
OLDER EDMONTONIANS – ACTIONS TOWARDS SAFETY & WELLBEING

The City of Edmonton has a legislated responsibility under the Municipal Government Act to provide a safe & viable community.ⁱ

EDMONTON'S PROMISES

On its website, the City of Edmonton, partnering with the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, has an initiative called *Age Friendly Edmonton* that promises all Older Edmontonians that:ⁱⁱ

1. Edmonton is a community that values, respects and actively supports the safety, diversity and wellbeing of seniors;
2. Seniors are engaged, participating, and contributing to their communities;
3. Seniors are safe and well in their homes and communities;
4. Seniors are respected and included; and
5. Seniors have access to the programs, services, and resources they need.

The City also states that it wants to ensure that:

6. Current and future Edmontonians aged 55+ have access to diverse and inclusive programs, services and activities to support healthy aging and that the City uses resources to effectively support these goals.ⁱⁱⁱ

Finally, the City has created an Edmonton Seniors Declaration that promises our Older Edmontonians, that:^{iv}

7. They will be respected;
8. Urban spaces are intentionally designed to be vibrant, inclusive, and accessible to meet the interests and needs of older adults;
9. They have access to information, programs, and services that promote engagement they feel safe, empowered, and supported as individuals, so that they can age well, connect with, and enrich the community;
10. The City will work towards making Edmonton age-friendly as part of its vision for an integrated, sustainable, livable city; and
11. The City will use the best knowledge available from international, national and local research.

12. The City will ensure decision-making and policies embrace all promises made
13. The City will work with other orders of government to increase commitment and coordination on seniors' issues
14. The City will encourage other organizations, individuals, businesses and institutions to adopt this declaration
15. The City will value all seniors

However, having spoken to older Edmontonians at almost every single one of the older Edmontonians' residences in O-day'min, I can confirm that those promises listed above are either not perceived as being kept; or are not actually being kept. A majority of older Edmontonians I've spoken with have never heard of a seniors' strategy or declaration, nor have they been consulted about their contents.

The City does not appear to be having direct & meaningful consultations with many older Edmontonians affected by their bylaws, policies and processes. They seem to be putting the most emphasis on engaging with organizations and professional stakeholders within Edmonton's seniors serving network; and while that is an important part of ensuring Senior Safety – it is only one part. Arguably, the most important part, hearing from older Edmontonians directly in a meaningful and cohesive manner, is not getting enough emphasis.

In contrast to Calgary, a city with a fairly robust seniors' strategy and a better set of principles supporting its strategy^v, Edmonton is only just beginning its efforts. According to its website and documentation, Edmonton has just wrapped up the engagement portion of assessing its current supports and services for older Edmontonians.^{vi} It appears from information online, that the engagement consisted of discussions with agencies (who often have senior volunteers) and one online survey through its regular Insight Community (not comprised of solely of older Edmontonians and their supports).

Edmonton is basing its strategy development on the following list (developed by the AB Assoc of Seniors Centres):

- Physical and mental health
- Social environment and engagement
- Social support
- Personal well-being
- Physical environment
- Safety and security

Edmonton's strategy has two phases:

Phase 1

Assessment of the current state of programs, services and activities; clarification on the City's role, and identifying future enhancements to supporting healthy aging.

Edmonton again makes the following promises in its video only presentation that it says is representative of phase one success – in other words, phase one has already happened:

16. To ensure that current and future Edmontonians 55+ have access to diverse and inclusive programs, services & activities to support healthy aging
17. To ensure the City uses resources to support those goals
18. That they've already heard from seniors
19. That their engagement under phase one will be with City staff & external stakeholders (focus groups, interviews & survey)

Phase 2

Discussions around existing and potential role(s) of organizations serving older Edmontonians with healthy aging services and programs, clarification of the City's mandate with older Edmontonians, and update the City's funding model to align with the strategic directions identified in phase 1.

The video presentation referenced above does not mention engagement with older Edmontonians at all in phase 2 that started in the spring. In the pictures they use from a focus group with stakeholders there do not appear to be any mobility challenged persons, nor any older Edmontonians. It appears that the feedback is all from organizations or people who offer services like financial literacy to older Edmontonians – not from older Edmontonians themselves.

