



# breathe

EDMONTON'S GREEN NETWORK STRATEGY

Strategic Plan

~~April 2017~~

**August 2017 Edits - Markup Version**



- e) Cluster compatible and complementary services to create activity centres or neighbourhood hubs that serve the greatest number of residents.
- f) Plan for weather and all seasons through enhanced open space design.
- g) ~~Implement the provision of the *Municipal Government Act* that allows for an additional 5% of required reserve dedication where proposed subdivision would result in densities of 30 units per hectare or greater.~~

DELETE

### CASE STUDY: URBAN GROWTH AREAS

Planned development in greenfield areas must take advantage of existing natural features to ensure the provisioning of high functioning ecological spaces. Connections between the new areas and existing developments will require planning to prevent these areas from being isolated from the rest of the city.



## 4.2 VIBRANT SPACES

*Make open spaces vibrant, sustainable and functional to support community identity and needs.*



Cities everywhere are investing in environments that attract and retain residents, workers and visitors. People need amenities that support their activity preferences as well as spaces that enable enjoyable experiences, encourage social gathering, evoke interest and beauty, reflect local cultures and create a sense of place. In Edmonton, the green network is effective at providing for many activities, but there is potential to make open spaces more multifunctional, innovative and flexible to elevate them from “effective” to “outstanding”.

An important concept in creating vibrant spaces is animation, or the extent to which they are well used. A busy, active park or streetscape is more likely to attract people than one that appears desolate. Edmontonians consistently express disappointment with local open spaces that seem underused or neglected, and prefer open spaces with a sense of character and beauty. Some even noted that they enjoy “people watching” as a favourite activity.

Animation is a challenging outcome to “design” through policies and recommendations, because human behaviour and preferences are often unpredictable. What makes a person want to spend time in a place? The best answers acknowledge that there are many different “recipes” for bringing people together, but often they involve some combination of:

- » Amenities or infrastructure that respond to community demand for a certain use;
- » Programming that introduces events, programs or activities to the space; ~~and~~
- » Attractive or interesting design that promotes a unique sense of place and aesthetic appeal; ~~and~~
- » **Scenic quality of a landscape based on characteristics like vegetation, terrain, impacts of cultural modifications or human alterations, and the visibility of the landscape from points of interest to viewers.**

Vibrant spaces are not only created by animating places, but also by leveraging opportunities to recognize and celebrate Edmonton’s rich heritage and culture. Public art, historic sites or interpretive information and places to practice traditional or ceremonial activities enable people to connect with unique places and reinforce a sense of community identity, whether that community is the local neighbourhood or Edmonton at large.

## 4.2.1 LANDSCAPE + URBAN DESIGN

### Planning + Design

- a) Adopt best practices in landscape and urban design during open space (re)development to encourage social interaction and compatible relationships with surrounding uses.
- b) Incorporate a balance of sunlight and shelter to encourage user comfort in every season, and in variable weather. Develop guidelines outlining the circumstances under which it is acceptable to shadow open spaces, and required mitigation measures to improve pedestrian-level comfort in relation to sunlight and wind.
- c) Open spaces should contain sufficient trees or other shade structures, strategically situated to support social gathering and permit surveillance of adjacent activities.
- d) Develop a Lighting in Open Spaces Strategy that considers the appropriate application of lighting for safety, design and aesthetics, and situations where lighting is not appropriate due to ecological sensitivity or light pollution issues.
- e) Explore opportunities through landscape and urban design to recognize and emphasize Edmonton's **scenic landscapes**, ecological heritage and cultural connections to the land (e.g. native species and vegetation patterns).
- f) Promote a culture of excellence in open space design, including site planning, landscape architecture and amenities/facilities. Design should incorporate elements of interest, beauty and creativity wherever possible. The City should encourage open space design competitions and expand its support of extraordinary designs to promote public interest.
- g) Encourage year-round usage of open spaces by employing siting and design that promotes sheltering from winter climate impacts, and incorporating well-designed artificial lighting to extend winter hours of operation. Winter climate comfort can be achieved through various means, such as:
  - › Sheltering open spaces by framing them by surrounding development, with blocks and parcels oriented to optimize solar access
  - › Providing infrastructure and amenities that encourage winter use, including shared-use greenways for walking, cycling and cross-country skiing
  - › Landscaping with drought-tolerant and low-maintenance native vegetation species
  - › Designing the street pattern and orientation to shelter open spaces from prevailing winds
- h) Use vegetation and plantings in open spaces to introduce colour, shade, beauty and aesthetic value to the cityscape.
- i) Develop a toolkit of high-quality open space design interventions for use in different environments, outlining appropriate applications and capital/operating funding implications for each.
- j) Support placemaking in priority locations (e.g. main streets, transit nodes, downtown) and underutilized open spaces through high quality urban design and enhanced amenities.
- k) Through the development approval process, require proponents of open space (re)development to demonstrate how the design aspects of their project enhance the character, aesthetic value and quality-of-life of the public realm.
- l) Protect vistas, views and visual connections between the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System and the top of bank through implementation of top-of-bank development

