strategic plans. WinterCity staff collaborated with coworkers to incorporate a winter lens into the new plans wherever possible. Some excellent work has been accomplished, but there is still room for improvement.

Edmonton City Plan (2020)

Edmonton’s winter city identity is acknowledged and embraced throughout The City Plan. It is referenced in three outcomes and in the mobility section, but most directly in Direction 1.3.2: Support Edmonton’s identity as a winter city through its infrastructure, design, events and economy.

The Bike Plan: Making Cycling Inviting in All Seasons for All Reasons (2020)

Support for winter cycling is embedded in the new Bike Plan. It is encouraged through bike lane design, programming (including year-round maintenance) and monitoring.

ConnectEdmonton: Edmonton’s Strategic Plan for 2019-2028 and the Corporate Business Plan

No direct reference is made to Edmonton’s status as a winter city in these plans, nor do any of the visions or goals mention winter or striving to build a better city year-round. This is a missed opportunity; however, attractive, inviting winter images are scattered throughout the ConnectEdmonton document. This is an improvement over pre-WinterCity Strategy documents that generally did not have any urban or people-focused winter photos. As the Corporate Business Plan is updated, a winter lens should be included to ensure the City gets the best return on investment while building our city for, and serving its residents in, all seasons.

Change in Approach

Our WinterCity Strategy has always garnered international attention and visibility. One key piece of advice that we have relayed to other cities beginning their own winter strategy journeys is to find a political champion to support the work and its importance. This remains a key reason for our own city’s early success. That said, Edmonton’s winter work has now matured to the point where applying a winter lens is part of the everyday City of Edmonton approach to building our city. The WinterCity Strategy is no longer attached to a single political champion, but its philosophy and approach are embedded across The City Plan and other key areas of City work.



The Strides We've Made

Winter Life Pillar

Goal 1: Make It Easier to "Go Play Outside": Provide More Opportunities for Outdoor Activity

Goal 2: Improve Winter Transportation for Pedestrians, Cyclists and Public Transit Users

Where We Started

"We think winter has been miscast as being dangerous, dark, lonely and boring. We make this claim because one of the most common reactions from Edmontonians when asked about their best memories of winter is how much they loved the freedom, beauty and fun of winter when they were young. Our winter life group talked about this and concentrated on how we have, as a community, lost these memories and allowed barriers, of attitude and life-style, to reduce winter to a drab stereotype in our glorious northern climate.

By finding ways to improve our ability to manage the pragmatic realities of day-to-day life in weather that can be challenging, while enjoying the joyful and non-universal opportunities that winter offers, winter life in Edmonton can be something to look forward to."

- John Mahon & Tammy (Fallowfield) Pidner, Winter Life Hub Co-Chairs, 2012

Where We Are Now

There is much to celebrate in the Winter Life Pillar. The efforts made on more than half of the actions have created positive, lasting impacts for the community. The remaining work largely relates to active transportation and snow clearing.

Status of Pillar Actions

23 actions:

- 10 have created a lasting impact
- 11 need a more sustained effort to create a lasting impact
- 2 are no longer required

Successes and Insights

Community benefits from the actions include:

- New cafés in four parks in the river valley
- Rental equipment in three river valley parks
- Free skate rentals at the City Hall Rink
- IceWays in two river valley parks
- Several community league skating trails
- Increased cross-country-ski trail maintenance
- Support for free skate rental programs at some community leagues
- Three online toolkits for creating winter fun
- More fire pits in public spaces



"To put my support behind the WinterCity Strategy, from both a personal and professional standpoint, I was seeing real strides with this initiative. At the beginning, it may have been challenging for people to understand why a winter strategy was needed. But now, it's clear that getting more Edmontonians outside during the winter season to participate in festivals, recreation activities and into our River Valley certainly promoted the arts and changed the conversation around winter. I am looking forward to advancements on Winter Design and continued progress on Winter Economy."

Sally Kim, Associate Executive Director, Edmonton Arts Council

Status of Winter Life Pillar Actions



- Bookable winter picnic sites
- More than 11,000 free skiing and snowboarding experiences for newcomers and youth
- Year-round bike lane maintenance

Other actions saw mixed success. A **bike lane clearing pilot project** on 106 Street was regarded as a failure, at first. The City crews worked extremely hard to keep the lanes clean, but spray from passing vehicles landed in the painted bike lanes, and drivers often parked on them. In the end, the project team decided that the maintenance approach was not at fault, rather the infrastructure design was the problem. As a result, we learned that we need separated, protected bike lanes in order to keep them clear and passable in the winter. This change in design has led to a protected bike lane network that is used in all seasons.



As the bike network has grown, the **culture has shifted** around cycling in all seasons. More Edmontonians are cycling year round, which has led to an increased demand for information about how to cycle in the colder weather. The City's bike education team and WinterCity have supported and championed winter cycling with educational videos and workshops, and by hosting Winter Bike to Work Day, sharing local stories, and partnering with Bike Edmonton to provide equipment to new winter cyclists through the Studded Bike Tire Challenge. Edmonton's reputation as a year-round cycling city was boosted when it was chosen to host the international 2024 Winter Cycling Congress.



The action calling for a **city-wide winter fest** was deemed no longer necessary. During engagement, community leagues told us they were satisfied with hosting their own events and did not need support, other than being able to book or rent equipment for their winter events.

Mixed progress has been made around **using snow and ice as a resource**. The Front Yards In Bloom: Winterscapes program has seen many creative entries by residents who have used snow and ice to create displays in their front yards. However, using snow and ice as a building material or even piling fresh snow for children to play on has been met with resistance. In addition, the Silver Skate Festival producers worked extremely hard to bring Ice Castles to Edmonton. Along the way, they ran into many barriers because of the lack of building code legislation around the use of snow and ice as a building material. Thankfully, the producers were tenacious and overcame the engineering hurdles. Building code changes are beyond the control of the City, but more advocacy work could be done in this area.



Finally, a pilot project offered a **shuttle bus service to Victoria Park** during the 2020 Family Day Weekend. The route ran from Victoria Park to RE/MAX Field, along Jasper Avenue to connect with two LRT stops, to the Government Transit Centre, and back to the park. The service was not well used, but several factors came into play: it was a colder-than-average weekend, marketing could have been more wide-spread, and the COVID-19 pandemic was on the horizon. City parks staff liked the idea of a transit connection to Victoria Park and



recommended trying again during the Christmas to New Year timeframe. Another shuttle service pilot should take into account what we learned about constraints for running a bus into the parking lot and increase advertising.

Where We'll Focus Next

The **active transportation** and **snow clearing** actions require additional effort in order to make our city truly accessible to all. Rundle Park IceWay already offers a barrier-free experience, and some community leagues have installed skating rink ramps for accessibility, thanks to a partnership with the City. Support for other **universally accessible recreation opportunities** will be explored.

Other areas that would benefit from a sustained focus include supporting more **commercial anchor points** in the river valley and select parks, as well as more **rental equipment opportunities**.



Chipping Away at the Winter Life Iceberg

Events

- Community league skating rinks, free skating rentals & winter fests
- Edmonton Arts Council winter programming at City Hall
- 11,000+ free skiing & snowboard experiences
- Snow slide in Churchill Square
- Ice Castles in Hawrelak Park
- Bike lane clearing pilot project
- Free bus to Victoria Park pilot project
- DATS ElfMobile pilot project on Candy Cane Lane

Patterns & Trends

- Increased winter park use (walking, skiing, skating & cycling)
- Rental equipment in river valley parks
- Increased number of winter cyclists
- New winter activities and equipment are in greater demand



Systems

- Winter Party Toolkits
- Winter placemaking workshops
- Warming elements in parks, including warming huts & fire pits
- More skating rinks & trails
- More cross-country ski trails
- Pathway and bike lane clearing is prioritized
- Cafés with winter patios in river valley parks
- Winter amenities on City Kids Map and Bike Maps
- Winter Priority Route signage on bike lanes

Mental Models

- Edmontonians are embracing winter & outdoor activities
- Winter is no longer considered the off-season
- Year-round amenities in parks are crucial
- Winter experiences for all are valued
- Winter cycling is becoming normalized



Winter Design Pillar

Goal 3: Design Our Communities for Winter Safety and Comfort

Goal 4: Incorporate Urban Design Elements for Winter Fun, Activity, Beauty and Interest

Where We Started

“When we began work on this project, one of the first things we talked about is that most people in the world don’t really know what winter is—they don’t live with it. For them, snow, ice and cold are kind of exciting—evoking feelings of wonder and playfulness. It’s easy to view winter this way when you don’t have to deal with the daily challenges inherent in the season!”

If we plan our public spaces with the aim of enjoying winter, the outside can become inviting for everyone—not just those who love outdoor winter sports. This means allowing places for kids and adults to play in the snow; providing outdoor patios with blankets, heaters and great views for people watching. We need to make the most of winter’s darkness, illuminating our infrastructure, architectural accents on buildings and public spaces with eye-catching, playful nightscaping. Great urban design that showcases and takes advantage of our unique climate and geography will make our city an even better place to live, play and to visit.”

- Dianne Johnstone & Simon O’Byrne, Urban Design Hub Co-Chairs, 2012

Where We Are Now

Developing the Winter Design Guidelines was the foundational action of this pillar. Published in 2016, these award-winning guidelines have become the gold standard around the world. They are used locally by designers and builders, and have been featured in international articles and exhibitions. Nevertheless, there is still more education to be done around the winter design principles, how to apply them, and awareness of the economic return on investment.

Status of Pillar Actions

12 actions:

- 4 have created a lasting impact
- 8 need a more sustained effort to create a lasting impact

Successes and Insights

Change to the built environment takes time, but the City is encouraging use of the [Winter Design Guidelines](#) in all development. Winter and evening renderings are now recommended and encouraged in development permit applications. The Façade and Storefront Improvement Grants ask applicants to consider multi-season design. The [Winter Design Policy](#) requires all City-led developments to consider winter design principles.

The development industry reports that attempts to use some of the winter design elements have run into challenges with the permitting



“The rise of the modernist era in planning really led to a form of planning that was detached from its surroundings - we were looking to impose our will upon nature. As a result, in many ways, the existence of winter almost disappeared in terms of how we planned and designed our city. The WinterCity Strategy and design guidelines have gone a long way to correcting that. Renderings from developers began to include winter scenes and key winter aspects of design began to be included in proposals again. The efforts and initiatives have helped us plan our city to not only accept and include winter, but to embrace it.”

Robert J. Summers, Ph.D.,RPP, MCI;
Director, School of Urban and Regional
Planning, University of Alberta

Status of Winter Design Actions



- Created a Lasting Impact
- Need More Effort

process. **Ongoing education** within the corporation is recommended to regain support for, and understanding of, winter design principles. External education would also foster a greater understanding within the development community.

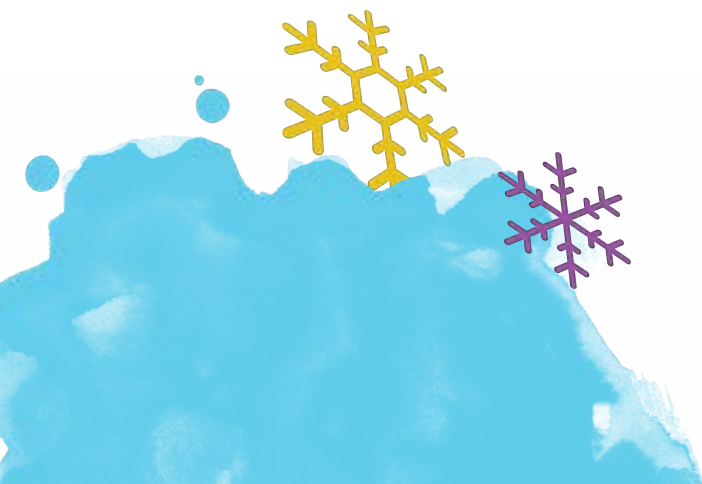
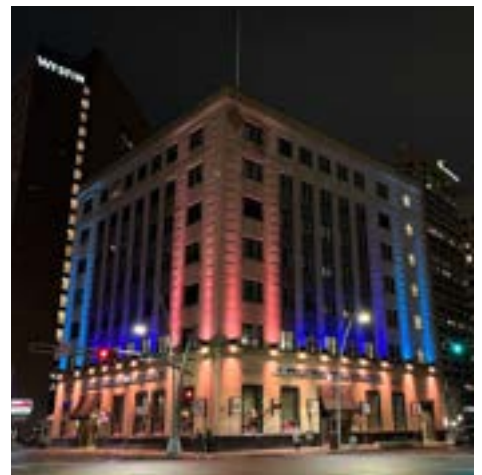
Initial development of a lighting master plan took several twists and turns. Many questions about the nuances of light were raised during a number of artistic lighting projects. In the end, the Winter Design Working Group concluded that **creative lighting guidelines**, not a master plan, would be more useful for Edmonton. Once completed, these guidelines will be added as a new chapter to the Winter Design Guidelines.

Where We'll Focus Next

The **Winter Design Guidelines** will be updated to include creative lighting guidelines and four-season patio design tips. We will continue to educate City staff and the development industry about the guidelines, particularly around the social benefits of designing for all four seasons and the increased return on investment. How to monitor and test the different winter design principles over time still needs to be addressed.

Edmonton is now starting to see more touches of colour, especially in murals across the city, but the **use of colour** in general is very conservative. A conversation around using more colour in our built environment could inspire more change in this area.

Winter Design Action D1.5 calls for a requirement to construct **boulevard sidewalks** as a first choice in new developments and redevelopments. There are several benefits to boulevards, including protecting pedestrians from vehicular spray and adding landscaping to the urban form. However, constructing boulevard sidewalks must consider important issues related to accessibility. Vehicle wheelchair ramps are generally installed on the right-hand side of a vehicle. When a ramp-equipped vehicle is parked, the ramp extends onto the boulevard. Wheelchair ramps are not usually long enough to extend across a boulevard, and many wheelchairs cannot move through the snow from the end of the ramp to the sidewalk. While there are many benefits to boulevards in a winter city, the context of this design should be explored more to ensure our city remains as accessible as possible to all residents.



