

What We Heard Report

Paddle Association Stakeholder Engagement

Community and Recreation Facilities
City of Edmonton

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Edmonton

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Project Overview

The concept of an all-season adventure/activity centre was brought forward by a community proponent over the past two years. This idea originated from the desire to increase public accessibility to paddling/rowing activities within the river valley and support required to achieve this. The adventure/activity centre has been proposed in the river valley, as a site that could support year-round outdoor recreation, with a focus on on-river paddling opportunities. The idea was envisioned to be aligned with the new LRT station near Muttart Conservatory.

The following council reports provide background information and the evolution of the motions that have brought us to the most recent December 2, 2021, motion regarding the adventure/activity centre:

On October 17, 2018, Community and Public Services Committee passed the following motion to examine current options regarding canoeing, kayaking, and paddling:

That Administration provide a report examining options on the current status of canoe, kayak and paddling access to the river, including disabled access and access to canoe, kayak and paddling storage.

On April 10, 2019, Administration brought forward CR_6542 Options on the Current Status - Canoe, Kayak and Paddling River Access to respond to the October 2018 motion. Community and Public Services Committee subsequently passed following motion to explore options to develop activity/adventure centre:

That Administration provide a report to Committee on its work with affected stakeholders to explore options to develop a four season Adventure/Activity Centre, including commercial options and canoe and kayak storage at sites including but not limited to Dawson Park and Rafter's Landing, including funding options.

On December 4, 2019, Administration brought forward CR_7143 Options to Develop Adventure/Activity Centre to respond to the April 2019 motion. Community and Public Services Committee subsequently passed the following motion regarding an all-season adventure/activity centre concept plan:

That Administration further engage with the community and develop a concept plan for an all-season adventure/activity centre at Rafter's Landing and/or Dawson Park, and provide a report to Committee.

On December 2, 2020, Administration brought forward CR_7837 All-Season Adventure/Activity Park Concept Plan to respond to the December 2019 motion. Community and Public Services Committee subsequently passed the following motion relating to a year-round adventure/activity centre concept identified by the paddling community:

City of Edmonton Administration to conduct some preliminary engagement as part of the previous Committee direction, specifically with the paddle associations, and return with a high level update about possible next steps prior to Fall 2021.

To ensure Administration understood the paddle association's long-term plans for programs and their vision of a facility to support paddling, stakeholder engagement specifically with paddle associations, was completed.

How We Engaged

Who We Engaged

Paddling stakeholders were selected based upon current license and lease agreements between the City of Edmonton and the paddling/rowing associations. Additionally, some known commercial operators that utilize the North Saskatchewan River within Edmonton's jurisdictional boundary were invited to participate. Due to the nature of paddling and how members utilize the river, the engagement may not have included all operators.

A total of ten non-profit organizations and six commercial operators were invited and of those, eight non-profit organizations and three commercial operators attended, including:

- Ceyana Canoe Club
- Northwest Voyageurs
- Edmonton Rowing Club
- Edmonton Whitewater Paddlers
- United Albertan Paddling Society
- Greater Edmonton Racing & Canoe Club
- Edmonton Paddle Centres Association
- RiverWatch Institute of Alberta
- Aquabatics Outdoors (commercial)
- Haskin Canoe (commercial)
- Hela Ventures (commercial)

Engagement Process

Stakeholders were invited to attend one of two facilitated workshops. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the sessions were held virtually. The Jamboard application was utilized to allow participants to answer questions in a similar manner to in-person workshops (through sticky notes and writing). This approach allowed for individual idea generation and group discussions on select ideas. The sessions were 1.5 hours in length with approximately seven representatives per evening.

After the workshops, a thank you email was distributed with a follow-up invitation for participants to reach out with any questions or comments they might have regarding questions or ideas from the session.

