

# Awesome Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Edmonton

Summary Report

March 8, 2013



## Background

In May 2012, The Natural Step, with the support of many leading organizations in Edmonton, hosted a “Dialogue on Sustainability and Prosperity in Edmonton” attended by 50 leading citizens in Edmonton. At this gathering we heard 7 clear messages:

- Sustainability is local and tangible
- Work at the neighbourhood scale
- Engage the voices of generations
- Big challenges require collaboration
- Work with people we know and don’t know
- Learn to collaborate effectively
- Tap into and unleash our creativity



Figure 1: Stakeholders at Dialogue for a Sustainable and Prosperous Edmonton, May 2012

Based on this feedback and the generous support of the Alberta Real Estate Foundation, the concept of “Awesome Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Edmonton: What do you declare possible?” was born. In brief, the project was a series of two workshops. The first engaged the voices of youth to identify their ideal neighbourhood. The second engaged stakeholders who directly or indirectly influence the development of Edmonton neighbourhoods to hear the call of youth and to collaborate together to look at how we can address the major barriers to making this a reality.

Citizens were invited to join us via the following invitation:

***We create and re-create our neighbourhoods constantly. What do we need from our neighbourhoods? What do our neighbourhoods need from us? What do YOU declare possible?***



Figure 2: “It was one of the best workshops I have ever been to. Very engaging.” – Workshop Participant

*Our cities are made by us. Most parts of cities are left to us by earlier generations, but they are still made by us. We believe that working at the neighbourhood scale is where we can make cities what we need them to be. It is at this scale where we experience the city and all it has to offer.*

*It’s time to name the impossible dream. It’s time to experiment and find our way there. It’s time to name what the dream is for our city and our neighbourhoods.*

***It’s time to make the impossible possible.  
Join us for an experiment...***

The format of the workshops included group discussions, creating physical models and action planning using an open space format to maximize interaction and dialogue. Overall reviews of the workshop were excellent.

Below are the key messages we heard at the workshops about awesome neighbourhoods.

## The Prime Ideas

The points below represent the Prime Ideas from both workshops from participants on what Awesome Neighbourhoods mean for Edmonton.

In short, Awesome Neighbourhoods...

1. **Integrate the neighbourhood and the city-region.** Just as the well-being of neighbourhoods affects the city-region, the well-being of the city-region affects each neighbourhood. Of note - the city-region's low density has an impact on our ability to look after all of our neighbourhoods. If spread too thin, all are at risk. Is the city's footprint too big?
2. **Are significant places that nurture community, nature and design.** We cultivate and spread the wisdom through community. Natural areas and biodiversity contribute to our identity and sense of place. Awesome neighbourhoods look great too - full of colour, art and personality.
3. **Offer essential places to gather.** They are indoors and outdoors, for all seasons, public and private, programmed and flexible, formal and informal. 'Bumping' places, where we bump into each other in cafes, grocery stores, walking trails, are frequent. Awesome neighbourhoods connect neighbours with each other. The more connections, the better.
4. **Welcome and tap into the wisdom of multiple generations and perspectives.** There is great wisdom in the diversity of interests, skills, knowledge, spirituality and culture of an awesome neighbourhood. We seek to learn from each other because we know that living together connects us with something larger than all of us. Housing choices reflect the various needs of citizens, as do commercial, recreational, spiritual and employment opportunities.
5. **Move in many, connected ways.** Multiple modes of transportation are evident: walking, cycling, public transportation and vehicular. Each mode is ensured connections and interconnections between the component parts of the neighbourhood.
6. **Generate healthy citizens.** Healthy choices abound for neighbours in the form of opportunities for active lifestyles, support networks and health services. Neighbours help and support each other. The built environment is non-toxic and adds value to the city-region's ecosystem.

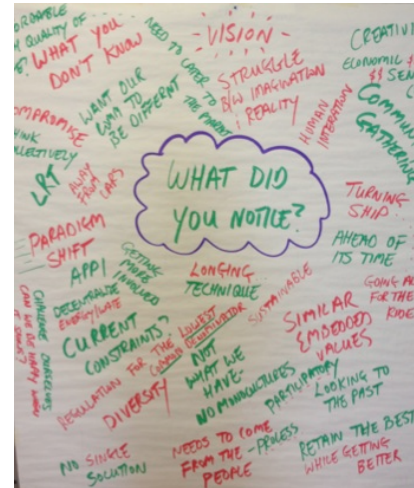


Figure 3: Observations from participants at Workshop II



Figure 4: Synthesizing Ideas into Action at Workshop II

7. **Support multiple business models.** Conventional business models, co-ops and social enterprise thrive in awesome neighbourhoods. Local manufacturing is thriving. There are diverse employment centers, allowing diverse citizens to live near work.

8. **Organize for energy resilience.** Renewable energy systems are front and center. You will find wind farms, active and passive solar, and district energy systems. Energy also comes in the form of food for citizens; food security is top of mind and the awesome neighbourhood produces food. Local wastewater treatment is found, as well as natural storm water management.

9. **Organize for private and public lives in neighbourhoods.** How do we create community when we also crave privacy? Our neighbourhoods will become sustainable when we are able to see the value of living closer together and serving each other well.

10. **Plan for neighbourhood life cycles** with long-term planning and annual city budgets that contemplate life cycle assessments of infrastructure. This is not simple work because everything is interconnected. There are many processes for citizens to engage in. How can we limit the barriers to engagement within authorities *and* within ourselves.

11. **Self-organize for wisdom.** Mentors, leaders and champions all have roles in the awesome neighbourhood to build social capital. As a whole, neighbours listen well to each other, look after each other, and explore how to shift their minds.

12. **Support neighbours' individual and collective dreams.** The tension between personal choice and collective goals is recalibrating. The more we interact and discuss our individual aims, the more the collective can address them. All we need to do is look at the full range of benefits of meeting everyone's needs. Polarization serves us, and does not derail us.



Figure 3: Discussion at Workshop II



Figure 5: Participants synthesizing key lessons

13. **Build trust to take risks.** There are various perspectives on what makes a neighbourhood great, and the more we interact with each other, and give each other (and ourselves) the time to explore these perspectives, we will find more in common. Let's listen to each other. Let's look for common goals. Let's find time for what is important. Let's experiment.

## Amazing Neighbourhoods: Engagement and Sustainability Planning Guide

The lessons from the Awesome Neighbourhood dialogues will inform the *Amazing Neighbourhoods: Engagement and Sustainability Planning Guide* prepared by The Natural Step, with the support of the *Alberta Real Estate Foundation, The Calgary Foundation, Alberta Ecotrust, The Catherine Donnelly Foundation and ISL Engineering and Land Services.*



If your neighbourhood is interested in learning more about the *Amazing Neighbourhoods: Engagement and Sustainability Planning Guide* and/or participating in a pilot program to apply this guide to develop a sustainable neighbourhood action plan, then please contact John Purkis at [jpurkis@naturalstep.ca](mailto:jpurkis@naturalstep.ca).

## Thank You and Next Steps

We would like to thank everyone for their participation in the Awesome Neighbourhood dialogues and for their leadership and commitment to create a sustainable and prosperous Edmonton.

To leverage the excellent work during the dialogues, this report will be shared with key stakeholders in Edmonton and Alberta who are working on the themes of neighbourhoods, community and sustainability, and will be officially submitted as part of the feedback process on the City of Edmonton's design guidelines for new neighbourhoods. If you are interested in learning more about the Awesome Neighbourhood dialogues, please contact Beth Sanders at POPULUS Community Planning at [beth@populus.ca](mailto:beth@populus.ca).



Figure 7: Please join us in the dialogue