Chipping Away at the Winter Design Iceberg

Events

- Winter design presentations
- Winter design was a key theme at all four international Winter Cities Shake-Up conferences
- Winter design was featured at the 2024 international Winter Cycling Congress in Edmonton

Patterns & Trends

- Development applications request winter renderings
- Development applications consider four-season design elements
- Winter images in City documents
- Urban Design Awards add special considerations for winter design



Systems

- Winter Design Guidelines
- Winter Design Policy
- Sun Shadow Studies must now identify shadows for December 21
- Wind Impact Assessments are now required for development permits for buildings over 20 m in height
- Winter lens is included in City frameworks and strategic plans
- The Bike Plan: Making Cycling Inviting for All Reasons in All Seasons
- Warming huts pilots in river valley parks
- Lighting projects
- Pilot to light heritage buildings

Mental Models

- Designing for winter is a strong mindset
- Designing for winter first is a growing mindset (i.e., design spaces with winter activities in mind first, before planning for summer ones)



Winter Economy Pillar

Goal 5: Increase the Capacity and Sustainability of Edmonton's Winter Festivals

Goal 6: Develop a Four-Seasons Patio Culture

Goal 7: Become a World Leader in Innovative Winter Related Business/Industry

Where We Started

"The winter economy in Edmonton has a vast and largely untapped potential. In all aspects, ranging from tourism to commercial activity and manufacturing, the possibilities of winter require a thorough exploration. Our most significant season may also be one of our most important resources. There is much that can be done to lure people outdoors, to increase activity on the streets and to create safe and enticing winter gathering places. Winter festivals, outdoor socializing on our main streets, winter sports, activity in the river valley are all ways to engage the citizens of Edmonton and to enhance the tourism experience.

A focus on winter business and industry could take advantage of our natural environment to diversify our local economy and to produce, attract and retain innovative business leaders, professionals and workers. Edmonton has a strong winter construction industry, world class post-secondary education and research facilities and both large and small winter focused niche industries. These could be catalogued, marketed and utilized as a foundation to expand and grow a robust 'Edmonton Winter Economy'."

- Shirley Lowe & Ken Fiske, Winter Economy Hub Co-Chairs, 2012

Where We Are Now

Edmontonians have embraced celebrating outside in winter, supporting the growing number of winter festivals, events and year-round patios. Outside our borders, our city has gained a positive reputation for its approach to winter. Tourists looking for a winter experience now visit Edmonton, and international winter events hosted here have put Edmonton on the world stage.

Status of Pillar Actions

12 actions:

- 7 have created a lasting impact
- 4 need a more sustained effort to create a lasting impact
- 1 is no longer required

Successes and Insights

The number of winter festivals and events has increased significantly since the WinterCity Strategy was implemented. Attendance at events is strong, even in cold winter weather. Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) have embraced winter programming and created events such as light-up nights and parades to support their local businesses. Residents have also created smaller, community-based events like winter bike rides that end



"The WinterCity initiative has been a vital part of making Edmonton a truly enjoyable winter city and one that is to be celebrated. Since its inception a decade ago, we've seen several new winter festivals emerge, including our own! We launched Winter Whyte Light Up seven years ago as a celebration of winter and were inspired and supported by all the work that WinterCity has done. We can't wait to see what is in store next for our incredible winter city!"

Cherie Klassen, Executive Director, Old Strathcona Business Association

Status of Winter Economy Actions



Created a Lasting Impact
Need More Effort
No Longer Required

at a winter patio. All of these events are supported with promotions whenever possible through the WinterCity social media channels and website.

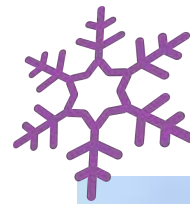
Winter events, in general, experience higher production costs than events in other seasons. Reasons for this include having to provide warming spaces for participants and volunteers, lighting costs, and winter-rated equipment; tents and electronics are simply more expensive to rent or purchase than warmer-weather equipment. For several years, WinterCity staff helped manage a shared inventory of [equipment for the winter festivals](#). WinterCity funding also helped add to the inventory as the festival community grew and needs changed.

Grant funding for winter events began as an informal process through the WinterCity Office. As the number of events grew, so did the need for a more formalized process. The [WinterCity Festivals and Events Grant](#) has been created to help offset the extra winter-related costs and to support emerging winter festivals. This grant is administered by the Civic Events Office.

Edmonton's WinterCity Strategy has not gone unnoticed by others. [Large international events](#), such as Red Bull Crashed Ice in 2018, the 2022 Snowboard World Cup and the 2024 Ice Climbing World Cup, have been attracted to Edmonton because of our approach to winter. These large events have drawn tourists, supported the local economy, and helped to put Edmonton on the world stage.

One of the actions in this pillar was to support [winter market](#) initiatives. Several attempts and activities have been piloted under this action, including supporting the 124 Street BIA's All is Bright festival and market, piloting two types of market huts, and hosting a market as part of the 2015 Winter Cities Shake-Up conference. The most significant challenge encountered was the (in)ability to keep vendors warm. Space heaters in the market huts were sufficient in milder winter temperatures if the vendors dressed appropriately and took breaks, but they were not sufficient for -20°C. Edmonton winter weather is unpredictable, with some Novembers being mild and others extremely cold and/or snowy. Festivals have, in general, abandoned market programming because of the cost of moving market huts and the unpredictable weather conditions. However, one local production company has forged ahead and produces an annual Christmas market at Fort Edmonton Park.

Goal 6 of the WinterCity Strategy calls to develop a [four-season patio culture](#). This has been one of the most significant shifts in culture as a result of the WinterCity initiative. Before the strategy, no year-round patios existed in Edmonton. Support and encouragement to achieve this goal was initially met with scepticism and outright rejection. However, a couple of early-adopting venues saw value in offering a new experience. Their leadership helped during the COVID-19 pandemic, when venues could only serve patrons outside. City staff in the permitting areas also supported the goal, and a review of patio processes has led to a more streamlined process for patios in the public realm (i.e., on sidewalks and



in the roadway). During winter 2022-23, more than 20 venues offered patio service in the winter.

Where We'll Focus Next

Winter patios will continue to be supported with a seasonal city-wide marketing strategy. The campaign's signature event is typically the #YegWinterPatios Kick-Off Weekend, which is usually held the first weekend in December. Participating venues are advertised and highlighted on social media leading up to, and during, the weekend. Some venues may choose to offer food and beverage specials, while others may also add programming such as live music or other activities to their winter fun.

Demand for more winter experiences and products has grown. Explore Edmonton has reported that the tourism industry has expressed a desire for more packages, such as tours, lessons with rental equipment and multiple-activity experiences. In the 2023 Insight Survey, Edmontonians requested more equipment rentals and cafés in parks. Currently, rental equipment is available in three river valley parks and cafés are offered in four. Increasing the number of winter experiences would benefit residents, visitors and the local economy.

After hosting two successful international Winter Cities Shake-Up conferences in 2015 and 2017, Edmonton was approached by other cities interested in continuing the conference series. Saskatoon and Winnipeg hosted in 2019 and 2023, respectively. Since the Winnipeg conference, two more cities have expressed interest. The strategy action, and the resulting 2015 conference, was intended to be a one-off event. However, support has grown nationally to continue. Options for the future of the conference, its brand, and the City of Edmonton's role in it, need to be explored.

Work has begun on the action calling for the creation of a centre of excellence for northern architecture, design and winter technology. A public announcement is expected in 2024.

As we move forward with Edmonton's WinterCity work, we will apply an economic lens to new programs and initiatives. This will continue to strengthen and grow Edmonton's unique winter business, festival, and tourism markets.



Chipping Away at the Winter Economy Iceberg

Events

- Annual #YegWinterPatios Kick-Off Weekend
- Annual Christmas market
- Winter fashion shows
- Winter fashion makeover videos
- Winter festivals & events
- Winter Cities Shake-Up conferences

Patterns & Trends

- Edmontonians patronize winter patios
- Growing number of Edmontonians & visitors attend festivals & events
- Growing number of visitors come to Edmonton for a winter experience



Systems

- WinterCity Festivals and Events Grant
- Four Season Patio Design Tip Sheet
- Patio Program Guide includes winter-specific information
- AGLC flexibility around patio regulations
- Communications plan to support patios
- Permanent winter patios
- Market huts pilots

Mental Models

- Other municipalities approach Edmonton for information about winter patios
- Large international events consider Edmonton because of our winter city reputation



Our Winter Story Pillar

Goal 8: Celebrate the Season and Embrace Daily Living in a Cold Climate

Goal 9: Promote Edmonton's Great Northern Story Locally, Nationally and Internationally

Goal 10: Kick Start and Lead Implementation of Edmonton's WinterCity Strategy: Apply a 'Winter Lens' to Our City

Where We Started

"A story always has a beginning, middle and an end. How can Edmonton have a 'winter story'? Perhaps it starts before central heating, before block heaters and the two-car family, when winter in this part of the world wasn't an annoyance. Then, when we secured the means to battle winter, we battled it. We built our city and we built our lives in opposition to winter. Edmonton's winter story, then, is a story of renewal and rediscovery.

The winter story isn't a marketing campaign. It's the story we tell ourselves and our neighbours, first. It's an invitation to play outside in the light and the dark, the hot and the cold, in that enchanting place between fire and ice. It's a challenge to our artists and our urban planners and our entrepreneurs, to make winter a part of their work. It's a call to all Edmontonians to be honest about our climate and our place on the map. We've complained enough. Our northernness is an asset, economically and culturally and spiritually. We are a northern people. It's time to be playful about it, shameless, even a little boastful."

- Todd Babiak & Carmelle Boston, Winter Story Hub Co-chairs, 2012

Where We Are Now

When we started implementing the strategy, the Advisory Council predicted that shifting the culture towards celebrating winter would take determined effort and would evolve over several years. As mentioned in the 2018 mid-strategy report, however, changes in mindset began with the development of the strategy. We also took the advice of the City of Oslo and the University of Aalto very seriously: *Use marketing and communications tools to shape people's attitudes about winter. From year to year, people forget how to deal with winter. Marketing winter events and making people proud of their winter city identity helps remind people that winter can be fun.*

[\(WinterCity Strategy Executive Research Study Findings, Norway and Finland, p. 16\)](#)

Annual storytelling campaigns, coupled with ongoing efforts to embrace winter, have created a shift in mindset and culture. Edmonton is now known nationally and internationally for its leading role in the winter cities movement.



"The WinterCity Strategy has been key to activating Edmontonians in winter. We have made a lot of progress, but long-term continuous investment is essential. The day we pull the plug is the day the water runs out of the bathtub. Edmonton has a reputation for being a winter leader, especially in our festivals and the growing number of year-round patios. Let's keep going!"
Daniel Cournoyer, Executive Director,
La Cité Francophone



Status of Pillar Actions

17 actions:

- 16 have created a lasting impact
- 1 needs a more sustained effort to create a lasting impact

Successes and Insights

Sharing Edmonton's winter story had to start with Edmontonians. The WinterCity **social media platforms** provide residents with a communal space to share their own stories and images. The blog posts and newsletter help tell deeper stories. And the website gives Edmontonians a central information hub for all things winter. Analytics from all platforms show a healthy audience size and an engaged community¹. Feedback from the 2023 Insight Survey, though, called for reaching audiences not engaged online. A number of participants responded that they do not know where to find information for outdoor winter fun.

Goal 9 of the WinterCity Strategy calls to **promote Edmonton's great northern story** locally, nationally and internationally. Explore Edmonton has been a key partner, and leader, in this area. They won a provincial industry award for their first Winter in Edmonton campaign, which ran in winter 2013-14. Their cheeky, self-deprecating tone has guided the WinterCity voice. Explore Edmonton has continued to champion Edmonton's winter story with visitors, regional partners and local vendors. They also produce imagery that captures the joy of winter in Edmonton and can be used by the City of Edmonton for local stories. In addition, the WinterCity social media and website analytics show that 75 per cent of social media and 64 per cent of website users are from the Edmonton area, and 10 per cent of website engagements hail from outside Canada. We have, indeed, gained national and international attention.

Our **reputation as a leading winter city** has been built on a solid foundation: national awards for the Winter Design Guidelines, hosting two Winter Cities Shake-Up conferences, and having our mayor serve as Vice-President/North-South America for the World Winter Cities Association for Mayors. Staff and advisory council members have conducted numerous interviews with national and international media outlets, including Wired, CBC's The Current and Spark programs, Bloomberg and The New York Times. WinterCity staff have also been a resource for other cities developing winter city strategies, collaborated with organizations, and spoken nationally and internationally about Edmonton's approach. In fact, our reputation was cemented during winter 2020-21, when the Winter City Planner was a guest on at least 16 webinars to advise other cities on how to help residents embrace being outside during the first COVID-19 winter.

The one area that needs more attention is a local one: exploring opportunities to integrate **local Indigenous winter culture and traditions** into Edmonton's overall winter culture and our collective winter story.

Status of Our Winter Story Actions



- Created a Lasting Impact
- Need More Effort



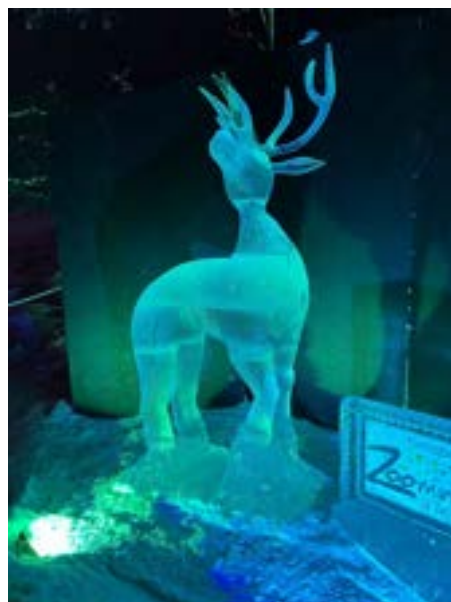
¹ See appendix for detailed social media analytics.

Inroads have been made, such as publishing three blogs by a local writer and using images from winter festivals, but more remains to be done.

Where We'll Focus Next

Updating the **communications plan** is recommended to continue supporting Edmonton's brand locally, nationally and internationally. Feedback from the 2023 Insight Survey should be used to inform it, including finding ways to reach residents who are not heavy social media users, and increasing support for other City of Edmonton outdoor winter programs. The communications plan should also prioritize exploring opportunities to share local Indigenous winter culture and stories.

The Winter Excitement Guide was very popular with social agencies that worked with newcomers. The guide was reportedly used in classes to discuss winter activities, festivals, and safety. A request has been received to produce printed **materials for newcomers** that can be used as a teaching tool, but also for inspiration. The images were a powerful tool to show that winter does not have to be feared.



