



Calgary



2023 Spring Focus Groups

Final Report

June 2023

Prepared by: Ipsos
160 Bloor Street East, Suite 300
Toronto, ON, M4W 1B9
Deborah.AdieBoyd@ipsos.com



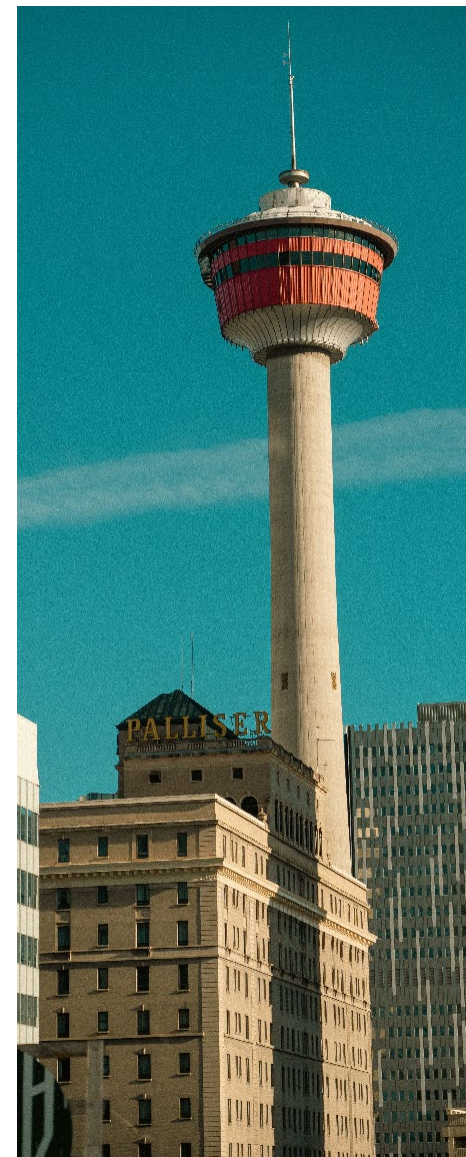
Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the traditional territories and oral practices of the Blackfoot Nations, which include the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai. We also acknowledge the Tssut'ina and Stoney Nakoda First Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

Table of contents

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Background and methodology | 04 |
| Key findings | 05 |
| Detailed findings | 07 |
| Quality of Life in Calgary | 08 |
| Resilience | 21 |
| Economic resilience | 24 |
| Social resilience | 28 |
| Environmental Resilience | 33 |



Background and methodology

Background

The qualitative research was designed to gather residents' perceptions of quality of life in Calgary and the meaning of resilience. Resilience was explored in a broad sense, as well as from three perspectives: Economic resilience, Social resilience, and Environmental resilience

Methodology

A total of seventy-eight (78) individuals participated in this research. Ten focus groups were conducted in between April 12th and 19th, 2023 with Calgarians aged 18 years and older. Each session lasted a total two hours and participants were offered an honorarium of \$100 for their time and participation. The groups were segmented by geography.

- 2 groups with residents in the southwest quadrant
- 2 groups with residents in the southeast quadrant
- 2 groups with residents in the northwest quadrant
- 2 groups with residents in the northeast quadrant
- 2 groups with downtown residents

In close collaboration with The City's Corporate Research Team, Ipsos designed a recruitment screening questionnaire to ensure a good mix of gender, age, education, and income. Ipsos also worked with The City to develop a moderator's guide of discussion themes which included a variety of exercises for focus group participants to undertake during the sessions.

City of Calgary representatives were present in the backroom for all sessions.

Please note: The following findings are qualitative in nature. The work is exploratory as a result of the number of participants and the method by which the sample was drawn. The results should be regarded as directional and may not necessarily be projected to the larger population without further quantitative research.

Key findings

Calgary was believed to be a ‘great place to live’ by most participants.

- This was a function of the ‘small town feel’ and welcoming community, greenspace and proximity to nature (including the Rockies) , easily accessible City-provided programs and services, and the availability of opportunity within the city. Concerns were related to affordability, the perceived necessity of vehicles, and worries about safety (specifically on transit).

City programs and services were identified as enhancing the quality of life of Calgarians.

- In particular, the availability and accessibility of programs and services – at little to no cost or subsidized for low-income Calgarians – was seen to positively impact quality of life. Factors with a negative impact on quality of life were identified as being related to affordability, transportation struggles (e.g., traffic, construction, transit system limitations), and a perceived difference in levels of support across quadrants.

Areas of opportunity to improve quality of life in Calgary were identified, with an emphasis placed on housing, safety, transit and parking.

- There were resounding calls from many residents for the extension of transit systems, effective management of parking and traffic congestion in the downtown core, investment in affordable housing and shelters, and increased presence of police and transit officers to address safety concerns, as well the creation of a strategy to address the underlying causes of safety issues – namely homelessness, mental health crises, and substance abuse.

Calgary was deemed to be a resilient city, given its supportive community and a ‘get-er done’ mentality, but there was a desire for ‘action’ and ‘strategies’ in the promotion of resilience among Calgarians.

- Resilience was believed to be built through action and the provision of services, rather than inspirational messaging – with comprehensive mental health resources and reduced food bank criteria during the pandemic provided as examples of Calgary promoting resilience.

Key findings (continued)

There was a low depth of awareness of economic programs and initiatives, with participants expressing concerns about increasing costs of living and affordability.

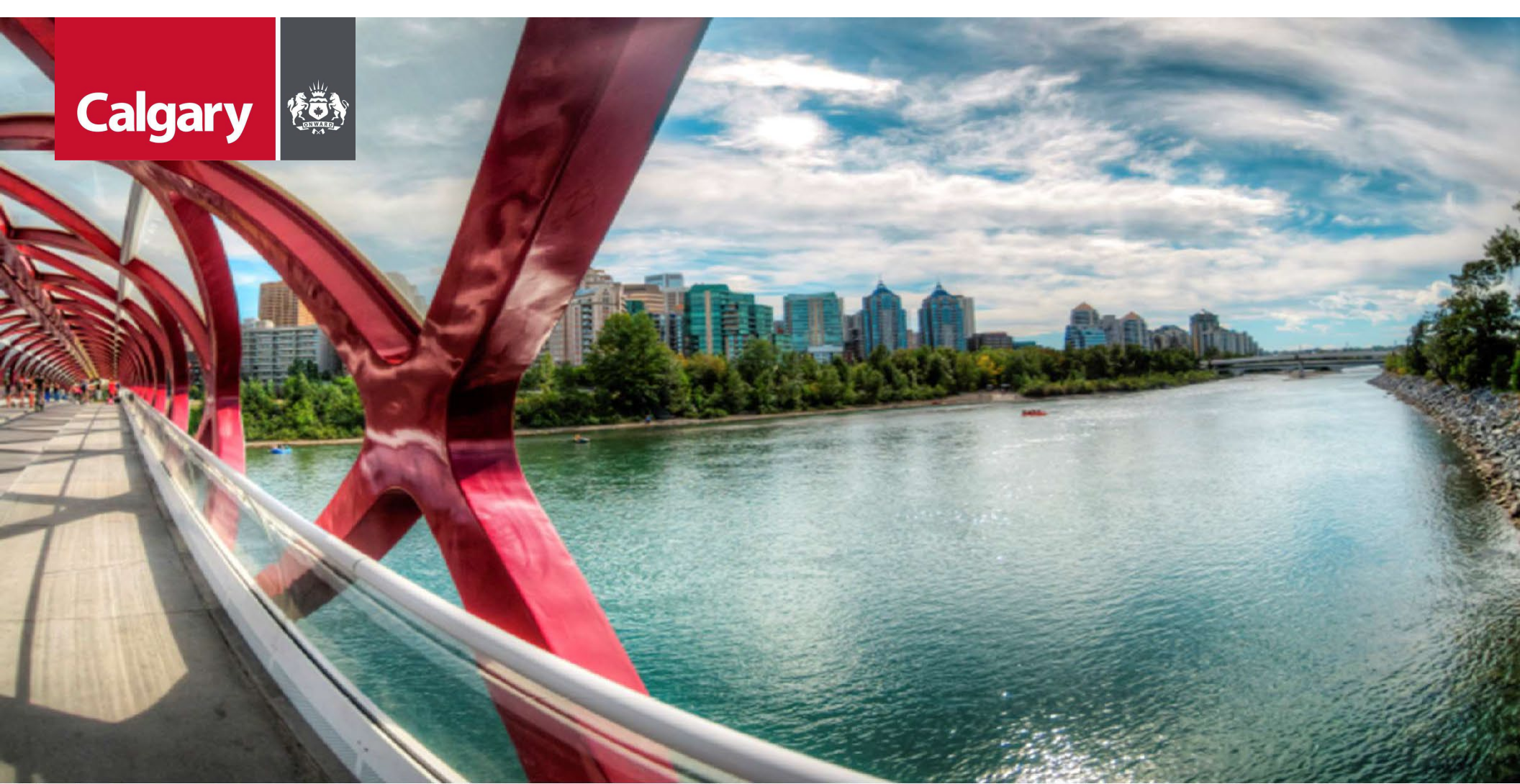
- An emphasis was placed on ensuring equitable service provision and support across all quadrants and prioritizing the economic needs of individuals and small businesses, rather than promoting the movement of larger corporations to Calgary.

