

Impacts of the Citizens' Panel on Edmonton's Energy and Climate Challenges

This document outlines what has happened since the Citizens' Panel on Edmonton's Energy and Climate Challenges produced its Final Report. The document includes how recommendations have been shared with City Council and used by City of Edmonton administration to develop Edmonton's Energy Transition Plan.

Background

The Way We Green, Edmonton's environmental strategic plan, identifies climate change and high reliance on fossil fuels as serious risks to the City's sustainability and resiliency. From October 13 to December 1, 2012, fifty-six diverse Edmontonians participated in the Citizens' Panel on Edmonton's Energy and Climate Challenges and developed recommendations on how the City could respond to these risks. They learned about climate change and energy vulnerability, engaged in extensive dialogue with one another and with visiting experts, and developed recommendations in support of key City of Edmonton priorities. Panelists worked together over six day-long sessions, supported by a Citizens' Handbook. The Handbook—which was vetted by both a reference group of citizens and diverse stakeholders—drew on an Energy Transition discussion paper that the City commissioned to identify key actions and policy levers in relation to energy transition in Edmonton. From their deliberations, Panelists developed a Final Report putting forward recommendations for the City of Edmonton.

Members of the Citizens' Panel represented Edmonton's demographic diversity in terms of age, income, background, ward, experience, and views on energy and the environment. They came together at the invitation of the City to make recommendations to Administration and Council, with the City's commitment to seriously consider their recommendations in developing an Energy Transition plan. This innovative public involvement process was convened by the City of Edmonton's Office of Environment in partnership with Alberta Climate Dialogue (ABCD) and the Centre for Public Involvement (CPI).

- Read the Panel's Final Report including recommendations, as well as summaries of Panel process, composition and participant evaluations¹
- Watch a short video on the Citizens' Panel²
- City of Edmonton Energy Transition Plan to be reviewed by City Council on March 18, 2015³

“In the two years since we completed our work on the Citizens' panel, I have gained a much greater understanding of how public policy is developed, how city politics work, and just how many opinions are taken into account when making decisions. Facilitating change is a huge challenge and I think I have a better grasp on the difficult task of those working with the City.”

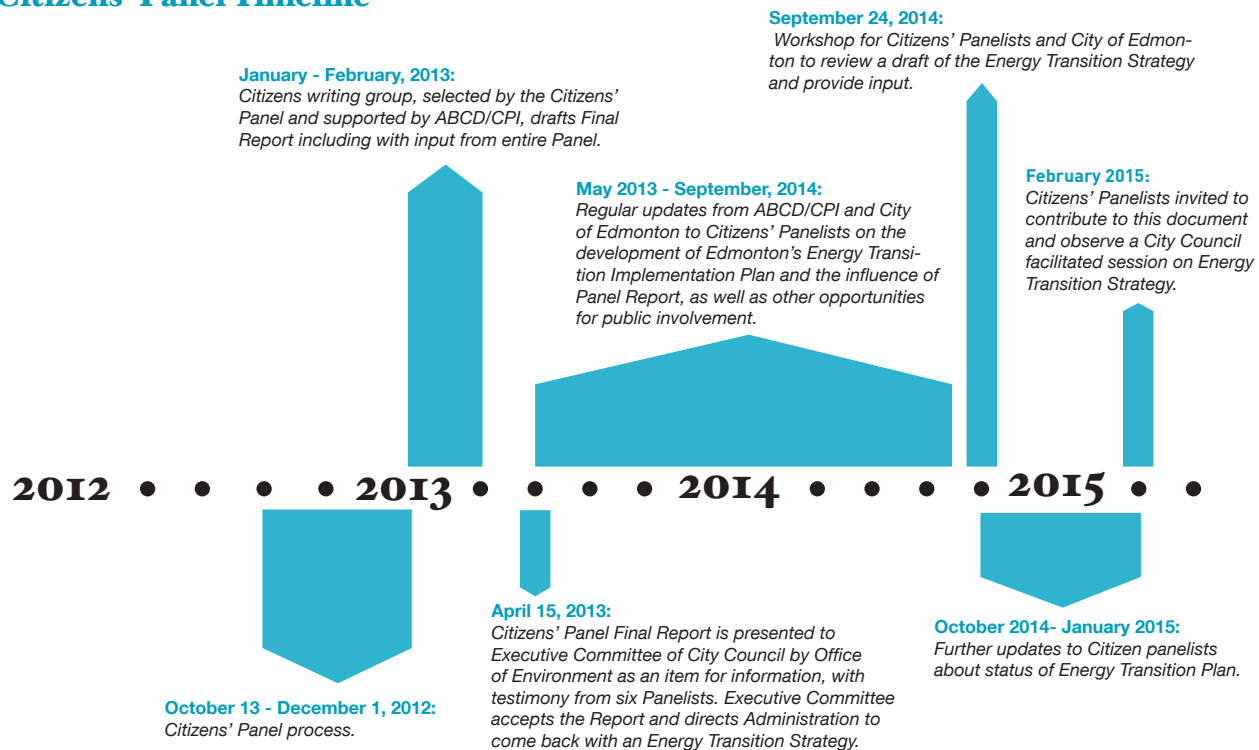
– Christine Tucker, Citizen Panelist

¹ http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/environmental_stewardship/citizens-panel-energy-climate.aspx

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5yMpnQIUf0>

³ http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/environmental_stewardship/energy-transition.aspx

Citizens' Panel Timeline



“Partaking in this process has shown me that if I want to effect change in Edmonton, I as well as other citizens must be active participants in providing a course for the city to follow.