Chipping Away at Our Winter Story Iceberg

Events

- Premiere to Winter
- Annual Winterscapes contest
- Signature Drink Competitions
- Award to Explore Edmonton for winter tourism campaign
- Awards for the WinterCity Strategy and Winter Design Guidelines

Patterns & Trends

- Edmontonians access information through WinterCity Edmonton's online presence
- Expertise of WinterCity staff is sought after by other municipalities & organizations

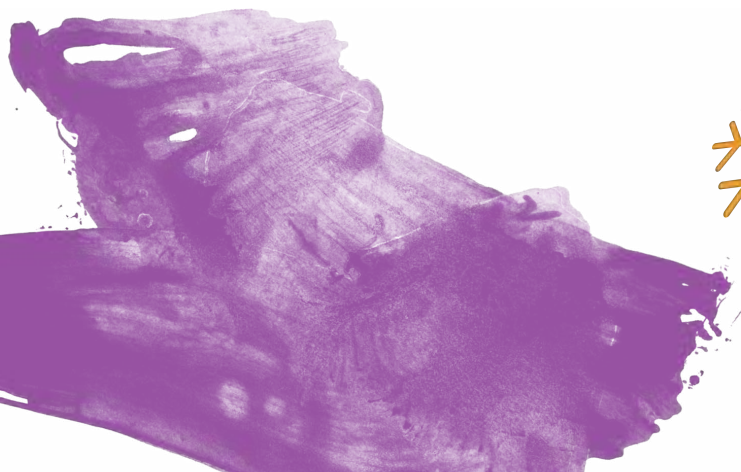


Systems

- Robust communications plan with website & multiple social media platforms
- Image library to support the corporation as a whole
- Explore Edmonton and other partners actively promote the Edmonton winter brand
- WinterCity Advisory Council
- Winter City Planner

Mental Models

- Edmontonians share stories and images about winter
- National and international organizations see Edmonton as a leader in the winter cities movement



How We Know This

Insight Survey

In February 2023, the City of Edmonton conducted a survey to understand participation in winter initiatives, activities and events. The survey was distributed to the City's Insight Community via an open link on the City's website and also through QR codes on posters in river valley parks. A total of 3,894 respondents completed the survey: 3,674 from the Insight Community survey and 220 respondents from the QR code and open links.

Interviews

Data and comments were collected from and confirmed by internal and external stakeholders for the action details in the appendix. These stakeholders include City staff in several departments, Advisory Council members and community leaders.



Recommendations

The recommendations of the mid-strategy report, *Keep the Snowball Rolling: WinterCity Strategy Evaluation and Report*, continue to be relevant. However, much has changed since 2018. The following additional recommendations are a result of consultations with City staff, stakeholders and the public.

1. Refresh the Strategy

Since the WinterCity Strategy was developed in 2012, the social, economic and cultural landscapes have evolved and needs have changed. The strategy's goals and actions should be revisited and an updated strategic direction should be created. A working group based loosely on the existing advisory council should be created to undertake this work. In the past, the Advisory Council gave invaluable support and strategic advice, but the ongoing WinterCity work would now be better served with ad hoc, project-based working groups. These working groups should continue to have a mixed internal/external membership model to ensure that the WinterCity Strategy remains grounded in the community.

2. Continue to Invest

The City of Edmonton has invested in an annual, on-going budget for the WinterCity Strategy. This funding has made the successes of the strategy possible. In recent years, other Western Canadian cities have written winter strategies, but most of the work has stalled due to lack of funding for implementation and staffing. Edmonton stands out not only because of its comprehensive implementation plan and investment in the work, but also because it is the only city in Canada with a dedicated winter planner. Continuing to invest in the WinterCity Strategy and its supports and programming will ensure that the cultural shift will endure, support for local winter businesses will remain strong, and the City of Edmonton will maintain its status as a leader in the international winter cities movement.

3. Create an Evaluation Framework

The WinterCity Strategy calls for the creation of a “multi-dimensional evaluation framework for the WinterCity Strategy objectives”. Data were collected for the mid-strategy report using a framework that relied on interviews, surveys, formal evaluation data and informal supporting information. The mid-strategy report recommended collecting future data intentionally on an ongoing basis, conducting market research every two years, and conducting a full evaluation again at the 10-year mark. Although efforts were made to record data on a continual basis, data collection is still somewhat haphazard. A more formal evaluation framework must be developed to help the City evaluate the social, economic and cultural benefits of the WinterCity work.

Recommendations from *Keep the Snowball Rolling: WinterCity Strategy Evaluation and Report*

1. Keep the Snowball Rolling
2. Preserve the Shared Vision
3. Steer Dynamically
4. Document Progress

“We have amazing community leaders who have collaborated to spark this change in our city. The City and its Administration does its best work when it works with community and it needs to reinvigorate and continue to convene/support a strong Winter City Advisory Panel, to continue to grow this innovative effort. Few global cities have a wintercity planner or office to spark change. Build on this to make this office, working with community, a huge agent of change!”

2023 Insight Survey Participant

“I think that to continue to be a true WinterCity and a leader with this initiative we should continue to provide funds for our longest season, winter. In all reality the snow covers the ground longer than the grass over the course of the year. Let's get people outside, active and exploring our diverse city 365 days a year.”

Erin DiLoreto, Executive Producer, Silver Skate Festival

“I know there are a lot of negative people out there. No matter what, please do not give up. Continue with the activities. You are changing our lives. Thanks for the work everyone of you does, from the person who creates the surveys till those who are in the front line in the events. Thanks to you too, the person who is gathering the data. Please smile, you are making a positive impact on someone's life. And thanks for the hot chocolate you give away.”

2023 Insight Survey Participant

4. Champion Winter Design

The Winter Design Guidelines set the standard for how to build and plan for Edmonton’s winter context. Industry, community and City staff were involved in developing the guidelines. However, education on how and why to use them was limited, so adoption of the guidelines has been mixed. Some projects have true four-season placemaking goals and, ultimately, a better return on investment. Others have used the guidelines as part of a checklist without really understanding the benefits of the principles. Developing an education strategy for City staff and industry members would increase awareness of the benefits of designing our city for all four seasons. The Winter City Planner is currently consulted by other City staff and industry partners for advice on how to use the guidelines, but a better approach would be to provide training.

5. Capitalize on Edmonton’s Reputation

Edmonton is a leader in the international winter cities movement. Representatives from other cities often contact the Winter City Planner for advice in improving winter life, applying winter design principles, encouraging their winter businesses, and social planning. The City’s role as secretariat of the Winter Cities Shake-Up conferences is also well known, but the future of the conference series needs to be explored and formalized if we are to retain this status. Large winter events such as Red Bull Crashed Ice, Ice Castles, and The Style Experience FIS Snowboard Big Air World Cup have been attracted to Edmonton in part because of our approach to embracing winter. Continuing to embrace the snowy season, capitalize on our winter assets, and strengthen policies and programming will help to expand the City’s reputation as a leading winter city and increase Edmonton’s brand nationally and internationally. Edmonton’s winter economy flourishes with that brand.

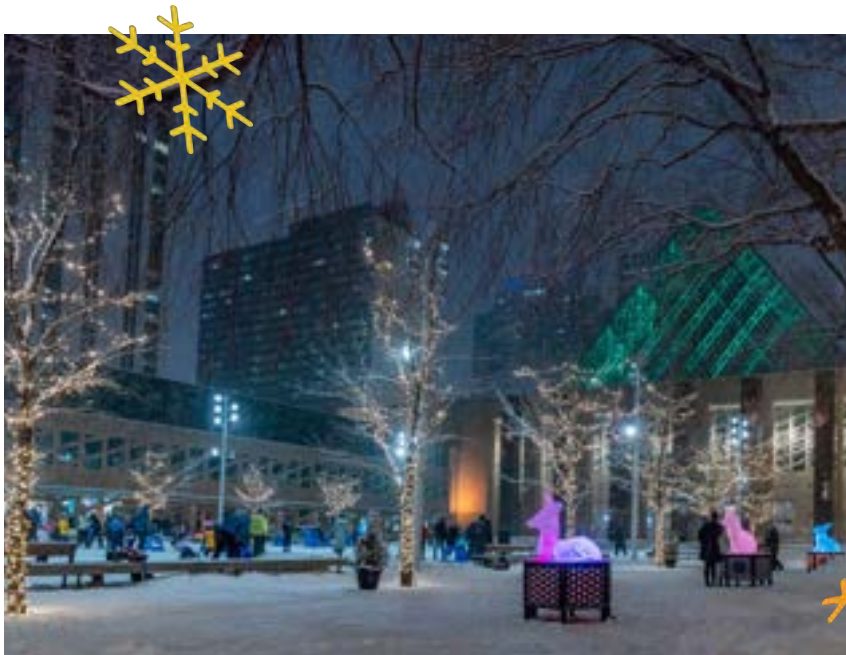
If you design for winter first, summer’s easy.

Liz Wreford, Public City Architecture,
Winter Cities Shake-Up Speaker

In my research on winter city design and governance, there are vastly different perspectives on what the Winter Design guidelines and policy are for—an aesthetic component added to dress up a space for winter or the foundation to create all-season functionality, interest and user experience within our built environments.

Educating city builders, planners, designers, and architects to design for winter first or as a prominent design feature for socio-ecological connections and climate adaptation is needed. In doing so, we can create a macro-scale material culture and operational plans for all seasons. This education can establish a distinct northern vernacular tailored to Canadian winter contexts.

Danielle Soneff, University of Alberta
Graduate Student, Designer of
#YegWinterWarmingHuts



“Since 2014, Edmonton has been an outstanding leader of the winter city movement in Canada and beyond. We are looked to for creativity, a fresh and holistic approach to embracing winter, and an approach that puts community at the centre. WinterCity Edmonton has led this change over a decade. Now is not the time to ease off the culture change.

2023 Insight Survey Participant”



COVID-19 Response and Silver Lining

In 2020, like many other cities around the world, the City of Edmonton responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Provincial health restrictions were ever-changing, and City staff did their best to support residents and businesses. Based on directives from Alberta Health, and the human need for social connection, Edmontonians became increasingly active outside. This did not change when winter hit.

During winter 2020-21, residents flocked to the parks to use the City-maintained winter amenities. At times, such as over the 2020 holiday season, many park spaces saw an influx of Edmontonians, and at Victoria Park some residents had to be turned away in order to maintain social distancing on the busy skating Oval and IceWay. Sports equipment businesses saw boosts in sales and, as a result, residents sometimes had challenges finding winter gear and recreational equipment. Edmontonians also embraced the outdoors by patronizing the many new winter patios that were created by local businesses.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Edmonton had gained an international reputation as a leader in the winter cities field. In the late summer and into the fall of 2020, City staff were approached by numerous cities and organizations for advice on how to support and encourage winter activities and local businesses during the crisis. We began to realize that we had a special story to share.

Research Project

In January 2021, a research project was proposed to better understand if the WinterCity Strategy played a role in how willing Edmontonians were to spend more time outdoors during the pandemic, how well local businesses were able to adapt, and how the City was able to support residents and businesses with winter-related activities.

The research included a public survey, an internal survey with City Neighbourhood Resource Coordinators (NRCs), and ten interviews with internal and external stakeholders. The Insight Community survey consisted of one 16-question survey which was promoted online and one six-question survey accessible through a QR code in river valley parks. The survey available in the parks was shorter as it was designed to be completed on site, during cold weather on cell phones. Overall, 1,684 participants completed the surveys.

Insight Survey Results

The surveys asked residents about their outdoor activities during the winter months and where they found relevant outdoor activity information. 1,584 responses were collected from the Insight Community long survey and 100 responses were collected from the parks QR code short survey.



Activities

Overall, respondents indicated they spent more time outside from November 2020 - March 2021 than they had during the previous winter. The participants who spent less time outside expressed concerns about COVID-19 and/or being around too many people, not knowing which activities they could take part in, and what the COVID-19 restrictions allowed them to do.

Nov 2020 - Mar 2021	Insight Survey Participants	Parks QR Code Survey Participants
Spent more time outside than during the previous winter	40%	71%
Spent less time outside than during the previous winter	23%	8%
Top three activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter walking • Gathering with friends outside • Skating on an outdoor rink or IceWay in a major park 	
Activities tried for the first time or for the first time in over five years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering with friends outside • Winter walking • Visiting a winter patio • Winter picnicking 	N/A



Insight survey participants who indicated that they cycled in winter 2020-21 were asked when they had started cycling. Of the 179 respondents, 24 per cent began that winter. This increase in cycling was reflected in bike shop sales, where business owners reported selling bikes within days of them arriving in the shop.

Communications

The survey asked participants where they got their information about outdoor activities from and how useful they found the WinterCity website and social media channels. It is important to note that the WinterCity social media channels and website were dormant for six months in 2020.

Nov 2020 - Mar 2021	Insight Survey Participants	Parks QR Code Survey Participants
Used the WinterCity Edmonton website	10%	41%
Used WinterCity Edmonton social media	9%	35%



Open Comments

The open-ended responses reflected frustration with the pandemic and public health policies, especially around closed warming facilities and washrooms. Mixed comments were received about parks and trails maintenance, with many complaints around the lack of rental equipment available in parks. However, in general, park facilities were praised.

City Parks

During the first pandemic winter season, Edmontonians embraced outdoor winter activities, particularly in the river valley parks. The City supported these activities in several ways. Signage was added to all parks to help with the new capacity and spacing restrictions, and staff were available at river valley park pavilions to greet residents and explain the new rules. Although indoor warming spaces were closed, City staff enhanced outdoor areas with picnic tables and benches. Some river valley park parking lots were so full that the City had to assist with parking management.

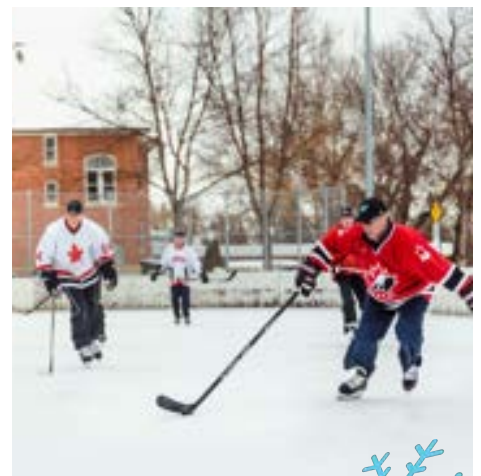
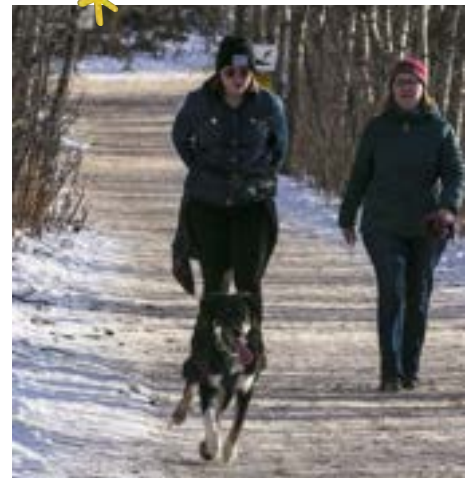
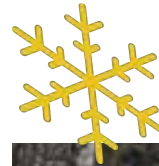
Skating was very popular, so extra outdoor seating was added next to ice surfaces to create skate-change areas. City staff added more lights to the Rundle Park IceWay to make the whole trail skateable at night. Groomed river valley walking and cross-country ski trails were also extremely busy. And, even though there was a long stretch without fresh snow, staff observed residents tobogganing on almost-bare hills.

