



# REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN EDMONTON

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Alberta's  
NDP Caucus

Alberta's  
**FUTURE.ca**



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## MESSAGE FROM **NDP LEADER RACHEL NOTLEY**

Edmonton has been my home for 21 years.

It is a cultural hub, an economic driver and a small community where everyone knows each other all wrapped in one. The incredible River Valley, world-class restaurants, one-of-a-kind retail shops, and vibrant festivals bring the city to life, but it's the people who make it truly great.

Still, there have been challenges in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic, the crushing impact of inflation on small businesses and the drug poisoning crisis have taken a toll on the downtown core.

All of this coupled with the UCP's cuts to policing, housing, and critical support programs only added to the increase in social disorder and closures of far too many businesses, including Google's DeepMind.

It's time for a change. We need a new plan to revitalize downtown, one that invests in our local community and that effectively addresses the root causes of crime, addiction and more.

Taking action now, we can attract new businesses, help existing small businesses grow and make downtown Edmonton a vibrant place to live, work, and play. We will need to work collaboratively with all levels of government and the numerous community leaders who are working tirelessly to make downtown a safe and energetic destination.

I'm looking forward to getting to work helping to revitalize Edmonton's downtown, together.



MESSAGE FROM  
**DAVID SHEPHERD**  
**MLA EDMONTON-CITY CENTRE**



I've been a proud resident of the heart of our city for nearly 15 years and represented our downtown for nearly eight years. In that time, there's been a lot of growth and change, creating new vibrancy and excitement as so many have worked and invested to build up our downtown as a wonderful place to live, work and enjoy life.

We're home to internationally recognized restaurants; cultural institutions like the Citadel Theatre, Winspear Centre, Art Gallery of Alberta and Royal Alberta Museum; vibrant clubs and venues; great local businesses; the Alberta Legislature; post-secondary institutions like MacEwan University and Norquest College; and hubs of tech and innovation like AMII and Edmonton Unlimited. We host many of Edmonton's most iconic festivals and parades and hundreds of pop-up events and celebrations. And every year, a growing diversity of Albertans choose to call our core communities home.

Unfortunately, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, so much of what animates the heart of our city was brought to a sudden halt even as it exposed and amplified some of the longstanding challenges we've faced.

Over the last year, I've spoken with many constituents about these impacts and their concerns and what

governments can do to help. And in those conversations, three things have been clear:

- *We want the heart of our city to be a vibrant, attractive place to live, visit and build;*
- *We want everyone who lives and visits here to feel safe and welcome;*
- *We want to see compassionate, effective supports for our friends, neighbours and families in need.*

Together with our substantial plans to invest in housing, harm reduction and recovery, mental health supports, and community safety, this proposal builds on what I and my colleagues have heard from residents, businesses, those who provide social supports and community advocates. And it puts forward a clear plan for concrete action and investments to bring new life to the heart of our city.

There is so much to love and celebrate about Edmonton's downtown and so many ready and willing to work together to help it thrive and grow. And I'm excited to work with all of my colleagues in the Alberta NDP Caucus to make it happen.





## MESSAGE FROM

# JANIS IRWIN

## MLA EDMONTON-HIGHLANDS-NORWOOD

I'm so proud to represent the east end of downtown Edmonton, one of the most culturally diverse and exciting areas of the city. From Little Italy to Chinatown, you can find some of the most delicious food, unique shops, and some of the kindest people in all of Edmonton.

Over the last few years, the social and economic impact of the pandemic has hurt downtown Edmonton, and the neighbourhoods that I represent in Boyle Street and McCauley have felt these impacts deeply. Residents and community leaders all want to see real action.

They want evidence-based support for houseless Edmontonians, they want to see mental health and addictions supports prioritized, including investment in harm reduction, transitional supports, and pathways to recovery. It's with all of this in mind, that the Alberta NDP has already committed to housing 40,000 more Albertans and committing to substantial hiring of new, frontline support workers.