Calgary was believed to have a crucial role in building social resilience, through ‘top-down leadership,’ and must be transparent and held accountable in their actions.

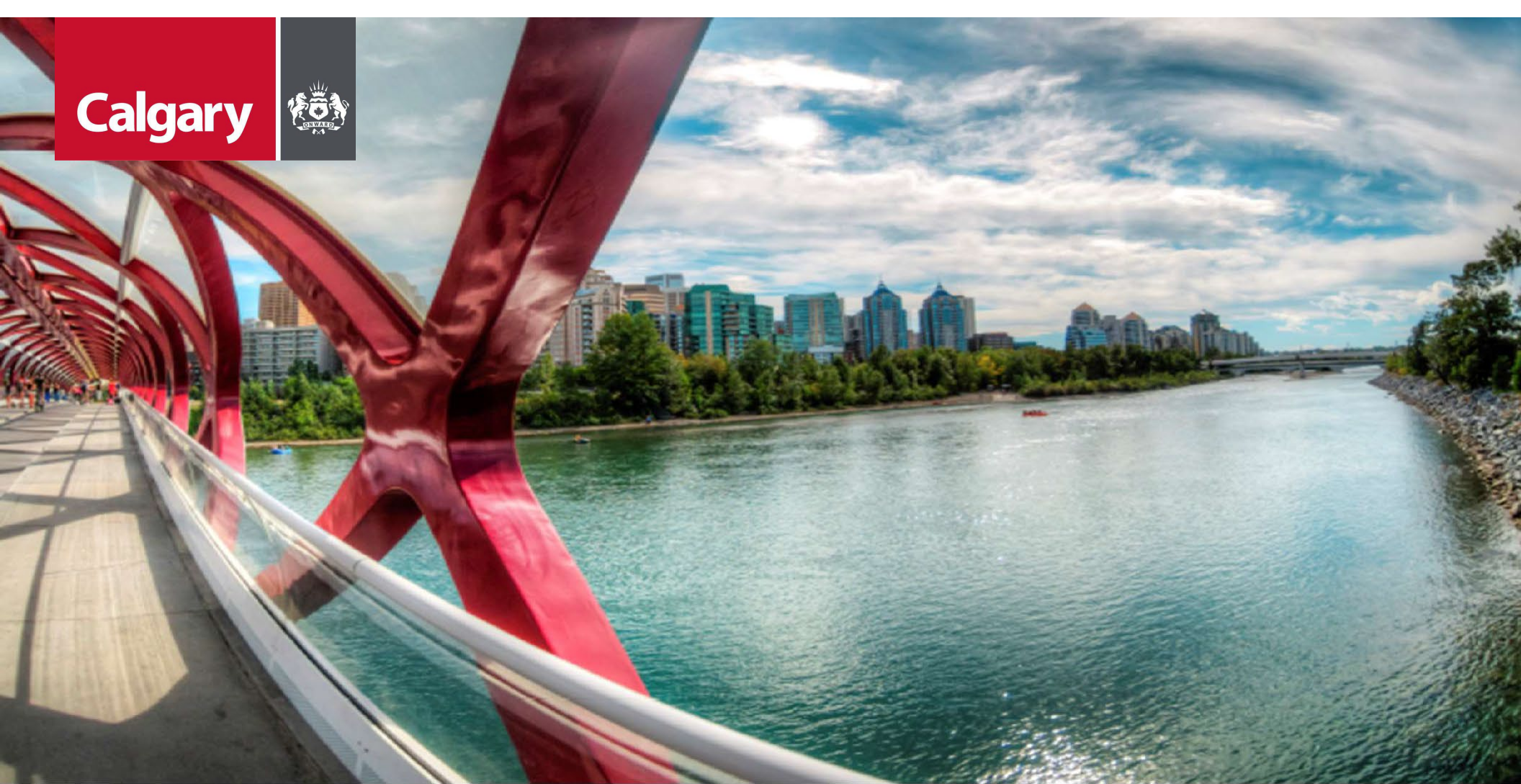
- Concerns were primarily related to The City’s role in reconciliation and the need for partnership with Indigenous communities, as well as the necessity of addressing and providing supports for those experiencing homelessness in Calgary.

Participants were familiar with, and praised, City programs related to environmental resilience – with concerns being related to vehicle dependency and difficulties engaging in environmental behaviours for those living in multi-unit residences.

- There was a perceived need to further encourage environmentally-friendly behaviours (e.g., transit use, proper recycling practices, solar energy) through subsidization of ‘green energy,’ public education of programs and initiatives, as well as ensuring they are available and accessible for Calgarians.



Detailed findings



Quality of life in Calgary

Life in Calgary

- Calgary was described as a “great place to live” by many participants, deemed as a “big city with a small-town feel.” This was largely attributed to the friendly and welcoming demeanor of Calgarians, the diverse population, and the sense of community found across the city.
- Nearly all participants were quick to mention the spaciousness and abundance of greenspace that Calgary has to offer, as well as the proximity to nature (e.g., the Rockies, Fish Creek Park, Bow and Elbow rivers), as a benefit of living in Calgary. The abundance of nature allows Calgarians an opportunity an “escape” the city without leaving – encouraging outdoor activities and facilitating opportunities for connection with others in the great outdoors (e.g., through activities such as rafting, kayaking, fishing, skiing, and biking).
- Further, from the accessibility of green space within the city, and the proximity to natural spaces outside the city, participants expressed an appreciation for the cleanliness of Calgary – both in terms of the streets and the air quality.
- The availability and accessibility of City-run programs, services and amenities enhance the lifestyles of Calgarians – with frequent mentions of recreation centres, public swimming pools, biking and walking paths, ice rinks, library programs, off-leash dog parks, and the plethora of opportunities to “have fun.” These activities further provide an opportunity for Calgarians to connect with others in their community, or those with similar interests and mind-sets.
- Participants also reflected upon the opportunities available to them in Calgary, in terms of economic opportunities (e.g., the availability of jobs), educational opportunities (e.g., quality educational institutions) and cultural opportunities (e.g., public art and live music).

“And it’s beautiful too. We have the rivers, we’ve got all the pathway systems and everything out here. There is a lot of public art, which is a really nice contrast, even in the middle of downtown. People are really friendly which is really nice. We’ve got the mountains close by. A lot of good things about Calgary.”

– **Downtown participant**

“Lots of organized sports for kids... they can be busy all the time, and it’s always well-organized too, whether it’s the City of Calgary or the minor hockey, anything. Lots to do.”

– **Southeast participant**

“I think what makes Calgary a good place to live is, even though we’re growing, and we’re having more big city problems, we’re clean. The air is clean. You walk downtown, and it’s clean. You go anywhere else, like I was in New York not too long ago, and you get that whiff of stank that smacks you in your face.”

– **Northeast participant**

Life in Calgary (continued)

There were three primary areas of concern that emerged among participants as perceived caveats to Calgary being a ‘great’ place to live – namely, affordability and the cost of living, a perceived reliance on vehicle use, and concerns related to safety and the prevalence of crime.