What We Heard Summary

To gain a clear understanding of the paddle community's long-term plans for river-based programs, and the concept of a facility to support these, questions focused on gathering perspectives and input from specific community stakeholders most vested in paddle activities. Stakeholders were encouraged to share information on current programs including successes and struggles and what support for programs might be required. They were also invited to provide feedback on the idea of a year-round adventure/activity centre.

Input related to programs showed some consistencies with opportunities and challenges. Suggested forms of support that resonated strongly included storage, transport options for equipment and users, access to diverse water sources, and increased communications (on promotion, education, and enforcement).

Questions related to the development and operation of a year-round adventure/activity centre resulted in mixed feedback. Discussion was provided on the benefits and challenges of such a facility, but it did not appear that there was resounding support. Alternatively, the idea of smaller, seasonal, centres in a variety of activity appropriate locations seemed of potential interest to the group. Other suggestions included: expanding storage facilities, investigating shuttle opportunities, identifying new or modifying current water sources, and increasing access to existing facilities/amenities.

What We Heard Details

Area of Focus 1 Feedback

Questions were broken into two areas of focus. The first set of questions focused on gaining an understanding of what the current paddling environment looks like in Edmonton, specifically on program activities. Questions also examined what highlights, drawbacks and/or gaps exist, and what kind of support could help with the development or improvement of these programs.

Participants were in agreement that the paddling/rowing community in Edmonton offers numerous programs, to both the public and their members, for a range of abilities, ages, and areas of interest. Additionally, even though it's mostly a seasonal sport due to outdoor water sources, the social aspects help to create a strong community. There was also valuable discussion on how groups could further collaborate on training, events, programs, facility/amenity use, communications and progressing participants through the sport.

In reviewing programming gaps/drawbacks, stakeholders provided a number of suggestions on what kind of support would benefit the paddling community. Some of the key topics included:

- removing barriers to equipment and storage
- transportation opportunities for equipment and participants
- communications (promotion, education, awareness, enforcement)
- access to a variety of water sources
- training and skill development
- building community through collaboration
- access and availability of existing facilities/amenities
- financial (grants, local business aid)

Question	Summary/themes from Stakeholder Input
<p>What does the paddling environment currently look like in Edmonton?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● River provides a wonderful resource for paddling activities ● Seasonal ● Social sport ● Programs for a range of abilities, ages and areas of interest ● Public and member opportunities
<p>What barriers or challenges need to be considered when developing programming opportunities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equipment and storage availability ● Facility availability (indoor and outdoor pools) ● Traffic flow/user conflict on river ● Public awareness and education ● Access to a variety of bodies of water ● Transportation logistics
<p>Is there an opportunity for collaboration on paddling programs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training and education ● Social gatherings / Events ● Facility use ● Program development and execution ● Communications and scheduling ● Participant progression through the sport

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EPCA provides collaboration platform
What types of programming or activities could be offered that are currently not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educational/area of interest presentations ● Instructional and skills training ● Family paddling opportunities ● Programs at Hermitage Park ● More targeted school group activities
What gaps exist or are being forecasted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of river features (eddies, channels) ● Availability to utilize pools ● Storage facilities ● Increased conflict between water users ● Access to equipment ● Education, enforcement and awareness ● Reduction in water body sources
What would support further development or improve paddling in Edmonton?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased river/water enforcement ● Remove barriers such as access to equipment, training and/or water source ● Building collaborative relationships ● Supporting local businesses that activities rely on (equipment, services, etc.) ● Improved communications around the promotion and awareness on river/water safety, skills, programs, etc. ● Financial aid from the City (grant money) ● Creating features in the river (eddies, channels) ● Pool access including onsite storage ● Increased collaboration with Partners and City staff in facility and/or open space planning to ensure river access points are designed to meet a variety of programming needs ● Shuttles/transportation options ● Storage facilities near bodies of water ● Embracing new or emergent paddling sport trends ● Equipment rental options near river access points or water bodies

Area of Focus 2 Feedback

The second area of focus was aimed at reviewing the identified gaps and specific needs associated with programs, and conceptualizing solutions for these. Specifically what a year-round adventure/activity centre could provide or if other alternatives exist that may better assist the river-based activities.