My constituents also want economic and social supports to help address the challenges that their

communities are facing, such as funding to help revitalize our neighbourhoods and support for struggling small businesses with grants that will help attract new customers.

The plan outlined in this paper has been developed through consultation with small business owners, not-for-profit leaders, and various community stakeholders. With their help, we built a plan to improve our communities and help grow our economy.

Edmonton's downtown is a vibrant hub for cultural enrichment and social cohesion, and we want to invest in the people that live, work, and invest in our area.

I'm so excited to work with everyone who wants to build a better future for downtown Edmonton, and all of Alberta.

I can't wait to see what we build, together.



# SETTING THE STAGE

The need to revitalize Edmonton's downtown core has become more evident than ever before. As the heart of any city, the downtown area plays a crucial role in fostering economic development, cultural enrichment, and social cohesion.

Edmonton's downtown core has been a central hub for vibrant small businesses, residents, and visitors alike. However, with the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which emptied office towers and increased social disorder, the Alberta government needs to prioritize investing in downtown Edmonton to ensure the city's continued resilience.

In the wake of the pandemic, the downtown area has been left in a precarious position. Far too many small businesses closed their doors, employees shifted to remote work, and the core's economic drive has been severely diminished. According to CBRE, Edmonton has the third highest downtown office vacancy rate in the country at 23.5 per cent.

Over the past few years, major retailers such as Holt Renfrew, Hudson's Bay, and Sport Chek have all pulled out of downtown Edmonton. A lack of businesses in the downtown core leads to less foot traffic, which has then, in turn, prompted concerns about safety.

We need a provincial government to take decisive action to restore vibrancy to the area so people feel safe and businesses can return to the area. By doing so, we can reverse the cycle and make the downtown core more attractive and accessible to workers, visitors, and residents alike.

The City of Edmonton has released their own [Downtown Vibrancy Strategy](#). The strategy's objectives are to:

1. *Encourage people to live downtown*
2. *Make a strong, diverse economy*
3. *Attract visitors*
4. *Improve safety*

The strategy calls for the provincial government to support downtown Edmonton in a variety of areas, including affordable housing, business attraction and retention, and public safety. We will partner with the City of Edmonton to help implement this strategy, as well as provide additional support based on consultations with residents.



# RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT POLICY

Edmonton's downtown is home to many businesses in the tech and innovation sector. But in the UCP's first budget, they declared economic diversification a luxury and cut several tax credits that supported the tech sector — including the Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit and Alberta Investor Tax Credit — and cut the province's artificial intelligence (AI) strategy. As a result, instead of creating new jobs here, digital media companies started hiring out-of-province and AI companies like Google's DeepMind closed their operations and moved jobs to Ontario and Quebec.

Despite repeated calls from the business community, the UCP has refused to reinstate these tax credits.

In February 2022, the UCP government established the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Economic Recovery Working Group to determine policies the provincial government could look at to enhance growth in Edmonton and surrounding area. It included four high-level recommendations to support downtown Edmonton:

- 1. Provide a residential construction grant (per door), focused on increasing the downtown population;*
- 2. Invest in government-owned buildings and provide other incentives to get provincial employees back in the office;*
- 3. Provide matching grants for private and public investments in downtown infrastructure improvements (sidewalks, roads, trees, street furniture, and other beautification initiatives);*
- 4. Provide funding for respite and addiction treatment centres, as well as programs with demonstrated success in supporting people with mental health and addiction issues*

The report was initiated under former Premier Jason Kenney, was released in April under Premier Danielle Smith and it is not clear which recommendations the government plans to implement — if any.

In 2019, the UCP government also made deep cuts to social support programs and municipal funding that was directed towards policing. That included confiscating municipal fine revenue by increasing the provincial take from 26.7 per cent to 40 per cent, resulting in a \$5 million cut for Edmonton police.

The UCP have also decreased the number of provincially supported affordable homes by 8,000 and cut financial assistance programs that support the most vulnerable. There were nearly 66,000 provincially supported affordable homes in 2018-19 under the previous NDP government and only 58,000 supported under the UCP in 2021-22.

