



[Click to navigation](#)

- NEWS
- OPINION
- SPORTS
- BUSINESS
- ARTS
- LIFE
- CAREERS
- OBITS
- CLASSIFIEDS
- DRIVING



Development will continue changing the face of Edmonton in 2017



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Edmonton isn't likely to see a construction boom in 2017, but the landscape will continue to grow as big projects wrap up and new work gets underway, say commercial real estate experts.

The downtown core is still the city's development hot spot with \$5.5-billion worth of work proposed or underway, including the Ice District's 66-storey Stantec Tower and 54-floor JW Marriott Hotel-Legends Private Residences.

Although they won't be finished until 2018-19, they'll make a big difference to the look of Edmonton's core over the next 12 months, says Avison Young principal Cory Wosnack, part of the district's leasing team.

"You will see this massive physical change to the skyline ... You will see two (new) towers."

That will be a shot in the arm for a construction industry that, overall, could face a soft 2017.

City chief economist John Rose expects the value of building permits issued this year will total about \$3.8 billion, down five per cent to 10 per cent from 2016.

Richard Goatcher, economic analyst for the Canadian Home Builders Association-Alberta, foresees the number of housing starts in the region rising just one per cent from 2016 to 10,125, well below the 17,000 starts two years ago.

This year's figure will probably be pulled down by a drop in the number of multi-family apartment, row and townhouse units going up.

"Apartment activity tends to be very cyclical. You get the big boom and then you get the (downturn)," Goatcher says.

"You have a lot of inventory there. You have buildings that are struggling to sell out. That's going to weigh on the first half of the year ... The investor sector is going to sit back and say 'We want to see some improvement before we step in and invest.' "

Some projects, such as the long-discussed Galleria northeast of 101 Street and 103 Avenue, and the Artists Quarters on 96 Street, need funding decisions from the provincial government before they can go ahead.

Others, such as nearly completed expansions of Norquest College and MacEwan University, are poised to add to the nearly 40,000 post-secondary students who will soon be studying downtown, Avison Young's Wosnack says.

That's good for the area, he says.

"It changes the amount of activity that's on the street ... These young adults who are coming downtown to be educated rent an apartment, buy their first condo and eventually seek employment," he says.

"That will have a generational impact on our downtown scene. That's why it's so important to have these new offices and new towers."

Here are a few projects that might catch your eye in 2017:



Construction continues in Edmonton's Ice District. Larry Wong / Postmedia

Ice District (104 Avenue to 103 Avenue between 102 Street and 103 Street)

By the end of the year, the Stantec Tower should be poured up to the 29th floor and glazing completed up to level 23. Occupancy is set for Oct. 1, 2018.

The neighbouring Marriott-Legends tower is scheduled to hit level 33 this year, with glazing up to the 24th floor. Occupancy is set for spring 2019.

The underground parkade on the site of the former Greyhound bus station should reach ground level by the end of the year. A grocery store and a Cineplex with five VIP theatres and two UltraAVX theatres will be part of the residential tower scheduled to open above the parkade by mid-2020.



The interior of the new downtown Royal Alberta Museum should be completed by fall. Larry Wong / Postmedia

Royal Alberta Museum (103A Avenue between 97 Street and 99 Street)

Western Canada's biggest museum opens its doors in late 2017. The nearly 40,000-square-metre, \$376-million facility is twice the size of the former museum in Glenora, featuring new galleries in the natural and human history wings as well as an expanded bug room.



MacEwan University's Centre for Arts and Culture will open this fall. Larry Wong / Postmedia

MacEwan University Centre for Arts and Culture (104 Avenue and 110 Street)

This \$181-million addition to MacEwan's downtown campus is scheduled to open in August. The five-storey building, designed by noted architect Bing Thom, will house programs now available at the west-end campus and provide space for other work.

It includes theatres, a recital hall, recording studios, two-storey dance spaces, fine art and digital design classrooms, and a student art gallery.



Norquest College's Singhmar Centre for Learning is still under construction. Larry Wong / Postmedia

Norquest College's Singhmar Centre for Learning (103 Avenue and 107 Street)

Another major downtown educational facility will start taking students next September. The \$192-million centre will have a learner centre-library occupying the entire second floor, classrooms, labs and a child-care training space. The four-storey building is connected to the existing South Learning Centre, which is undergoing renovations that will be finished in 2018.



A new Mountain Equipment Co-op store is being completed in the Brewery District. David Bloom / Postmedia

Edmonton Brewery District (121 Street and 104 Avenue)

First Capital Realty plans to start what's thought to be Edmonton's largest historic renovation in January when it begins a two-year, \$8.4-million upgrade of the five-storey former Molson's Brewery building on the north side of the retail development.

A micro-brewery and restaurant are planned for the basement and first floor, the company hopes to move into the top two floors, and office tenants are planned for the other levels. The work will likely take two years.

Popular outdoor store Mountain Equipment Co-Op is moving this spring out of its current location a few blocks away into a 3,500-square-metre, two-floor space in the Brewery District.



Artist's depiction of the river valley funicular and boardwalk. City of Edmonton

Funicular (south of Hotel Macdonald)

Opening this fall, the \$24-million "mechanized river valley access" will link downtown to the North Saskatchewan River for people unable or unwilling to climb stairs.

The Plexiglas funicular will take 48 seconds to run between the top and a 200-metre walkway partway down the hill, which leads to a pedestrian bridge and an elevator that will carry passengers to water's edge.

There's also a wide staircase and viewing platforms along the way.



Work on services for Phase 1 of the Blatchford redevelopment starts this year. The area will include a community garden near the old airport control tower. City of Edmonton, supplied

Blatchford (northwest of Kingsway Avenue and Princess Elizabeth Avenue)

Construction starts this year on sewers, roads, a district energy system and a park in the first phase of this city-run development on the 217-hectare former City Centre Airport property.



The first of three towers with a total of up to 550 units starts construction this spring at the West Block. Supplied

West Block (142 Street and Stony Plain Road)

In-House, a division of Beaverbrook Developments, took control of this partially constructed eyesore property in 2014, winning city council approval last March to erect three slender towers with 550 units, along with offices and retail space.

This spring, they'll start building the \$85-million first phase, a 16-storey tower containing offices and shops on the first two floors, with residents expected to arrive in 2018.



Ground turning is set for this month at the Raymond Block on Whyte Avenue. Supplied

Raymond Block (10455 82 Ave.)

After sitting vacant for almost 20 years, the long-contaminated former Esso station property has been remediated and is finally coming back to life in January when construction starts on the Raymond Block.

This upscale six-storey structure will feature two floors of shops, restaurants and offices topped by 96 rental apartments, along with underground car and bicycle parking.



The Premium Outlet Collection mall at the Edmonton International Airport is scheduled to open in fall 2017. Supplied

Premium Outlet Collection mall (Edmonton International Airport near Highway 2)

More than 100 stores, many new to Alberta, will be on tap when this 40,000-square-metre shopping magnet opens in the fall, creating about 1,000 jobs. None of the shops has been publicly identified yet.

The project is part of plans by Canada's largest airport (in area) to build a retail, entertainment, logistics, warehousing and transportation hub on its property.

New access roads to the mall are expected to prevent the kind of traffic jams regularly seen leading into the much larger Crossiron Mills shopping centre north of Calgary.

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