

Hello Better Infillers,

The article below takes about five minutes to read. We hope it helps you understand the debate about Edmonton's infill policy better. Please circulate it widely.

—THE TEAM AT BETTER INFILL

Edmonton's Zoning Bylaw Never Had Public Legitimacy

Edmonton's new zoning bylaw had many serious failings, none more serious than its lack of public legitimacy. Public engagement on the new zoning bylaw was so poor that even after five years of it, most Edmontonians had never heard of the zoning bylaw.

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In May 2023, when the city wrapped up the public engagement it began in 2018 and the zoning bylaw was on its way to councillors for approval, only three percent of Edmontonians were familiar with its details. The large majority had never heard of it. Those were the findings of a statistically valid poll undertaken by Pollara Research, one of Canada's leading polling companies.

Though Better Infill warned city council that the public wasn't on board, in October 2023 council voted 11-2 to approve the zoning bylaw. Only councillors Principe and Rice voted against it. In hindsight, it seems Edmonton's experiment with zoning was pushed through from the very top of city hall, and the core of the zoning bylaw was determined before public consultation began.

A REALITY CHECK ON CITY CLAIMS OF ENGAGEMENT.

To show how the city's public engagement on the zoning bylaw failed to engage the public, let's dig into the records.

The city produced five *What We Heard* reports describing its public consultations on zoning. The first, in October 2020, counted a total of 692 participants over 26 events, an average of 27

people per event. More than 100 of these participants were stakeholders and industry representatives.

The second *What We Heard* report, in January 2021, reported on the next round of engagement. There were 3,084 visits to the engagement website, but of these 3,084 visits, only 228 involved a comment or question. It's likely some people both made a comment and asked a question, so the number of individuals is probably less than 228.

The final round of engagement was held in 2023, when the zoning bylaw was effectively completed. The city's May 2023 *What We Heard* report said the city received 1400 comments on the bylaw (that's 1400 comments, not 1400 people). Notably, the second most common theme among the comments was that public engagement was unsatisfactory.

This report trumpets 18,297 visitors to the Engaged Edmonton website and 9,688 views of the "guided feedback tool." But digging deeper, the city also reported that "direct contact with the zoning renewal bylaw team" amounted to receiving 84 emails, answering 13 questions, and holding 20 one-on-one chats with interested people. It's in direct contact that real engagement happens, and these are tiny figures for a city of over one million residents.

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The fact only 13 questions were asked should have signalled to city hall that it was out of touch. Instead, it was mistakenly taken as a vote of confidence.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST.

Let's compare the city's five-year multi-million-dollar public engagement with what volunteers have achieved in much less time and zero taxpayer cost. The group that became Better Infill held its first public meeting on infill in April 2023. We expected a couple of dozen people; more than 75 turned up from about twenty neighbourhoods. This was almost triple the average turn-out the city got for its 2021 engagements. Since then, our public meetings have ranged from 50 to 150 people, and our webinars have been watched by over a thousand people. As of October 8, 2026, Better Infill's website had 11,819 unique visitors, comparing well to the city's numbers.

But Better Infill's public engagement pales in comparison with Edmonton Neighbourhoods United (ENU). This is what the volunteers at ENU have achieved in less than eighteen months:

ENU ACHIEVMENTS IN LESS THAN 18 MONTHS

39
NEIGHBOURHOOD
PRESENTATIONS

*to just under 4,000
people, with
comments &
questions too
numerous to count*

77,000
WEBSITE HITS

4,000
LAWN SIGNS

*Paid for by the
people who take
them*

6,100
SIGNATURES

on an e-petition

2,200
PEOPLE LEAVING
COMMENTS

*(not 2,200
comments, 2,200
people)*

If we add what other groups have done, such as the Residential Infill Working Group, Infill Action Committee, and SaveYeg, the numbers are almost overwhelming. The Infill Action Committee organized a campaign that saw about 42,000 letters and emails sent to the provincial government, including 2,653 letters to the premier in one week.

Edmonton city council has an opportunity to genuinely engage the public on the zoning bylaw and city plan. It's clear the public is eager. Let's hope city hall opens its mind instead of closing its doors.