These cuts to police and, combined with other UCP cuts and the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to rising rates of poverty, homelessness, addictions and crime in urban centres like Edmonton.





# PROPOSALS

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- 1. ADDRESS SOCIAL DISORDER**
- 2. ATTRACT INVESTMENT AND CREATE JOBS**
- 3. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS**
- 4. SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORTS**
- 5. CHINATOWN SUPPORT**
- 6. POST-SECONDARY EXPANSION**

## 1. ADDRESS SOCIAL DISORDER

Edmonton residents, the business community, and the City have all highlighted that the current social disorder is the number one issue facing downtown.

There is a need for the government to address the housing crisis, substance use, and crime in the downtown core.

As part of our [plan to address crime and safety](#), we will restore municipal police funding that was cut by the UCP and invest in integrated teams to make urban transit safe while addressing poverty, homelessness, mental health, and addictions.

Reversing the UCP cuts to fine revenue will allow us to hire 150 more police officers across the province and partner them with 150 more support workers.

We will also hire more probation officers, invest in post-release programs to stop repeat and prolific offenders, and direct resources to enhance teams already established, like 911/211 co-location, Indigenous teams and culturally appropriate and trauma-informed outreach.

In addition, we will provide wrap-around supports and support community agencies in areas such as health, mental health, housing, harm reduction, addictions treatment, and access to training and employment to address the roots of crime.

As part of our broader [affordable housing strategy](#), we will ensure 40,000 more Albertans have a safe and affordable place to call home in five years by building 8,500 more affordable housing units across Alberta and increasing rental assistance to support 11,000 more homes.

In addition, we will invest \$120 million into the Indigenous Housing Capital Program to support Indigenous-led projects and solutions to affordable housing, create a rent bank to protect people from sudden evictions, and reforming income support so the program works to ensure Albertans have stable and secure housing.

Overall, the plan will improve public safety and better address the root causes of social disorder by ensuring properly-funded police forces are working together as a team with community and social service providers to make a meaningful impact, specifically in the downtown core of Edmonton.

## 2. ATTRACT INVESTMENT AND CREATE JOBS

The City's Downtown Vibrancy Strategy calls for incentives for startups and scale-ups who are considering locating or returning to the downtown.

Edmonton already has a strong tech and digital media sector that has grown significantly over the past several years. The previous NDP Government supported these sectors through the introduction of the Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit (IDMTC) and the Alberta Investor Tax Credit (AITC).

The IDMTC was available to companies creating primarily interactive digital media and gaming products, covering 25 per cent of qualifying labour costs.

The AITC, offered a 30 per cent tax credit to qualified individuals or corporations who invest in eligible Alberta small businesses doing research, development or commercialization of new technology, new products or new processes; or to those engaged in interactive digital media development, video post-production, digital animation or tourism.

These tax credits helped startups grow and attracted established companies to come to Alberta. However, the cancellation of these tax credits led to companies hiring out of the province and choosing to invest in other jurisdictions.

We will reinstate the IDMTC and the AITC to restore our competitiveness, attract investment, and create jobs in downtown Edmonton.



## 3. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The City's downtown vibrancy strategy also calls for public realm improvements to make it safer and easier to get to, and around, downtown.

The City has already put forward the [Downtown Public Places Plan](#) that seeks to make further improvements to the downtown that will require further funding to implement. This includes improvements to Warehouse Park, Beaver Hills House Park, and Michael Phair Park Renewal, 97th Street Bridge Area Renewal and projects.

To facilitate ongoing and future capital improvement, we are proposing \$50 million in capital funding for the City of Edmonton. This can help provide physical improvements to derelict spaces, address security concerns, and large capital projects to attract people downtown.

The City has also started examining a program to convert empty office space into residential in order to encourage more people to live downtown. However, no details of the program have been released.

We will consider any future funding requests for downtown Edmonton office conversions once the City develops a plan.



