



**Creative Edmonton:
Envisioning a Culturally Vital Community**

City of Edmonton Cultural Inventory

Discussion Paper 4: Edmonton: A New Urbanism

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Edmonton: A New Urbanism

1. Background

Ursula Franklin, eminent Canadian geologist and museologist, at a Canadian Museums Association conference in St. John, New Brunswick, noted that poverty was the best preserver of heritage. By this she meant that wealthier provinces tore down their stock of historic buildings in downtowns while poorer cities that had suffered from recessions for years, such as St. John, had an excellent stock of historic buildings.

Cities in the Western democracies have been struggling with a range of challenges including aging physical infrastructure, urban sprawl, and also a range of inner-city social issues. The development of the automobile impacted on the footprint of North American cities by making suburbs and even separate, nearby towns accessible to those who worked in the city. The garden city movement promoted the notion that cities needed to be surrounded by “green belts” and that families lived on the outskirts of cities in bungalows surrounded by gardens with easy access to services. Thus, families ceased to go into the downtown for many amenities. It became a truism that only the poor and the disadvantaged continued to live in the downtown core. The development of industrial parks also drew away small and large businesses to areas outside the city. The building of shopping malls covering large terrains on the fringes of the city surrounded by extensive car parks, further impacted on the city.

Beginning in the 1950s, city planners were focused on moving traffic in and out of the downtown core in the most efficient manner possible and this result in the creation of concrete freeways and overpasses that required the tearing down of old buildings, further denuding the downtown core of historic buildings that gave it identity as well as visual beauty. The result of all of these trends was a downtown core denuded of significant residents and businesses that gave it a purpose. For many city residents, there was no longer any reason to go downtown other than to complete transactions with governments since public buildings remained in the downtown.

All of these trends happened without significant planning on the part of cities. It would appear that neither civil servants nor elected officials were aware of these trends in a mad dash to modernity. In the US, beginning in the 1950s, historians, curators and some architects saw that the loss of traditional neighborhoods meant that important aspects of the cultural patrimony were being lost. Initiatives then began to preserve colonial and federal structures many of which were situated in the downtown core. In many cities, these efforts were too little, too late but champions such as Jane Jacobs made it possible to state the value of historic buildings in ways in which the larger community could become involved. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, like Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, made people aware of the negative impacts of modernity and an unchecked progressivist ethic. Jacobs and her husband had moved to Toronto to ensure that their sons would not be conscripted to fight in the war in Viet Nam and Toronto became the base of her operations. It became the crucible for testing her ideas about city life and urban values. The values of small communities and communal governance, such as the New England town hall meeting were espoused by Jacobs and others, and ordinary citizens were encouraged to take back the city from developers and civic politicians and others captivated by the “edifice complex.”

By the 1980s onwards, building preservation was firmly linked with urban revitalization and the arts and culture were seen as a tool for making this happen. There are many American and some Canadian examples of efforts and successes in this area. Examples include Baltimore, Philadelphia, Seattle, Portland in the US and Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver in Canada. Philadelphia for the Arts was a major urban revitalization project that saw the preservation and adaptive re-use of historic buildings; sadly, great swaths of the downtown were also razed to create a new convention centre complex and new cultural flagship facilities. This also happened in Seattle and Baltimore. Ursula Franklin, eminent Canadian geologist and museologist, at a Canadian Museums Association conference in St. John, New Brunswick, noted that poverty was

the best preserver of heritage. By this she meant that wealthier provinces tore down their stock of historic buildings in downtowns while poorer cities that had suffered from recessions for years, such as St. John, had an excellent stock of historic buildings.

Edmonton and Calgary, in relation to other North American cities are relatively new. They had their beginnings at the end of the 19th century and their first building booms happened at the beginning of the 20th century. The establishment of the Province of Alberta in 2005 heralded a major building boom that saw a range of public buildings, such as the Legislative Assembly, built. The architectural style of public buildings was largely neoclassical in nature. The building boom ended with the coming of World War II. After that, building continued at a slow rate until the coming in of Leduc # 1 in 1947. Since then, while there have been some recessionary periods, the economy of Alberta remained largely buoyant and building continued. In terms of the building stock of the cities of Edmonton and Calgary, there are the few building jewels from the first part of the 20th century and, then, the significant building stock from 1947 onwards, largely Modern in style.¹ The recently completed City of Edmonton Modern building inventory is evidence of the building boom that the City experienced in this era and some of these buildings are of international significance.

While Calgary saw a building boom spurred by “big oil” in the 1970s and 1980s in keeping with it being the corporate centre for Alberta’s oil patch, Edmonton did not. It was in this period as well, under the premiership of Peter Lougheed that Edmonton’s position as the provincial capital was eroded, a process completed under Premier Ralph Klein’s leadership. Under Minister Steve West, many services traditionally housed in the capital city, were decentralized to communities throughout Alberta. In addition, there were major cuts to the Edmonton-based provincial civil service. The loss of these offices and reductions to the Edmonton-based provincial civil service impacted significantly on Edmonton. It was the potential threat to the loss of Edmonton’s International airport that, finally galvanized City Council and public opinion to challenge the province on the erosion of the power base of the Capital City. Under Mayors Bill Smith and Stephen Mandel, Council has shown leadership in this area but the battle has not been won.

2. The Built Heritage

Buildings have hearts and souls, just as cities do. We can feel the memory and meaning in a building, sense the spiritual and cultural longing it evokes. If you doubt that, think about the heartbreaking immensity of the loss when the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapsed.

Daniel Liebeskind, breaking ground

2.1 Theory

For many building preservationists, Daniel Liebeskind represents the enemy. His buildings are bold architectural statements; sculptural pieces that are expressions of modernity. One need only consider the extension to the Royal Ontario Museum, which appends, in a brutal way, a modernistic glass and steel crystalline structure into the façade of the Italianate red brick

¹ Excellent inventory work has been done by architect David Murray and historical researchers Marianne Fedori and Ken Tingley on Edmonton’s Modern architecture. Initially, they created a report based on funding from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation (the report can be seen at www.doorsopenalberta.ca – part of the *Alberta Online Encyclopedia*, which can be found at www.albertasource.ca. The Encyclopedia was developed by the Heritage Community Foundation and currently comprises 73 website. Murray, Fedori and Tingley have recently completed the inventory for the City of Edmonton. In addition, David Murray, Shafraaz Kaba and Troy Smith created the Capital Modern exhibition for the Edmonton Art Gallery in 2007. The exhibit catalogue is titled *Capital Modern: A Guide to Edmonton Architecture & Urban Design 1940-1969* (Edmonton: Art Gallery of Alberta, 2007).

structure, to see that he does not respect historic buildings per se. Having said this, in his fascinating personal and architectural memoir, *breaking ground*, he makes the important statement quoted above.² He grasps that buildings have other values beyond the architectural. It must be strongly stated that “landmark” buildings can be historic as well as contemporary and that cities must have both. Buildings and cities do have souls and we forget this at our peril.

A city exists in a space/time continuum and continues to evolve by building on the past. When developers and architects, civil engineers, transportation specialists, civic politicians and others are allowed to erase past eras through the wholesale demolition of historic buildings, it is as if we are erasing a portion of our history. This is not to say that every part of the city should be a historic precinct. Cities must accommodate change but this needs to be done with planning and forethought and we must also understand the nature of buildings that makes them heritage treasures and landmarks. The notion of landmark buildings applies to both old and new structures; thus, the city must ensure, in some fashion that buildings that are to be erected meet design guidelines. They should also meet community needs and fit frameworks for appropriate downtown mixed use and residential neighbourhoods.