SOLUTIONS FOR SUCCESS

1. Establish an Older Edmontonians Advisory Council with a designated resident senior from each older Edmontonians' independent living establishment; and from others across the spectrum. Pay them. Empower them. Pro-actively engage them.
 - a. Review and revise bylaws, policies and processes through their lens.
2. Older Edmontonians' residences and communities with senior demographics, **MUST HAVE ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT** – we must prioritize local areas & establishments for dedicated, safe & accessible transit.
 - a. One of my first actions will be to bring a motion for the City to immediately re-install transit routes within one block of all senior residences – with those routes having access along them to groceries, medical centres and the downtown library or similar amenities for fitness/culture.
 - b. I will also bring a motion for the City to assess its neighbourhood demographics information (already available) and replace or add routes to those neighbourhoods needing them the most based on age and level of income.

- c. For those older Edmontonians with mobility issues who cannot take the bus, the City needs to partner with & support organizations like [Drive Happiness](#) and [Driving Miss Daisy](#) as part of its strategy, or completely remodel its [DATS](#) system, which often has wait times of up to 4 hours – making medical appointments impossible and other options nearly unachievable.

The misguided changes to our City transit routes, where all current councillors voted in favour, have ELIMINATED accessible transit for older Edmontonians. That is unacceptable and in breach of every single above promise and legislated requirement. We pay taxes to get basic services. Transit is a basic service. It needs to work well. This will also support our climate goals by reducing vehicular traffic where older Edmontonians rely on relatives to transport them when possible. Edmonton needs to be flexible & responsive to age-related issues.

As part of permitting process for developers, the transit access used to be a requirement – and now.

3. MUCH better communication, transparency & engagement by the City & senior serving organizations in partnership.
 - a. Starting with communication, our City needs to re-instate paper-based communication & engagement with older Edmontonians and older Edmontonians' residences for critical matters – like its older Edmontonians' strategy, for instance. Edmonton needs to follow up in person as well. Currently, it appears that senior engagement is tailored to English-speaking, able-bodied persons in a lower age range.
 - b. We need to ensure Sage Seniors' Centre is funded to continue producing its paper directory of senior services. Sage produces a 4500-page directory listing all services available to older Edmontonians (both private and public). That book is delivered pharmacies and grocery stores, around 600 organizations, to other senior centres; and anyone who wants a copy can call to be mailed a copy. This project is not currently funded and costs around \$180,000.00 a year to update, print and deliver.
 - c. We need to adequately fund & staff the 211 Seniors' help line. This phone line is a central point of access for older Edmontonians who don't have access to the internet or have difficulty using online services. Currently, follow through on referrals is very low. Older Edmontonians tend not to follow through, therefore, warm transfers between 211 and older Edmontonians' organizations is essential. Along with pre-screening older Edmontonians to better understand individual needs and then making referrals to appropriate organizations; we then need to ensure call-backs are made to see if older Edmontonians followed through on the referral. If older Edmontonians connect directly with organizations, we cannot track whether 211 services are effective or efficient. Call-backs help to do that. We also need to ensure our 211 databases are updated so that we have current and complete information on issues affecting the senior population. 211

currently provides services for housing, taxes, mental health and language translation, among others.

- d. We need to ensure in-person engagement sessions in older communities and in all older Edmontonians' residences or we need to direct and empower the agencies that run those residences and with community leagues (including providing resources) to ensure older Edmontonians' voices are pro-actively engaged and actually heard on a continual basis. Edmonton Senior Coordinating Council is actively working towards the coordination of services for older Edmontonians.^{vii}
- e. We need to use our available data effectively. For instance, for those older Edmontonians aging at home, we can look at those accessing deferral of property taxes and those using snow angels, as an indication of which older Edmontonians need more assistance. Look at using available data effectively.
- f. We need to encourage and support ageing at home by creating partnerships with existing agencies and private industry; and by appropriately funding CORE Alberta.^{viii} Core Alberta is a knowledge hub for community-based older Edmontonians' organizations, allied agencies and individuals. It provides a sector-based approach. Everyone needs to be at the table to engage for solutions that work to address existing and potential gaps in services.
- g. We need to improve communication and coordination among in-home and mobile services to ensure that older adults receive services that they need. Free services or at cost services are available through organizations like Jenny Pro & the Mennonite Centre.
- h. We need to promote & facilitate "good neighbour" assistance through a community development approach within geographic neighbourhoods, faith communities, and cultural communities (including Indigenous, Black, Asian, Indian & others, using Snow Angels, Elder Brokers, emergency preparedness workshops, etc.)

