

Creating Cultural Connections in the Greater Forest Lawn Communities



Introduction

Creating Cultural Connections was a series of targeted engagement efforts developed as part of the Greater Forest Lawn Communities Local Area Planning (LAP) project's commitment to equity and further interest to plan culturally.

In doing so, the innovative approach reduced barriers to participation and provided more opportunities for inclusive engagement. This work is part of ongoing efforts in the local area planning process to create plans that better reflect the communities and demographics within the plan areas.

In the broadest sense, culture is anything that defines the unique identity of a community or social group. Planning Culturally is the practice of planning that adds a cultural lens by integrating cultural considerations into the way The City undertakes its work.



Project History

In 2022, the project team began working together to create a future vision for how land could be used and redeveloped in the area. Using a phased approach, the project team had conversations with community associations, community members, key impacted and interested groups, along with industry representatives in consideration of the communities of Albert Park/Radisson Heights, Applewood Park, Dover, Erin Woods, Forest Heights, Forest Lawn, Forest Lawn Industrial, Penbrooke Meadows, Red Carpet, Southview, 09Q, and a portion of Golden Triangle.

The Plan Area is comprised of these 12 communities that make up nearly 60,000 residents. The communities are home to a high percentage of Indigenous, racialized and immigrant populations. Nearly seven per cent of the population identifies as Indigenous, and 44 per cent of the population are visible minorities, and over 30 per cent are immigrants.

The approaches and actions taken as part of the Creating Cultural Connections work are intended to build closer and more trusting relationships between The City's Community Planning team and cultural communities within the Plan Area.

Throughout engagement for the project, concerns were heard about the previous Plan name "Greater Forest Lawn Communities Local Area Plan." Engagement undertaken in Phase 3 resulted in a shortlist of alternate names. Taking various factors into consideration, a new Plan name of "East Calgary International Avenue Communities Local Area Plan" was selected for Council approval.

"This was a good opportunity for our community. I hope these efforts continue."

— Participant

Process

With support from The City's Arts & Culture and Community Strategies divisions, the project team moved forward with Creating Cultural Connections, an engagement approach that sought to gather feedback from the notable representation of cultural communities in the Plan Area for further policy considerations.

This approach allowed the team to ensure that engagement was grounded with a deeper understanding of culture and opportunity to influence the formulation of planning policy.

Using cultural categories that included ethnocultural organizations, community nonprofits, sports organizations, artist and cultural infrastructure and others, key priority groups for Creating Cultural Connections were identified within the Plan Area. To build connections with these groups to host Creating Cultural Connections sessions, community engagement was conducted in two parts:

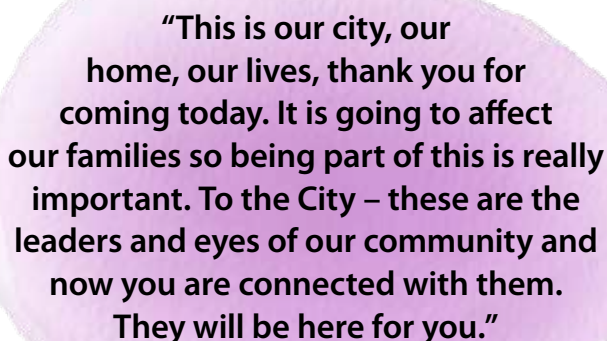
- **Part 1 – Pre-Engagement:**

Outreach and pop-up events were held in communities to build awareness and identify contacts from less represented organizations or groups. Concurrently, the project team conducted a further plain language review of content used from Phase 1 and 2 for use during Creating Cultural Connections sessions.

- **Part 2 – Co-hosted Sessions:**

After making connections, the project team began to co-host sessions. Before each session, the project team worked with cultural community contacts to determine appropriate facilitation methods, accommodations (including language interpretation) and other considerations.

A co-hosting method was intentionally used to ensure relevancy and support participation with the different cultural communities. Spending time to go through content and session flow with each group, asking their advice on current assets, existing issues and future opportunities. In addition to utilizing their own community members for interpretation, content navigation and outreach, they helped the project team broker relationships and address barriers such as lack of trust, confusion, high complexity, and general engagement fatigue.



“This is our city, our home, our lives, thank you for coming today. It is going to affect our families so being part of this is really important. To the City – these are the leaders and eyes of our community and now you are connected with them. They will be here for you.”

— Participant

Impact

Through the targeted efforts made with Creating Cultural Connections the project team interacted with over 700 community members and co-hosted sessions with seven different cultural groups, including members of the Vietnamese, Filipino, South Sudanese and Indigenous communities, Ethiopian and Eritrean business owners, Alex Community Food Centre and Eastview Basketball Association.

Ideas and perspectives shared by the participants during the Creating Cultural Connections sessions allowed the project team to include additional policy considerations into the local area plan. Changes to the policy framework included:

- Supporting opportunities for placemaking and naming of existing features within the Plan Area, including, but not limited to, streets, parks, open spaces, and public facilities, that recognize and celebrate sustained Indigenous presences on these lands through engagement with appropriate Indigenous Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers from the Nations who made Treaty 7 and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government as part of future upgrades.
- Reinforcing the commitment to pursue recreational and multicultural centres that can facilitate cultural expression and various activities.
- Investing in accessible, inclusive, and year-round programming of parks and open spaces, for people of all ages, cultural backgrounds, and abilities to promote overall community wellness and quality of life.

Building relationships with groups that have previously been missing or excluded from the planning process ensured that perspectives and lived experiences are reflected in the policies that will guide growth and change in their communities over the next 30 years.



7 co-hosted sessions
with different cultural groups



700+ interactions
with community members



422 comments
during pre-engagement

Next Steps

The Local Area Planning program will review opportunities to implement activities from the Creating Cultural Connections efforts for upcoming local area plans. Processes within the program look to continuously improve and seeks equity as well as the inclusion of a cultural lens as a key part of the evolution of the Local Area Planning program.