The work begun by Jane Jacobs has been continued by others including Roberta Brandes Gratz and Norman Mintz. In their *Cities Back from the Edge: new life for downtown*, they analyze failures in urban planning as well as suggesting how to remedy them. They make the important point that cities can be rebuilt but not reborn and explain this notion as follows:

The ones rebuilt, but not reborn, have done so according to expensive plans, bankers’ plans, planners’ plans, politicians’ plans, developers’ plans – all Project Plans. The result is a collection of expensive, big activity places – tourist attractions – connected to each other and the suburbs by a massive auto-based network. When the elusive goal is merely tourism, efficiency, and big copycat civic projects, little real energy and downtown life follows, just single-activity places. The complex, multidimensional urban fabric has been effectively replaced. A collection of visitor attractions does not add up to a city.³

They provide a range of examples of successes that are at an appropriate scale for the community and that are not “exercises in nostalgia.” They view the past as a resource for the present and also bring forward a number of projects that are “catalytic” in nature. Such projects are not only building preservation projects but also generate spin-off businesses that stimulate the local economy. Gratz and Mintz also suggest that sometimes rules need to be broken to achieve desired results:

Defying convention or breaking rules begins the process of unraveling the mess we have created. Bad rules and destructive guidelines have accrued during 50 years of automobile-oriented planning. Professions have grown up to perpetuate them. Urban planners. Architects and engineers. Traffic engineers. Retail consultants. Real estate developers. These professionals have a stake in keeping the public believing in their expertise. But the so-called experts too often ignore or deny the legitimacy of local citizen instincts, common sense, and accumulated wisdom.⁴

They note, as so many others have done that communities and cities are about the sense of place. In order to rebuild our cities, we need to define space through public discourse that focuses on “strengthening family values, rebuilding community, integrating people, building secure communities, and eliminating crime.”⁵ The process required to succeed in a “multi-benefit way” is:

² Daniel Liebeskind, *breaking ground* (New York: riverhead books, 2004), p. 13.

³ Roberta Brandes Gratz with Norman Mintz, *Cities Back from the Edge: new life for Downtown* (New York: Preservation Press, John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1998), p. 2.

⁴ Gratz and Metz, p. 4.

⁵ Gratz and Metz, p. 43.

...across the country, efforts abound to recreate destroyed public spaces, rebuild undermined downtowns, stimulate new entrepreneurial opportunities, and repopulate the stores on Main Street and their upstairs apartments. Groups diligently repairing, restoring, reweaving, and replacing those communities, Main streets, public meeting places, small businesses, parks, cultural landmarks, and historic buildings are actually repairing democracy itself.⁶

They note that there are no formulas for success but, throughout the book, they provide positive US examples of urban redevelopment. Time and again they demonstrate that historic buildings can be rescued and restored to be the centerpiece of developments with a range of community and business uses. They are also advocates for small is beautiful and communities leading such projects rather than developers in “distant corporate headquarters.”⁷ Principles include norms such as “incremental development builds on local character”⁸ and the organic model of gardening. Frequently, a small project serves as a catalyst. Downtown is seen as needing cars to bring people in and out but not at the expense of other community values since transportation can destroy neighborhoods. They also note that superstores and national chains can locate downtown, even in historic buildings. They do not need to be in big box developments. Finally, they advocate a “back to basics” approach:

Many communities, big and small, wait for a private owner or public agency to create the new attraction. Farsighted residents don't. They recognize a need, seize an opportunity, and get something started without waiting for public officials to move. Community-based investment, in fact, has the greatest chance for success, simply because local people treasure and nurture their own ownership role.⁹

Project for Public Spaces, Inc. is a nonprofit organization established by President Fred Kent in 1975. They have developed expertise in the area of the social and spatial issues that challenge cities and focus on helping citizens to rebuild their communities. They have created a handbook titled *How to Turn a Place Around: A Handbook for Creating Successful Public Spaces*.¹⁰ They were brought in by the City of Edmonton to advise senior staff and community volunteers in November, 2007.¹¹ The workbook echoes many of the same principles noted by Gratz and Metz but puts them into a “how to” format. Their mission is “to create and sustain public places that build communities.”¹² They have chosen public places as their focus for the following reasons:

Public places are a stage for our public lives. They are the parks where celebrations are held, where marathons end, where children learn the skills of a sport, where the seasons are marked and where cultures mix. They are the streets and sidewalks in front of homes and businesses where friends run into each other and where exchanges both social and economic take place. They are the “front porches” of our public institutions –

⁶ Gratz and Metz, p. 43.

⁷ Gratz and Metz, p. 51.

⁸ Gratz and Metz, p. 53.

⁹ Gratz and Metz, p. 251.

¹⁰ Project for Public Spaces, Inc. *How to Turn a Place Around: A Handbook for Creating Successful Public Spaces* (New York, Project for Public Spaces, Inc., 200-2005).

¹¹ On Friday, November 9th, 2007 at City Hall, Cynthia Nikitin from PPS presented a on the theme “community Revitalization – How to Build Cities around Public Places.” The flyer noted:

Cynthia Nikitin has earned a reputation as a persuasive advocate for “Placemaking” as an approach to city planning and urban design. As a manager of numerous large-scale and complex projects during her sixteen years with Project for Public Spaces, Inc., where is Vice President for Public Buildings and Downtowns. Her technical expertise stretches from the development of downtown main street master plans and corridor enhancement projects, to the creation of transit station area plans, and public art master plans for major cities.

¹² PPS, p. 11.

city halls, libraries, and post offices – where we interact with each other and with government.

When cities and neighborhoods have thriving public spaces, residents have a strong sense of community; conversely, when they are lacking, they may feel less connected to each other.¹³

PPS has focused on what others describe as Iconic Space and note that such places have the following benefits:

- Give cities their sense of identity
- Benefit cities economically
- Help the environment and
- Provide settings for cultural activities

As a result of researching more than 11,000 public spaces, they have created a visual that demonstrates the Key Attributes, i.e., Intangibles Measurements of successful public spaces:

- Accessibility (Access and Linkage)
- Activities (Uses and Activities)
- Comfort (Comfort and Image) and
- Sociability

Each of these Key Attributes results in positive feelings and, in turn, relates to specific civic functions. For example, Comfort and Image, encourages positive feelings such as:

- Safety
- Charm
- History
- Attractiveness
- Spirituality
- Sittability
- Walkability
- “Green”-ness
- Cleanliness

In turn, these impact on:

- Crime statistics
- Sanitation rating
- Building conditions and
- Environmental data

PPS also indicates why many public spaces fail:

Today, many public spaces seem to be intentionally designed to be looked at but not touched. They are neat, clear and empty – as if to say, “no people, no problem!” But when a public space is empty, vandalized, or used chiefly by undesirables, this is generally an indication that something is very wrong with its design, or its management, or both.¹⁴

The principles outlined for developing and managing a successful place are as follows:

¹³ PPS, p. 14.

¹⁴ PPS, p. 20.

- Underlying Ideas:
 - The community is the expert
 - You are creating a place – not a design
 - You can't do it alone
 - They always say it can't be done

- Planning and outreach techniques:
 - You can see a lot just by observing
 - Develop a vision

- Translating ideas into action
 - For supports function
 - Triangulate

- Implementation
 - Start with the petunias
 - Money is not the issue
 - You are never finished¹⁵

2.2 *Urban Revitalization: Edmonton Examples*

While many consider that the issue of urban revitalization is a hot issue today, it has taken about 30 years to get here. When visiting experts such as Roberta Brandes Gratz visit Edmonton, they present success stories from largely American sources and do not have a background in what has been happening in Edmonton. In fact, there have been a number of successful projects and it would appear that there is now a critical mass of community and civic understanding of the importance of such projects to the life of the City viewed broadly and not simply from the lens of culture or heritage. The following discussion provides some case studies and analyzes the history, motivation, processes, and successes and/or failures of each.