Right now, this is not a priority in Edmonton. Improving access to information, services and programs for older Edmontonians is a key factor in reducing the social isolation of older Edmontonians. The majority of older Edmontonians I've spoken with have no idea where to find the information and services that they need. Older Edmontonians who have limited vision, hearing, or English proficiency face additional barriers to access information and services. The majority of Older Edmontonians I've spoken with have no internet access, or have significant struggles with use – and help is not readily available.

4. The areas in and around older communities and older Edmontonians' residences must have a higher service level standard when it comes to clearing snow and fixing sidewalks. It's impossible to be safe walking on ice and through snow if you are a senior – especially if you need to walk to a bus stop.
 - a. I will push for a service level review of areas identified as having older demographics and for areas proximate to older Edmontonians' residences so

that we can ensure a higher standard of service is met, along with increasing our frequency.

5. The MGA authorizes a city to create & enforce bylaws that maintain the health, safety & wellness of the community.
 - a. At a minimum, we need standards for any older Edmontonians' housing mandating fob key locks and security cameras with identifying signage. Many break & enters or property crimes are those of opportunity. Deterrence is important.
 - b. Standards also need to be in place that require cleanliness – no infestations. I've personally observed a older Edmontonians' building with traps set up all over every floor. It's demoralizing.
 - c. We must advocate for affordable in-home support and services with service levels that meet the population growth, such as day programs, mental health supports, and independent living support. Ensure that services are accessible through interpretation, multicultural health brokers/system navigators, and are available to people who require them.
 - d. We must ensure the accessibility of adaptive technologies to assist older adults with chronic health conditions, cognitive challenges, and mobility limitations.
 - e. We must ensure that in-home services are inclusive for LGBTQ and other diverse groups of older adults (e.g., M/F/other on intake forms, staff awareness/sensitivity) and that service providers are able to communicate effectively with the older Edmontonians they serve – or have effective translators on staff to assist – especially with medical issues.
 - f. Provide information materials on personal & building safety to older Edmontonians that include plain language and instructional pictures – ensuring accessibility.
 - g. Develop and implement strategies to coordinate in-home safety assessments for older adults across multiple disciplines. Ensure landlord assessments are made available to the public and review the crime-free multi-housing program standards that are over 10 years old.
 - h. Work with the Province to improve building codes for care facilities, while ensuring that resources are available for building owners to make upgrades.
 - i. Promote and encourage the development of public buildings and homes that apply standards such as Universal Design.
 - j. Explore recommendations by the SAFERHome Standards Society.
 - k. Support advocacy efforts to change the standard for accessible units in provincially funded affordable housing from 10% to 15% - currently, CIVIDA provides 20% accessible units in its affordable housing.
 - l. Explore ways to create incentives for older Edmontonian accessible housing development among home builders, developers and homeowners/buyers.
6. Establish a “Silver Alert” system to engage the public to locate missing older adults who have reduced cognitive abilities...CIVIDA does annual in-home visits annually & wellness

checks when maintenance done on units – if we send a staff member to do a quality assessment, we've trained our staff to look for signs of domestic violence when there; we do regular visits for hoarders (condition of unit) – we connect with a place that helps – if nobody has called for maintenance and service in a year, we will do a check – we send police to do wellness checks – all recorded on tenant's file

7. We must have a residential and business tax deferral/grant/credit program to help offset the fact that O-day'min residents & businesses pay the highest taxes in the city, receive the worst services and face the accumulated worst social issues and crimes. Without an additional safety incentive program in place, older Edmontonians and others cannot equip their individual homes with safety measures like cameras & fencing/gates – or getting a dog. Pursuant to s. 347 of the MGA, Council can cancel, reduce, defer or refund taxes & tax arrears.
8. We must complete our dozens and dozens of massive construction projects throughout Ward O-day'min that are preventing older Edmontonians, the disabled and almost every other resident from enjoying anything in the Ward. At no time has the City pro-actively consulted older Edmontonians or others about mobility issues during construction. We need to engage affected citizens, taking particular care to engage our vulnerable citizens, when they will be directly impacted by changes we make as a city. We need to ensure there are mitigating strategies in place. We also need to complete our construction projects across our Destination Zone from 124th St to Chinatown – now – not over the course of 20 years, like Jasper Avenue.
9. I will push for the development and promotion of mandatory public audits of housing agencies, landlords and management companies that provide services to older Edmontonians. In particular those mandatory audits must ensure physical & mental safety and accessibility (vision loss, hearing loss, plain language, multiple languages, physical accessibility, affordability, welcoming environment, etc.). Audits must provide recommendations for both low-cost and higher-cost improvements, with a plan to address any deficiencies and enforcement of non-compliance. CIVIDA is audited annually by province – not public – audits aren't robust – public dollars – be accountable to public
10. I will work with existing initiatives and think outside the box to explore ways to facilitate access to key City-wide services at local community locations, such as community centres or libraries.
11. I will push for creation of a program to link houseless youth and older Edmontonians to build trusting relationships for both and a mentorship experience that will encourage intervention and prevention of isolation for both.