Food and beverage options were expanded significantly during winter 2020-21. The locations were all busy because residents felt more comfortable meeting outside. Fire pits, heaters and hot drinks were very popular. The mild weather also helped with comfort levels.

Community Activities

Residents were keen to get outside, but looked to the City for guidance on health restrictions, permissible outdoor activities, and how to get snowbank rinks and cross-country ski trails in their neighbourhoods. Many community leagues saw more people using neighbourhood facilities and/or taking part in the limited number of events. However, only half of the traditional number of community league rinks were open, so leagues reported they had residents from other neighbourhoods using their rinks. Managing the high numbers of users while complying with the public health restrictions was a challenge for leagues and their volunteers.

City Neighbourhood Recreation Coordinators (NRCs) provided much more support to communities over winter 2020-21 than usual. Both the NRCs and community leagues were WinterCity partners on several pre-pandemic projects. Both groups reported they felt more prepared to support outdoor winter activities, even under challenging circumstances, because of that work.



Festivals and Events

City staff observed a lot of creativity, ingenuity and collaboration between winter festival organizers. BIAs animated spaces with passive displays for shoppers to wander through and/or offered free timed tickets for markets and events. The large festivals did not hold their regular programming, but Deep Freeze Fest animated Borden Park and Silver Skate Festival set up artistic displays in Hawrelak Park and provided music at the skating rinks in Hawrelak and Victoria Parks. Flying Canoë Volant managed to run most of its regular programming by offering timed tickets to attendees, and volunteers helped monitor spacing between groups. The winter city mindset was strong and organizers rose to the challenge.

The City's Civic Events staff fielded questions from other Canadian cities about how Edmonton was dealing with various winter programming. Inquiries centred around how we managed festivals and events in the winter, especially during the pandemic. City of Edmonton staff explained that, for Edmonton, winter is now mostly embedded in our regular processes. We did not have to adjust regulations or city policies and, as a result, expanding and adapting was fairly easy. Staff reported that other cities were impressed by Edmonton's winter approach.

Winter Patios

In order to support the local food and beverage industry during the early stages of the pandemic, the City set up the Temporary Patio Program. This program allowed for more flexible patio spaces so businesses could remain open and serve customers outside, while complying with provincial public health guidelines. While 110 businesses participated in the program overall, 35 continued to operate temporary winter patios during winter 2020-21. City staff reported that some venues used the WinterCity Strategy as the impetus for trying new ideas on patios, such as windblocking elements and temporary domes.

Because of pre-pandemic work on the winter patio goal, some resources were already in place. City staff who sat on WinterCity working groups brought a winter mindset to their work. A four-season patio tip sheet and presentation slides created for a winter patio workshop were shared with business owners. Venues were also able to draw inspiration from the few established, year-round patios. Vendor feedback on challenges and success led to a review of all patio requirements and regulations, and, ultimately, a streamlined up-date to the City's procedures for patios on public spaces.

Sharing Our Winter Story

Because of our international reputation as a leading winter city, and our success in encouraging more residents to embrace the outdoors in winter, a flurry of requests for presentations were received starting in late summer 2020. Topics included the WinterCity Strategy itself, encouraging winter activities, open space design, supporting businesses (especially with patios), creating festivals and events, and combatting social isolation in the winter. WinterCity staff were involved in no fewer than 17 webinars over six months.



Virtual presentations were made to the following organizations between September 2020 and February 2021:

- 8-80 Cities
- Alberta Parks and Recreation Association
- Barr Foundation (USA)
- Canadian Consulate in Boston
- Canadian Parks and Recreation Association
- Canadian Urban Institute
- City of Hamilton
- Civic Commons Learning Network (USA)
- Develop Nova Scotia
- Friends of the High Line Network (NY)
- Heritage Ohio
- Michigan Association of Planning
- Mobycon (The Netherlands)
- NAIT, Landscape Architecture Program
- University of Calgary, School of Planning
- University of Waterloo, School of Planning
- World Urban Parks

Silver Lining

If a silver lining can be found in the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that the work of the WinterCity Strategy leading up to winter 2020-21 put Edmonton in a position to respond quickly to shifting activities outdoors. The public attitude toward winter had already changed; Edmontonians embraced going outside and our regular parks operations offered many outdoor activities. Community leagues and festival producers responded with creativity, and had support from City staff. Business owners were able to tap into local knowledge on how to offer a winter patio. And fortuitously, Edmonton was able to share its story, leadership and knowledge about embracing winter with other cities across Canada and around the world. Quite simply, we had chipped further into the iceberg than we had thought.



Conclusion

In 2011, a delegation from the City of Edmonton visited five cities in Norway and Finland to learn how to embrace winter. Two years later, Edmonton's WinterCity Strategy was being implemented, and Jason Lee Norman was publishing *40 Below: Edmonton's Winter Anthology*. Jason had collected stories from Edmontonians about their memories and experiences of winter. Some are tales of childhood fun, others lament the cold. In *I am a Houseplant*, Michael Hamm explains, "I'm a houseplant. I do nothing, and die every winter." He then writes:

"Some people embrace winter. This October I saw these people gathered on 104th Street. There was hot chocolate and a fire and people making speeches. It was all to try to inspire people to get outside and embrace winter, but I didn't know that at the time. I just drove by them and thought, "those dear poor homeless people."

Michael was describing the 2012 WinterCity Strategy kick-off celebration. That fire on 104th Street created the embers for a culture shift in Edmonton. We have chipped away at the iceberg of systems change and embedded a winter lens into our city. We've made it easier for residents to play outside and travel by active transportation. We've written design guidelines to increase winter safety and comfort as well as incorporate elements for winter fun, beauty and interest. We've helped increase the capacity and sustainability of our winter festivals and developed a four-season patio culture. And, we've helped Edmontonians celebrate the season by sharing Edmonton's great northern story locally, nationally and internationally.

We hope we've encouraged Michael to change his winter story, too, and that he's learned to thrive in the colder season. While everyone may not embrace winter wholeheartedly, we've heard from many Edmontonians who now do. As we were wrapping up the research for this report in October 2023, we received an unexpected and surprising email: a team from Rovaniemi, Finland, one of the cities Edmonton staff visited over a decade ago, reached out to ask for advice on how to help their residents embrace winter. We knew then that we were truly on our way to transforming Edmonton into a world-leading winter city.



October 31st, 2023

Greetings Edmonton!

I'm contacting you because I work on a project where we are developing the city of Rovaniemi so that people would be more active outdoors and also tourists would experience more pleasant moments while in Rovaniemi.

We have heard that you are pioneers in how winter is planned and utilized for the enjoyment of the residents, so we would love to hear your thoughts and tips that we could learn from.

If that's okay, please suggest a few times that work for you and we'll meet via Teams.

Have a very good day!

*Project Research Team
Lapin AMK / Lapland University of Applied Sciences*



Appendices

A. Progress on Individual Implementation Actions

Note: Action numbers correspond to the Implementation Plan, not the *For the Love of Winter* strategy document.

Winter Life

Action has created an impact.
Action requires more effort to make an impact or is no longer meaningful or necessary.

Goal 1 - Make It Easier to “Go Play Outside”: Provide More Opportunities for Outdoor Activity

L1.1 Encourage and promote the development of permanent and temporary commercial anchor points throughout the river valley and in select city parks that offer people a place to linger, warm up and enjoy. Amend City of Edmonton governance framework to allow for more commercial development in the river valley and in select city parks.

Cafés with winter patios can now be found in Louise McKinney and Hawrelak Parks as well as at the Valley Zoo and the Muttart Conservatory.

Restaurants next to cross-country ski trails were piloted at Victoria and Riverside Golf Courses. They were popular with park users, but did not generate enough business for local business owners to continue them.

A winterized food truck was explored for Victoria Park, but internal policies would need to be reviewed to advance this action.

By The Numbers

4 river valley parks with cafés

What We Heard

“Cafes at the golf courses (Victoria, Riverside, etc.) should be open more often in the winter. Can't get a cocoa after a skate or ski right now. Maybe a regular coffee cart at Victoria oval? There should be more opportunities to get a warm drink, snack, refill water bottles, and use a public bathroom in the winter.”
2023 Insight Survey Respondent

L1.2 Work creatively with existing and potential vendors to encourage and promote multi-season equipment rental and lesson opportunities in three new river valley locations.

Space in City facilities has been rented to local businesses to offer equipment rentals. Segway, snowshoe and fat bike rentals, as well as tours, are available in Louise McKinney Park.

Skate rentals and sharpening are available at Rundle and Hawrelak Parks. (While Hawrelak Park is closed for renewal, these services will move to Laurier Park.)

Cross-country ski rentals are not yet available at ski trails.

By the Numbers

3 equipment rental locations

What We Heard

“Consider a winter recreation equipment library in conjunction with EPL and the winter festival warehouse.”
2023 Insight Survey Respondent

L1.3 Further develop outdoor skating opportunities in the river valley, communities and elsewhere.

IceWays

Two new IceWay skating trails were created in the river valley. First piloted in winter 2015-16, the Victoria Park IceWay has been a popular spot to skate and take Instagram photos. This 750 m trail wound through the trees and looped back to the Ice Oval. The following winter, river valley park staff created the Rundle Park IceWay. Expanded over time, it is now 1.5 km long. Both trails are lit for evening skating, and a treed section of the Victoria IceWay has artistic lanterns with coloured lights.

By the Numbers

2 IceWays
2.25 km river valley skating trails

River valley skaters, winter 2019-20:
40,400 Rundle IceWay
145,744 Victoria Skating Oval
152,335 Victoria IceWay
76,312 Hawrelak Lake Ice
36,451 Hawrelak Snowbank Rink

Community Skating

Community leagues do an excellent job of providing neighbourhood skating surfaces. Pick-up hockey, however, dominates many of the surfaces, leaving little ice time or room for other activities. Grants were awarded to community leagues to create skating trails and non-hockey ice surfaces. These have been very popular with families and young children.

Three leagues were supported with equipment to maintain their rinks: funds were provided for a snow broom and two storage sheds for Zambonis.

Neighbourhood ice surfaces saw increased demand during the 2020-21 COVID-19 winter season, but leagues were cash-strapped due to loss of hall rental and programming revenue. In collaboration with the grants team in Community Services, microgrants were awarded to 69 leagues to help cover water costs that winter.

Accessible Ice Surfaces

Collaboration with the Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy Liaison led to ramps being piloted at three community league rinks. These ramps made the rinks accessible for all ages and abilities in the summer for off-leash use, and in winter 2022-23 for skating. Options and recommendations for an ongoing project are being explored.

The entrance to the IceWay at Rundle Park is at grade and is accessible for users of all abilities. The Rundle Family Centre is also accessible, but the washrooms are not up to current universal design standards.

8 community skating trails

- 50 skaters/day at the Kenilworth Skating Trail (approx. 3600/season). Skaters travelled from as far away as Terwillegar and Sherwood Park to use the trail.
- Glastonbury Community League members reported using the rink an average of 9 times the first winter. Two years later, survey respondents reported using it multiple times per week.

1 snow broom

2 Zamboni storage sheds

3 accessible community league rinks

69 water cost microgrants

What We Heard

"(The Glastonbury Skating Trail) got a lot of neighbors together, always someone out there to say hello to. My oldest was able to go by himself and skate with buddies. It was an amazing close to home fun healthy activity for pre-teen/teens to do. Keeps kids busy with positive activities."

Glastonbury Community League 2019 Survey Respondent

L1.4 Increase cross-country ski trail grooming service levels in the river valley, and enhance ski trail connectivity between river valley parks, in support of the 'End to End' ski trail vision.

A new ski-doo was purchased in 2014 for City staff to improve trail grooming in the river valley parks.

A surge in the use of the Capilano-Goldstick-Goldbar Parks trails, especially since winter 2020-21, has resulted in an increase in grooming provided by the Edmonton Nordic Ski Club.

In winter 2022-23, new cross-country ski trails were piloted at Laurier Park. Lighting was added for nighttime use.

Top-of-bank/Community Ski Trails

While this action focused on river valley trails, community efforts also led to more cross-country ski trails in neighbourhoods. In all, nine communities have worked with the City's NRCs to offer this amenity, though not all of them offer trails every winter.

Century Park Locking Ski Rack

The neighbourhoods around the Century Park LRT Station are home to many dedicated cross-country skiers who began commuting to the station on skis. Looking for a place to secure their skis, they worked with the Southwest Area Council (SWAC) community league organization and ETS to install a locking ski rack at the LRT Station. The rack was installed in January 2015. SWAC was responsible for the rack's maintenance. Significant repairs were conducted in 2019, but the rack was ultimately removed in 2020 due to safety issues.

By the Numbers

1 new ski-doo for City park staff for ski trail grooming in the river valley

7 communities with groomed cross-country ski trails in winter 2022-23

13 km/650 hours of cross-country ski trail grooming in the river valley by the City's partner, Edmonton Nordic Ski Club

15 km of cross-country ski trail grooming by City park staff in the river valley

River valley skiers, winter 2020-21:

11,430 Hawrelak Ski Trail

28,594 Victoria Ski Trail

48,893 Gold Bar Ski Trail

What We Heard

"Regular grooming of the cross-country ski trails is much appreciated! I ski regularly at Victoria and was always happy to see groomed skate ski trails - thank you!"

2023 Insight Survey Respondent

L1.5 Provide and promote free skates for people to use at outdoor public and community skating rinks.

Many community leagues provide free skate and helmet rentals at their rinks, but rely on members for donations of old equipment. As a result, some leagues are missing sizes or do not have enough to meet demand. Funding was provided to help to fill those gaps.

Keeping the free skates sharp is an annual financial cost to community leagues, as well as a draw on volunteer hours. In 2019, Empire Park Community League applied for and was granted funding to purchase a skate sharpener. This equipment has reduced their commercial sharpening costs and the number of volunteer hours spent transporting the skates. The community league also provides free sharpening services to community members and surrounding leagues.