Stakeholders provided thoughtful feedback on the idea of a year-round adventure/activity centre. Benefits consisted of:

- Increased partnerships within the sport as well with other outdoor recreation activities
- Dedicated spaces to offer training and education
- Creating a specialized facility for current and future outdoor recreation users and their equipment

Challenges included:

- defining clear goals and purpose of such a facility
- financial viability to build and operate
- determining an accessible location
- coordination of use and operations

When asked to provide suggestions on what alternatives to a single location centre to offer paddling opportunities could be, the idea of multiple, smaller centres in numerous locations was one that stood out with the group. There was agreement that these might be more viable for year-round (seasonal) opportunities, accomodating a variety of activities and users, and locations could be intentionally selected and linked to best benefit the sport and participant experience. Other alternatives consisted of expanding storage facilities, investigating shuttle opportunities, identifying new or modifying current water sources, and increasing access to existing facilities/amenities.

Question	Summary/themes from Stakeholder Input
Is there a need for a year-round adventure/activity centre or facility?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully exist in other municipalities with river access • Nice but not essential • Would need to be financially viable • Public transit access would be necessary • Year-round use should be priority • Clear goals for such a facility • Could provide opportunities for other outdoor recreation activities • Could assist with Eco-Tourism trend
How could the facility be operated and maintained?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operated by EPCA - maintained by COE • Commercial groups could help maintain
Would you utilize this facility? How and When?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet/collaborate with other paddlers or rowers (socials) • Provide training and education activities • Paddle community development
How could this type of centre offer year-round opportunities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with other seasonal outdoor activities (x-country skiing, snowshoeing, bird watching, biking, orienteering, etc) • Education and training spaces • Partner with other outdoor amenity uses (nordic spa, bike park)
What are the benefits/challenges of such a facility?	<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storage • Get more public participants on the water • Provide a prominent point of river access • Collaboration between paddle groups • Place to offer education and training <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facility coordination / sharing • Development in the River Valley • Defining clear goals of facility to help drive design and purpose • Location (access, variety of activities, etc) • Funding / budget to build and operate

<p>What indoor program spaces/amenities could be included in the facility?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Storage ● Lockers, washrooms, drinking fountain, fireplace, technology abilities ● Gathering space / meeting rooms ● Indoor water amenity (pool) ● Coffee shop / snack bar / kitchen area ● Fitness room
<p>What type of outdoor spaces/amenities would need to be included?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Storage ● Benches, fire pit, washrooms ● Parking (vehicle, trailer, shuttle) ● Turn around space for trailers/shuttles ● Shelter ● Water access (clean boats/gear)
<p>What could be alternatives to a single location centre in order to offer these programs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased storage opportunities (buildings, containers or fenced yards) ● Public paid storage for boats near river ● Explore shuttle/transportation logistics ● Multiple smaller centres in numerous locations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Year-round or seasonal ○ Offer a variety of activities ○ Available for multiple users (paddling associations, schools, non-profits, etc) ○ Locations to be intentionally linked to maximize user experience/enjoyment ○ Review current outdoor group facilities ○ River activity nodes ● Addition of river access points at west and east ends of the City ● Access to already existing public spaces (ex outdoor pools, recreation centres) ● Review what other municipalities offer for river access/adventure centre options ● Identifying new or modifying current bodies of water <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creating narrow channels or adding eddies to the river ○ Clearing of Whitemud Creek ○ Utilizing ponds in new development areas when possible ● Infrastructure not required, focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Education and programming ○ What activities/development belong in River Valley

What Happens Next?

The City is reviewing the feedback and information provided from the stakeholder sessions. This input will help to inform Administration's report that will be put forward to the Community and Public Services Committee on August 25, 2021, to answer the December 2, 2020 motion.