

What We Heard Report

Community Vision and Pillars of Sustainability Policy C-CG-11

July 8, 2025



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INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of common themes shared by most Committees and recommended edits to the Community Vision and Pillars of Sustainability Policy used to update the Policy.

The Community Vision and Pillars of Sustainability (Policy C-CG-11) were developed in 2015/16 by a special Council Committee consisting of members of Council, residents, and Administration, and with input from over 7,000 residents received through a survey, in-person participation opportunities and videos.

The Community Vision and Pillars of Sustainability were established to provide a single, shared community vision and set of sustainability pillars to govern and align all strategic and business planning and decision-making efforts across the City. The Community Vision outlines an inspirational future state and quality of life that the community aspires to, and the Pillars of Sustainability are the key areas that need to be supported to provide strength and balance to the community.

As per the Policy Standard, the Community Vision and Pillars of Sustainability are to be assessed every 10 years to ensure they continue to reflect the community's desires. On October 8, 2024, Council approved the proposed approach to consult with Council Committees for input related to assessing the relevance of the Vision and Pillars of Sustainability.

COUNCIL COMMITTEES INPUT SUMMARY

The following section provides a summary of input received from the members of X Council Committees, organized by each element of the Community Vision and Pillars of Sustainability document.

Overall Comments, Across Most Committees

Key Themes:

- The document is still seen as accurate, speaking of how Committee members would like to see St. Albert in the future.
- The language should be updated to reflect what we know now and the terminology we use 10 years later.
- Clarification was required to explain why we use the present tense for future statements. A suggestion was made to consider using aspirational language (e.g., “strive”) rather than what was seen as overstatement in some instances (e.g., “we are doing it”).

Recommendations:

- Small town values should be replaced due to the dual meaning of what they could be, and we are a growing City.
- The document needs to reflect what we know now related to our history, with the inclusion of points related to Indigenous history and people.
- The document needs to be updated with an inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility lens.
- Listing specific names and names of buildings should be removed.
- Consider streamlining the wording of each point and the number of points under each Pillar

Community Vision

Key Themes:

- The phrase “small town values” is widely seen as outdated, potentially exclusionary, and not reflective of future growth.
- Some see St. Albert as a “big little city,” highlighting a desire to retain the sense of closeness and community connection while acknowledging growth, suggesting using a word that will speak to that desire.
- There is a preference for terms like “community-centred” or “sense of community”, which better capture inclusivity and connectedness without limiting future potential.

- The “Botanical Arts City” tagline needs a clearer definition or better integration. Many saw it as confusing or disconnected from other City messaging, such as “*Cultivate Life*.” *It was not well understood, and the connection to lived experience was not clear.*
- Mixed reactions to whether the city feels “*innovative*” or “*unique*”. Many see room for clearer expression of what differentiates St. Albert, with suggestions to root the City’s unique identity in nature, walkability and community culture.

Recommendations:

- Replace “*small town values*” with “*sense of community*” or more inclusive language that reflects both heritage and future growth.
- Define or clarify what the “*Botanical Arts City*” means and how it is demonstrated. Also, consider improving alignment to “*Cultivate Life*”. This should be done as part of the City’s communication efforts.
- Consider strengthening language around *inclusion*, *sustainability*, and *innovation* to better reflect community priorities.
- Remove “*unique identity*” and use other verbiage throughout the document to outline our identity.

Pillars of Sustainability

Social

Key Themes:

- Desire for more active and inclusive language (e.g., “we promote diversity” instead of “we believe...”).
- Need for clarity around gender identity and broader inclusivity (race, socioeconomic status, disabilities and cultural background).
- Interest in acknowledging Indigenous history and culture, including the legacy of residential schools, as distinct and foundational.
- The dislike of the term “passionate equals” due to its unrealistic nature. Preference for clearer, more relatable and diversity-focused language.
- Emphasis on community engagement, social connection, equity, and design of inclusive gathering spaces.
- Recognition of the business community’s important role in shaping the social fabric through events, donations and partnerships.

Recommendations:

- Remove or revise “passionate equals”.
- Merge or restructure overlapping or repetitive terms/bullet points for clarity and flow.
- Include explicit recognition of Indigenous peoples and history, including reconciliation efforts.