Boyle Street Plaza

Boyle Street Community League is an inner-city league with few amenities. The Boyle Street Plaza was designed with space for an outdoor skating rink in the winter. This league was provided with a full set of skates, helmets and storage racks when the rink opened. Attracting volunteers to look after the rink and equipment was difficult in this inner-city neighbourhood. An honorarium was established to assist with attracting rink volunteers and an attendant. Despite this, the rink was closed after a few seasons due to lack of staffing. The equipment was donated to other community leagues and Sport Central for other in-need families to use. The rink space was redesigned as a playspace.

City Hall Plaza

The Edmonton Arts Council offers free skate rentals and winter programming at the City Hall Rink. Free skates for the program were acquired from the shuttered Community Services Skate Van Program (a mobile program that offered skate rentals to schools and community groups). Swing 'n Skate programming began on Sundays in 2012. Swing dancing was offered inside City Hall, while skating was held outside. As a live band played inside, the music was piped outside to provide entertainment for both groups.

When the City Hall Rink was closed for renovations in 2019, Community Swing 'n Skate programs were hosted at community leagues across the city with music and free skate rentals.

In January 2022, when COVID-19 restrictions were eased, Ice Grooves programming was created for Friday and Saturday evenings, in addition to the Sunday Swing 'n Skate. Ice Grooves offers free skate rentals, fire pits, local DJ music, partnerships with winter festivals and learn-to-skate tips. Staff report many participants are new Canadians, new skaters and people who do not own skates.

By the Numbers

1 skate storage rack
1 helmet storage rack
1 skate sharpener
2 hockey nets
4 pairs of trekking poles
5 community leagues
35 hockey sticks
45 helmets
127 pairs of skates

Boyle Street Rink
1 part-time attendant
6 community volunteers

City Hall Rink
1,707 people used free rental skates in
January and February 2023

What We Heard

"The skate sharpener and the skate program, at Empire Park Community League, has been a resounding success! Now we can sharpen any of the skates that are to be used, and re-sharpen some of the heavy usage sizes. So that is a savings of money, volunteer hours and safety. Because of the availability of skates, of which EPCL does not charge for usage, and helmets, we have attracted many newcomers to Canada, as well as many new to skating families. Last year, we were lucky enough to offer skates and skating to many families from the Ukraine. It was a safe gathering place for Moms and some Dads to meet while the children skated. It was nice to have the means to offer, simple as it was."
Brian, Rink Attendant, Empire Park Community League

"Just knowing that there was a desire and commitment for winter programming gave us confidence to continue and grow. We would not have put the same effort into programming (City Hall Plaza), accessing a skate collection, or experimenting with different ways of producing the programming if support for winter programming wasn't there. Personally, being invited to the different groups and meetings around WinterCity Strategy ... helped me see how our little program fit into the bigger picture of creating a vibrant winter city."
Bob Rasko, Manager, Activations and Connections, Edmonton Arts Council

L1.6 Develop a guide/toolkit on how to hold a winter party, event or festival

This action began with the idea of producing one document. However, in response to community feedback and demand for more information, three toolkits were created to support winter fun: Be Active, Be Social and Be Creative.

The winter party toolkits encourage a culture of shared responsibility and appropriate risk-taking by outlining tips for playing safely in the snow, using fire pits and preparing for winter weather. They also provide ideas for snow play, recipes and creating *hyggelig* spaces in backyards.

In November 2021, WinterCity and Neighbourhoods staff partnered to host a Winter Placemaking Workshop for community leagues. The WinterCity content was largely drawn from the three toolkits.

By the Numbers

1 Winter Placemaking Workshop
3 toolkits
5,777 views of Be Creative pages
33,986 views of Be Social pages
107,218 views of Be Active pages

What We Heard

"It would be awesome if we encouraged more block parties in winter months!"
2023 Insight Survey Respondent

L1.7 Coordinate a city-wide winter festival at the community level in conjunction with one of Edmonton's big winter festivals.

Efforts were made to encourage a city-wide winter fest, but logistics and lack of equipment rentals created challenges. Leagues were happy to host their own events on preferred dates. This action is no longer needed.

L1.8 Create opportunities and develop parameters for the use of fire in outdoor public spaces (e.g., fire pits, fireplaces, bonfires, heaters and other fire amenities).

Hawrelak Park EFCL Pavilion

The Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues kept skaters in mind when designing the 100th Anniversary Plaza in Hawrelak Park. A permanent, gas-fed fireplace was installed in the heart of the plaza. Skate mats are placed over the plaza concrete in the winter to provide access between the pond ice and the seating area.

Fire Pits

City-designed fire pits were built for activities on Churchill Square. Taking safety into account, they were built 48" H x 69" W. The height of the pits and the depth of the safety rings has created challenges for some staff when lighting the fires because the internal barrels are difficult to reach. Staff also have to discourage parents from setting their children on the rings so they can roast bannock. Shorter fire pits, 36" H, were built by City staff to add to the winter festival shared equipment inventory. These pits are easier for fire attendants to light and safer for children who are roasting food. Both sizes are still used on the square.

Fire Pits & BBQs in Parks

Edmonton has a long history of fire and barbecue pits in the river valley parks. These amenities have always been available year-round, but not always accessible. River valley park staff now clear pathways to some picnic sites and fire pits in the winter, and large sites are now bookable.

Patio Fire Tables

The City's patio program has been updated and allows for electric and propane heaters on parklet and partial and full sidewalk patios (but not small sidewalk patios). Solid, gel, or liquid-fuel fire features are not allowed, which eliminates wood-burning fire pits and stoves. However, propane-fed fire tables with visible flames are allowed and are becoming more popular. Wood-burning fire pits and stoves are allowed on patios on private property.

By the Numbers

1 gas-fed fireplace at Valley Zoo
2 gas-fed fireplaces at Hawrelak Park
2 fire pits built for Churchill Square
4 fire pits built for festivals

What We Heard

"Although City-designed and/or City-approved fire pits exist already in some parks, we are still receiving inquiries internally on how to include new ones in designs. There seems to be a knowledge gap about how to design and/or procure fire pits that meet City codes. This is not only a challenge for internal design teams, but also a barrier to advancing WinterCity goals. More work needs to be done to find fire pit designs that are easy to procure and that meet City codes while satisfying operational concerns."
WinterCity Planning Team, 2023

L1.9 Sponsor free alpine ski and/or snowboard lessons at local downhill ski clubs.

Annual grants were awarded to Snow Valley and Edmonton Ski Clubs to provide free ski and snowboard lessons to newcomers and vulnerable Edmontonians. Since the WinterCity Strategy was launched, Rabbit Hill Ski Club has been annexed into the City of Edmonton boundary, but has not yet identified a need for City funding.

Snow Valley Ski Club

Since winter 2012-13, Snow Valley Ski Club has enhanced their Community Initiatives Program by accessing an annual WinterCity grant. The club provides lessons and lift tickets to schools in low-income neighbourhoods, organizations that serve New Canadians, and groups that help low-income families. They also host a Welcome to Winter event for some of these organizations.

Edmonton Ski Club (ESC)

For eight winters, the Edmonton Ski Club has received a WinterCity grant to provide free ski and snowboard experiences to Edmontonians. The club has provided multi-week lessons and day camps to schools and organizations that serve low-income families. They have also started offering a Muslim Women's Night with all-female instructors, as well as lessons in French, and a Pride Night for members of the LGBTQ2S+ community.

Edmonton Nordic Ski Club (ENSC)

In January and February 2017, ENSC piloted a Ski at School program with three junior high schools. One program was held at the school, with ENSC grooming tracks in the schoolyard. Warm, then cold, temperatures damaged the tracks and the program was cut from four weeks to three. The other two schools attended lessons at Gold Bar Park, which provided better, more predictable skiing conditions. The pilot was a success and the program continued for a few more winters without WinterCity funding before being discontinued.

By the Numbers

Snow Valley
7392 experiences
45 organizations
14 schools

Edmonton Ski Club
4 schools
23 organizations
3607 experiences

Edmonton Nordic Ski Club
3 schools
197 experiences

What We Heard

"Thank you for supporting our high-risk and homeless youth. We had a wonderful day today. The kids could not stop talking about it. Appreciate your staff and all the love, help, and support we felt."
Snow Valley Community Initiatives Program Participant, Snow Valley Year End Report 2022-23

"The Edmonton Ski Club is "The" inclusive snow sports learning facility in Edmonton, and the city's partnership under the WinterCity Program has helped immeasurably in this messaging. The ESC has, in turn, continues [sic] to support and promote the city's WinterCity Strategy at every opportunity and will continue to do so regardless of continued funding to get people outside during our wonderful winters."
Jeremy Derksen, Edmonton Ski Club Year End Report 2019-20

L1.10 Develop integrated wayfinding systems and a marketing strategy that help residents and tourists find their way into the river valley and to its amenities, particularly from downtown.

Wayfinding signage, print and digital maps were harmonized, and more seasonal information was added, e.g., toboggan hills, skating surfaces and cross-country ski trails. A winter version of the Kids Map of Edmonton was created by the Child Friendly Initiative in partnership with WinterCity Edmonton.

Additional signage is being added at top-of-bank locations to assist the public with navigation.

New cross-country ski trail signage was added to the river valley parks in winter 2023-24.

By the Numbers

1 Kids Map of Edmonton: Winter

14 active transportation priority routes will have new signage installed

35 neighbourhoods will have updated signage through the neighbourhood renewal programs

What We Heard

"I love them and it is such a long time coming! More please!"
2022 Bike Route Wayfinding Survey Participant

L1.11 Pilot several creative projects throughout the city that use snow and ice as a resource that is fun, beautiful and interesting.

Snow Slide

A 25-metre snow slide was built on the steps in Churchill Square for the 2015 Winter Cities Shake-Up Festival and Market. Even though it was a temporary structure, the slide had to meet playground safety standards for grade and height of the chute sides. Snow was harvested from Rundle Park for the project. Despite the popularity of the slide with children and adults, concerns over risk and vandalism meant that it had to be dismantled as soon as the festival was over. As staff were breaking it up, residents arrived and were disappointed, hoping to use it again.

Ice Castles

Support was provided for Silver Skate Festival’s bid to attract Ice Castles to Edmonton. Legislation around using snow and ice for creating structures is not clear, which resulted in many challenges for the festival producers. The challenges were overcome, however, and Ice Castles were built in Hawrelak Park for five winter seasons, starting in winter 2015-16.

Harvesting Snow

Festivals that rely on large amounts of snow for programming prefer artificial snow (i.e., made with a snow gun). Unlike harvested natural snow, artificial snow compacts better in blocks for snow sculptures and is not contaminated with debris (e.g., leaves, dirt and/or sticks). These contaminants create melting and carving issues for the artists, sometimes to the point where the entire sculpture’s design needs to be revised. (Debris is darker than snow and heats up from the sun, causing the snow block to melt faster.)

Snow/ice shavings from arenas cannot be used as they are potentially contaminated with biohazard material.

Climate Change

Climate change models predict more rain and less snow during future winters, so work on this action may have to adapt.

By the Numbers

1 snow slide in Churchill Square
5 Ice Castles
20,000 tonnes of snow from Rundle Park for the snow slide

What We Heard

“Why not put an ice patch in the parks that have flat ground. There does not need to be anything special and snow can be built up to make seating. Very cost effective and for those with children who live in apartments or are low income can enjoy the space and get to know their neighbors. ... Other events like snow sculptures (not ice sculptures) that kids can build or snow mazes (no higher than 2 feet) are other low cost functions which build community spirit.”

2023 Insight Survey Participant

“Bringing the Ice Castles to Canada was not without its challenges. What kind of building codes can we use? Are there building codes? After many conversations with previous site hosts in the United States, the Ice Castles Team, engineers and City officials, we were able to move through these processes.”
Erin DiLoreto, Executive Producer, Silver Skate Festival

Goal 2 - Improve Winter Transportation for Pedestrians, Cyclists and Public Transit Users

L2.1 Categorize and prioritize snow clearing on City-cleared shared-use paths, walkways and sidewalks to better service pedestrians and cyclists.

WinterCity staff supported related work by:

- Participating in 2018 and 2022 reviews of the City’s Snow and Ice Control Policy, including speaking at the 2018 Winter Walkways Symposium.
- Participating in the 2023 review of the Community Sandboxes Program as a stakeholder.
- Presenting in 2023 as speaker on snow clearing and active transportation routes for The Centre for Active Transportation.

L2.2 Develop better sidewalk snow removal strategies in Business Revitalization Zones so that public sidewalks are cleared within a reasonable, designated time.

This action remains open.

L2.3 Pilot a project in which the City of Edmonton is responsible for residential sidewalk snow clearing in a higher density residential/transit-oriented development area. Focus on opportunities to create white-of-ways.

This action was not worked on directly, but support was given to NRCs who worked with the southwest community leagues to create groomed cross-country ski trails. These trails were used for commuting from local neighbourhoods to the Century Park LRT Station.

Although a pilot project was not initiated, the City cleared the sidewalks along Candy Cane Lane in January 2023. After the festival ended, the snow was compacted so much that residents were unable to clear their sidewalks. Snow-clearing warnings were issued by the City prematurely, which saw a backlash in the media. Once it was clear that residents could not remove the compacted snow and ice, the City graded all affected walkways.

L2.4 Pilot free public transit below certain temperatures.

This action remains open. The City's Extreme Weather Response for cold includes a free shuttle service to local NGO shelters for vulnerable persons. Free transit for all residents is not yet available.

L2.5 Pilot a snow clearing program on an on-street bike route.

106 Street Bike Lane

In winters 2013-14 and 2014-15, Sustainable Transportation and Roadway Maintenance led a pilot project to clear the painted, on-street bike lane on 106 Street from 29 Avenue to Saskatchewan Drive. The goal was to maintain a one-metre clear lane for cyclists.

Maintaining the bike lane was challenging throughout the pilot project, with the minimum standard seldom met. The result led to rethinking bike lane design. Separated, protected bike lanes have become the preferred design for Edmonton's winter context as they are easier to clear and maintain throughout the winter.

Other Support for Winter Cycling

After the downtown protected bike grid was built in 2017, Edmonton saw an increase in year-round cyclists. The culture around cycling in all seasons started to shift and the need for information around winter cycling was identified. The City and WinterCity Edmonton supported and championed winter cycling in several ways.

Winter Bike to Work Day

Winter Bike to Work Day is an international grassroots event that is supported by the Winter Cycling Federation. The first Edmonton event was held in 2014 by Earth's General Store. In 2016, the City began hosting the event by providing hot drinks for morning cycling commuters. The event is typically hosted by several City internal partners, including Walk Edmonton/Active Mobility, WinterCity, and the Bike Outreach Team/Bike Education Street Team. This has been an annual event since 2016, except for 2021, when it was not held because of COVID-19 restrictions. An online event called Winterbikealoopa was run by the Winter Cycling Federation instead, and cyclists were encouraged to upload and share interesting cycling loops in their neighbourhoods. WinterCity social media campaigns for Winter Bike to Work Day have included winter cycling challenges with prizes, such as, winter patio gift cards and registrations to the 2024 Winter Cycling Congress.