2.2.1 *Old Strathcona*

While Edmonton has done nothing of the scale required to ensure the complete revitalization of its downtown centered around Jasper Avenue, it has undertaken some successful projects. Ironically, the most successful is in Old Strathcona, which started its life as a separate incorporated community on the South bank of the North Saskatchewan River. This urban redevelopment project fits many of the criteria set out by Gratz and Mintz, and the PPS. In fact, it was one of the earliest urban revitalization projects in Canada centered on a historic precinct and received funding support from the Heritage Canada Foundation, a national agency that promotes the preservation of the built heritage. The initiator of this project was the Old Strathcona Foundation, incorporated on November 13th, 1974 with the primary purpose:

To sponsor, establish and administer a heritage conservation area within the boundaries of the Town of Strathcona as it existed prior to amalgamation within the boundaries of the City of Edmonton, honouring the citizens, preserving the buildings and relics and portraying the community of the area.

To revitalize the community centre character of Old Strathcona to provide for the social and civic needs of the Old Strathcona Heritage Conservation area.¹⁶

¹⁵ PPS, p. 33.

¹⁶ See www.osf.strathcona.org/History/Foundation.html.

The way in which the Foundation has seen its role is twofold: as a preserver of the historic fabric and as a cultural programmer to make the area a place where people would want to live, do business and visit.

After its annexation by Edmonton in 1912, Strathcona ceased to be a centre for business and became largely a residential area. Its main street – Whyte Avenue – declined as the prestigious shops, businesses and offices were concentrated in Edmonton’s downtown on the North side of the River. The area is an example of a very successful mixed use urban revitalization project. For the past 33 years, the Old Strathcona Foundation has raised funds from all levels of government for the preservation work, as well as masterminding street beautification and façade restoration projects. The Foundation planned and undertook a number of projects including:

- Streetscape improvements beginning in 1985 (these include brick sidewalks, oak benches, turn-of-the-century light poles, trees and banners)
- A building restoration program (15 buildings along Whyte Avenue were restored)
- Seeding the development of the Old Strathcona Farmer’s Market (now a separate entity)
- Seeding the development of the Fringe Festival (now a separate entity)
- Development of McIntyre Park with its historic fountain and gazebo
- Development of the End of Steel Park
- Development of the Silly Summer Parade
- Development of the Merchant’s Association (now the Strathcona Business Association)
- Development of walking tours of the area¹⁷

At the heart of Old Strathcona is a classic Alberta Main Street with historic buildings dating back to the early part of the twentieth century. Some have received municipal, provincial or federal historic designation. It is a living, urban neighbourhood with historic homes, character buildings and a range of activities that draw people to the area. The buildings house restaurants and cafes, pubs, a library, jazz club, shops, bookstores, cinemas and offices. Infill concrete buildings have now been given some character and one has become a boutique hotel. Some new constructions have been designed to fit in with the historic frontages. The City of Edmonton’s old Bus Barns and the complex of buildings around them include a market as well as performance space for the Fringe Theatre Adventures. The old firehall became the Waltherdale Theatre. Besides shopping and entertainment venues, the area also houses a range of non-profits that undertake programming to attract visitors. Old Strathcona was so successful that it became the model for the Province of Alberta’s Mainstreet Programme, which provides funding support for revitalization projects in municipalities throughout Alberta.

Once the City of Edmonton discontinued its grant to the Old Strathcona Foundation, its capacity to develop and implement programs was reduced but some of these activities were continued by the Strathcona Business Association. The most successful programming entity in the area is the Edmonton International Fringe Theatre Festival, established in 1982 and modeled on the Edinburgh Fringe. It is likely the largest festival of its kind in North America. For many years, productions were scattered throughout the neighbourhood in a range of venues. However, as businesses moved in to empty premises, thereby reducing performance spaces, the non-profit society that runs the Fringe was able to raise funds to transform temporary performance space to professionally designed, permanent space.

Today, Old Strathcona is a victim of its own success. While the mix of cultural programming, retail and entertainment continues, the bars and clubs attract not only responsible but also irresponsible drinkers who annoy law-abiding residents. Individual acts of violence had occurred in earlier years but residents of the area, and Edmontonians, were shocked when good times around Canada Day celebrations in 2001, turned into a violent rampage in the small hours of the

¹⁷ See www.strathcona.org/Projects.html .

morning. Drunken hooligans, only a minority of the 10,000 estimated visitors to the area, vandalized property and assaulted police officers, who tried to contain them.

The City of Edmonton, in order to address these issues and accepting the fact that the area hosts regular crowds comparable to ongoing festivals such as Heritage Days in Hawrelak Park and Folkfest at Gallagher Park, has designated the district a performance venue. This is a visionary way of dealing with the special needs of the area. By doing this, the City is responding to appeals from residents fed up with the drunkenness, graffiti, violence, garbage and general wear and tear on the area. Old Strathcona has now moved from an emerging redevelopment area to a mature one. This has meant that young entrepreneurs can no longer afford to move in but, as in other communities, they will move to areas where rents are low, there is a good stock of historic buildings and begin the redevelopment cycle again.

A City of Edmonton heritage planner, Robert Geldart, has undertaken a study of the area and would like to see Old Strathcona designated under the provincial Historical Resources Act as a Municipal Historic Area. This would reinforce protection of the historic fabric and ensure that proposals for development would be screened to ensure that they maintain the unique character. Building on the experience of the Old Strathcona Foundation, the City of Edmonton produced the Strathcona Redevelopment Plan.¹⁸ This reinforces the linkage between historic neighbourhoods, the built heritage and cultural activities in the Goals:

1. Preserve the existing character and structure of the community, by retaining its residential and commercial functions and its historic qualities.
2. Recognize the city-wide importance of the Strathcona community as a focal point for historic, cultural and entertainment activities and events.
3. Maintain a diversity of housing types in the community, including single family, semi-detached, row housing and apartments, to provide opportunity for people of different age groups, lifestyles, and incomes, to live in the community.
4. Maintain existing commercial areas, and encourage reinvestment in these areas, recognizing some of the physical restraints and the need to be sensitive to surrounding residential communities.
5. Protect the residential environment in Strathcona from the negative impacts of arterial roads running through the community, while maintaining reasonable vehicular access to activity nodes within the area.
6. Provide safe and attractive bicycle and pedestrian access to activity nodes within the community, and also through the community to regional activity nodes such as the Downtown and the University.
7. Retain and promote awareness of historically significant areas and structures.
8. Maintain existing park and school sites for public use and recreation.

¹⁸ See www.edmonton.ca?CityGov/CommServices/OSISTStrathconaAreaRedevelopmentPlan.pdf for the City of Edmonton Strathcona Area Redevelopment Plan Update March 2002.

2.2.2 Churchill Square

Another urban redevelopment case study is offered by Churchill Square. The City of Edmonton initiated an important community consultation process with respect to probably the city's most important Iconic Space/Place, Churchill Square, in 2002-03 for the City's centenary in 2004. Representatives from various arts, heritage and cultural organizations as well as businesses took part in a series of envisioning sessions aimed at the renovation of the Square based on functional design. At various times, the City had looked at the redesign of the Square, renamed in 1965 to honour war-time British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill in 1965. Some wonderful early designs exist that, had they gone ahead, would have given it an impressive neoclassical look.