I am proud of what we did and the outcomes that resulted from our efforts, we have given the city a decisive direction in which to move forward. It is my hope that council will see our intentions, follow through and implement them to set a path for Edmonton's future.”

– Scott Hannah, Citizen Panelist

“ It has been very gratifying to hear that strong commitments (regarding CO₂ emissions) are being made by the city—which I believe may not have been had we not participated. I feel like I was able to help make a difference, and that my input was valued all the way to the top. Now I am excited to see the progress that happens, and I hope it is much better than the last 20 years! ”

– Leon Milner, Citizen Panelist

What influence has the Panel had?

The Citizen Panelists, in their final report, made clear that they wanted their recommendations to influence City decisions. In a section of the Report (page 4) headed “What we hope City administration and City Council will do with our recommendations” the Panelists wrote:

Our recommendations provide a clear and reliable representation to you as decision-makers of what Edmonton as a whole would want if every citizen could be given the time, support, exposure to diverse perspectives, and balanced information needed to reach an informed conclusion. For all of these reasons:

- *We expect City Administration to take our recommendations seriously as it develops an Energy Transition Plan. In the process, we hope to be told publicly which recommendations have been adopted, which have not, and why. Understanding how our recommendations are used builds both the accountability of the involvement process and our capacities as citizens. We appreciate that the Office of Environment has committed itself explicitly to these things in recruiting us to the Citizens’ Panel and during the Panel.*
- *We expect City Council to take our recommendations seriously as it makes decisions about energy transition issues, and we hope that Councillors will speak explicitly about which of our recommendations are being adopted, which are not being adopted, and why.*
- *We request a chance to speak to the process and reasoning of the Citizens’ Panel to Council when it considers our recommendations.*

Although we come from all walks of life and have very different personal values and priorities, we have developed a shared understanding that Edmonton must address the energy and climate challenges we face with an unprecedented sense of intensity and urgency. The time to act is now.

Both Mayor Iveson and Jim Andrais (the civil servant responsible for developing the Energy Transition Strategy) identify the Panel’s support for a low carbon pathway for Edmonton as crucial:

“I would argue that every plan that has ever been developed by a government organization has consulted in some form with citizens. The question really is: what is the quality of that consultation and can you lean on it? I love the fact that the methodology that is behind the panel is the best I’ve seen. And I would say pretty much as good as

it gets in terms of constructing a group of citizens who can help policy makers make decisions.”

– Jim Andrais, Program Manager, Environmental Policy, Urban Planning & Environment, City of Edmonton

“I think one thing that does give us security as politicians is knowing that when you put a diverse group of Edmontonians in a room, you give them the facts, you give them a chance to talk about it, they will tell you with a remarkable degree of consensus that we ought to be doing something different.”

– Don Iveson, Mayor of City of Edmonton

The City of Edmonton’s Energy Transition Strategy⁴ overlaps extensively with the Citizens’ Panel’s recommendations. One reason is that, like the Citizens’ Panel’s deliberations, the Energy Transition Strategy draws heavily on the Discussion Paper commissioned by the City as Stage 1 of the Energy Transition Strategy process. The recommendations of the Discussion Paper were thoroughly vetted through the Citizens’ Panel’s deliberations, and the Energy Transition Strategy draws explicitly on the Panel’s work in two ways:

First, the Strategy incorporates particular concerns raised in the Final Report of the Citizens’ Panel, especially those highlighted as “Guiding Principles”—these are included in the Strategy as Strategic Action 10.

Second, in the draft Strategy itself, in how the Strategy is being framed as it goes to Council, and in many other communications, the City bases the democratic legitimacy of this complex and ambitious strategy on the fact that its key elements were strongly supported by the Citizens’ Panel.

- In the Strategy, the Panel and its recommendations are described in detail in Phase 2 of the Development Process.
- Part 3 of the Strategy describes eleven strategic actions. The following is an excerpt:

The City of Edmonton will apply the advice of the Citizens’ Panel on Edmonton’s Energy and Climate Challenges: (a) weighing the costs and benefits of each energy transition action, (b) using public and transparent decision making processes so that citizens are confident that energy transition decisions serve the public good,

⁴ http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/environmental_stewardship/energy-transition.aspx

(c) linking City leadership to citizen education, and,
(d) recognizing and promoting multiple reasons for energy transition.

As previously discussed in Section 1.3, in September 2012 a Citizens' Panel was formed "to discover whether we as Edmontonians want our city to become low carbon, whether we consider the Discussion Paper to provide a good map for getting there, and how much we support particular actions proposed in it." In its report titled Citizens' Panel on Edmonton's Energy and Climate Challenges,⁵ the Panel recommended: "That the City of Edmonton take the measures needed to become a low carbon city by 2050."

This strategic action reflects the Panel's advice within the strategy, giving priority to the principles of financial prudence, project transparency and citizen engagement.

The ultimate influence of the Citizens' Panel will be clearer when:

- Council deliberates during the facilitated session on March 18th.
- The decision is announced about the Strategy that day.
- The Panel influence is part of discussion of the Strategy in Council and in the Press.
- We see whether the Strategy in turn influences future City decisions about spending, regulation, and other initiatives.

To find out more, contact:

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"As council takes a look at the energy transition strategy, I hope they can approach any decisions made with an open mind, considering the opinions of the actual citizens that were involved in the development process, and not their own opinions regarding climate or energy science."

– Christine Tucker, Citizen Panelist