Winter Cycling Stories

The City's communications team and WinterCity have created blogs and videos to encourage Edmontonians to cycle more in the winter. Links to the stories can be found on the WinterCity [Winter Cycling](#) page. City staff have also been guest speakers at community winter cycling workshops.

By the Numbers

1 pilot project
3 City videos
3 Studded Tire Challenges
4 Blog posts

What We Heard

"I didn't expect the bike paths to be as maintained as they've been, I use a bike for most of my trips in our area as the commute times are comparable/better than our car, and only slightly worse in winter conditions. Nothing beats getting outside regularly though!"

2023 Insight Survey Participant

"When I moved to Edmonton, from Vancouver, I didn't know how to drive. Biking was my main mode of transportation. I knew there was going to be snow and ice and cold for a good portion of the year and I didn't want that to stop me from being able to ride my bike. I prefer more active modes of transportation and cycling is a great way to model that for my kids. It's a fun way to get around. They enjoy it. They see more than if they were in the car. It's also economical."
Karen Parker, Year-round Cyclist, WinterCity Blog

"Bike Edmonton was awesome in every interaction! I attended a great workshop and learned a lot, and the volunteers who got my winter tires on were extremely generous with their time and knowledge. City of Edmonton's WinterCity Strategy funding for bike tires really got me out there - I doubt I'd have done any biking since the snow fell and instead I've made 6 or 7 trips!"

2021 Studded Tire Challenge Participant

Studded Tire Challenge

WinterCity has partnered with Bike Edmonton to provide studded tires to new winter cyclists. The Studded Tire Program began in 2021 and has over 20 recipients per year, on average.

L2.6 Work with Community Recreation Coordinators and other partners to identify areas where there is a real need to clear snow from walkways in key parks, utility lots and/or other specific routes.

This action remains open.

L2.7 Pilot increased bylaw enforcement for residential sidewalk snow clearing in a higher density residential/transit-oriented development area.

This action remains open.

L2.8 Support non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to enhance shuttle-type transit for vulnerable street populations, to make sure people have easy access to social agency warming shelters.

When approached early in the strategy work, the various shelters indicated that their existing systems were working. This action was deemed no longer needed. In 2019, as a result of work conducted by other areas of City administration, City Council adopted Policy C620 Supporting Vulnerable People During Extreme Weather Conditions. Starting in 2022, the Extreme Weather Response for cold spells has included a free City-run winter shelter shuttle service to transport vulnerable persons to local NGOs.

L2.9 Develop accommodations for jaywalking and street crossing bylaws, so pedestrians can exercise discretion in crossing lower speed roads after yielding to traffic.

This action remains open.

L2.10 Work with Edmonton Transit Services (ETS) and other partners to identify best options for more frequent and/or heated and/or wind-protected transit shelters.

This action remains open. ETS currently provides heaters strategically in transit centres which serve large numbers of riders. Existing shelter heaters do not come on until the temperature inside the transit centre drops below -5°C in order to balance public comfort with environmental stewardship. Although heaters are typically installed only in permanent transit centres, in late fall 2021, five shelters at the temporary West Edmonton Mall transit station were fitted with heaters and benches for winter.

L2.11 Increase promotion and awareness of ETS Stop Request program.

WinterCity has supported the Stop Request program through website and social media promotions during the winter months.

ETS does not track stop requests. Data covering usage or increased awareness of the program are not available.

L2.12 Explore further opportunities to assist families to get around the city, easily and inexpensively, to winter events and activities.

Shuttle Bus Pilot to Victoria Park

In order to increase access to Victoria Park during the 2020 Family Day weekend, a free shuttle bus service was piloted. The route ran from Victoria Park to RE/MAX Field, along Jasper Avenue to connect with two LRT stops, to the Government Transit Centre, and back to the park. The service was not well used, but several factors came into play: it was a colder-than-average weekend, overall skating numbers were down, marketing could have been more wide-spread, and the COVID-19 pandemic was on the horizon. City parks staff liked the idea of a transit connection to Victoria Park and recommended trying again during the Christmas to New Year timeframe. Another shuttle service pilot should take into account what we learned about constraints for running a bus into the parking lot and increase advertising.

DATS ElfMobiles Pilot on Candy Cane Lane

The Open Streets Nights on Candy Cane Lane have proven very

By the Numbers

2 pilot projects

What We Heard

“Candy Cane Lane is the longest-standing winter event in Edmonton. We’ve been working to make it more accessible by partnering with the City to get the ElfMobiles on the Lane during Open Streets Nights.”
Duane Hunter, Candy Cane Lane Resident and Volunteer

successful. In 2021, a citizen asked about accessibility for residents who would like to enjoy the quieter, vehicle-free nights but who have mobility challenges. In response, ElfMobiles were piloted in 2022. The City of Edmonton provided two DATS buses, DATS drivers volunteered their time, and Candy Cane Lane provided a booking system for seats. The buses travelled the lane behind the horse-drawn sleigh convoy, offering up to four wheelchair spots and 24 ambulatory accessible seats per sleigh ride time slot. The ElfMobiles were run again in 2023.

Winter Design

Action has created an impact.

Action requires more effort to make an impact or is no longer meaningful or necessary.

Goal 3 - Design Our Communities for Winter Safety and Comfort

D1.1 Develop winter design guidelines that outline performance expectations including consideration for safe, comfortable and aesthetic winter design. Guidelines should also include recommendations for their adoption.

The Winter Design Working Group, a sub-committee of the WinterCity Advisory Council, was dedicated to completing the Winter Design Guidelines. They were supported by a core project team of City staff from the then-Sustainable Development Department and the WinterCity Office.

The guidelines were published in 2016 and awarded the 2018 Canadian Institute of Planners' Award of Merit in the Urban Design category.

Requests for use of images and content have been received from several organizations, including:

- UrbanShift Academy and the United Nations Environment Programme
- Zamek Cieszyn (an urban design centre), Poland
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation - The Blue Marble Gallery
- *Seasonal Sociology*, University of Toronto Press

The Winter Design Guidelines do not include patio-specific design tips, but as winter patios became more popular, venues asked for help with design elements. A graduate student was hired to create the [Four Season Patio Design Tips](#) sheet. This information sheet may be integrated into a future edition of the Winter Design Guidelines.

By the Numbers

- 1 Winter Design Guidelines document
- 1 National urban design award
- 1 Four Season Patio Design Tip Sheet

What We Heard

"These guidelines are for the planning department to help get these ideas into the permitting applications from builders. This is really a tool for city planners to help enforce these ideas.... It will take a few years to really see the impact. But I think making these guidelines will have a long-lasting impact on our buildings and public spaces." ([CBC News Interview](#))

Shafraaz Kaba, Architect, Member of the Winter Design Working Group

"I work in the development industry and have many clients that have attempted to provide winter city strategies in their developments only to get shot down by the City of Edmonton. Parks with fire pits, lighting, warming huts, all shot down. The City is not promoting anything, they are the barrier."
2023 Insight Survey Respondent

D1.2 Conduct two pilot projects to test new guidelines in one new development and in the redevelopment of an older area.

Pilot projects in (re)developments were not worked on, but warming huts were piloted in parks.

Local Warming: A Warming Hut Pilot Project for Edmonton

In 2015, an industrial design student from the University of Alberta proposed a project to sprinkle the river valley parks with warming

By the Numbers

- 1 pilot project
- 3 warming huts in 3 parks
- 9 geodomes in 3 parks

huts. In January 2016, the first wooden warming huts were piloted in Hawrelak Park. Over the next three winters, warming huts were piloted in Hawrelak, Victoria and Rundle Parks. The huts were well used and liked by residents. Challenges to the project included the logistics of moving the huts in and out of the parks without damaging the turf, and storage during the summer months.

YEG Valley Domes

In January-April 2022 and winter 2022-23, nine geodesic domes were leased to provide warming spaces at four river valley skating surfaces. The domes were equipped with picnic tables and provided seasonal spaces to change skates, get out of the wind and have a rest. The domes were well used, but financial constraints prevented renewal of the lease. Summer storage and staff constraints prevented the purchase of domes.

What We Heard

"I do like the clear dome shelters at Victoria Park for skaters."
2023 Insight Survey Respondent

"(The domes are) a nice place to lace up."
Trevor Chow-Fraser, Let's Find Out Podcast, 63 - A Park For All Seasons

D1.3 Create a new City of Edmonton policy that requires adherence to the winter city design guidelines.

[Winter Design Policy C588](#), was adopted by Council in December 2016. The purpose of this policy is to: "Inform the planning and design of new development to achieve the outcomes, and realize the vision, of Edmonton as a global model for winter city living and cold-weather design."

This policy is written in such a way that the supporting Winter Design Guidelines can be updated without having to revise the policy.

Recent research by a University of Alberta student shows there is still a need for more education around how and why the policy and guidelines should be used.

By the Numbers

1 policy

What We Heard

"In my research on winter city design and governance, there are vastly different perspectives on what the Winter Design Guidelines and policy are for—an aesthetic component added to dress up a space for winter or the foundation to create all-season functionality, interest and user experience within our built environments."
Danielle Soneff, University of Alberta Graduate Student, Designer of #YegWinterWarmingHuts

D1.4 Update design standards to accommodate better winter design for walkways and crosswalks.

This action remains open.

D1.5 Require construction of boulevard sidewalks as a first choice in new developments and in redevelopments.

This action remains open. Future work should consider what we have learned from a local resident about challenges with boulevards and winter wheelchair accessibility: Wheelchair ramps that are installed on the right-hand side of a vehicle extend onto boulevards, and many wheelchair users cannot move through the snow from the end of the ramp to the sidewalk. While there are many benefits to boulevards in a winter city, the context of this design should be explored more to ensure our city remains as accessible as possible to all residents.

D1.6 Promote and foster a greater understanding of winter city design.

A sustained effort to educate local city builders has not yet happened. However, recent research indicates the importance of this action.

What We Heard

"Educating city builders, planners, designers, and architects to design for winter first or as a prominent design feature for socio-ecological connections and climate adaptation is needed. In doing so, we can create a macro-scale material culture and operational plans for all seasons. This education can establish a distinct northern vernacular tailored to Canadian winter contexts."
Danielle Soneff, University of Alberta Graduate Student, Designer of #YegWinterWarmingHuts

Goal 4 - Incorporate Urban Design Elements for Winter Fun, Activity, Beauty and Interest

D2.1 Incorporate winter design guidelines into new and, as opportunities arise, existing City of Edmonton governance framework and associated operations and maintenance approaches.

ConnectEdmonton: Edmonton's Strategic Plan for 2019-2028

An opportunity was missed with this plan. No direct reference is made to Edmonton's status as a winter city, but winter images are scattered throughout the document.

Edmonton City Plan (2020)

Edmonton's winter city identity is acknowledged and embraced throughout The City Plan. It is referenced in three outcomes and in the mobility section, but most directly in direction 1.3.2: Support Edmonton's identity as a winter city through its infrastructure, design, events and economy.

The Bike Plan: Making Cycling Inviting in All Seasons for All Reasons (2020)

Support for winter cycling is embedded in the new Bike Plan. It is encouraged through design, programming and monitoring.

River Valley Parks Maps

Winter recreation amenities and activities were added to the river valley parks paper maps and online digital map.

Pedestrian Wayfinding Signage

New pedestrian wayfinding signage included lighting and reflective features for legibility during the winter darkness.

By the Numbers

1 online recreation map with winter amenities
2 strategic plans
3 river valley parks maps with winter amenities

What We Heard

"Based on the WinterCity work, we have added a winter recreation side to the three River Valley Parks maps we produce as well as all the winter recreation amenities to our public facing digital map. The Winter Design Guidelines also played a factor in the design of our pedestrian wayfinding signage system."
Ian Hosler, Strategy Implementation Coordinator, Mobility, Urban Planning and Economy, City of Edmonton

D2.2 Prepare an Integrated Lighting Master Plan/Program to identify buildings, landmarks, bridges and public open spaces for special lighting consideration.

Development of a master plan began, but the Winter Design Working Group concluded that creative lighting guidelines would be more useful. A draft is being written and will be included as a chapter in the Winter Design Guidelines.

Lighting Projects and Installations

A number of lighting projects were developed to explore how to use light creatively.

Winter Cities Shake-Up Conference Temporary Light Installations

Temporary artistic light installations were set up as part of the 2017 Winter Cities Shake-Up conference to demonstrate how creative lighting can change a space.

Alleys of Light

Light boxes were funded along two Alleys of Light downtown, curated by The Works.

Arrowhead Trail

A community-based lighting project conducted in partnership with the Callingwood North community and a City Community Safety Liaison. String lights were hung along fence lines to light Arrowhead Trail, a pedestrian path through the neighbourhood. The story is told in the [Lighting Up Arrowhead Trail](#) blog post.

By the Numbers

1 temporary light installation
1 community-based project
2 Alleys of Light
88 strings of lights for Arrowhead Trail

What We Heard

"Creative lighting makes places more inviting, magical, fun. It uses darkness as a palette and can greatly impact our impressions of dark places."
Sabine De Schutter, Lighting Architect

"I have children who use the trail to and from school every day. They loved the lights and always bragged about having a special place to walk. I think they thought they were in a movie."
Callingwood North Resident, Lighting Up Arrowhead Trail Blog Post

D2.3 Conduct a cost-sharing pilot project to light heritage buildings.

A [Pilot Project to Install Creative Lighting on Historic Buildings in Edmonton](#) was created. It is co-managed with the City's Heritage Conservation Unit.

Completed lighting projects under the Heritage Lighting Pilot Program:

- Imperial Bank of Canada
- Empire Building
- Goodridge Block
- Ritchie Mill
- Metals Building
- Street Substation 600
- Strathcona Hotel
- Mercer Warehouse
- Rossdale Power Plant

By the Numbers

1 pilot project
9 heritage buildings lit

What We Heard

"The program has been successful in helping to bring added attention to Edmonton's historic buildings. It has been a nice additional incentive to offer to owners related to ongoing building maintenance, and we'd love to see secured funding to ensure it can continue. In terms of challenges, this has mainly been in working with owners to ensure that the lighting is focusing on heritage architectural elements, not just light on the building overall. I would love to make this type of lighting a requirement as part of the rehabilitation of any City-owned historic building."