Affordability

- Calgary is perceived as affordable in comparison to other large cities in Canada (e.g., Toronto, Vancouver), with employment and education opportunities.
- However, participants believe that many Calgarians are currently struggling to make ends meet. This was attributed to be a function of several factors:
 - Inflation
 - High cost of living (e.g., food, gas, utilities)
 - Cost and/or lack of housing
 - Increasing rental prices



Vehicle Reliance

- Participants appreciate the spaciousness that Calgary has to offer but express concerns that urban sprawl and the limitations of the transit system have made vehicle use a necessity in Calgary – this was particularly true for those living outside of the downtown core.
- The perceived reliance on vehicles was believed to contribute to:
 - Traffic
 - Commute times
 - Limited parking
 - Emissions



Safety

- Crime levels and safety was a top-of-mind concern for many participants – specifically safety concerns on transit and recent increases in theft, vandalism, and altercations resulting in injury – leading to calls among some participants for increased levels of enforcement by police and transit officers.
- Participants also expressed concern about the prevalence of people experiencing homelessness in the downtown core, and a lack of housing and services to address the underlying issues.



Life in Calgary (continued)

"I like the opportunities. Opportunities to be able to create whatever kind of life you want, whether it's economically based, capitalistically based or whether it's family oriented, nature oriented. There's enough diversity, especially in the last 15-20 years, the influx of diverse cultures to allow the opportunity to branch out. Whether it's eating or socializing and learning about other cultures, there's opportunities to grow and to do in Calgary."

– Northwest participant

"Me and my partner, we've been participating in some of the rec programs over at the Wildflower Art Centre. The Wildflower, and the North Mount Art Centre is really neat. It's art, it's culture, it's not just swimming or physicality."

– Southwest participant



"All the enrichment that they're doing for different communities, Inglewood is going through a massive change, like with innovation right now downtown. They've done a lot of public artwork, and converting old parkades, so that there's more kind of stuff that you can do that's free downtown. Yeah, a lot of unused space that they're making use of, which has been really good."

– Downtown participant

"I would say the employment picture is not bleak as other parts of the country. I think there are still opportunities here in Calgary for people to find work, and to raise a family. Even though agriculture and oil and gas has been the leading economic growers in this area for most of the last century, we are diversifying, we are attracting high tech industries because of our location, our climate, our government. I'll leave that area open to discussion. But I think that businesses still find Calgary a possibility."

– Northeast participant

Contributors to quality of life

When asked what contributes to quality of life, participant answers aligned with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, in terms of needs, as well as order of importance.

Self-actualization: Participants underscored the importance of having a sense of purpose or reason to get up in the morning, contributing to society; gratitude, and passions or things that bring you joy (e.g., music, gardening, travel) – i.e., *“Freedom to do what brings you joy.”*

Esteem: Participants understood esteem needs as freedom and/or choices, respect for diversity (e.g., through exposure to multicultural people and culinary experiences, events, cultures), a healthy work-life balance, time for hobbies and appreciation for the Arts, and a sense of contentment and peace.

Love and Belonging: Many elaborated on the need for connection and a sense of belonging – through family, friends, relationships, community and pets – as well as a connection to nature and the importance of acceptance, volunteering and education.

Safety needs: Safety was a key topic, with an emphasis being placed on physical and mental health, personal safety (specifically on transit and downtown), protection of property and possessions, and secure income and employment (e.g., the availability of good job opportunities).

Physiological needs: There was a focus among participants on the importance of shelter (or affordable housing), food (with accessibility to “good food” higher up the pyramid), clean water, clean air and environment, and opportunities for exercise.



Some participants immediately leapt to what living in Calgary adds to their quality of life, which will be covered in the next section. ¹²



Quality of life in Calgary

Although there were varying awareness levels of programs and services offered by The City, participants were able to identify many contributors to quality of life in Calgary, including:

- **Community support:** volunteerism, “Calgary Spirit” and “can-do attitude” – especially in times of adversity and environmental catastrophes (e.g., 2013 flood, hailstorms). Calgarians came together to help each other recover from the damage and volunteered to help The City prepare for The Stampede.
- **Access to green space/outdoors:** parks, mountains; rivers and Glenmore Reservoir, Prince’s Island Park, Fish Creek, the 4 seasons, blue skies, Chinooks and outdoor activities and day camps for kids.
- **Entertainment and events (various experiences):** Festivals in public spaces (Lilac, Salsa, etc.), the Arts community (theatre, music, etc.) and development (small grants, spoken word events, etc.), Stampede (economic impact – tourism & hospitality), casinos, NHL/CFL games, biking events, etc.
- **Diversity:** communities, food/restaurants, festivals, progressive – there are many opportunities to try new things.
- **New Central Library (and others):** Free library card, free printing, eBooks, access to computers, educational programs (coding, reading, etc.).
- **Industry expansion & diversity:** Booming film industry, growing tech industry, De Havilland facility.
- **Emergency & support services** (Fire, Police, etc.); 211 (resource agencies), 311 (City services) and 811 (Health Link); drop-in centres, food banks, animal shelters, Veterans program; supported living facilities.
- **Community initiatives:** community kitchens and gardens; food available at community centres, the food bank, and animal shelters for those in need. Refugee donation centres; groups to join (e.g., knitting, running); Stampede breakfasts & Veterans programs.
- **Access to public health** (which is a provincial responsibility but associated with availability within Calgary).
- **Opportunities:** work, economics, room to grow & change careers; “do what you want”; access to many amenities and retail.
- **The people:** Calgarians are welcoming and friendly.
- **History:** Fort Calgary, Heritage Park, Glenbow Museum; roots and family history.
- **Affordability:** Compared to other large cities; No PST.
- **Weather:** Four seasons and lots of sunshine (which lifts spirits).

Factors impacting quality of life

Positive impacts

City-provided programs and social services were deemed to have a positive impact on the quality of life for Calgarians across the board.

- Participants were quick to note the positive impact of City of Calgary programs and services on their quality of life. In particular, there was significant appreciation for recreational facilities/leisure centres and their associated programs, activities, and sports/recreation leagues (e.g., slow pitch, skating, swimming lessons).
- In addition to an appreciation of the availability of programs, activities, and services there was praise towards The City for facilitating accessibility through:
 - Affordable (or free) recreation programs and activities
 - Free library cards and services
 - Discounted bus passes for low-income Calgarians
 - The Fair Entry program, providing discounted admission passes for low-income Calgarians
- As previously mentioned, participants were particularly fond of the green space in Calgary, and most expressed positive feelings towards the maintenance of parks and public areas.
- Social services and support provided by The City were also said to have a substantial positive impact on quality of life, with participants specifically making note of:
 - Access Calgary: specialized transit
 - Seniors' activities and transportation
 - 311

“I'd like to add onto the green spaces as well...the areas where you have free tennis courts for people to use, or free hockey rinks, basketball. That kind of stuff is really good... because it's just accessible to everybody in the community which is important.”

– **Southeast participant**

“A program that we utilize, as much as it is in the background, I love parks and the way that [The City] does their spring cleanup and the way that they're maintaining our green spaces, whether it be beside the roadways or parks. That is something that I need – that greenery. It happens in the background but it's really important to me. It's one of the cleaner cities that I've been to....”

– **Northwest participant**



Factors impacting quality of life (continued)

Negative impacts

Affordability, cost of living and safety were top-of-mind factors with a negative impact on Calgarians' quality of life.

- Calgarians report a sense of financial insecurity and/or concern (as previously mentioned) related to the increasing costs of gas, utilities, groceries, property taxes, and housing – as well as the limited availability of housing (including rentals). Affordability is a concern for many.
- There is also concern about increasing levels of crime and theft – this prompted calls by some residents for more police/peace officers.
- Perceived lack of safety on transit was a significant concern among participants, as was the difficulty in navigating transit outside of the downtown core (e.g., bus routes, frequency, etc.).
- Participants note the impact of rush-hour traffic, on-going construction, and the lengthy time associated with crossing the city, related to urban sprawl and development. Some also expressed frustration with the timeliness of snow removal in some areas, and the tendency for residential driveways to be blocked by snowplows.
- Some voiced their concern about the increasing number of cannabis shops (as they change a neighbourhood's dynamic).
- There was a perception among several participants that northeast Calgary does not receive the same attention and support that other quadrants and downtown do, believed to be reflecting an unstated (or unconscious) bias toward the ethnic populations living there.
 - The lack of a call-to-action by The City to help folks impacted by the severe hailstorm in the northeast compared to the support people downtown received after the flood was cited as an example of the incongruity.

“But I think sometimes it changes the dynamic of areas. I would be very sad in some ways if there was a cannabis shop chain in Inglewood. Because Inglewood is known for small, local businesses. I would be sad if there was a Tim Horton's in Inglewood. I think there's certain areas of the city that should be protected from the chains [retailers].”

– Northwest participant

“I feel like theft has gone up. My car has been broken into twice. My mom's windows got smashed last week. My in-laws' got smashed the week before on my street.”