## 4. SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORTS

The City of Edmonton's vibrancy strategy seeks to optimize a four-season experience for pedestrians, parks, and patios; as well as enabling events and experiences throughout the year that continually give people a reason to come downtown and have fun.

In addition, we have heard from the business community that they are looking for support in repairing, improving, and modernizing storefronts, as well as funding to attract new small businesses into the downtown core.

The City currently has the Storefront Improvement Grant reimbursement grant for large, significant exterior renovations, up to 50 per cent of project costs. The City provides up to \$800,000 in funding for the program each year.

In addition, the City has the Interior Building Improvement Grant that provides a matching reimbursement grant for interior renovations, up to 50 per cent of project costs to a maximum of \$20,000. The City provides up to \$750,000 for the program each year.

The Edmonton Downtown Business Association also recently announced \$1.8 million to support business growth, retail, and dining in the core.

This program provides up to \$5,000 per business to help cover costs for building a new patio or improvements or additions to an existing one located on public space, such as sidewalks, parking spaces, or alleys.

Selected businesses will also receive up to \$5,000 per business to cover implementation costs like digital marketing, signage, and minor interior and exterior renovations.

We propose providing up to \$5 million to support ongoing efforts by the City and the Edmonton Downtown Business Association to attract new businesses into downtown and improve existing spaces.

## 5. CHINATOWN SUPPORT

For over 100 years, Edmonton's Chinatown has served as an economic and cultural hub. But Chinatown has been hit hard by COVID-19 and the rise in social disorder has reduced economic activity, hurt businesses, and created significant safety concerns within the area.

In 2022, the City established a \$1-million Chinatown Recovery Fund as part of an effort to increase safety and economic activity in the area.

The program allocated funds for projects in the following areas:

- *Improve sense of safety and security*
- *Focused economic development*
- *Governance and community leadership network*
- *Celebrate Chinatown as a destination*
- *Enhance built form and landmarks*

The program is running successfully and has already distributed most of the \$1 million to struggling small businesses and nonprofits. However, the program has not been renewed for another year.

We propose committing another \$1.5 million to support the continuation of the fund and support the ongoing work to revitalize Chinatown.

Chinatown businesses and community groups can also access funds from other proposals within this paper. Chinatown will benefit from the increase in police and social support funding, as well as be eligible for the small business and capital improvement grants.





## 6. POST-SECONDARY EXPANSION

Downtown post-secondary campuses bring students, researchers, and businesses together to support innovation and collaboration. In addition, they increase the vibrancy by increasing foot traffic in the area, adding to a sense of safety in the area.

Research has also shown that downtown campuses lead to better economic outcomes. They produce:

- *80 per cent more licensing deals*
- *Report 123 per cent more inventions*
- *Receive 222 per cent more income from licensing agreements*
- *Create 71 per cent more startups*

The previous NDP government invested in the Singhmar Centre for Learning at Norquest, as well as the new Student Association of MacEwan University building and the MacEwan University Health Centre in downtown Edmonton.

The current government has announced in their most recent budget that they will provide \$125 million over five years for the new MacEwan University Business School, a move we support, as there is a great deal of need for more post-secondary space. Alberta is expected to see another 60,000 new students entering post-secondary institutions by 2030 and the business school will provide another 7,500 spots.

We will work with all post secondary institutions that would be looking to build or expand their campuses within downtown Edmonton.

# CONCLUSION

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Downtown Edmonton deserves a provincial government that supports the people and businesses that make the downtown core so vibrant. The last four years of UCP policies have failed.

The UCP cuts to policing, affordable housing, and social supports have driven social disorder that severely impacted downtown Edmonton’s economic capacity and livability.

The policies proposed through consultation with residents, business owners and community leaders show that there is a better way. From the proposal above, it is clear that Alberta’s NDP believes in investing in Edmonton’s downtown core by helping small businesses adapt and grow.

Alberta’s NDP will address social disorder, attract investment, create jobs, and support businesses in Edmonton’s core. By doing so, we can restore a sense of safety and vibrancy to downtown Edmonton and make it a destination to live, work, and play.