David Johnston, Principal Heritage Planner, City of Edmonton Heritage Conservation Unit

D2.4 Support the Edmonton Design Committee in continuing to provide an emphasis on designing buildings and public spaces for winter, including consideration of colour, light, night- and winterscaping, microclimates, and the relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces.

The draft Winter Design Guidelines were shared with the Edmonton Design Committee (EDC) for feedback. EDC is a strong supporter of asking for winter and nighttime renderings in applications. When EDC updated their Standards and Procedures manual, Principle B3 was added under the Design Excellence section: *Celebrate The Winter City + Edmonton's Climate*.

EDC should be consulted for any updates to the Winter Design Guidelines.

By the Numbers

1 design principle added to EDC's Standards and Procedures

What We Heard

"(EDC) is committed to working with proponents presenting their designs.... We regard the process as a collaborative one in which we hope to work together for the betterment of the design and the City of Edmonton as a whole."

EDC Standards and Procedures 2021

D2.5 Develop a recognition program for developers whose projects (e.g., buildings, new communities) incorporate winter-friendly features.

Collaboration with the City's Urban Design Unit resulted in a change to this action. The current Urban Design Awards are aligned with the national awards, and adding another category to Edmonton's program was not championed. However, in 2019, special considerations for child-friendly and winter design elements were added to the judges' criteria. It is now at the judges' discretion as to how these features are considered in decisions. When City staff review the applications with the jurors, winter design considerations are taken into account.

Many submissions for the 2023 Edmonton Urban Design Awards contained winter and/or evening renderings.

By the Numbers

5 projects recognised at the 2019 award gala

What We Heard

"The addition of the winter design special considerations raised awareness of the need to view projects through an all-season lens. Though categories for the Urban Design Awards are fixed, adding 'feature' categories has allowed an awareness to be developed and added to future juror review considerations and criteria."

David Holdsworth, Senior Planner, Urban Planning and Economy, City of Edmonton

D2.6 Develop a directive for all City of Edmonton departments to promote inclusion of WinterCity Strategy objectives in all negotiations relating to the built environment.

This action remains open.

Winter Economy

Action has created an impact.

Action requires more effort to make an impact or is no longer meaningful or necessary.

Goal 5 - Increase the Capacity and Sustainability of Edmonton's Winter Festivals

E1.1 Prepare a business plan to drive the creation of a Winter Festival Facilitating and Nurturing Body.

Engagement with winter festival producers resulted in the decision to not create a formal body at this time. The purpose of this action was to increase the capacity and sustainability of existing festivals and to support new ones, but this goal has been met in other ways.

Winter Festival Shared Equipment

The WinterCity Office helped manage the shared winter festival equipment for several years until the producers of Ice on Whyte were able to run the rental program again. WinterCity funded the repair and maintenance of the shared inventory. New items were added in consultation with the Winter Festival Working Group.

Marketing and Promotions

The WinterCity social media suite, Winter Excitement Guide and website were used to promote winter festivals.

SNOW FUNd

In 2019 and 2020, a Snowy Networking and Outdoor Winter (SNOW) FUNd was set up to support small, community-building winter events. In fall 2021, the grant was discontinued and funding was used to enhance the existing Neighbourhoods Micro- and Macro-Grants.

WinterCity Festivals and Events Grants

Initially, WinterCity Edmonton sponsored existing and new winter festivals on a case-by-case basis. As more festivals were created, it became clear that a new funding model was required. In December 2017, as a result of advocacy from the four large winter festivals, City Council provided ongoing funding for winter festivals. Through the Civic Events Festival and Event Delivery Action Plan, Action 6, administration worked to "determine a model and mechanism to distribute winter festival funding". As a result of this work, and additional funding from City Council, the WinterCity Festivals and Events Grant was created in 2022. This grant helps festivals and events cover the extra costs of producing events in winter, and supports emerging festivals.

Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)

Seven of the thirteen BIAs have embraced hosting winter events. The events range from local winter light-ups that promote holiday shopping to Santa parades to large festivals that draw residents from across the city. The events not only promote economic activity within the BIAs but also increase vibrancy in the areas.

By the Numbers

1 crokicurl set
3 community presentations on how to run a winter fest
7 BIA winter events
55+ winter festivals and events sponsored
57 SNOW FUNd grants awarded
111 festivals and events promoted in the Winter 2019-20 Winter Excitement Guide

What We Heard

"The community of Rosedale hosted a winter party on March 10th. The weather was beautiful and the grill was full of burgers. Firefighters from our local fire hall came out to say hello and play a few games of street hockey. Thank you to the City of Edmonton SNOW FUNd for supporting this event!"

Winter 2019-20 SNOW FUNd Recipient

"The WinterCity Strategy has elevated and celebrated our district by making the Deep Freeze Byzantine Winter Festival one of Edmonton's signature winter festivals. It has inspired us to embrace all things winter and cultural, transforming our festival into a vibrant showcase of arts, heritage, sports and community spirit. Thanks to the strategy's support, Deep Freeze has become a cherished tradition that unites and enriches our community every year."

Christy Morin, Executive Director, Arts on the Ave and Artistic Director, Deep Freeze: A Byzantine Winter Festival

Goal 6 - Develop a Four-Seasons Patio Culture

E2.1 Develop a winter patio development program.

In consultation with the business community, initial funding for winter patios was provided for the city-wide events. More funding was offered to a few venues that were interested in creating all-season patios. Development happened slowly. Pre- COVID-19, four or five permanent winter patios were offered across the city. Post-COVID-19, more than 20 remained open. For the pandemic period, please see the COVID-19 Silver Lining section.

Equipment that was funded to support winter patios included:

- Blankets
- Heater rentals
- DJ rentals
- Fire table (this is now part of the winter festival shared equipment inventory for use at festivals and events)

A winter patio grant was made available for winter 2023-24 in partnership with Parks and Roads Services. Twenty-seven venues received grants.

By the Numbers

1 fire table
20+ winter patios across the city in winter 2022-23
27 winter patio grant recipients
100s of blankets were given and/or lent to venues for patio events

What We Heard

"Winter patios...FINALLY! ... more, more & more!"
2023 Insight Survey Participant

"The challenges around the winter patios over the past few years has been increased firewood, propane costs and the pandemic of course! Incentives for businesses to maintain their patios by offsetting the direct costs related to their program would be helpful."
2021-22 #YegWinterPatios Venue Participant

E2.2 Work with other Alberta municipalities to review and amend provincial restrictions around the way alcohol can be served to patrons outdoors.

City of Edmonton councillors and staff met with the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) to discuss provincial legislation around serving alcohol on patios. New policies were clarified and concerns were discussed. Changes were eventually made to allow more flexibility around serving, security and fencing.

E2.3 Simplify the process and, if necessary, remove regulations to increase year-round use of space for patios, including temporary winter patios at festivals, events and on sidewalks.

In the past, patio permits were only valid from May to October. Permits had already been changed to allow for year-round patios before the WinterCity Strategy was adopted; however, a significant number of business owners still believed that they were restricted to the summer months. WinterCity staff spent time educating and reassuring many venue owners that they could take part in the city-wide winter patio events with their existing permits.

WinterCity staff supported the Local Economy team's patio workshop for local businesses by presenting four-season design ideas and tips for keeping serving staff warm.

Parks and Roads staff were great supporters of a pilot project to keep a boardwalk sidewalk in the roadway during the winter. This allowed a venue to maintain their sidewalk patio. Snow clearing crews did an excellent job of keeping the roadway clear of snow even with the boardwalk sidewalk in place. Temporary boardwalks are now allowed year-round in several places.

City staff in Permits, Development and Construction and in Parks and Roads areas simplified processes and encouraged winter patios. During winter 2020-21, they became winter patio champions in order to help local venues stay open during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By the Numbers

1 workshop
1 pilot project
1 new program guide

What We Heard

"The City of Edmonton is pleased to provide a winter and year round patio program to businesses with no fees for permits and for traffic safety measures. This is adding to the vibrancy of Edmonton's main streets and BIAs."

James Robinson, Corporate BIA Infrastructure Specialist, Parks and Roads Services, City of Edmonton

In 2023, staff in Parks and Roads launched a refreshed program for patios on public space. A new Patio Program Guide outlines the simplified process and provides winter-specific information.

E2.4 Create a city-wide, annual winter outdoor patio event that promotes Action E2.1.

In consultation with business owners, the city-wide winter patio events started by focussing on the shoulder seasons, specifically spring. Owners were not willing to take patio furniture out of storage for one-off events in the winter, but were willing to take them out several weeks earlier in the spring. The first city-wide Farewell to Winter Patio Party was held in March 2014. Over 75 venues across the city took part. In the three subsequent years, fewer venues participated, but the seed had been planted. By 2017, some businesses were exploring year-round patios, and some were putting furniture out on nice winter days.

In December 2017, the first Winter Patio Season Kick-Off Weekend was held. It was an online promotion for any venues that wanted to take part. This was repeated in 2018 and 2019.

In winter 2021-22, a #YEGWinterPatios campaign began with a virtual weekend festival in December to mark the beginning of the winter patio season. Patio promotions were maintained throughout winter 2021-22. Since patio patrons could not share blankets because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Winter Warming Kits were created and sold at participating venues. The kits consisted of a WinterCity blanket or scarf, lip balm and a postcard. All proceeds went to the Boyle Street Winter Warming Bus Program.

In winter 2022-23, patios were promoted on social media and the WinterCity website. The WinterCity Office also supported the businesses by providing gift cards for winter patio venues as prizes for the Winter Bike to Work Day event and Winterscapes program.

By the Numbers

- 1 #YEGWinterPatios online festival
- 3 #YEGWinterPatios Kick-Off Weekends
- 4 Farewell to Winter Patio Weekends

What We Heard

"The support behind the promotion has been good."

2021-22 #YegWinterPatios Venue Participant

"The @CityofEdmonton does a spectacular job to make every #Edmontonians life just that bit better. Thanks 😊 #HawrelakPark #YEGWinterPatios #Culina"
Keshav Das, @keshavuvacha, Twitter, Jan 15, 2022

Goal 7 - Become a World Leader in Innovative Winter Related Business/Industry

E3.1 Support outdoor winter market initiatives, beginning with the BIA-planned outdoor winter market in November 2013.

In November 2013, a market was held as part of the first 124 Street BIA All is Bright on 124 festival. Small tents were used for the market.

In 2014, a local builder was commissioned to make six market huts that would withstand Edmonton's climate, provide vendors with an attractive place to sell their wares, and keep the vendors warm. They were first used at the 2014 All is Bright on 124 Street festival. The huts were used for several seasons by festival producers, including at the Winter Cities Shake-Up Festival and Market, which WinterCity Edmonton produced as part of the 2015 Winter Cities Shake-Up Conference.

The market huts were a mixed success. They were attractive and provided adequate space for vendors. Unfortunately, it was very difficult to keep vendors warm, especially in very cold temperatures, and off-season storage was a challenge. In addition, the huts were a

By the Numbers

- 1 Winter Cities Shake-Up Market
- 10 market huts

What We Heard

"Firstly I'd just like to say that I love these huts! ... They are fairly simple to erect and the packaged hardware kits are practicable and convenient. The unique design of these huts are a pleasure to the eye and are great conversation pieces on any event site... (Even) with (the) little quirks and errors that occurred I think these huts have value! After speaking with numerous organizers, production staff and (the) general public the expression was that we need/want more of

solid unit, making them expensive to move to and from events, and they sustained damage from frequent transportation.

In 2019, four market huts that could be disassembled for transportation and storage were commissioned and built. They were first used for the ATB Winter Market and were very well received. The huts were added to the winter festivals' shared equipment inventory.

A local company has produced a Christmas market for several years. WinterCity has supported their initiative in a variety of ways, including sponsorship, equipment rental, and promotions.

these!"

2019 ATB Winter Market Production Staff

E3.2 Develop a strategy that will identify, promote and encourage various winter businesses.

This action remains open.

E3.3 Host an international winter cities conference in Edmonton in 2015.

The first Winter Cities Shake-Up conference was held in Edmonton in 2015. Participating city mayors and senior administrators asked Edmonton to host a second one, which took place in 2017. Since then, two more conferences in the series have been held: 2019 in Saskatoon, and 2023 in Winnipeg. Some interest has been received from other cities to host future conferences.

By the Numbers

2 conferences in Edmonton

- 2015: 403 participants
- 2017: 312 participants

2 conferences in other winter cities

What We Heard

"Goodbye #Edmonton. Thank you @wintercities @WinterCityYEG for an invigorating #WinterShakeUp conference!"
Hazel Borys, @hborys, Urbanist, Twitter Feb 18, 2017

E3.4 Sponsor annual outdoor winter fashion shows.

WinterCity Edmonton and Western Canada Fashion Week (WCFW) partnered to present a fashion show that aimed to change the narrative around how we dress in the winter. The fashion designers were challenged to create a winter outfit to inspire Edmontonians to dress warmly and fashionably. It was held on an outdoor runway and showcased talented local fashion designers. This competition ran during WCFW from 2013-2015.

In 2014, WinterCity Edmonton produced two Winter Fashion Makeover videos. Two Edmontonians were chosen from a list of nominees to have an outdoor winter wardrobe makeover. The videos were uploaded to the WinterCity website and shared on social media channels. The aim was to inspire residents to dress warmly, but fashionably.

By the Numbers

2 videos
3 fashion shows

What We Heard

"Winter in the city is going to be a lot more classy for me now. I'm very excited about it. ... I've already made plans!"
Chantelle, Winter Fashion Makeover Winner

"I love the colour and (the jacket's) warm and it's tailored. It's not bulky like my old jacket. ... It's great. I love it. I love the whole spot."
Norm, Winter Fashion Makeover Winner

E3.5 Explore the creation of a symposium or conference on all things winter to advance Edmonton's reputation as a world-leading winter city.

This action remains open.

E3.6 Explore the creation of centre(s) of excellence for northern architecture, design and winter technology.

This action is being worked on, but a public announcement has not yet been made.

E3.7 Create an incentive prize or program to encourage innovation in various winter businesses.

This action remains open.

Our Winter Story

Action has created an impact.

Action requires more effort to make an impact or is no longer meaningful or necessary.

Goal 8 - Celebrate the Season and Embrace Daily Living in a Cold Climate

S1.1 Create a well-developed and aligned information hub that educates and carries consistent and fun messages that encourage sharing knowledge about winter.

An annual Winter Excitement Guide was created out of a demand from the public for information on activities and events. This evolved into the wintercityedmonton.ca website.

Social Media Suite

The social media platforms grew quickly. We started with Facebook and expanded to include Twitter and Instagram. These platforms are independent of the main City of Edmonton streams, allowing for cheeky, fun interactions with residents. Negative comments about winter living are often addressed by the community at large, without intervention by the WinterCity team.