–Downtown participant

Factors impacting quality of life

(continued)

Positive impacts

“

“One thing I just found out – that most community centres, they give food to people that can’t afford or don’t have the ability to get to the food bank. So, at my community centre, there’s lineups, and I guess they give out food to people every Tuesday. They usually have community kitchens, so you can go, and they cook as well.”

– Northeast participant

“The Parks and Rec. All the classes you can take, from the swimming to ballet dancing, to tennis to you name it, for all ages.”

– Southeast participant

“Also, if you're low income, through The City of Calgary, as a kid, you get access to a lot of subsidized sports.”

– Northwest participant

Negative impacts

“

“I know people at my work live in the south and if they need to come into downtown, they're like, "It doesn't matter because I can either drive 40 minutes and then be on the train for 40 minutes, or I sit in traffic for an hour-and-a-half to get into downtown"”

– Northwest participant

“Safety is a big one for me right now. I live downtown, work in the northeast, take transit between the two very early in the morning. I’m a woman and I smoke, and I’m by myself. I’m probably at least once a week calling in ODs that I’m seeing out in the communities, having violent altercations with people while I’m just trying to wait for the train. They’re definitely stepping up some things right now to try to take control of that after all of the violent, violent incidents that have happened over the last couple of weeks, and the homicides. But it’s taken a long time and like during [the Covid-19 pandemic] it was a rough time. So, it will be interesting to see what happens with some of the changes that they’re making, if that’s actually going to improve things.”

– Downtown participant

Improving quality of life

Participants identified several programs that, if cut back, would have a significant negative impact on their quality of life.



- **Transit:** despite complaints, there was recognition of the necessity of transit (and security at transit stations)
- **Parks and leisure centres:** emphasis was placed on park maintenance and low costs of recreation programs
- **Access to social services and EMS services:** specifically, CFD, CPS, and mental health services
- **Safe-injection sites and drop-in centres**
- **Education and libraries:** affordable (or free) access to services and programs, continuing to fund educational institutions
- **Food banks**
- **Support for the Arts**

“Well, to me, all the parks and the Soccer Dome, and things like that. And all the hockey rinks, that includes all the recreational stuff. There’s so many people who get so much benefit from that, and then that’s across barriers and, you know, hopefully it’s reducing the cost. But that’s the league’s responsibility primarily. So, if they reduced access, that would be a severe impairment there.”

—Southeast participant

Impact of programs/services

Participants were quickly able to identify areas of opportunity to improve quality of life in Calgary, with an emphasis being placed on transit and housing.

Housing

- Invest in more low-income housing and shelters, with appropriate access to healthcare and mental health support
- Convert more empty office buildings to address demand
- Protect tenants' rights

Transit

- Extend services to the edges of the city
- Improve bus routes
- Reduce wait times for buses
- Connect northeast across Deerfoot Trail
- Add a train line connecting the airport to downtown
- Non-breakable glass at transit shelters

Safety

- Increasing numbers of police and transit officers to address immediate safety concerns
- Create a strategy to resolve the root cause (i.e., homelessness, mental health crises, drug/opioid use) rather than being reactionary
- Ensure streets are well-lit

Traffic/Parking

- Provide carpool lanes
- Attend to potholes/road maintenance
- Free parking on weekends in high-traffic areas to encourage people to visit, contribute to revitalization efforts and support local businesses (e.g., downtown, Kensington, 17th Avenue, etc.)
- Provide parking for people commuting into the city

Leisure Centres

- Extend hours to everyday until 10:00 pm (currently closed M-W; hire more staff)
- Offer annual and monthly passes
- Add splash parks as the summers are getting hotter

Communications

- Marketing programs to increase awareness of what The City offers
- Calgarians (especially since program guides are no longer printed/distributed)

Additional areas of opportunity, as identified by participants include:

- Comprehensive and transparent planning for future growth and infrastructure
- Helping residents find a health care professional/family doctor
- Advertise availability of Good Food Box bus
- Provide programs for people living with disabilities or accessibility issues
- Convert 17th Avenue to a pedestrian mall
- Continue enrichment in communities through innovation and prioritizing public spaces and public art (e.g., murals)
- Provide information about City-provided programs and services, and volunteer opportunities.



Improving quality of life

“

“Safety downtown, I know that they’re adding more presence of police, but I also wouldn’t probably go downtown at night by myself. So, maybe just more presence of safety officers.”

– Southeast participant

“Just for me personally, though, I tend to drive everywhere that I go and a lot of the time, you know, you’re having to dodge massive potholes. And it seems like a lot of the time the traffic lights aren’t well programmed. You’d be sitting at a light for way too long, just for the amount of traffic that gets backed up. Things like that tend to get annoying.”

– Northwest participant

“I don’t know how to say this in short form. Some form of idea and actual method for people coming from Airdrie, Chestermere for parking, either actual planned high-density parking in East Hills or Saddletowne, so that they can take transit, or actual good transit built into the edges of the city. I know people, right now, East Hills is being developed over in the northeast. When it’s done, it’s actually going to border onto Chestermere. But there’s not enough parking to really use the bus from there that goes directly downtown, even though we have the transit system.”

– Northeast participant

“

“Well, supporting homeless, I mean not to give them more drugs and more food so they can sit somewhere on the bench. But they need to be put into normal life stream, to feel themselves as contributing members of the society.”

– Downtown participant

“I’m going to say not necessarily better road maintenance but more efficient road maintenance. We could do with probably half the staff and scheduling, instead of taking every major thoroughway and scheduling so you choke down the mobility of the traffic which ultimately frustrates people. So, if you start a project, finish a project, and schedule it accordingly and allow thoroughways. You just don’t choke off three out of four lanes and have a reverse lane. Figure it out, right? Have two lanes going one way or something. But it’s more just the efficiency of the road maintenance.”

– Northwest participant

“Because if the homeless shelter wasn’t as full as it is all the time, where people are spilling out into the streets, then it wouldn’t be as big of a problem. But, you know, it’s good to have a place where, unfortunately, people can go if they need to go there. But they need to fix the root problem of homelessness in the city.”

– Southeast participant

Looking to the future

As Calgary moves from pandemic to endemic, participants were asked to envision Calgary 3-5 years from now and reflect on their predicted quality of life.

