# My Living Environment
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I am a Singaporean who lives in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Edmonton is the capital of the province of Alberta and   is located in the north. I live in an apartment in downtown Edmonton. There were many reasons why I chose to live downtown. One reason was the relative ease of access to public transportation such as trains and buses. This is important to me because I do not own a car nor do I drive. Most Edmontonians drive because the city is spread out and services are generally located elsewhere. A second reason for living downtown is that it is convenient for me to commute to my place of work. I teach in a nursing programme called Bridge to Canadian Nursing which is located in a converted heritage building in downtown Edmonton.   I can either take the bus or walk (when the weather allows) to work. A third reason is that there are a number of services in downtown Edmonton such as the public library, supermarkets, book shops, shopping malls, restaurants, the symphony, an art playhouse and the art gallery. The local government is working very hard to rejuvenate downtown Edmonton so that it becomes a vibrant and attractive place for people to live.

The real estate boom in Alberta has also led to a number of condominiums being built in downtown Edmonton. This has created a more concentrated and dense living in an attempt to reduce the carbon footprint. The end result is that we are seeing a different group of the population moving to downtown—a group that has a buying power, giving rise to a number of local and innovative businesses to meet the demands of this group. But downtown also has disproportionate numbers of individuals who are homeless. These are individuals who have no fixed address and live on the streets or in shelters. Many of them earn 'income' by going through rubbish dumps to collect bottles, cans, newspapers or any other recyclables to sell. Many homeless individuals have history of mental illness or come from an abusive home environment. Many of them are unable to work due to health issues while some homeless individuals are victims of difficult economic times. It is difficult to imagine that such things exist in a country as well-endowed as Canada or in a province as rich as Alberta. However poverty does exist here and nowhere is it more visible than downtown Edmonton.

The signs of poverty become more acute especially during the holiday season such as Christmas—a time of giving and receiving. Retailers everywhere have started to entice people to  spend and buy by giving massive discounts and free gifts. For those

individuals who are living on the edge, this season is particularly painful. Charities such as the Edmonton Food Bank and others encourage Edmontonians to give so that all can celebrate the festive season. Many downtown businesses partner with the Food Bank and encourage their employees to organise and donate non-perishable food to the Food Bank while big supermarkets donate frozen turkeys for Christmas dinners. Shelters for the homeless also cook and serve Christmas dinners either on Christmas Eve or Day. This is possible because of a group of dedicated volunteers. It is times like this that Edmontonians pull together and show their spirit of sharing and giving. It is this that makes this city a wonderful place to live.

What I like about living downtown is the vibrancy of the place. A few metres away, I can walk along the river and be part of the green lung, and yet I am not far away from any amenities. If I decide that I want to listen to a symphony, I can simply take the bus and reach the Winspear in no time. Edmonton is a city of contrasts but it is also a city that allows community-building. Edmontonians do complain about the cold. I suspect this is more of a conversation topic rather than an actual complain because if you ask an Edmontonian what he or she thinks about the city, the answer would probably be that they do not want to live anywhere else but in Edmonton. For me, downtown Edmonton reflects the diversity of Alberta.