Sadly, Edmonton's downtown went through the same process as all North American cities in the throes of booms undergo when the adage of "off with the old and on with the new" ruled. Thus, beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, the city replaced its old city hall and central library and eventually the civic square was ringed with a new art gallery, concert hall and shopping mall construction. The only historic buildings left on the Square were an old Ed Tel art deco-style building which is now a condo development; the building occupied by the SAGE and the Edmonton Art Gallery. The Churchill Square revitalization project was an envisioning process in the nature of processes described by Gratz and Mintz and PPS. The revitalization, to the extent that it has occurred, finally happened because there was both civic and community involvement. Key to this was the fact that various festivals had made the Square the base of major activities including a Taste of Edmonton, the Works, the Street Performers Festival, CariWest (Edmonton Caribbean Arts Festival), etc. They were tired of dealing with cabling, set-up and take-down, cleaning and policing issues. Simultaneously, there was the desire, on the part of Mayor Smith and City Council, for an Iconic Public Space that would brand the city nationally and internationally.

The City's centenary in 2004 gave the redesign of the Square an added urgency. The project was viewed as being built on heritage components as is evident in the article by Edmonton 2004 Co-ordinator Chris McLeod and John Mahon, Executive Director, Edmonton Arts Council, which appears on the Creative Cities Network of Canada website. The authors describe the project as follows:

The redevelopment of Sir Winston Churchill Square is designed to interlink the vital arteries of time and history, people and community, and place and environment to create a successful and integrated urban space for social and cultural celebration.

The language of cultural revitalization is used in the article as well as in the facilitated envisioning sessions and public presentations including the linkage to the past (the commemoration of the centenary) and the new purpose and meaning (a vital multi-use civic space). The article was written before the Square was completed and launched in October 2005; therefore, it describes the vision and the future tense is used in what is to be achieved:

The theme of interconnectedness is fundamental throughout the Legacy Project. Sir Winston Churchill Square will lodge three large public structures, and a central natural waterfall will act as the interlinking motif for the buildings. The area will also have an expansive treed and greened landscape to blend the straight-edged cityscape with the more natural flow of a park space.¹⁹

¹⁹ Chris McLeod and John Mahon, "Urban Renewal Anchored on Legacy and Community: Edmonton's Churchill Square," Project Profile, Creative Cities Network of Canada website, www.creativecity.ca.

At the theoretical level, everything was there:

- strong vision
- involvement of community representatives in the planning
- funding support from three levels of government, the corporate sector and private donors
- involvement of internationally successful architects/urban planners/landscape designers with a proven track record (e.g., Portland's city square)

The authors of the article note:

The development philosophy for the Sir Winston Churchill Square redevelopment is of leading significance for its strong social and community consideration. The urban renewal project was designed to interlink the vital arteries of time and history, people and community, and place and environment to create a successful and integrated urban space for social and cultural celebration.

The themes chosen for embodiment in the Square are as follows:

- Time and History
- People and Community
- Place and Environment

The final vision of the redeveloped Square is described as follows:

The focal point of the landscaping will be a large waterfall with reflection pools and waterways that will interconnect the Interpretive Centre to an outdoor public amphitheatre. The site will be greened with grass and some 50 trees to encourage public usage and the creation of a dynamic urban park. The south Public Pavilion is a large open-air and glass-roofed structure with a large central stonework hearth and moveable furniture for intimate or larger social gatherings. Sustainable design is represented in the facilities infrastructure of the Churchill Square complex, as power, gas, water, and fiber options, are all housed underground for efficiency and cost-reduction. Edmonton's Churchill Square Legacy Project is an illustration of a redevelopment project where a considerate and socially aware redevelopment approach that integrates and interconnects time, people and place, arts and culture, and history will result in successful urban renewal for the city's future.

Having put in all of this time and effort to plan, what did the City and citizens of Edmonton get? The vision documents are excellent and all participants gave of their knowledge and expertise freely. These are hallmarks for city/cultural sector/community engagement processes around redevelopment. Sadly, the project price tag of \$12.3 million could not buy all of the features envisioned or the quality of materials required for an Iconic Place/Space. There is a reason for this. The City of Edmonton, sadly, has a history of conservative councils characterized by fiscal conservatism. Unlike cities such as Calgary and Vancouver, which have a history of significant building projects that are city-building, legacy pieces, Edmonton does not. In addition, as has been noted, the provincial government has not been generous to its capital city even allowing the official residence of the Lieutenant Governor to deteriorate resulting in the wrong-headed decision that it was unsalvageable and needed to be torn down.

Under Mayor Jan Reimer, the City focused on social agendas though she was also supportive of the arts and the significant Task Force on the Arts, which resulted in the establishment of the Edmonton Arts Council, occurred within her tenure as Mayor. It was Mayors Bill Smith and Stephen Mandel that made the erosion of the City's power as the provincial capital a primary

agenda for City Council. They began to attempt to remedy this with direct appeals to Premier Ralph Klein for additional funding for the Capital Region and even proposed a beautification process for 109th Street as a ceremonial entry-point to the Legislature. This has not, to date, borne significant fruit and is an ongoing focus of the Mayor and Council. There are also other complicating factors. For any major project, there needs to be Council consensus and this has not always been easy to reach. In addition, proposed expenditures on the Square were viewed as taking money away from social projects as well as from taxpayer pockets. This attitude bedevils any proposal that is not related to infrastructure and public safety.

In short, the final Churchill Square project was not the project as envisioned by stakeholders. While the space certainly functions better than it did for festivals, it has been criticized for the following reasons:

- The utility corridors in the cement under-structure of the Square cannot accommodate all cabling; thus, for larger festivals, power cables still litter the Square (this was the direct result of City staff ignoring the recommendations of Festival stakeholders as to the needs)
- The cement surface of the Square is showing cracking and staining resulting from food service
- There are not enough trees or grass (the City wanted to avoid re-grassing required after each festival and chose a cement surface with landscaping around the borders of the Square) and the water feature was not built
- Permanent “furniture” on the Square (tables, benches, etc.) are not aesthetically pleasing
- The glass structure occupied by a café blocks the view of the Central Library
- The Square, when programmed, is a vital and happening place but, when it is not, it is empty and bleak

In conclusion, the Square can only be considered “half built” and will require some major “fixes” in the future.

3. Arts, Heritage and Culture and the City

As has been noted in both the Old Strathcona and Churchill Square case studies, arts and heritage elements are necessary to urban revitalization projects. Successful urban revitalization projects require not just facilities but also a range of cultural organizations that undertake cultural programming that draws people to the area. As has been noted, Old Strathcona followed the lead of the Heritage Canada Foundation in using preservation of heritage buildings and adaptive re-use (i.e., non-museum or heritage-specific uses) as a basis for re-development. The success of this project, both in terms of revitalization and increased tax base, would serve to inspire community leaders to want to do more. It was also, effectively, the City’s first Arts District.

3.1 The City of Edmonton Cultural Futures Project

In 1988, the City, led by the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Advisory Board, began a cultural futures envisioning process. For a period of 11 months, over 100 volunteers representing 21 sectors of the community worked with Project Manager Donna Cardinal, volunteer Project Chairman Terry MacDougall and Consultant Warren Ziegler of Futures-Invention Associates to develop what, in effect, was a cultural plan for the City.

The project involved many of the same steps as the current Cultural Planning Process and the process and recommendations were ahead of their times. The same enthusiasm and some of the same people involved in the Old Strathcona project participated in the envisioning process. In the end, while the City did not ratify the recommendations, they did permeate the next generation of thinking on the importance of culture to the City. They may also, directly or indirectly, have resulted in the Mayor’s Task Force with its recommendation to create the Edmonton Arts Council.