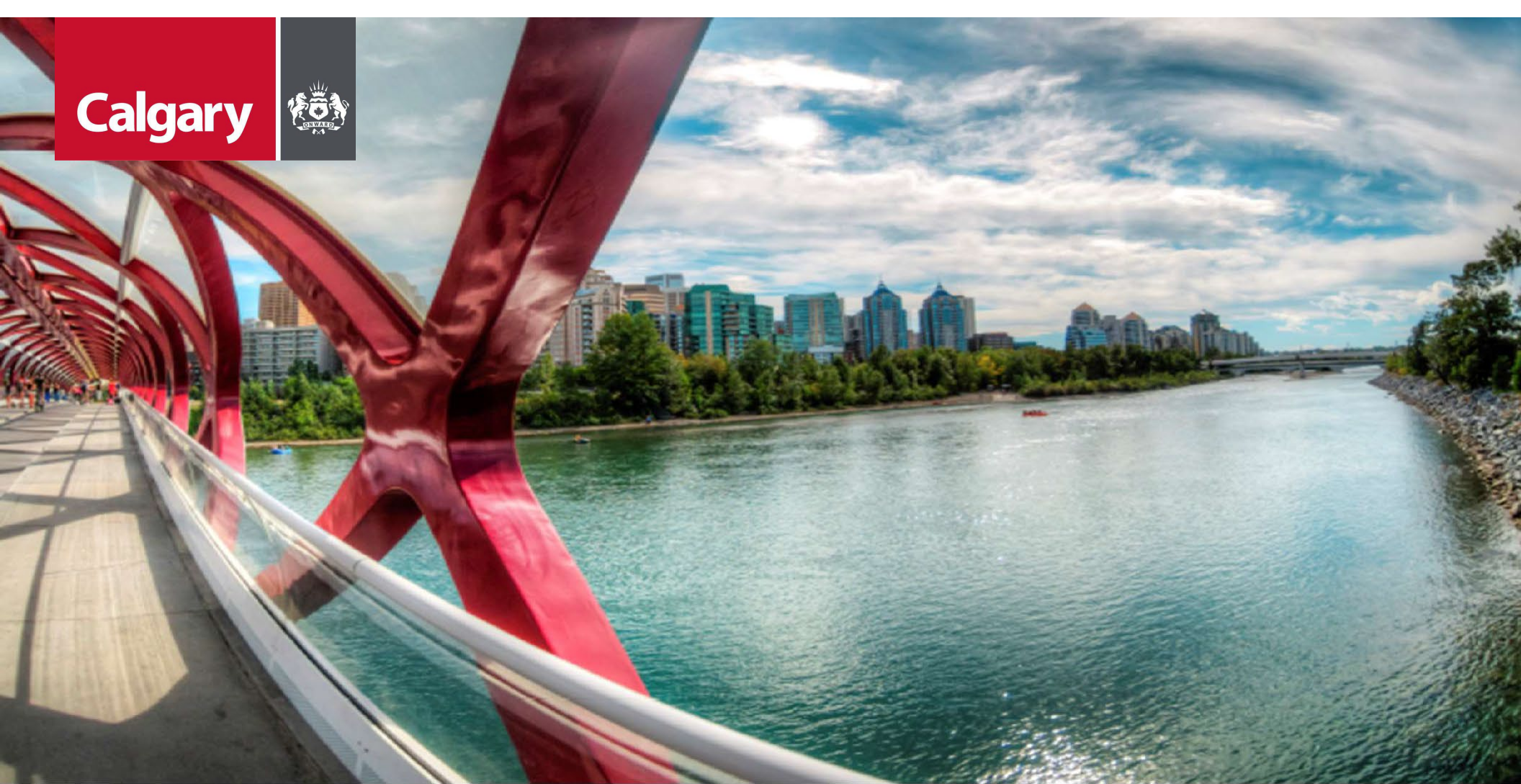
- Some feel that their quality of life will improve, as they regain their “freedom” and social circles, and as Calgary starts to “come to life” once again.
- A few participants had lost their livelihoods during the Covid-19 pandemic (and are grateful for CERB and the Calgary Food Bank to see them through), and as such, believe their lives will improve coming out of the pandemic.
- Others feel their lives will essentially stay the same.
- There is some concern about the economy, the oil & gas industry, and income keeping up with inflation. Similarly, there was some concern around City infrastructure and its ability to accommodate a growing population, as people relocate to Calgary. Of course, no one can be certain of what lies ahead, however, some anticipate another crisis or event, as they seem to happen every 5 years.
- Several commented on The City’s efforts to protect communities and residents who live near the rivers, by proactively installing barriers to flooding.
- Participants also cited Calgarians’ resilience, having lived through several environmental events (e.g., floods, hailstorms, wildfires/smoke), recessions and a pandemic.

“I don’t really see it getting much better. I see it getting worse. I feel like more and more people are moving here, and I get that because it is, like you say, sell your house in Toronto for a million, buy one for 700 here. It makes sense to come here. But, again, we don’t have the infrastructure. And more people are also coming here and maybe [its] not the dream world they thought it was going to be and they’re returning to crime. And it seems to be going down and rapidly.”

– **Southeast participant**

“Downtown core to come alive again, like it’s completely dead [now]. That is something that I’ve noticed since the height of the pandemic. Like everybody was forced to stay home, no more travelling, going downtown. A lot of businesses have closed downtown.”

– **Northeast participant**



Resilience

Resilience| According to participants

- Participants were quick to acknowledge the importance of resilience in their personal life and their community.
- Resilience was understood as a mechanism to navigate the inevitable challenges and struggles of life and come out relatively unscathed on the other side.
- The COVID-19 pandemic was brought up unprompted by many, as an exercise in personal and community resilience – as people navigated lockdowns, transitions to remote work and work in essential services. Additionally, there were several mentions of the 2013 flood in Calgary, as a demonstration of Calgary’s resilience.
- Despite the challenges associated with the pandemic, participants recognized the impact of resilience in building empathy and bringing people together, reflecting on the significance of “Calgary Spirit” and sense of community that emerged.





Resilience in Calgary

Calgary has “been through a lot,” demonstrating resilience and the ability to bounce back, in the eyes of participants.

- Several events were identified by participants as examples of Calgary’s resilience, allowing Calgarians to support one another. These events included the 2013 flood, the 2020 hailstorm, a boom-bust oil and gas industry, and recent train derailments.
- Calgary’s perceived resilience was tied to the idea that the city was built from hard work and a “cowboy – get ‘er done” mentality.
- For some, Calgary demonstrated resilience in the aftermath of the mentioned events through the provision of social services and leadership for Calgarians.
- Residents noted the importance of building trust in The City among Calgarians as a means of promoting and building resilience. Trust is built through action and the provision of services, rather than inspirational messaging or “empty promises”. Some participants called for further efforts to educate and communicate with Calgarians regarding what is being done to promote resilience.
- Participants identified programs and services that have promoted resilience, including comprehensive mental health resources and crisis lines, support for local businesses, and decreased criteria for accessing food banks during the pandemic.

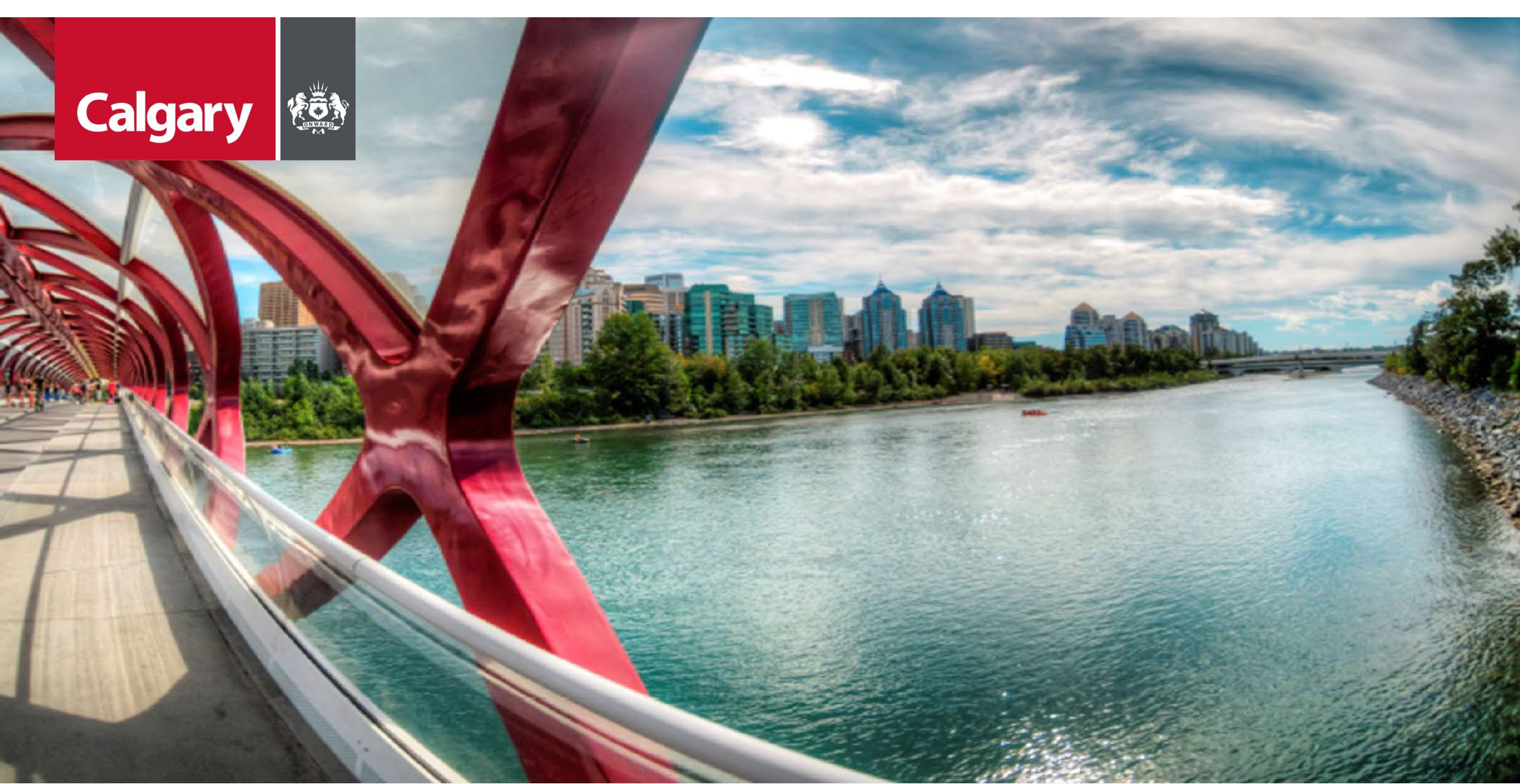
Participants were introduced to three types of resilience: economic, social and environmental resilience – with statements shared to garner their reactions to Calgary’s resilience in this context.

