

**Even with a long history of polarized views, the process works. For the City of Edmonton, we built meaningful understanding of public engagement, making sustainable, community-driven decisions possible.**

- Kim Hyshka

## Crafting a Public Involvement Plan

### *City of Edmonton*

*Dialogue Partners was retained to plan, design and implement a comprehensive public involvement project for the City of Edmonton. The project included development and implementation of an inclusive plan for the public involvement and communications for the Edmonton City Centre Airport lands – to explore the possibilities and challenges of land use. We engaged a wide cross-section of the community in a values-based conversation on a highly emotional, controversial issue, and identified options for the future.*

### What happened?

The project included: a detailed conflict assessment with more than 125 stakeholder interviews; a one-day Community Conversation with 150 participants; a 25 member Citizen Advisory Group that met monthly and provided input on the public involvement process; an online engagement process including Discussion Forums; community capacity building workshops to train citizens to host / facilitate their own conversations; a photo voice project to engage residents in visually reflecting their thoughts on the possibilities and challenges of existing and future land use; a one-day deliberative forum to refine and develop options for presentation to City Council; and three open houses with embedded key pad polling, to gather final comment on options going forward to Council. By the end of the project, more than 6,500 participants were involved.

The City of Edmonton rated our services as “exceeding expectations” in all categories of the contract, including deliverables, project management, and value for money, noting that Dialogue Partners handled high emotion and conflict in a professional, engaging way.

### Things we learned along the way.

High emotion and a long history of polarized views, complex issues and highly organized, well-funded stakeholders were evident. Dialogue Partners used a step-by-step methodology, capacity building with staff and decision makers and stakeholders, and a

values-based process to address these issues in the engagement process. After a meaningful conversation, the formal hearing process with 5 minutes at the microphone was scheduled as part of City Council decision making.

This resulted in a return to polarized views on the part of many stakeholders. Ongoing discussion and relationship building between elected officials, senior staff and stakeholders post decision-making would have helped long-term. Making sure that all partners – including the Edmonton Airport Authority – were actively participating in the process would have helped ease concerns about transparency and information sharing.



<http://eccalandspublicinvolvement.ca/>

*As part of the communication plan for the project a dedicated website was created. The site worked with “blogging” news for upcoming events and notified participants of the results of the engagement activities as well as it housed moderated discussion boards. The site also hosted an extensive library of documents. There were nearly 4,000 unique visitors to the website, many of whom registered for the RSS news feeder.*

### **Community capacity building.**

Dialogue Partners approach included community capacity building workshops to train citizens to host / facilitate their own

conversations. We also ran workshops with elected officials and senior staff to build understanding and knowledge about meaningful public engagement, making and implementing sustainable decisions.