

October 2013

# FACT sheet

2013 City of Edmonton Election



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Photo credit: City of Edmonton

## Introduction

The 2013 City of Edmonton Election campaign is now under way. In this election, there are some key issues concerning our city's infrastructure, social policy and long-term development that deserve our attention because of the impact they will have on our city's future. This fact sheet provides a concise overview of these topics. We hope that this helps to inform the electorate and candidates about key issues facing the city and the need for action in certain areas to ensure that the city's overall social and economic wellbeing is maintained.

## Low Income Transit Pass

The number of Edmontonians using public transit to get to work every day is on the rise. Results from the 2011 National Household Survey show that while the majority of Edmontonian workers drive to work alone, 14% of commuters rely on public transit to get to their job, an increase of 2.1% from 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2013a).

Edmonton Transit has acknowledged the growing demand for public transit and is pushing for more investment from the city. In a recently published report, Edmonton Transit requested that an additional 36 buses be introduced into the transit system to handle growing transit needs. Purchasing these buses would cost \$15.8 million. An additional \$5.2 million would have to be invested to maintain them overtime. The earliest these buses could be introduced into the system is 2015 (Tumilty, 2013).

As the use of public transit in our city continues to increase, Edmonton Transit's operating costs will also go up. The last two municipal budgets have seen increases to public transit fees. In 2012, the cost of a single ticket increased from \$2.85 in 2011 to \$3.00 in 2012, followed by an increase to \$3.20 in 2013 (Edmonton Journal, 2013, CBC, 2013). This year, the price of a monthly adult passes went up to \$89.00 from \$84.65 in 2012. (CBC, 2013)

Rates must go up periodically to address cost increases. However, we must remember that public transit is one of the few means of transportation that low-income Edmontonians have.

Currently, Edmonton Transit has a patchwork of reduced fares for youths, seniors, AISH recipients, post-secondary students and Public and Catholic schools students. But the discounted rates for students remain expensive for those from low-income families. And no discounts are provided for non-senior, non-AISH low-income adults. Their needs are partially addressed by the Donate-A-Ride program, but it meets only a fraction of ticket requests (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2012).

In 2012, the Edmonton Social Planning Council released a position statement which recommends that City Council follow other Canadian cities and adopt a low-income transit pass. We encourage candidates and the electorate to read this statement and consider the importance of having an affordable bus pass for low-income Edmontonians: <http://goo.gl/9jfmfd>

## Poverty Reduction Plan

Despite our city's prosperity, poverty is still a problem for too many Edmontonians. In 2011, more than 123,000 Edmontonians lived in poverty in the Capital Region. This includes 39,000 children under the age of 18 (Statistics Canada, 2013b).

Recently-published data from Statistics Canada shows that poverty is not limited to the unemployed. Between July 2012 and June 2013, 128,900 Edmontonians (or at least one in five workers in Edmonton) made less than \$15 per hour. The majority of low wage workers (80%) are working in their prime earning years (20 years and older). (Public Interest Alberta, 2013)

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Work is currently underway to develop a poverty reduction strategy in Edmonton. This initiative is being led by Edmonton's Poverty Elimination Steering Committee, a collaboration between 26 community partners in government and the social services sector. The strategy is dedicated to achieving the following goals:

- Edmontonians and families have income and resources to meet their needs, participate in community life and plan for the future.
- Every child in Edmonton develops their full potential.
- Edmontonians facing multiple barriers experience equitable access to opportunities and supports to thrive and enjoy a better quality of life.
- Edmontonians grow their income and assets and contribute to Edmonton's vibrant economy

(Edmonton, 2013a)

## 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness

Despite our region's prosperity, there are still too many Edmontonians living without a home. During the 2012 Edmonton Homeless Count, 2,147 Edmontonians were counted. This is a 29% reduction in the number of Edmontonians counted during the 2008 Edmonton homeless count (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2013).

This reduction is the result of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, an initiative led by the Edmonton Homelessness Commission. The plan is centered around the Housing First approach to ending homelessness, which involves finding suitable housing for those without a home and then offering them a series of social supports that help them keep their home and live healthy and productive lives (Edmonton Homelessness Commission, 2013b).

During the first four years of Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness, 1,664 permanent homes were made available to 2,325 residents. The majority of those housing units were in Edmonton's private rental market (Edmonton Homelessness Commission, 2013b).