Overall, the statements were considered aspirational for The City of Calgary (i.e., a goal to aim for, but work to be done to achieve it), but the essence of each was appreciated by residents. These are further explored in the next sections of the report.

“I think the ability to diversify. If we encounter a challenge, it’s like, what can we do with the flooding and stuff? They’re doing the revitalization of the river in different areas of the city, especially downtown, where they’re building up the banks so that if it does happen to flood again, because we know it’s a 10-year cycle, that it’s not going to destroy a bunch of homes and do what it did the last time. And that goes back to resilience. What can we do better, and how can we avoid this in the future? It’s planning.”

– **Northeast participant**

“I’d say, address the issues more. I don’t want any more empty words. For better or worse, there have been some really good Councillors, and there’s been some good action on things. But we’ve been resilient together, now we need City officials to step up and actually action items, not give us empty promises, saying, ‘we’re going to do this’. This is our daily lives. Our daily lives need to change. Certain pressure points and pinch points in our lives need to change for the better. A campaign to say, ‘we’re all in this together’. Yeah, we’ve been three years all this together. We don’t need that.” – **Southwest participant**



Economic resilience

Economic resilience

Economic resilience: a city where everyone participates in a strong diverse economy. We remove barriers for business success, enabling businesses to start, grow, and invest in our city. We are an incredible destination and a great place to live, work, grow and raise a family.

- Participants felt the provided statement (above) was “welcoming” and “aspirational,” with some holding the belief that Calgary lives up to this statement.
- However, some felt the statement was vague and did not reflect the current economic situation, with recurring concerns about economic security, stagnant wages and increasing interest, inflation rates and the high cost of living.
- There was a recognition that quadrants exist in their “own little bubble,” and may have differing economic needs and require different levels of support, with some expressing concern that the northeast quadrant is underserved.
- There was a desire for a “game plan” or “strategy” regarding economic development, with an emphasis being placed on the diversification of Calgary’s economy.
- Some participants were unaware of efforts by The City to promote economic resilience, demonstrating a lower depth of awareness of existing economic initiatives or programs.

“It was very vague. I mean, I don’t know, what’s a barrier? What is preventing businesses from succeeding right now? And so, as a statement, I’d like to see the details. Otherwise, it’s just kind of a mission statement.” – **Southwest participant**

Some questions were raised by participants in relation to the provided statement, including:

- Which types of businesses are being addressed?
- How will the economy be diversified?
- What does it mean to remove barriers?
- Which types of barriers are being removed?

“I think it’s tricky in a way, because when we look at this, I look at this more as a business. For economic resilience, when you’re talking about the economy, or thinking about businesses, restaurants. I wouldn’t even know what The City is doing, honestly, because it’s not on my radar because I’m not a business owner. That kind of stuff. Maybe they’re doing some great things, I honestly don’t know. All I can see is what I’m seeing.”

– **Northeast participant**

Economic resilience (continued)

Participants put forth several suggestions regarding how Calgary can promote and support economic resilience among Calgarians. Most suggestions placed an emphasis on supporting individuals and small businesses. Suggestions included:

- Creating and maintaining a balance between smaller and larger businesses (e.g., moratoriums to prevent retail chains from monopolizing business space)
- Continue funding and promoting the growth of the Arts (e.g., Calgary Arts Development)
- Transforming unused office space into affordable housing units
- Lowering business taxes and removing “red tape” for business development (e.g., permits, difficulty getting approvals, etc.)
- Providing incentives and economic support for business development in lower-income quadrants
- Supporting the core needs of people (specifically related to costs of living and wages)
- Providing incentives for further education in certain programs or career paths to diversify industries and encourage entrepreneurship
- Focusing on individuals, rather than providing financial incentives for larger businesses to operate in Calgary
- Disseminating communications to shift perspectives of Calgary as being an exclusively oil-and-gas based city
- Providing clear information regarding economic goals and programs, to facilitate transparency and inform Calgarians

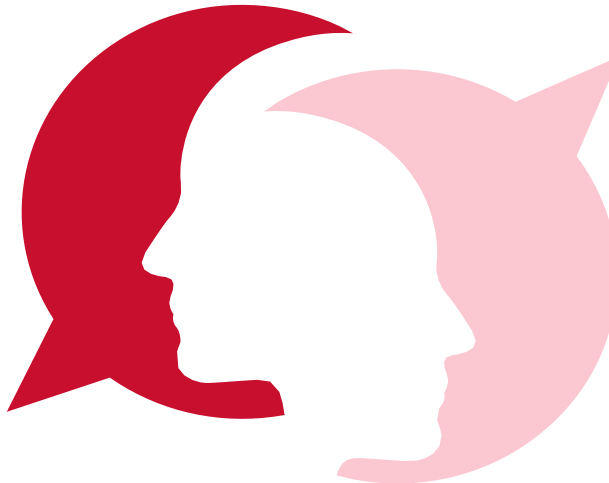
“When you think of the big companies too, like Co-op or any of those things, they’re going off of the demographics and the stats and data. If people aren’t shopping at Co-op, then they’re not going to put a Co-op in there. Which turns into a food desert for some of these outer-lying neighbourhoods, which is really frustrating. It’s up to The City to provide some sort of incentive. You need to have a balance of the big and the little.” – **Northeast participant**

Economic resilience (continued)

"I like the statement in general, but I kind of feel like when they talk about a strong, diverse economy, I question it a little bit. Because when you have stagnant wages like we do, especially right now if you're looking at it, at the rate of inflation, how is the economy being strong and diverse? Nobody has any extra money to go out. We're not getting paid. The rate of pay isn't coming close to what we have to spend on our day-to-day living, and how do you have the diverse economy? People have to have money to go and spend it on things. It's a circle, and I don't know how to fix it. But it stresses me out when I think about it, because it's like, how do you crawl out of this right now?"

– Northeast participant

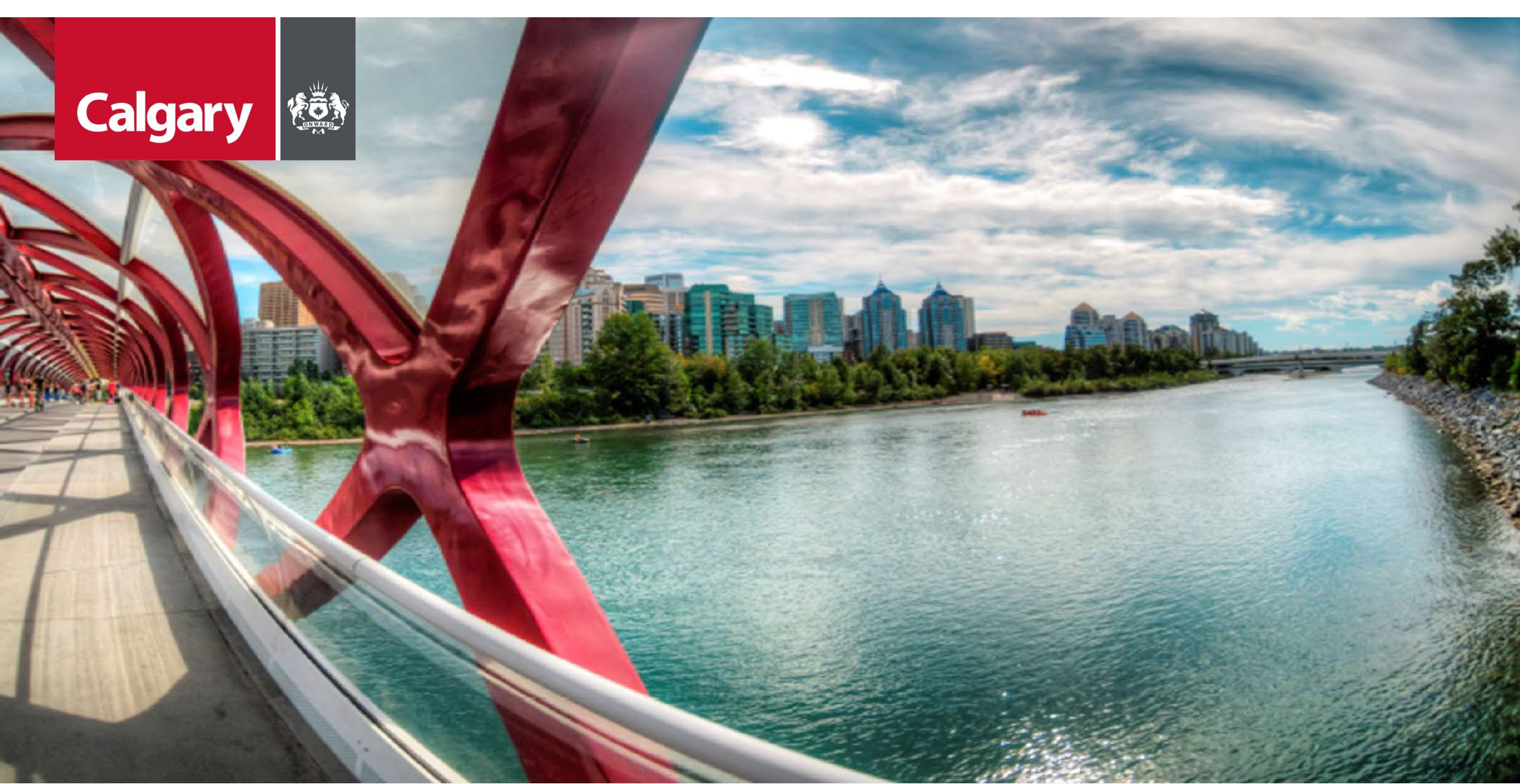
"I think diversification of tax revenue, because we are a boom-and-bust economy, and we've been a boom-and-bust economy for many, many years. And when the times are good, the times are really good, we get great things out of our taxpayer dollars. But when the times are bad, it just doesn't seem like they have a plan to account that things are never going to be bad, and things sometimes can be bad." – **Downtown participant**



