

Can't be afraid to think big

Edmonton Examiner
Wed 10 Jan 2007
Page: 4
Section: Editorial/Opinion
Byline:
Column: Editorial
Source:
Edition: Final
Length: 458 words

A top-10 list released a week ago by a website devoted to issues affecting Edmonton illustrates how much imagination residents have when it comes to the future of the city.

It also shows, by comparison, the relative lack of imagination displayed by the movers and shakers in this community.

The list was released by Connect2Edmonton.com (C2E), a site created by the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation as an online forum created to allow people to discuss Edmonton-themed topics. An offshoot of the site's Great Ideas for Greater Edmonton contest, the list features the top 10 ideas from the hundreds of suggestions generated. The quality of the suggestions ranges from the inevitable to the far-fetched.

Take No. 4, for instance - expand the LRT to the international airport and to West Edmonton Mall. Both are obvious destinations for Edmonton's rapid transit system and both will likely be included in future expansions. But it's not likely to happen any time soon, unless a great deal of funding is parachuted into the city for such projects.

That points out one of the peculiarities of the C2E site - it has close to 900 members in more than 20 countries. While they may care about this city's future, many from outside the country may not be as interested in the impact their ideas would have on taxpayers' pocketbooks.

Nor do they seem bothered by the impracticality of some of their suggestions. Item No. 7, building a new downtown arena, is a case in point. While it would likely help to liven up the area, Edmonton's downtown streets likely couldn't handle the influx of traffic - a situation that might be helped by suggestion No. 6 which calls for a new bridge over the North Saskatchewan River and unimpeded traffic flow from the international airport - not to mention the strain the facility would put on parking in the city centre.

On the other hand, item No. 8 - build an architectural icon - may not be as far-fetched as it seems. Most world-class cities are home to landmark buildings - the CN Tower, for instance, or the Empire State Building - that have become icons of the community. The private sector is the best source of such projects, though the public sector has access to various forms of encouragement.

Mayor Stephen Mandel has come out in support of improving the city's architecture, cleaning up the city (item No. 2) and increasing the amount of public art (No. 9). But Edmonton seems to lack the courage it had in the early '70s when it conceived and built Commonwealth Stadium in order to host a world-class sporting event.

This is an election year. Edmonton may be ready for people with big ideas to step forward.