While the City of Edmonton and the Government of Alberta remain committed to this successful homeless reduction initiative, the Plan's year four update report



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mentions that more money needs to be invested in permanent supportive housing (Edmonton Homelessness Commission, 2013b).

## Cornerstones: Edmonton's Plan for Affordable Housing

Edmonton's booming economy has led to a shortage of housing in the city. In April 2013, the vacancy rate was 1.2% (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2013). The cost of renting an apartment in Edmonton has increased as a result. Between 2002 and 2013, the cost of renting a 2 bedroom apartment in Edmonton increased by 52% (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013).

To improve access to affordable housing for low-income Edmontonians, the City of Edmonton's Cornerstones Housing project was launched in 2005 (Edmonton, 2013b). The City of Edmonton has provided over \$150 million in funding to the Cornerstones program, supplemented by provincial and federal funding. The funding was used to build more than 3,000 new housing units between 2006 and 2012 (Edmonton, 2013b).

The second phase of this successful initiative (Cornerstones II) was launched in 2012 (Edmonton, 2013c). Given the growing shortage of housing and the continued need for subsidized housing in Edmonton, Cornerstones II will require continued support from the new City Council.



### **Surplus school sites**

To address the growing need for affordable housing in Edmonton, the City of Edmonton is using 40 surplus school sites to build affordable housing units in the city. Most of the surplus school sites have been designated for first-time homebuyers, affordable seniors' housing, secondary suite housing, and mixed income housing. The City of Edmonton has proposed that surplus school sites be converted into seniors' housing facilities. (Edmonton, 2013d).

### **Food Affordability**

Food insecurity (or the inability to access nutritious food) continues to be a problem for low-income families and individuals in Alberta. According to the 2011 Canadian Community Health Survey, there are 172,300 individuals who are struggling with food insecurity, or the inability to access nutritious food. (Statistics Canada, 2011, cited in Tarasuk, Mitchell, et. al., 2013)

In Edmonton, the cost of nutritious food continues to increase. During the first six months of 2013, the cost of a nutritious food basket for a family of four in metro Edmonton averaged \$210 per week. In 2003, the same nutritious food basket was valued at \$133 per week. This increase in food costs is more than double the increase in overall inflation over the same time period. (Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, 2013)

In 2012, the City of Edmonton demonstrated their commitment to improving food security in Edmonton by launching Fresh: Edmonton's Food and Urban Agriculture Strategy. This initiative "imagines how new approaches to food and urban agriculture can make Edmonton an even better place to live, work, play and invest" (Edmonton, 2012). The strategy will be implemented by the newly-formed Edmonton Food Council (Edmonton, 2013e).

### **Edmonton's growing diversity**

Immigration to the Edmonton area has increased considerably in recent years. The number of immigrants and refugees permanently settling in Edmonton more than doubled from 2002 to 2012 (179.4% increase, to 11,806 people in 2012)(Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013).

The percentage of Edmontonians born outside of Canada has grown over the past twenty-five years. In 2011, there were 205,445 immigrants living in Edmonton, making up 25.8% of the city's total population (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013).

The number of immigrants in Edmonton grew 70.6% from 1986 to 2011, while the number of non-immigrants increased by 30.1% (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013).

Visible minorities made up 30% of Edmonton's total population in 2011. From 1996 to 2011, the number of visible minorities increased by 116.7%, while the number of non-visible minorities grew by only 11.5%. (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013).

### **Edmonton's Aboriginal Community**

Our region's Aboriginal population is growing rapidly. The number of Aboriginals grew 74.1% in the City of Edmonton and 88.2% in the Edmonton CMA from 1996 to 2011. This is significantly higher than the 32% overall population growth rate for the City and CMA during the same time period (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013).

In recent years, the unemployment rate for Aboriginals in Edmonton has gone down. From 2005 to 2007, the Aboriginal unemployment rate decreased by 3.1 percent. This was followed by a 5.8 percentage point increase between 2008 and 2009. Aboriginal unemployment rates have fallen 7.2 percentage points since 2009, compared to 2.1 percentage points for the overall population (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013).

However, the Aboriginal unemployment rate remains higher than that of the overall population. Between January and July 2013, the average unemployment rate for Aboriginals in the Edmonton CMA was 8.4%. This is almost twice as high as Edmonton CMA's overall unemployment rate during that period (4.6%) (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013).

Homelessness also continues to be a problem for Edmonton's Aboriginals. Whereas the Aboriginal population accounted for 46% of the homeless people counted in 2012, it comprises 5% of the total Edmonton population. (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2013).

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