12. I will push for better communication, transparency and cohesive access to older Edmontonians of applicable age-related benefits and financial literacy in alignment with the federal strategy on financial literacy for older Edmontonians.
13. I will push for low cost or free access to transit, events and activities depending on economic need and/or ability and/or age.
14. I will push for inclusive, accessible and affordable housing options for vulnerable older Edmontonians.
 - a. We must Improve communication between mental health outreach service providers in the health and social sectors in order to better integrate services. We need to ensure that the needs of homeless older adults are addressed within community-wide strategies to reduce homelessness.
 - b. We need support and expand multi-disciplinary outreach services for older adults with mental health issues at risk of losing their housing.
 - c. And we need to advocate for more housing with supports for older adults aged 50 and over with mental illness, including transitional housing, and permanent community housing with wraparound case management and onsite services.
 - d. Advocate for sustainable provincial funding for the development of new affordable housing.
 - e. Work with partners to increase access to information about programs that provide financial assistance for costs associated with housing affordability.
 - f. Improve awareness of and access to services that provide help with applications for financial assistance for home owners.
 - g. Education/awareness raising of alternative/innovative housing options among the public, including older adults and housing developers.
 - h. Investigate the feasibility of conducting a pilot/demonstration project to showcase alternative or innovative housing options.
 - i. Ensure that the planning process considers and accommodates the aging population.
15. I will support ageing in place as a viable alternative to residential living.
 - a. As part of that, we need to encourage and support landlords to make home modification to increase safety for older adult tenants; and explore ways to promote age-friendly knowledge and training among renovation contractors and to connect older adults with these professionals.
 - b. Inform and advocate for building code changes that will facilitate residents' ability to stay in their home as they age.
 - c. Work with the Hoarding Coalition to develop a comprehensive strategy to address hoarding and to improve home safety for those who hoard.
 - d. Create partnerships with private agencies providing ageing in place care.
 - e. Support the safe development of legal secondary suites.

- f. Support amending the Land Use Bylaw Amendment to allow secondary suites in inner city residential neighbourhoods.
- g. Promote a mix of potentially flexible, affordable housing types including accessory suites, rowhouses, duplexes, semi-detached, and cottage housing.
- h. Support the creation of a new mixed housing low-density district for new communities, which would support a mix of low-density housing forms, including single detached, semi-detached, duplexes, and rowhouses.
- i. Work with community development initiatives that support older adults to create age-friendly housing alternatives within their local communities, including creating secondary suites in permitted areas.
- j. Provide information about housing options through in-person sessions (e.g. open houses, workshops, forums).
- k. Ensure that comprehensive, consistent information about housing options is provided through local information sources (e.g. information lines, outreach workers).

As Edmonton’s Poet Laureate Alice Major says in *The Gift of Age*:

Caring for older people has been a hallmark of human culture from our beginnings. Providing integration and care is just as necessary in our contemporary society. Together we can build and sustain a neighbourly city where we work to support older adults and their families, friends and caregivers of all ages—a city with people of all generations as its heart.^{ix}

ⁱ **Municipal purposes**

3 The purposes of a municipality are

- (a) to provide good government,
 - (a.1) to foster the well-being of the environment,
- (b) to provide services, facilities or other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality,
- (c) to develop and maintain safe and viable communities, and
- (d) to work collaboratively with neighbouring municipalities to plan, deliver and fund intermunicipal services.

ⁱⁱ https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/age-friendly-edmonton

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.edmonton.ca/programs_services/for_seniors/seniors-centres-strategy-public-engagement

^{iv} <https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/documents/PDF/COE-Gift-of-Age-Plaque-v02.pdf>

^v <https://www.calgary.ca/csps/cns/seniors/seniors-age-friendly-strategy.html>

vi https://www.gov.edmonton.ab.ca/programs_services/for_seniors/seniors-centres-strategy-public-engagement.aspx

vii <https://corealberta.ca/resources/framework-support-coordination-services-edmontons-older-adults>

viii <https://corealberta.ca>

ix <https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/documents/PDF/COE-Gift-of-Age-Plaque-v02.pdf>