The participants defined culture broadly as “the sum of the material as well as the intellectual and spiritual distinctive features that characterize a society or group” and recommended that it be entrenched in a bylaw. They agreed on the following core principles:

- Participation
- Equity in Participation
- Respect
- Plurality and Diversity in Cultural Expression
- Devolution of Decision Making
- Assessing Progress in Cultural Development

Never let it be doubted that a positive press can make or break a project. As a participant in the process, I can testify to the fact that negative articles by Edmonton Journal columnist John Geiger turned City Council and the public against the Report. He ridiculed the envisioning process and the futurist language and influenced City Council. The result was that the Report did not receive approval. It is interesting to speculate how much further ahead the city would be, if the reports recommendations had been approved. The following is a summary of the 10 Policy Initiatives (i.e., recommendations):

1. An integrated system of LOCAL CULTURAL CENTRES, LINKED to one another and to cultural facilities across the city, will provide opportunities for people at the local level to become involved in the broad cultural life of the community.
2. Living in and being part of a NURTURING NEIGHBOURHOOD where the residents participate in identifying their needs and health and well-being of both the individual and the community.
3. A COMPUTER NETWORK SYSTEM LINKING ALL CITIZENS to an information centre, and to each other where desired, increases opportunities for Edmontonians to participate in all of the public activities which influence their lives.
4. A FOUNDATION FOR CULTURAL ANIMATION will encourage citizens to explore the existence and value of their own creativity and its relationship to art and artistry, through participating in recreational arts.
5. AN INTERACTIVE CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM for Edmonton will organize and deliver learning opportunities city-wide, providing life-long learning and cultural awareness for all citizens.
6. The cultural development of Edmonton will be enhanced when being a volunteer is considered a “career,” with benefits included such as retirement pension, health care program, child support credit and other provincial/municipal tax credits. The civic government, through a community agency, will implement, support and administer a BENEFIT CREDIT SYSTEM FOR VOLUNTEERS.
7. A MULTICULTURAL UNIT IN PARKS AND RECREATION providing support for ethnically-defined community groups, will enable those groups to participate more fully in Edmonton’s cultural development.
8. A CULTURAL CONGRESS, held annually in each ward and city wide, will be a forum for discussion of cultural issues by all groups and citizens. It will be a concrete expression of participatory democracy at the municipal level.

9. ASSESSING PROGRESS IN CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT requires that research be conducted to document the present state of cultural development, and that indicators be selected to use in comparing the present state with the future state of cultural development.
10. A WORLD'S FAIR IN EDMONTON IN 2015 SHOWCASES THE RIVER VALLEY as the symbolic and physical link for Edmontonians to our environment, our social history and our cultural present. The theme of the World's Fair will be the celebration of urban family life in all cultures.

It is interesting to note that many of the recommendations are still current though we might express them in different language. Perhaps one of the most significant is number 9, which recommends research and benchmarking. Interestingly enough, it has taken 18 years for this to happen and the current Cultural Inventory does this for the first time in a systematic fashion. Many of the recommendations resonate with the 2008 Cultural Plan being developed by the Cultural Planning Committee.

3.2 Arts Districts

John Mahon in his paper titled "The Development of the Edmonton Arts Council – A Case Study: Connecting communities through the Arts" recounts the creation of the EAC.²⁰ He notes that it was a laborious process requiring an active arts community lobby with vision and insight, as well as a Mayor who was interested in the arts. The Edmonton Professional Arts Council for the 1992 civic election developed an "arts platform" with the following recommendations:

- A need for arts funding from the City to be separated from funding for sport, recreation and multi-cultural organizations;
- A need for increased funding to the arts organizations;
- A need for grant decisions to be made by peer juries, that is by persons who had expertise in the area; and
- A need for a proactive organization to deal with the development of arts policy.

EPAC also recommended the creation of "an independent, arms-length arts funding organization with the two-fold mandate of determining grant allocations and engaging in municipal arts development policy."²¹ Mayor Reimer was re-elected and it took a year for development of terms of reference for a task force as well as the striking of a committee. This was done in 1993 and the Mayor's Task Force on Investment in the Arts was created with Denise Roy, a senior arts administrator, as the Chair. The Task Force was supported by administrative staff seconded from the Department of Parks and Recreation. The Task Force was charged with the following:

- Review existing research related to the role of the arts in Edmonton's community and economy;
- Examine the role of all levels of government in relation to the arts;
- Recommend funding strategies to develop the arts in Edmonton;
- Evaluate different models for funding and promoting the arts; and
- Address specific policy issues identified in previous studies of the arts in Edmonton.

The Report was delivered to Council in October 1994 and had the broad support of the arts community, Economic Development Edmonton and the civic administration. After further study by the Department of Parks and Recreation, the report went to Council for approval in April 1995. As Mahon points out in his paper:

²⁰ John Mahon, "The Development of the Edmonton Arts Council – A Case Study: Connecting communities through the arts," unpublished paper, May 2000.

²¹ Mahon, p. 3.

The report was finally passed on to City Council for their debate and potential approval in April 1995. That debate was intense and the report lost (7 votes against and 6 votes for) on a number of motions for acceptance. Finally, a portion of the report was rescued and one amended recommendation (the implementation of the Edmonton Arts Council for a one-year pilot project) was passed. The vote was 7 votes in favour and 6 votes opposed. There is some suspicion even today that the one vote that changed from a no to a yes was the result of one of the Councillors falling asleep during the debate, waking suddenly when the vote was called and pressing the wrong button.²²

The Edmonton Arts Council had its pilot year in 1995-96 and has not looked back. It has served effectively as funder, advocate and researcher with respect to the arts and their value to citizens.

In 1995, the EAC moved into a very important area by partnering with the Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation to invite Jeremy Alvarez, Executive Director, Central Philadelphia Development Corporation, to present on the theme "Arts Districts – Economic Development Initiatives of the 90's." The presentation was a part of the AGM of the EDDC and the flyer stated:

According to the International Downtown Association arts, culture and entertainment will be a major economic development activity for downtowns in the 90's. Philadelphia's four-mile Avenue of the Arts houses 16 cultural and educational organizations. It will generate \$2 million in economic activity over the next ten years including \$291 million in capital redevelopment, \$4.6 million in new tax benefits and \$5 million in wage taxes during the construction phase. The Central Philadelphia Development Corporation (CPDC), under Mr. Alvarez's direction, has been instrumental in making Avenue of the Arts a focus for Philadelphia and that City's top economic development strategy.

The flyer further notes that the EDDC is advocating the development of an arts district centred around Churchill Square in Edmonton's downtown. Another benchmark study, the Mayor's Task force on the Heart of the City is cited as having initially suggested the development of Sir Winston Churchill Square and the surrounding arts and cultural facilities as a major project for the downtown. The arts district concept had come to Edmonton!

The subsequent envisioning process did not bear the fruit that the stakeholder groups had hoped for and only a small pilot was realized. This was ArtsHab – the Arts Habitat Association of Edmonton, a not-for-profit organization with the mandate "to provide safe and affordable space where artists can live and work."²³ The time was not right and the appropriate vehicle had not been established to undertake even a "scaled back" version of Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts. As the flyer further notes:

Businesses and developers also benefit from the development of an Arts District. The arts' biggest asset in the 'real estate game' is the ability to draw people. Businesses want to be where people are. A special synergy occurs when commercial and artistic uses exist side by side. Together they create a greater drawing power than they would separately. An arts presence can contribute to greater property values for neighboring properties, and as a result of an arts presence, developers are finding vacant space can be rented quicker, at a higher rate and to a more upscale clientele.

