



August 26, 2026

Andrea De Gooyer
BIA Infrastructure Specialist
City of Edmonton
Parks and Roads Services
andrea.degooyer@edmonton.ca
patios@edmonton.ca

Dear Andrea,

Re: Recommendations for Patios on Public Spaces Program

The Edmonton Downtown Business Association (EDBA) appreciates the opportunity to provide input into the development of the future Patios on Public Spaces Program.

As the City of Edmonton develops its 2027-2030 Budget and business plans, we encourage Administration and Council to view the Patio Program as a city-building and economic development investment that directly supports the City's strategic priorities related to Economic Development, Growth Management, Quality Services, and Safety.

While this submission reflects the Downtown Edmonton perspective, the Patio Program serves businesses, BIAs, and communities across Edmonton. Many of the economic, vibrancy, safety, and investment benefits associated with patios are relevant throughout the city. As such, we encourage the City to consider the Patio Program as a city-building and economic development tool whose benefits extend beyond any single district.

Downtown restaurants, cafes, pubs, and hospitality businesses play a significant role in animating streets and public spaces, supporting tourism and events, attracting workers and visitors to the core, and creating the vibrancy that contributes to a successful downtown economy.

Patios Support Business Retention, Investment, and Economic Growth

The future Patio Program should be viewed through the lens of economic development and business retention. Restaurants and hospitality businesses create jobs, occupy commercial space, attract residents and visitors, contribute to municipal assessment growth, and help create vibrant commercial districts. When businesses thrive, the City benefits through increased economic activity, investment, occupancy, and a stronger tax base. When businesses close, the opposite occurs. This is particularly important given the significant pressures facing the restaurant sector, including rising costs, labour challenges, economic uncertainty, and changing customer patterns. In this environment, patios are an important business tool that helps restaurants attract customers, remain competitive, and continue investing in Edmonton.

Patios are not guaranteed profit centres as Edmonton's outdoor dining season is relatively short and can be influenced by weather, wildfire smoke, construction activity, and other factors outside a business's control. Even so, patios provide valuable opportunities for businesses to attract customers, support their operations, and contribute to the vibrancy of Edmonton's commercial districts.



They also support jobs, business retention, tourism, public safety through increased activity, and private-sector investment in Edmonton's public realm. Restaurants have invested significant capital into patio infrastructure and require long-term certainty to support continued investment.

Supporting the City's Strategic Priorities

1. Economic Development

Patios support business retention and growth, encourage private-sector investment, contribute to tourism and visitor experiences, and enhance vibrancy throughout Downtown and commercial districts across Edmonton.

Patios contribute to the type of urban experience that supports festivals, arts and culture activities, sporting events, conventions, tourism, and everyday economic activity. They help create destinations that attract residents, visitors, workers, and investment. Every patio represents private-sector capital being invested into Edmonton's economy and public realm. The City's objective should be to encourage and support these investments.

2. Growth Management

The City's growth objectives rely upon creating attractive, walkable, mixed-use environments where people want to live, work, invest, and spend their time.

Patios contribute directly to quality-of-place by activating streets, enhancing public spaces, and supporting vibrant commercial districts. These factors help attract residential growth, employment growth, and investment in key nodes, corridors, and Downtown. Active streets and vibrant public spaces make neighbourhoods more attractive to residents, employers, and investors alike.

3. Quality Services

The Patio Program demonstrates how municipal services can support broader economic and community outcomes.

By enabling businesses to invest in and activate public spaces, the program advances goals related to economic development, tourism, public realm enhancement, and civic pride. A stable and predictable Patio Program provides confidence to businesses making significant long-term investments and encourages continued participation.

4. Safety

Downtown businesses continue to operate within a challenging street environment. Visible social disorder, addiction and mental health-related crises, and other volatile street-level situations can affect public perceptions of safety and influence decisions about where people choose to spend their time and money.

These realities can be particularly impactful for businesses that rely on outdoor customer experiences. However, active patios are part of the solution.



Patios increase positive activity in public spaces, create additional eyes and ears on the street, support pedestrian activity, and contribute to more vibrant and welcoming streets. They help animate public spaces and contribute to the positive customer experiences that are essential to attracting residents, employees, visitors, and investment in Downtown Edmonton and commercial districts throughout the city.

EDBA Recommendations

A. Recognize Patio Support as an Economic Development Investment

The Patio Program should be considered an economic development initiative that supports business retention, employment, tourism, investment attraction, vibrancy, commercial occupancy, and growth of the municipal assessment base. Program decisions should be evaluated through the lens of these broader economic and city-building outcomes.

B. Suspend Patio Fees Introduced in 2026 Beginning in 2027

Restaurants are already the primary investors in patio infrastructure and operations, including boardwalks, railings, furniture, landscaping, maintenance, insurance, storage, and repairs. These investments are made at the businesses' risk and expense and often require many years to recover.

The EDBA recommends that the patio fees introduced in 2026 be suspended beginning in 2027 and not carried forward into the next Patio Program. Reducing barriers to participation will help encourage continued private-sector investment and support the retention and growth of patios throughout Edmonton.

C. Establish Long-Term Stability and Certainty

The Patio Program should provide a stable and predictable long-term framework that gives businesses confidence to invest.

The City should recognize that patio infrastructure investments often require many years to recover and that support for patios should extend beyond a single four-year budget cycle. Long-term certainty is essential to encouraging continued private-sector investment.

D. Prioritize Patio Retention and Growth as a Measure of Program Success

The City's objective should be to maintain and increase the number of patios operating throughout Edmonton.

Program success should be measured by the program's ability to encourage patio participation, support business investment, and contribute to vibrant commercial districts across the city.

E. Recognize Patios as Contributors to Vibrancy, Safety, and Quality of Place

City support for patios should reflect the broader public value they create, including increased activity in public spaces, enhanced vibrancy, improved perceptions of safety, tourism attraction, and stronger commercial districts.



Conclusion

The EDBA encourages the City to approach the future Patio Program with a simple objective: more patios, not fewer.

Every patio represents private-sector investment in Edmonton's economy and public realm. Patios support jobs, help businesses remain viable, attract customers and visitors, activate public spaces, contribute to positive perceptions of safety, strengthen commercial districts, and support municipal assessment growth.

The City should actively seek to retain existing patios, support the development of new patios, and remove barriers to participation.

The value of patios is not measured solely by the sales generated on a patio itself. Their value is reflected in the jobs they support, the businesses they help retain, the investment they encourage, the vibrancy they create, the safety they contribute to, and the growth they support within Edmonton's broader economy.

Any reduction in patio participation would represent a loss of economic activity, private investment, vibrancy, business confidence, and long-term competitiveness for Edmonton.

As the City develops its 2027-2030 budget and business plans, continued support for patios should be viewed as a long-term economic development investment that benefits both Downtown Edmonton and communities across the city. A stable, predictable, and supportive Patio Program will encourage businesses to continue investing in Edmonton and will contribute to a vibrant, safe, and prosperous city for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

James L. Robinson
Executive Director
JR@edmontondowntown.com