However, these ideas are not finalized. We will continue to engage with Edmontonians on these proposals and listen to others as we tackle the challenges facing Edmonton, so we can build a better future together.

# COSTING

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The costs below are either new, reprofiled, or future capital plan funding. New funding refers to incremental additional spend to further this initiative.

Addressing Social Disorder and Tech and Innovation Tax Credits have been budgeted through previous policy papers and announcements.

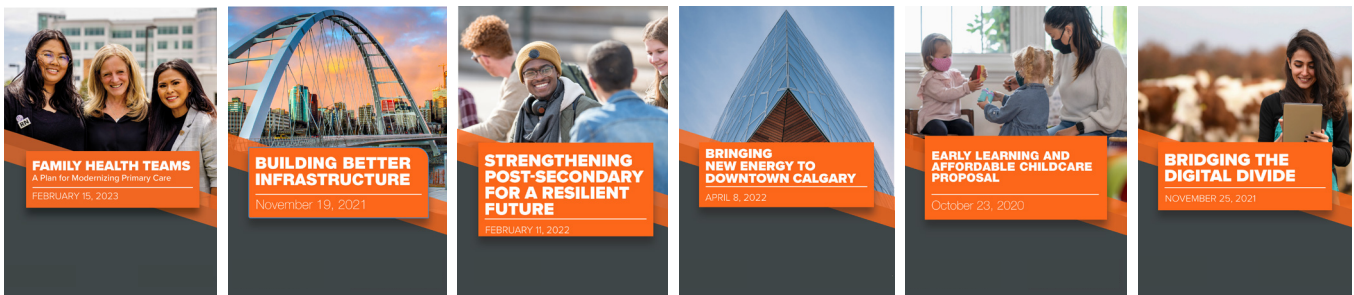
We welcome feedback on the costing of each proposal put forward as part of Alberta’s Future.

PROPOSAL	COSTS
<b>Capital Improvement Grants</b>	\$50 million
<b>Small Business Supports</b>	\$5 million
<b>Chinatown Support</b>	\$1.5 million
<b>Post-Secondary Investment</b>	\$125 million

# ALBERTA'S FUTURE



Over the past three years, we have been consulting through our Alberta's Future project to develop ideas to build a more resilient and diversified economy. Through discussion and consultation, we have benefited from the input of Albertans from all walks of life.



Earlier in this project, we released papers on foundational items, modernizing primary healthcare with [Family Health Teams](#), physical and digital infrastructure ([Building Better Infrastructure](#) and [Bridging the Digital Divide](#)), and improving our post-secondary education system ([Strengthening Post-Secondary for a Resilient Future](#)), on targeted challenges ([Bringing New Energy to Downtown Calgary](#)), on childcare ([Early Learning and Affordable Childcare Strategy](#)), and rural broadband ([Internet & Future Connectivity: Bridging the Digital Divide](#)).



Likewise, we focused sectors that could help drive economic growth, for example, the [Competitiveness, Jobs, & Investment Growth Strategy for Alberta](#), releasing papers on technology and AI ([Growing Tech, Creating Jobs](#)), in valued-added energy opportunities ([Bitumen Beyond Combustion](#)), in hydrogen ([Hydrogen: A New Energy Source for Alberta's Future](#)), geothermal ([Picking Up Steam: Geothermal and Alberta's Energy Future](#)) and agriculture ([Agriculture and Agri-Food: Increasing Value-Added Processing and Production](#)).

# Give Us Feedback

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## WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK

**Alberta's Future** is an initiative to build a new economy that benefits every person in our province. We want you to share your thoughts and ideas on proposals like this one.

We welcome you to submit your own proposals too!

All of our proposals and those contributed by Albertans like you can be found at **AlbertasFuture.ca**. There, you can also register for in-person and online conversations happening right across Alberta.

We are also hosting this conversation on social media, using the hashtag **#ABFuture**.

**Engage directly with NDP Leader Rachel Notley on YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook**



**@RachelNotley**

**Alberta's  
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