In fact, the City of Edmonton already had an "arts district" – Old Strathcona. It was simply not described in those terms. The downtown arts district has yet to be fully developed but it is well on its way.

²² Mahon, p. 6.

²³ See the ArtsHab website at www.artshab.com.

3.3 *Iconic Arts Spaces*

As is noted by Gratz and Mintz and PPS, urban revitalization projects require Iconic Spaces/Places and, frequently, in such projects, they are arts spaces. Philadelphia for the Arts is an established model. With respect to Edmonton, the downtown, at present, has a partially revitalized Churchill Square surrounded on two sides by cultural flagships: the Art Gallery of Alberta (formerly the Edmonton Art Gallery), the Winspear Centre for Music and the Stanley Milner Library.

3.3.1 *The Art Gallery of Alberta*

The AGA is an excellent case study with reference to Iconic Space/Place. It was positioned in this way from the outset by Director Tony Lupino, a shrewd communications specialist. When he became the Director, the Gallery had been stuck in a planning mode for at least 10 years and seemed unable to move forward. The Director and Board realized that they needed to launch a major offensive to win not only government and corporate support but also that of the citizens of Edmonton. Lupino chose the technique of an international design competition and getting the community involved in the choice of design. It was a process that engaged the community in a variety of ways culminating in presentations by the short-listed architects. At the center of these presentations were trenchant analyses of Edmonton's less than stellar buildings around Churchill Square. The criticisms gave offense to many civic-minded individuals and whipped up a frenzy of interest in developing a building that would make a bold statement. The design by winning architect Randall Stout is controversial but will certainly bring the Square into the 21st century. Reference points for the process were the art museum in Bilbao, the Tate Modern in London, and the addition to the Royal Ontario Museum. While preservationists were disturbed by the rejection of the Modern building, the futurists won out because the design was sold on the vision of a revitalized Churchill Square posited on flagship cultural institutions.

The "New Vision" for the AGA, which is posted on their website, reflects current thinking about arts institutions as central to community identity and pride, and serving diverse communities. The objectives for the Gallery make this clear:

- The AGA will preserve Canadian art and heritage for generations to come
- The AGA will be a premier venue for international exhibitions and a showcase for Aboriginal and regional art
- The AGA will be an architectural icon for Edmonton and Alberta
- The AGA will be a major new Alberta tourism destination and a source of significant economic impact
- The AGA will be a cornerstone of Edmonton's Arts District
- The AGA will be a motivating factor for attracting and retaining valuable employers and employees in Alberta
- The AGA will respond to the growing multicultural communities of Western Canada by providing greater educational opportunities
- The AGA will offer important children's programming to serve the entire region, including rural schools and inner-city students²⁴

The AGA has positioned itself as the catalyst for downtown revitalization as the following makes clear:

²⁴ See www.artgalleryalberta.com.

Scheduled to open in late 2009, the new AGA will be an 85,000 square foot innovative gallery that will allow us to present national and international exhibitions. It will be a premier presentation venue for international, Canadian and Aboriginal art, education and scholarship. The gallery in itself will be a work of art that will complement and complete the cultural precinct surrounding Churchill Square and solidify Alberta's Capital as a world-class city, epitomizing Edmonton's 2007 Cultural Capital of Canada designation.

The new building on Sir Winston Churchill Square will open in late 2009, in the heart of Edmonton's Arts District. This architectural icon will draw visitors from around the world with twice the former gallery space (25-30,000 sq. ft.), a doubling of educational classrooms for programming, and extensive facility usage opportunities. With optimal environmental conditions for installations, the AGA will attract more of the most sought-after touring art exhibitions. Construction is on schedule.

The fact that substantial monies were contributed by the Government of Alberta was recognized by a name change to the Art Gallery of Alberta. The federal government also doubled its \$10 million contribution to bring the total budget to \$88 million. While the AGA lost the "Edmonton" in its name, it was a step towards regaining the status of the City as the provincial capital and the worthy location for facilities with provincial mandates. The AGA has also developed a state-of-the-art collections storage area with conservation facilities behind the Grant MacEwan College adjacent to the new Alberta Tourism, Recreation, Parks and Culture collections center. These facilities, while not designed as public spaces, are necessary to the preservation, study and interpretation of fine and decorative arts, and artifacts. They are unique in Alberta and Western Canada and a feather in the City's cap. They are success stories yet to be shared with the public and this is another arts district in the making.

The temporary location of the AGA in the historic Hudson's Bay department store has also been extremely successful and reinforced the linkages between the Gallery and the University of Alberta, which has re-branded the building as Enterprise Square. This is the home of the Faculty of Extension, which is focused on life-long learning, and the business incubation unit, which is a partnership with the City of Edmonton. The wooing of the University to a downtown location is another success story in urban revitalization and is a testament to Mayor Mandel and University President Indira Samarasekera.

The high-ceilinged spaces of the old department store lent themselves to the creation of exhibit galleries and the presence of students and staff as well as visitors has revitalized this building which lay vacant for many years while developers tried to get planning permission to convert it to a trade centre and other uses. The most ignominious proposed use was as a parkade! Once the AGA moves to its new facility, its old space will be available to the University for exhibits, thereby adding another arts venue to the downtown. With over 11,000 square feet of newly renovated gallery space, as well as specifically-designed studio classrooms, and art sales and rental storefront facilities, this is a not inconsiderable gain for the University of Alberta.

3.3.2 *The Royal Alberta Museum*

While the Royal Alberta Museum (formerly the Provincial Museum of Alberta)²⁵ is not located in the area of Churchill Square, it is a part of Ward 4, which is the City's arts ward including not the Square but also Grant MacEwan College, the gallery district along the end of Jasper Avenue as it becomes 124th Street and down the top of Stony Plain Road. The Museum is also an important case study of Iconic Space/Place though its redeveloped facility is yet to receive the full funding support required to complete it.

At the time of the Queen's visit in May, 2005, the vision of the new facility was launched including architectural models. The facility had seen no serious enhancements in the fabric of the building since it was opened on December 6th, 1967 as a federal centenary project. It received a grant of

²⁵ The Museum received its Royal designation when Queen Elizabeth II visited to inaugurate the Province's centenary in 2005.

\$2.5 million as a Confederation Memorial Project. This funding was more than matched by the Government of Alberta, which contributed \$5.1 million. When the Museum opened, it was considered state-of-the-art but the permanent exhibit galleries received no updating for more than 20 years. In the 1980s a series of exercises to update exhibits and the facilities began but with the economic downturn it was never the right time for the Government of Alberta to commit dollars.

The Museum, under that direction of Director Phil Stepney, in the 1990s embarked on a series of blockbuster exhibits, e.g., *Sharks*, to bring in mass audiences. This culminated with the *Anno Domini: Jesus Through the Centuries* exhibit for the year 2000. The enormously popular exhibit (school bookings alone exceeded 50,000) was developed by Curator of Folk and Religious Life David Goa. In addition, the Museum developed the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture and the Wild Alberta Gallery (natural history). The broad popularity of the blockbuster exhibits enhanced the public's awareness and solidified the case for provincial investment in an updated and repurposed facility.

Unlike the AGA's redevelopment process, which was used to build public awareness and support, the Museum worked in secret and appointed Alberta architects Cohos Evamy. The did, however, have a series of consultations and focus groups with experts and citizens. Museum redevelopment became a major provincial centenary project and was unveiled at the time of the Queen's visit. The Province's commitment of \$170 million was, according to Director Dr. Bruce McGillivray, likely the largest-ever provincial contribution to a Museum in Canada. The proposed redevelopment would result in a 21st century museum with major new gallery space, including a new gallery that looked out onto the River Valley, classroom and other programming spaces, a new parkade to minimize the impact on the wealthy Royal Glenora neighbourhood where the Museum is located, as well as a range of other public spaces.