Economic

Key Themes:

- Overemphasis on downtown core, which many thought was not currently thriving or representative of broader economic life.
- Desire to include support for new and emerging local businesses, not just established ones.
- Need to address economic opportunities outside downtown, including neighbourhood accessibility, industrial/commercial development, home-based or online businesses.
- Walkability and accessibility were highlighted as key economic drivers, especially for attracting diverse industries.
- Language like “vigorous economy” and “prosper and excel” is seen as vague or overly optimistic.
- Tension between maintaining small-town values and enabling sustainable economic growth. Need to balance identity with long-term financial viability.
- Support for innovation, technology and entrepreneurship, including fostering youth skills and marketing future-focused industries.

Recommendations:

- Review for broader economic focus beyond downtown; reflect opportunities across all areas of the city. including neighbourhoods, industrial/commercial zones, and online or home-based business models. This would best be accomplished through the strategic planning process when determining the Council’s strategic direction.
- Reflect that we strive for economic accessibility and long-term financial sustainability.
- Replace unclear phrases like “*vigorous economy*” with more precise and forward-looking language, such as “*diverse*,” “*resilient*,” or “*thriving*”.

Built Environment

Key Themes:

- Strong desire for *affordable housing*, especially for young adults and seniors.
- Support for *walkability*, *snow removal*, *public transit*, and *sustainable infrastructure*.
- *Built environment* should support both historical context and modern resiliency.
- *Preservation language* (e.g., naming specific historical figures) may not feel inclusive or future-facing.

Recommendations:

- Streamline and remove duplication with points under other Pillars
- Incorporate principles of accessibility, traffic innovation and resilience in infrastructure design.
- Consider removing references to historical figures to promote inclusivity and reflect a broader, more accurate historical context and consider alignment with the Culture Pillar.
- Align growth-related language with environmental values to support both innovation and preservation.

Natural Environment

Key Themes:

- Tree canopy goals are seen as aspirational but not yet realized
- Concern that natural areas are unequally distributed; focus should include *urban naturalization*.
- Support for including *education*, *stewardship*, and *green infrastructure*.
- Preference for terms like “*conserve*”, “*preserve*”, “*stewardship*” over vague statements like “putting Earth first”.
- Need to reduce repetition and focus on the most impactful and actionable points.

Recommendations:

- Update terminology to include stewardship, conservation, education and environmental responsibility.
- Replace vague aspirational phrases with action-oriented commitments.
- Review for duplication with other Pillars.

Culture

Key Themes:

- Calls for *stronger promotion of cultural diversity, reconciliation, and inclusion*.
- Current tone is seen as passive; suggestions to adopt more *active, intentional language*.
- “*Treasure our past*” was seen as problematic in light of residential school history. Should focus on *recognition* and *reconciliation*.
- Emphasis on showcasing *public art, festivals, heritage, and multiculturalism*.
- Some elements (e.g., “active lives”, recreation) are seen as misaligned with the culture section.
- Missing references to the everyday nature of culture, its evolving definition, and its connection to wellness, identity, and future growth.

Recommendations:

- Replace “*treasure*” with more forward-looking language, such as “acknowledge”
- Include Indigenous and multicultural acknowledgment and participation.
- Consider broadening the definition of culture to reflect its everyday presence in community life, its evolving nature, and its role in supporting identity, wellness, and inclusive growth into the future.

Other

The following comments do not relate directly to the Community Vision and Pillars of Sustainability but were provided by members as their observations related to the community.

Key Themes:

- Positive reflections on living in St. Albert and civic pride.
- Many chose St. Albert for greenery, strong community feeling and a feeling of safety
- Frustrations about certain amenities (e.g., downtown not thriving, busing in specific neighbourhoods).
- Concerns that *new neighbourhoods lack character, green space, and connectivity*.
- Concerns about the housing market, snow clearing, or development patterns.
- Comparison to other cities and desire for better urban integration and walkability.

- Concerns about reduced library services and the need to maintain strong public libraries that support equitable access to education, technology, and lifelong learning.
- Recognizing that all Pillars are important, when asked which Pillar should receive more focus from the Council due to opportunities to improve, the following were mentioned, listed in the order of priority across all committees:
 - Build Environment
 - Social
 - Economic
 - Natural Environment
 - Culture