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EDMONTON CHAPTER



BOMA
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Minister of Municipal Affairs
The Hon. Dan Williams

May 11, 2026

His Worship Mayor Andrew Knack
City of Edmonton
Office of the Mayor
1 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, AB T5J 2R7

Re: A Phased Return to In-Person Work for Municipal Employees to Strengthen Edmonton

Dear Mayor Knack;

On behalf of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, BILD Edmonton Metro, NAIOP Edmonton, BOMA Edmonton and North, the REALTORS® Association of Edmonton, and the Edmonton Construction Association — representing more than 7,000 employers and over 150,000 employees across the Edmonton region — and alongside the Honourable Dan Williams, Minister of Municipal Affairs, we are writing to ask the City of Edmonton to take a meaningful step forward on downtown recovery.

Specifically, we are asking the City to return municipal employees to in-person work in the downtown core. This would complement the action the Government of Alberta took earlier this year with the return of nearly 12,000 Alberta Public Service employees, and we believe a coordinated effort between our two orders of government — supported by Edmonton's business community — would mark a turning point for the capital city.

Returning municipal employees to the office is, first and foremost, a decision about how the City does its work. In-person presence strengthens collaboration across teams, supports the mentorship and development of newer employees, and reinforces the accountability that residents rightly expect from their public service. It also recognizes that Edmonton's downtown was designed and built for the workforce it serves, and that the institutions of municipal government, like those of provincial government, function best when they are physically rooted in the communities they exist to support. The Government of Alberta arrived at this conclusion last fall, and the transition since February has reinforced that judgement¹.

Across major Northern American cities, the evidence consistently shows² that downtowns with higher in-person workforce presence recovered from the pandemic's impacts faster. We see that increased daytime population correlates with improved perceptions and realities of safety, retail sales, foot traffic, and office leasing, and that these strengthen as workers return full-time to the office; taxpayer-funded office space is significantly underutilized under the current hybrid model.

A return to in-person work need not, and should not, mean the end of meaningful workplace flexibility. The Alberta Public Service has continued to maintain accommodations for medical

¹ Global News. *Alberta government ending hybrid work policy for public servants*, October 24, 2025. <https://globalnews.ca/news/11493242/alberta-government-hybrid-work/>

² Forouhar, A., Chapple, K., Allen, J., Jeong, B., & Greenberg, J. *Assessing downtown recovery rates and determinants in North American cities after the COVID-19 pandemic*. *Urban Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 6 (2025), pp. 1209–1231. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00420980241270987>



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needs, modified schedules, and individual circumstances under existing policies, and we recognize that any municipal approach should be able to make exceptions where needed. The conversation is sometimes framed as binary, and it should not be: asking employees to return to a shared workplace can still respect the legitimate flexibility some staff members rely on.

A recent report by the Downtown Revitalization Coalition, supported by many of our organizations, called for Edmonton to become Canada's safest major city, and identified the return of office workers to the core as one of the practical, near-term tools available to advance that goal. Recent data is showing that roughly one in three Edmontonians feel unsafe walking alone after work. Although challenges remain, these gains mean a return to in-person work would occur in a meaningfully safer environment than even a year ago, and increased daytime presence would further strengthen visibility, activity, and "eyes on the street", reinforcing both real and perceived safety, and helping restore the confidence essential to a vibrant downtown.

The economic case for this decision deserves particular weight. At its peak, Edmonton's downtown generated approximately 10 per cent of the city's tax base while occupying less than one per cent of its land area, a remarkable concentration of value. That share has since fallen to roughly 5.2 per cent, driven largely by sustained office vacancy and the property value declines that have accompanied it. As of late 2025, downtown still carried approximately 3.4 million square feet of vacant office space. The cost of that contraction is borne by taxpayers across the city, in the form of higher residential rates, deferred services, or both. At the same time, the recovery indicators are real and worth reinforcing: in 2025, Edmonton was the only major Canadian market to post an increase in commercial property investment sales, reaching a record \$3.3 billion, and JLL identified Edmonton as Canada's strongest job-growth market. Daytime activations such as Winterval, funded through the City's own Downtown Vibrancy Fund, drew 10,000 attendees and delivered sales increases of 10 to 30 per cent for participating businesses on a single Saturday. The lesson is consistent: when people are present in the core, the economy of the core responds. The City of Edmonton is among downtown's largest employers, and the daily presence of its workforce would translate directly into foot traffic, spending, and the absorption of office vacancy that underpins the city's long-term assessment base.

We recognize that workforce decisions rest with the City of Edmonton and that Council will weigh them in the manner appropriate to its responsibilities. We offer this letter in the spirit of partnership between two orders of government that share an interest in the success of Alberta's capital city, and with the support of the business community that has worked alongside both of us through the most difficult years of the downtown recovery. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you and members of Council at your convenience.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Dan Williams, Minister of Municipal Affairs, Government of Alberta
The Honourable Doug Griffiths, President and CEO, Edmonton Chamber of Commerce
Kalen Anderson, CEO, BILD Edmonton Metro
Larry Westergard, President & CEO, REALTORS® Association of Edmonton
David Johnson, President and CEO, Edmonton Construction Association
Robynn Holstein, Executive Director, NAIOP Edmonton
Stacey Claffey, President and CEO, BOMA Edmonton and North