Circumstances prevented this plan from coming to fruition. The economic boom, which intensified in 2006, meant that construction costs were projected to come in well above the monies committed by the Government of Alberta, the Government of Canada (\$30 million) and other donated funds. Rather than biting the bullet, the Government of Alberta instructed Museum staff to go back to the drawing board and make cuts that involved a scaled-down building as well as no enhanced parkade. At a time of huge budget surpluses, this action has enraged Edmontonians and museum supporters throughout the province. This has slowed down the process and also opened up the debate around relocation. Some wanted the Museum to go into the downtown to complete downtown revitalization while others want to see it relocated to the current site of the Terrace Building below the Legislature to strengthen the government precinct. This idea came about as a result of Alberta's successful partnership with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington in 2006 which showcased the arts and culture. In Washington, most of the National Museums are grouped together along a great Mall. While government sources have indicated that the cost of relocating the facility to the Legislature grounds would be astronomical, the Government of Alberta has not totally rejected this option. RAM has reconfigured its design to remain within budget but this has not been made public as yet.

As the AGA, the Museum has also positioned itself in keeping with the requirements of Iconic Space/Place and this is evident in material on its website including some FAQ's:

Can we build a “world-class” museum on the present site?

Yes. The site has capacity to more than double the size of the existing facility. Several architectural plans have been prepared over the last 10 years that show various scales of renewal and expansion and even how a 400,000 square foot expansion can be accommodated on the site.

Why build the Museum in Edmonton?

Edmonton is our capital city – so the city is a fitting location. However, this Museum will be reaching out across Alberta as it is developed and once it opens. Look for innovative new programs that take the Museum to the people.

What is a “world-class” Museum”

The answer is clearly in the eye of the beholder. In our Vision for the Museum, we prefer to talk about creating a great Museum that is a beautiful building in an outstanding setting. Our plan is to create:

- A remarkable visitor experience
- A destination for the world’s best exhibitions
- Superb facilities for research and preservation

In the end, the Project will be judged by the response of Albertans. If we create a “must-see” destination, if it is a marvelous learning centre for our teachers and children, if everyone enjoys their experience, and if we can protect our heritage – the I would say we will have succeeded – and some may call us “world-class.”²⁶

3.4 Non-Downtown Arts and Heritage Districts

It is worth noting that not all cultural developments occur in the downtown. This is a normal occurrence since such developments usually happen in historically older areas of cities where, frequently, real estate values are depressed. There are three important examples in Edmonton.

3.4.1 Edmonton’s Francophone Quarter

Edmonton’s Francophone Quarter, located in the area of Bonnie Doon, on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River is a well-kept secret. As a part of the fur trade legacy, Edmonton is a Francophone community and today, next to Toronto, it is the largest Francophone city outside of Quebec. At the heart of the French Quarter is the complex of buildings that began as the Junioriat, the Oblate College for young men intending to join the priesthood. Situated on the West side of Rue Marie-Anne-Gaboury, the College was founded in Pincher Creek in 1908 and moved to its present location in 1911. In 1970, it became a junior college affiliated to the University of Alberta and a full-fledged faculty of the University in 1977, when the Oblate Fathers gave up the ownership to the University. Besides a range of classrooms, libraries, offices and student residences, it houses a Salle du Patrimoine (museum) and archives. Various Francophone organizations have found a home in the area, which is a historic precinct located on either side of la Rue Marie-Anne-Gaboury (91st Street). The street constitutes the heart of Edmonton’s French Quarter. In 1988, 91st Street was renamed in honour of Marie-Anne Gaboury, the wife of Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière and Louis Riel’s grandmother. The project was sponsored by a Francophone youth group, Les Jeunes entrepreneurs francophones.

A purpose-built cultural centre - La Cité Francophone - is situated on the East side of Rue Marie-Anne-Gaboury and houses a large number of Francophone associations. The idea of a French cultural centre was first discussed in 1944 but the project was only realized in 1996. Tenants include L’Unithéâtre, the French newspaper *Le Franco*, La Librairie le Carrefour Bookstore, the offices of both the provincial and the regional Association canadienne-française de l’Alberta, the Centre de développement musical (CDM), the Conseil scolaire Centre-Nord, L’Alliance française d’Edmonton, la Fédération des aînés francophones de l’Alberta (FAFA), Francophonie jeunesse de l’Alberta (FJA), l’Institut Guy-Lacombe de la famille, le Centre d’expérience préscolaire (CEP), and a medical clinic.

²⁶ Royal Alberta Museum website www.royalalbertamuseum.ca.

3.4.2 Alberta Avenue/118th Avenue

The most recent potential arts district is the proposed Alberta Avenue/118th Avenue project. The area is down-at-heels; businesses struggle to survive and there is a higher crime rate than other parts of the city except for the inner city. Rexall Place and Northlands are located there and crowds come in only for special events such as hockey games, concerts, CapitalEx and other trade shows. The housing stock comprises small, older bungalows (from World War I onwards) and is, therefore, affordable. It includes the neighbourhoods of Delton, Westwood, Spruce Avenue, Central McDougall, McCauley, Eastwood and Parkdale. The average income of residents is less than \$20,000 per year, thus, it is definitely a working class district. The business area was, at one time, the main street of the Town of Beverley, which amalgamated with Edmonton in 1961. The area is ripe for redevelopment and is sufficiently edgy to attract young Indy artists and potential young entrepreneurs.

The Alberta Avenue Business Association came up with a number of ideas including theming the area around sports champions. Metal cutout figures representing various sports were installed on light poles to give the Avenue flavour. In fall, 2004 the AVBA approached City Council for funding to install pedestrian-level lighting along 118 Avenue from Northlands to NAIT. Rather than approving the funding immediately, the City requested a planning study. What is different about this project is the fact that the City is incubating it. An Advisory Committee was struck that includes representation from City Council, the AVBA and community representatives. Studies were commissioned and consultations were held with stakeholders. These meetings were held at facilities of some of the key stakeholders including the Alberta Avenue Community League, Eastwood Community League, Parkdale/Cromdale Community League, and NAIT. The vision and some strategies are contained in the Avenue Initiative Revitalization Plan.²⁷

The 118 Avenue Streetscape Concept Plan has the following elements:

- Streetscape improvements and beautification along 118 Avenue
- Lighting and safescape improvements along 118 Avenue and through the alleys
- Curb extensions on all streets fronting on 118 Avenue to help calm traffic
- Pedestrian crossing improvements at all intersections
- People places to create gathering places and put more 'eye' on the Avenue
- Housing that is compatible with the community; and
- Villages spaced about every 1,400 feet along 118 Avenue, with one near NAIT, another near Northlands, and one between²⁸

The Strategy involves City funding, which, from 2007-2010, would amount to \$27.3 million.

While artists had begun to move into the area already, the revitalization project was given a major boost when the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts, a non-profit society that provides studios and places to make art and exhibit for people with developmental disabilities, struck an agreement with the City of Edmonton to relocate to 118th Avenue. The Centre was established in 2003. A plan was approved in August, 2007 that would see the City purchasing ArtsAve Place from the Edmonton Inner City Housing Society and sell it to the Nina Haggerty Centre. The Centre would need to raise \$1.7 million. An article in the *Nina News* issue of September 2007 (Volume 3 – Issue 5) states:

The thought of larger, custom designed space with more dedicated art studios, expanded art options and room for more public programming excites Nina Haggerty artists and staff. But even more exciting is the tremendous potential for Nina artists to collaborate

²⁷ See www.edmonton.ca/CityGov/CommServices/AIRSReport.pdf and www.aac1.shawbiz.ca/AlbertaAvenueCommunityLeague.