"I think it's interesting too, because life is getting more expensive here for people that live here. It's getting unaffordable. But that last sentence of, it's an incredible destination, great place to live, work, and grow and raise a family. I feel like I hear from friends in Toronto, they see advertisements for Calgary and Alberta all the time with these words on there. And because cost of living is so much higher in Toronto or Vancouver, it is more affordable for them to move here, but for the people that are living here, it's becoming unaffordable."

– Downtown participant

"I personally think there is a lot of diversity. I just think we aren't seeing it as much. Like obviously oil and gas is like at the forefront, but I know with the last bust, Calgary's film industry has grown so much recently. And agribusiness is super huge, but we just don't hear about it enough. And I think that might be an issue that Calgary deals with, they're not advertising it. And obviously oil and gas is the biggest, but I think we're a lot more diverse than some people think." – **Southwest participant**



Social resilience

Social resilience

Social resilience: a city where people of all backgrounds belong. A community of people who support one another. A vibrant, safe, and secure place to live, work and play. A city that does not tolerate hate; promotes community engagement and participation and actively works to address systemic discrimination in all forms. We live our commitment to reconciliation.

- Social resilience, as described in the provided statement, was met with primarily positive reactions from participants – who understood it as an important value to aspire towards. Some feel that this statement accurately reflects Calgary.
- The consensus among participants regarding this statement was that while it addresses an area of importance and is “packaged” nicely, social resilience is something that needs to be completely delivered, with a plan in place addressing how to achieve this.
- The City of Calgary was identified as having a crucial role in building and promoting social resilience amongst Calgarians, with participants expressing the need for top-down leadership, with City Hall “leading the charge.”
- Participants felt that Calgary has some work to do in building and promoting social resilience, but were able to identify a number of existing areas in which Calgary successfully promotes social resilience, including:
 - Promotion of diversity through multicultural festivals and events
 - Educational programming in schools
 - Provision of lower cost transit passes for low-income Calgarians and newcomers
 - Land acknowledgements before sporting events
 - Increased penalties for hate speech

Social resilience (continued)

Social resilience: a city where people of all backgrounds belong. A community of people who support one another. A vibrant, safe, and secure place to live, work and play. A city that does not tolerate hate; promotes community engagement and participation and actively works to address systemic discrimination in all forms. We live our commitment to reconciliation.



There was some negative feedback from participants regarding the provided statement, particularly in regard to:

- **Reconciliation:** this element was deemed to be vague and seemingly “tacked on” in a performative nature, as the “trendy thing to do.”
 - Some questioned who this is directed at, what specifically is The City reconciling and with whom?
 - Participants cautioned against tokenism and “knee jerk” reactions, noting that efforts need to be in alignment and in partnership with Indigenous people, as well as the importance of outlining the role of The City in reconciliation.
 - In addition, an Indigenous participant noted that “Truth” was missing from the statement and needs to be addressed in order to progress to reconciliation.
- **A safe and secure place:** some participants questioned the accuracy of this portion of the statement, reflecting on previously mentioned concerns around safety on transit and downtown after business hours.
- **Accessibility:** for some, the lack of mention of accessibility considerations was an area of concern.

Social resilience (continued)

Similarly, to participants' sentiments around economic resilience, there were calls for action, accountability, and transparency around City plans to promote social resilience. In order to successfully live up to the provided statement, participants offered several suggestions for possible action, including:

- Increasing accessibility of multicultural festivals and events (e.g., free or no cost and online streaming for those who cannot attend in person)
- Providing more comprehensive support for people experiencing homelessness and addiction (e.g., safe injection sites, social supports), with a focus on addressing the root cause
- Keeping Calgarians better informed about Indigenous communities (e.g., through public education) for better understanding and to encourage empathy for lived experiences (i.e., Residential Schools, addiction and homelessness are not a “choice”, the need for mental health programs and support for those on Reserves and living within the city, etc.)
- Adopting a “top-down” approach to culture and being a “role model,” by ensuring that the promotion of social resilience “starts at home” within City-run organizations or departments
- “More transparency” and accountability in City commitments and goals around social resilience

“I guess... I just don't think it does any good for The City to preach this stuff but then, you know, if something happens in the fire department or the police services, and it's covered up and, you know. So, it should start at home, and [with] City government organizations, that's where The City's focus should be, I guess.”

– Southwest participant

“I think that culture needs to be led from the top down with basically a conciliatory tone. So, if there's a problem, we work it out rather than yapping at each other. But if they're doing it up there, then... if they were acting like adults at the top, then we feel dumb yapping at each other at the bottom. But when they're yapping at each other at the top, then it just seems normal for people to be yapping at each other at the bottom.”

– Downtown participant

Social resilience (continued)

"I guess I think the last sentence is interesting and it's a bit loaded, if you're going to say that you're living our commitment to reconciliation you really need to be all in on it. I don't know, I kind of don't want to speak on it, because as a white person, it's not really my place to say, but I guess I feel like whether they're living up to their commitment to reconciliation or not is maybe for First Nations people to decide, not The City."

– **Northwest participant**



"I think The City's done a pretty good job through Truth and Reconciliation. Although I want to be able to trust that it's not a kneejerk reaction, like 'Oh my God, we have to change the name of a bridge', right? Do it for the right reasons, don't do it just because it's the thing to do. But I do think they're on the right path for inclusion, and I think that's a good, resilient thing, to show [residents of] the city that, you know, we own up to our mistakes and make everyone feel welcome and part of the group."