The social platforms are run by the WinterCity Planner for six months of the year, except for Instagram, which is put into hibernation over the summer. A communications consultant runs all platforms during the busy winter months.

Blogs

A blog site was created to share local winter stories. The first blog post was published on February 9th, 2015. It was called *Have You Fallen In Love With Winter Yet?* and was written by then-WinterCity Coordinator Sue Holdsworth. In it, she explained why even if you hate the winter, Edmonton's WinterCity Strategy is worthy of love. Topics have ranged from winter cycling and winter conferences to newcomers' first experiences and how to design a garden in summer for winter beauty. A total of 60 blogs were published by the end of winter 2022-23.

Website

The website transformed from a blog platform into a fully fledged website with tips, things to do, winter fun toolkits, and a full list of outdoor events. It has become the hub for outdoor winter information in Edmonton.

While 90% of website users are from Canada, 6% are from the United States, and others hail from as far as the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Ireland, France, India and Russia.

The top ten most viewed pages are:

- Ice skating
- Events
- Homepage
- Equipment rentals
- Cross-country skiing
- 19 Daytime Edmonton winter activities
- Winter patios
- Candy Cane Lane

By the Numbers

6 annual Winter Excitement Guide editions
10,000 copies distributed annually

Social Media (May 2023)

49,334 social media community members
75% of members from the Edmonton area

Blogs (Oct 2018-May 2023)

60 blogs
2909 views of all blog pages

Website (Oct 2018-May 2023)

189,057 people accessed the website 226,862 times

64% of sessions from Edmonton area

9% of sessions from Calgary

2 top engagement weeks:

- Dec 22-28, 2019: 6,411 pageviews
- Dec 25-31, 2022: 5,756 pageviews

Blizzard Newsletter

Approx. 1000 subscribers

Avg. 40-50% open rate

Podcast

3 aired podcasts

3 in production

795 downloads of the podcasts

What We Heard

There is still work to be done to spread the word about events and the website. 2023 Insight Survey participants commented on not knowing where to find information, especially for those who do not rely on social media.

"Make a dedicated web page for winter activities - and if you have that - advertise it - because I don't know about it. Consider an App where you can find all ideas of things to do."

2023 Insight Survey Participant

"In the past ten years of WinterCity's social media, we've seen a small idea grow into a big one, and a small following grow to become a key influencer in Edmonton's social

- Community League Rinks
- Downhill Skiing, Snowboarding and Tubing

WinterCity Blizzard

An e-newsletter was published from October 2013-July 2019. As the first newsletter reported, it was designed to share “projects WinterCity Edmonton is currently working on, upcoming events, and myth-busters to get you excited about winter.”

Podcast

In 2019, a podcast was added to the online suite. It has been well received, but was paused during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three episodes have been published and another three are close to completion.

media landscape. ... WinterCity’s social media channels have grown to become a trusted, well-regarded source of information, inspiration, and celebration of our city. We’ve learned over the last decade that Edmontonians want and need a place to congregate over a shared love of our city, and a shared passion for building a year-round culture we can be proud of, and where everyone can find a way to belong.”
 Marliiss Weber, CEO Parodos Communications Inc., WinterCity Edmonton Evaluation Report 2023

S1.2 Explore opportunities to further integrate local Indigenous winter culture and traditions into Edmonton’s overall winter culture and into our collective winter story.

Members of local Indigenous communities have sat on the Advisory Council since its inception, but finding new ways to work together should be explored.

Jacquelyn Cardinal, of the local social enterprise Naheyawin, used her storytelling talents to write three blogs for WinterCity readers to learn more about Cree winter traditions, language and culture.

By the Numbers

3 blogs sharing Cree winter traditions, language and culture

What We Heard

Meeting times and locations were not always convenient for Indigenous Elders and partners.

S1.3 Work collaboratively with Communities in Bloom and its partners to develop an Edmonton winter beautification program.

Front Yards in Bloom: Winterscapes was established in winter 2013-14 in partnership with the City’s Front Yards in Bloom program, Edmonton Horticultural Society, and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. The program encourages residents to decorate their front yards and schoolyards. Snow, ice, lights, plantings and colour have all been used to brighten our winter landscape. This program has been slow to grow, but the creativity of the nominees is always impressive.

Prizes for this program have ranged from tickets for winter activities and events to patio gift cards to winter-themed art by local artist Jason Blower. Teachers who were interested in taking part in the program were given a Snow Play book by Birgitta Ralston for inspiration. Winning classes were awarded pizza parties or themed sugar cookies from a local business.

This program has inspired Albertans beyond Edmonton’s borders. Submissions have been received from Parkland County, Devon and even as far away as Viking.

By the Numbers

10 nominations in 2014
 45 nominations in 2023
 76 Snow Play books

What We Heard

“Yards in Bloom - winterscapes should be expanded. People love to decorate their yards to brighten the dark nights In addition to people not wanting to turn off or take their Xmas lights down, I have noticed people have started decorating their yards with a valentines theme - pink lights & hearts on their trees. I think this should be encouraged. It brightens peoples’ moods. I can hardly wait to see what they do for St. Patrick’s Day.”
 2023 Insight Survey Participant

“Some folks from Viking, Alberta wanted to submit a snow fort they made. It was really unfortunate they didn’t live in Edmonton because they did a good job!”
 Cameron Einarson, Beautifications Team, City of Edmonton

S1.4 Create an avalanche of winter stories and photos, with people submitting/sharing their own stories and photos to share locally and internationally.

The work for this action merged with the efforts for action S1.1, particularly with the creation of the social media suite.

S1.5 Work with local media (hosts, anchors, meteorologists), as well as thought and cultural leaders, to encourage them to continue to talk more positively about winter in Edmonton.

Much of this work was achieved while developing the strategy. This action could be revisited as part of the renewed focus on the WinterCity work.

S1.6 Develop high-impact, low-cost community initiatives that engage a full spectrum of Edmontonians to have fun in and celebrate winter.

This action became a core part of the WinterCity work. Projects included:

- Sip n' Slide Sundays: provided hot chocolate at toboggan hills
- Candy Cane Lane initiatives: hot chocolate team, Open Streets Nights, DATS ElfMobiles on Open Streets Nights
- City Hall School presentations
- Coldest Night of the Year walk teams
- In Your Own Words project support for winter stories
- EFCL Leagues Alive Conference presentations
- Premiere to Winter 2013
- Santa's Parade of Lights float
- Signature Drink Competition
- Placemaking workshops with the City's Neighbourhoods team
- Recognition events for volunteers and partners
- Valentine's Day Disco Skate at City Hall

Support was given to social agencies' winter campaigns through the WinterCity social media platforms to increase audience reach.

Proceeds from the sale of WinterCity scarves and blankets were donated to the Boyle Street Winter Warming Bus program.

By the Numbers

1 Premiere to Winter
3 Signature Drink Competitions
3 Santa's Parade floats
3 Coldest Night of the Year walks
5 Years of Sip n' Slide Sundays
5 Valentine's Day Disco Skates
10 City Hall School presentations
700+ Scarves and blankets sold to raise funds for the Boyle Street Winter Warming Bus

What We Heard

"Thank you for teaching us about this city in winter it was very interesting to learn about your strategy in winter it really inspired me to go to some of the festivals and go to some of the fun activities like skating and sledding"
finley, City Hall School Student, Grade 1

S1.7 Recognize and encourage appropriate use of our city's natural areas by creating an 'Edmonton in winter' mobile website and/or app.

Incorporated into the website, toolkits and blogs.

S1.8 Consult and work with school boards to explore best options for integrating enjoyment of winter into daily life.

Initial inquiries were made with the Edmonton Catholic School Division, but the timing was not right. This goal should be revisited.

Goal 9 - Promote Edmonton's Great Northern Story Locally, Nationally and Internationally

S2.1 Work collaboratively with Edmonton Tourism, regional tourism partners and Travel Alberta to develop an Edmonton Arts/ Culture/Recreation 'winter product' package.

S2.2 Develop a winter chapter of the Edmonton brand. The winter chapter should invigorate Edmontonians, speaking to our city's extremes: light and dark, hot and cold, wild and cozy, contemporary and ancient. It should also play on our classic Edmonton self-deprecating humour.

S2.3 Leverage marketing campaigns to increase focus on Edmontonians' humour, resilience and pride in being a great northern city.

S2.4 Leverage all potential marketing funds to support winter partnerships and tourism initiatives.

The work for actions S2.1, S2.2, S2.3 and S2.4 was often carried out concurrently on the same projects. Funds were pooled with Explore Edmonton (then Edmonton Tourism) to create marketing campaigns that included the Edmonton region and Edmontonians. A cheeky, fun, self-deprecating tone was used on all platforms.

The first revamped winter tourism campaign, to focus on the outdoor experience, was launched in winter 2013-14. It was an award-winning campaign with the main message being:

Cold? Yes.

Dark? Yes.

Boring? Never.

Tag lines included “Your winter boots will thank you” and “The best shoes are snowshoes”. The campaign included the first series of winter images of Edmonton with people outside enjoying the snow. Since then, Explore Edmonton has marketed Edmonton in winter annually. Pre-COVID-19, winter tourism numbers were up, with people coming to Edmonton to have a winter experience.

A partnership with SnowSeekers Media for #YegWinterPatios in winter 2021-22 leveraged a Travel Alberta grant.

S2.5 Work to incorporate and share digital assets of Edmonton in winter in marketing materials, reports, publications and other materials.

A photo library of winter images has been built for the City of Edmonton and winter images are now regularly found in City reports. The current images are now several years old and need to be updated/refreshed. Partnerships with other areas of the City could help expand the subject matter and number of images.

Explore Edmonton and Travel Alberta also have winter images that the City of Edmonton can use.

Goal 10 - Kick Start and Lead Implementation of Edmonton’s WinterCity Strategy: Apply a ‘Winter Lens’ to Our City

S3.1 Create a multi-sector WinterCity Advisory Council to champion, lead and oversee implementation of the WinterCity Strategy.

The WinterCity Advisory Council was created in 2013 with community and industry leaders as well as senior City staff. The advisory council guided the WinterCity work with strategic advice. Former members continue to be champions for embracing a winter lens in city and community building.

A working group for each pillar was also created with community members and City staff. These teams were instrumental in working through the details to implement individual actions.

As co-chair of the advisory council, former Councillor Ben Henderson was not only a political champion of the WinterCity Strategy, but a passionate spokesman for the importance of building on Edmonton’s winter assets. His support was critical to the strategy’s success.

By the Numbers

100s of volunteers on the advisory council and working groups

What We Heard

“(Edmonton is) looked to for creativity, a fresh and holistic approach to embracing winter, and an approach that puts community at the centre. WinterCityEdmonton has led this change over a decade. Now is not the time to ease off the culture change.

We have amazing community leaders who have collaborated to spark this change in our city. The City and its Administration does its best work when it works with community and it needs to reinvigorate and continue to convene/support a strong Winter City Advisory Panel, to continue to grow this innovative effort. Few global cities have a wintercity planner or office to spark change. Build on this to make this office, working with community, a huge agent of change!”
2023 Insight Survey Participant

S3.2 Create or identify a WinterCity Coordinator position to support the work of the WinterCity Advisory Council.

The WinterCity Strategy was housed in Community Services from 2012-2019. The department assigned one FTE to the WinterCity Coordinator position.

By the Numbers

1 coordinator

1 planner

3 co-op students

One full-time temporary planner was hired to support the coordinator from 2014-2016. In 2016, this became a full-time permanent Winter City Planner position. The position was funded by the WinterCity base budget. Co-op student positions added temporary support in 2013, 2014 and 2017.

In November 2019, the coordinator was moved to another project within Community Services, while the planner and strategy were moved to the Urban Planning and Economy Department.

Work on the strategy was paused from May to November 2020 as part of the City's COVID-19 response. Work was slowed temporarily in 2022 while the planner provided part-time support to the Downtown Vibrancy Strategy.

What We Heard

The City of Edmonton is the only municipality in Canada to have a Winter City Planner.

S3.3 Develop a City of Edmonton Council-approved 10-year WinterCity Implementation Plan which will identify priorities, quick wins, partners, indicators of success and resources needed to implement the WinterCity Strategy. This plan will outline how to engage Edmontonians in shifting attitudes toward winter, as well as sharing and promoting Edmonton's great northern story.

The 10-year implementation plan was developed in spring and summer 2013 and was passed by City Council that September. Work began immediately.

By the Numbers

Dozens of volunteers on the advisory council and working groups

What We Heard

"Edmonton has embraced the idea of winter programming through a focussed strategy that combines research into successes in other cities and consultation with citizens to produce 'a blizzard of ideas' for making the city more active and social in the winter months. The plan addresses implementation with both a new staff position and Advisory Council. The report is highly usable by other northern cities for both precedents and ideas."

Canadian Institute of Planners, 2014, Planning Excellence Merit Award description

S3.4 Develop a multi-dimensional evaluation framework for the WinterCity Strategy objectives.

A framework was developed for mid-strategy evaluation and report, [Keep the Snowball Rolling: Mid-Strategy Evaluation and Report](#), 2018.

The mid-strategy report recommended a full evaluation again at the ten-year mark. This was not possible as Council Initiatives were still officially paused as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the work progresses, an updated framework could assist with a longer-term evaluation, as tracking a culture shift is difficult and requires a sustained effort.

By the Numbers

1 framework
1 mid-strategy report

What We Heard

"Conduct a full evaluation again at (the) 10-year mark."

Keep the Snowball Rolling report

B. Resources

[WinterCity Strategy Executive Research Study Findings, Norway and Finland](#), February 2011

[Edmonton WinterCity Strategy Consultation Summary](#), July 2012

[For the Love of Winter: Strategy for Transforming Edmonton into a World-Leading Winter City](#), October 2012

[WinterCity Strategy Implementation Plan](#), September 2013

[Winter Design Guidelines: Transforming Edmonton into a Great Winter City](#), December 2016

[City of Edmonton Policy C588: Winter Design Policy](#), December 2016

[Keep the Snowball Rolling: WinterCity Strategy Evaluation and Report](#), May 2018

[Edmonton's City Plan, Charter Bylaw 20.000](#), December 2020

[City of Edmonton Corporate Business Plan 2023-2026](#), June 2023



C. Photo Credits

We have learned that good images are crucial to telling a story and shifting culture. We thank the many photographers whose photos have helped tell Edmonton's WinterCity story:

- City of Edmonton and Why Edmonton
- Explore Edmonton
- SnowSeekers
- Laughing Dog
- JAH Rice
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