²⁸ City of Edmonton, *Avenue Initiative Revitalization Strategy*, Executive Summary, p. v.

with a broader community of artists. "The Avenue is alive with arts," enthuses Centre Director, Wendy Hollo, "and it's very welcoming. There are so many ways our artists can get involved. It will be amazing, and what a great chance to be part of something really positive and exciting in our city."

Groups in the area held a very successful arts festival/open house in fall, 2007 and there seems to be a buzz about the potential of this area to become a successful arts district. Commentators have already made comparisons to Whyte Avenue in the early 1980s.

There is a potential problem in the redevelopment of the area. Mayor Mandel and business influentials are pushing a major arena development for the CN lands adjacent to Churchill Square. This would mean that Rexall Place might be at risk. The downtown arena project is currently being studied by a City-appointed committee and was given a boost by an announcement by prominent pharmaceutical multimillionaire Daryl Katz. On December 14th in a lead article in *The Edmonton Journal*, Katz's most recent offer to buy the Edmonton Oilers is discussed as well as his offer of \$100 million towards a new arena. There is some City Council resistance, including Councillor Kim Krushell, who sits on the Board of Northlands, and who believes that this decision would require a plebiscite.²⁹

The premise for the move would be to aid downtown revitalization but, while some American cities have gone this route, arenas in downtown areas present problems. They are monolithic structures that dwarf other buildings and are not "people friendly." In addition, their usage is limited to major events, such as games, which means that there is not the continuous street traffic that creates a vital downtown. A well-thought out plan for the facility and excellent architects could help to address these issues. Locating a sports hall of fame and museum, including hockey, at ground level could be one solution. Other "creative" space would also enhance the proposal.

3.5 *The University of Alberta and Other Educational Institutions*

The University of Alberta is a category unto itself and its importance is enormous not only as a centre for arts, heritage and cultural activity but also as the primary educator in many cultural areas in the province. The University, the oldest institution of higher learning with a provincial mandate, celebrates its official centenary in 2008. It is a cultural precinct in its own right and has a wonderful stock of historic buildings, over 40 museums and/or collections and, within the Faculty of Arts, has Bachelor, Masters and Ph.D. degree programs in almost every cultural discipline. The Art Department has provided training for many renowned painters and it also started art instruction in Banff, which ultimately became the Banff School of Fine Arts. Grant MacEwan College's development of arts disciplines further enriched the City including the following diploma and/or degree programs: Arts and Cultural Management, Design Studies, Fine Art, Journalism, Theatre Arts and Production, and Applied Communications in Professional Writing. With respect to new media, NAIT, Grant MacEwan and the University of Alberta all provide instruction.

There is evidence that activity in specific cultural disciplines in a city is very much tied to whether training is available in that city. As can be seen, there has been strong instruction in the visual, literary and performing arts and, now, in new media, and this has supported these disciplines in the City. It can be categorically stated that, without the drama program at the University, we would not have a strong theatre community with flagships such as the Citadel, Walterdale and the range of other companies and performing venues. Bioware, the internationally ranked electronic entertainment company, was possible because of the entrepreneurial spirit of its founders but also initially drew on a local talent pool. It was founded in 1995 by Dr. Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk (both medical doctors) and Augustine Yip. Its successful role-playing computer games,

²⁹ Susan Ruttan and Jim Farrell, "Downtown arena closer to reality," *The Edmonton Journal*, December 14th, 2007, A3.

such as *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* and *Jade Empire*, have catered to the fascination that young and old have with fantasy, sword and sorcery giving them cult status.

4. **he New Urbanism: The Revitalized City**

The new city is not only creative, it is also green and sustainable, equitable and enlightened. It values its historic buildings and protects the environment. It has design guidelines to ensure that historic buildings from past ages are preserved and that new buildings are not only functionally excellent but also a contribution to the life of citizens. In a sense, we are experiencing a kind of 21st century age on enlightenment where it is all of us who have the power to change our cities and lives rather than enlightened despots.

In North American cities, traditionally, the arts and culture have been viewed as a “good thing” and heritage activities are paraded whenever an anniversaries needs to be celebrated. They are not entrenched in the life of the community and cultural workers are expected to subsidize them by being willing to accept lower wages. There is a tension between expectations that these activities will be funded through a combination of “user pay,” government subsidy, and sponsorship by wealthy elites and corporations. As Jeff Holubitsky, in an article in *The Edmonton Journal* titled “Feds add \$10 M more for art gallery,” states: “The issue of spending on the gallery [Art Gallery of Alberta] versus spending on deteriorating roads was mentioned frequently in the recent municipal election, which saw Mandel win a second term as Edmonton’s Mayor.” He then quotes the Mayor as stating: “Cities need to have a personality and cultural components. This is part of reshaping the city and our image across the country.”³⁰ The fact that not only Mayor Mandel but also other mayors across North America are becoming champions of culture is a result of some enormously influential writings such as Richard Florida’s *Creative Cities*. In his book, Florida captured the zeitgeist – the spirit – of the age and provided a model for moving cities from obsessing about sewers, roads, police and other tangible concerns to more intangible concerns such as the vision of the ideal city.

As inner-city decay, spiraling infrastructure costs, the competition to attract business, global competitiveness and other issues have surfaced, civic politicians and civil servants have had to struggle to define what makes their city unique. While cities such as Rome and London could easily answer that question – government institutions, codes of law, universities, historic buildings, cultural institutions, writers, artists, curators, performers, public squares, gardens, streetscapes, landscapes – for North American cities, which have not had thousands of years to develop, these answers have not been readily forthcoming. They needed to be shown the way and gurus, such as Florida, have made it possible to acknowledge the foundational importance of culture not as a “quality of life” value but as central to individual and community identity and pride. Of course, writers, artists, curators, performers, and others know this intrinsically but to have the greater society appreciate and value what they do has been a long-time coming. We are not there yet. This thinking has also resulted in a broadening of the definition of culture. Creative cities are cultural hubs in which individuals and groups undertake not only traditional pursuits such as painting, acting and performing but also a range of other activities that add value to community life, preserve architectural wonders and address environmental concerns. The new city is not only creative, it is also green and sustainable, equitable and enlightened. It values its historic buildings and protects the environment. It has design guidelines to ensure that historic buildings from past ages are preserved and that new buildings are not only functionally excellent but also a contribution to the life of citizens. In a sense, we are experiencing a kind of 21st century age on enlightenment where it is all of us who have the power to change our cities and lives rather than enlightened despots.

³⁰ Jeff Holubitsky, “Feds add \$10M more for art gallery,” *The Edmonton Journal*, Sunday, October 28th, 2007, Section A/14.

Urban revitalization projects, arts districts, cultural plans are the tools for creating the new city. This, of course, cannot all happen at once. Cities are organic and it would be well to bring forward important Renaissance symbols of the city – the beehive and the well-ordered garden. All are living and must be cultivated. Cultivation has the same root as culture. Cities must become intentional in doing this.

With respect to Edmonton, as this paper has demonstrated, we have a number of excellent models for urban revitalization based on heritage, arts and culture. We do not need external experts to tell us of successes in other jurisdictions as other than reference points. Having said this, we need to acknowledge these successes and build on them as well as creating opportunities for synergistic projects involving citizens, artists and creators, business and the city.

A Cultural Inventory process and cultural planning serve as catalysts for cultural development, which, if done well, will result in a creative and vital city.

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