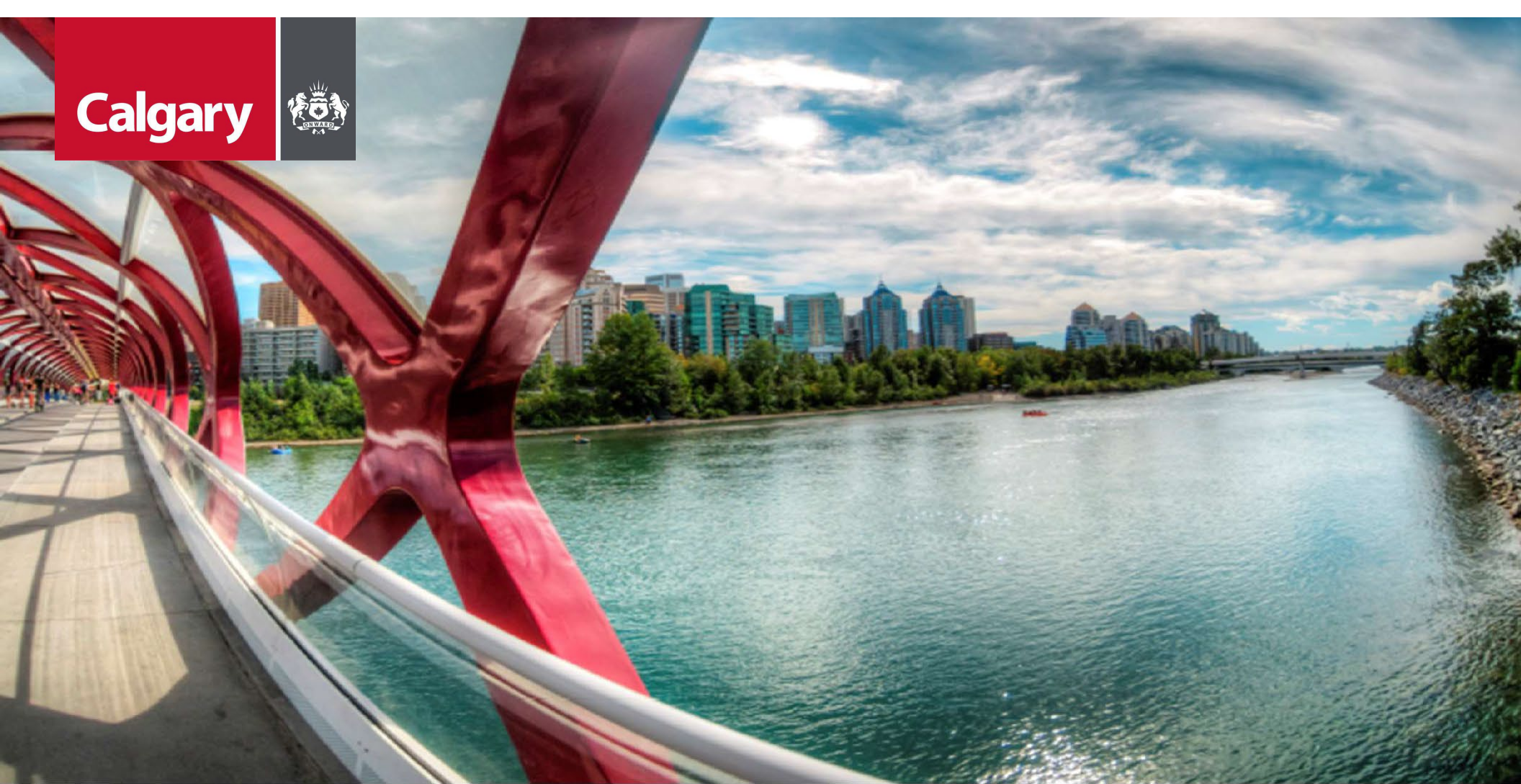
– **Southwest participant**

"I think we can do better though. I do agree with you in so many ways, but I do think we can do better. Because there's so much hate crime still going on in our city, and there's so much racial profiling still going on in our city. And I think it's just, it's education as well, you know. I mean we all cry the same way, we all bleed the same way, we're all the same. But I think that, you know, depending on how people have grown up or what their backgrounds are, they... yeah."

– **Southwest participant**

"Reading this in some ways, I think... this is where City Hall and the Councilors sort of have to lead the charge in this, in the sense that... because I feel like even if the mayor says something... there's some pattern that she says that this is wrong. It's always the opposition, they're always like, try to combat that. So, I think like the social morale, the resilience, it has to come from City Hall in some sense."

– **Downtown participant**



Environmental resilience

Environmental resilience

Environmental resilience: a city that does its part to limit global warming. A more sustainable community that can manage the impacts of severe weather events like floods and hail; reduce emissions; build our green economy and play an active role in environmental innovation.

- Aligning with the two previous statements, participants expressed a relatively positive reaction towards this statement and felt that Calgary was working to embody environmental resilience.
- Despite the concerns (noted at right), participants were able to identify many initiatives and programs being undertaken by The City that promote environmental resilience. These programs included:
 - The Green Cart composting program
 - Promoting electric vehicle charging stations
 - Recycling tires for playground matting
 - Community gardens
 - Introducing natural gas and propane buses
 - Providing Calgary residents with free mulch
 - The use of goats alongside Deerfoot Trail to manage the grass, rather than using lawnmowers

“I really like the word ‘innovation’, because for the oil and gas industry, we’re not going to stop using oil and gas, I don’t think, in my opinion, ever. But they’re creating new technologies for that kind of stuff, so it is more environmentally conscious, I guess. So, we’re innovating technologies.” – Northeast participant



Participants struggled with some elements of this statement, particularly:

- Those living in multi-unit residences felt that they did not have equal access to City environmental programs – stating that they must pay fees to properly recycle and dispose of food waste.
- A minority of participants were dissatisfied with the use of the term ‘global warming,’ on the basis that it feels “misinformed,” and stating a preference for ‘climate change’ instead.
- Participants reflected on the high level of and dependency on vehicle use as detracting from environmental resilience. It is perceived to be a result of The City’s infrastructure not being built to support a green economy, and specifically tying this to the limited nature of the Calgary transit system and increasing urban sprawl.
- Finally, consistent with the other two resilience topics, participants expressed the need for further transparency and “concrete plans” from The City.

Environmental resilience (continued)

Several suggestions by participants of actions or initiatives The City could implement to better promote environmental resilience and live up to the presented statement, included:

- Grassroots programs in schools, allowing children to learn about environmentally friendly behaviours at a young age
- Allocating funds to the development of environmentally conscious technology
- Ensure all Calgarians have equal access to environmental programs and initiatives – especially those living in multi-unit residences
- Subsidize green energy (e.g., solar panels, harnessing wind energy), providing affordable opportunities for families and individuals
- Encourage higher transit use (e.g., through taking steps to make transit safer and more appealing for Calgarians)
- Shift terminology when addressing environmental issues, specifically using ‘climate change,’ rather than ‘global warming’
- Encourage recycling and environmental practices by making them more accessible and convenient (e.g., more locations to recycle electronics and furniture)
- Transparency in City communications and publications about environmental efforts, initiatives and programming
- Specifically with the upcoming election, there was a desire for The City to “dig in their heels” and set themselves apart from the rest of Alberta.

“Well, how things are recycled, even beyond that. They do the open house once a year where they welcome people to come in and see the trends in maintenance and see the recycling facilities and see what goes on at the dumps. So, it just would be kind of nice to see more communication throughout the year of, ‘Hey, this is what happens’. Not so much an open house style, but a publication.”

– Southwest participant

Environmental resilience (continued)

“And one of the things for me is we have an election coming up, and I really want to see The City of Calgary dig their heels in and stand their ground, and say, you know, ‘We are Calgary’, you know, ‘Alberta’s Alberta, but we are Calgary, and this is what we have, and you’re not taking it away from us’. I would love to see that happen.”

– **Southwest participant**



“I like the goats. You know how they have the goats at the side of the highway that actually take care of the lawn.”

– **Northeast participant**

“I think it’s important to invest in the clean energy and the opportunities for families to have those products in their home making it more affordable. I think it’s also important that we continue to talk about, I’m bad for it too, plastic use, but the recycling options and the reuse, all of those words that they have and what that means to the individual and to the family and how we can do it in the workplace as well. When I take the bus downtown it’s packed solid, and I continuously see cars driving by with one person in their vehicle. And so, what are the other opportunities for cleaner energy, is it carpooling? Does somebody have one of those trolley cars? Like something that would make it easier for people to commute around rather than [taxi or Uber].”

– **Northwest participant**

“I’d say Calgary, I mean even when you go on vacation to other places, Calgary recycles a lot, even though it costs The City a lot of money to do recycling. You go to other places, or even if you go to the States, I mean there were some States we were in, they don’t recycle [aluminum] cans, which are almost infinitely reusable. Calgary’s really good on that aspect, and we have green carts. Tons of places lack those sort of things. So, I would say Calgary’s still a lot more progressive than a lot of other places, especially across North America where it’s a first-world country that should have access to those sort of technologies now. I would say that Calgary’s a little better off really.”

– **Southeast participant**

“It’s privatized in, because I’m on my condo board. We have to pay a company to come and get our organics and our stuff. But people who live in the suburbs get it with their curbside. That’s always felt really like an inequality to me, because I’m taking up a lot less space, but not being part of urban sprawl. I should get the same.”

– **Downtown participant**



Calgary



Contact

Krista Ring
Manager of Web, Research & Projects
The City of Calgary
403-268-9963 | 403-988-9425
Krista.Ring@Calgary.ca