› **Compatibility:** Often uses can be combined to enhance the multifunctionality of an open space (e.g. a Light Rail Transit corridor and adjacent active transportation greenway).

**d)** Ensure that development proponents demonstrate how their project adheres to this Strategy and related City policies and procedures which promote an integrated network approach to land use planning. Develop and impose penalties on development proponents who fail to implement elements of their projects which were promised to support the green network, e.g. developing open spaces or amenities, locating or orienting land uses in accordance with an Ecological Network Report.

**e)** Develop master plans or management plans for any metropolitan or district parks that currently do not have one or where existing plans have become outdated.

### 4.9.3 REGIONAL COLLABORATION

#### Planning + Design

**a)** Ensure that open space acquisition and development supports the recommendations of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region Growth Plan for population growth, intensification and complete communities.

#### Engagement + Partnerships

**b)** Foster and support consultative, contributory, operational and collaborative partnerships with federal and provincial agencies and with other municipalities through the Capital Region Board regarding open space development and ongoing operations. Engage with adjacent municipalities, Indigenous communities and/or Alberta Environment and Parks to coordinate planning, development and operations of open spaces located near their shared jurisdictional boundaries.

**c)** Collaborate with the River Valley Alliance, Capital Region Board, senior levels of government and Indigenous communities to support the regional connection, expansion, protection and responsible development of the River Valley and Ravine system.

### 4.9.4 PARTNERSHIPS

#### Planning + Design

**b)** Provide sufficient funding, planning, design, management and programming support for community-driven park improvement and (re) development projects.

Evaluate the level of municipal contribution to community projects using the following criteria:

- › Community open space needs as determined through community needs assessment
- › Community ability to finance the project
- › Equity in open space financing and distribution
- › Synergy with other City programs and priorities

**c)** Work with school boards, community leagues and other community service providers to acquire, develop and operate open spaces in conjunction with recreation and community facilities.

**d)** Develop a Community Facility Requirements Strategy to better coordinate the open space needs of community organizations and service providers (e.g. community leagues, sports organizations, Indigenous or cultural groups) across the city. The Strategy should incorporate and update information and management approaches from existing facilities plans and policies.

#### Management + Operations

**d)** Work with community partners, where appropriate, to share in open space maintenance and stewardship, e.g. field or trail grooming, beautification initiatives, natural area monitoring, maintenance agreements.

**a)** Continue to work with the development industry as key partners in the development of open space, through programs such as the Shared Park Development Program.

ADD

#### 4.10.1 CAPITAL PLANNING

##### Planning + Design

- a) Leverage funding for open space acquisition and upgrades through coordination with complementary projects across the City of Edmonton, including transportation, drainage and neighbourhood renewal, among others.
- b) Identify future capital and maintenance upgrades early in the open space development process and establish an ongoing fund to pay for upgrades and renovations. A portion of taxes and development fees could be used for this fund.
- c) Establish decision-making criteria and processes anchored in *BREATHE* for the following scenarios:
  - › **Add:** Acquisition of open spaces or the development of new amenities, infrastructure or facilities
  - › **Replace:** Replace aging open space amenities or infrastructure
  - › **Redesign:** Improve the service capacity of existing open space or facilities
  - › **Repurpose:** Change the existing use of open spaces or facilities
  - › **Dispose:** Sale of surplus open spaces or removal of facilities
- d) Revisit the current acquisition, maintenance and operations funding mechanisms and processes to look for opportunities for efficiencies:
  - › **Reallocate:** Look for possible service delivery and budget efficiencies to find areas where budgets could be reallocated to under-served areas
  - › **Redistribute:** Look across departments for opportunities to redistribute open space services to other areas

- › **Repurpose:** Consider repurposing underutilized or redundant open spaces or facilities to higher priority uses or uses with fewer service delivery requirements
- › **Shift:** Consider shifting resources from a lower priority area to a higher priority area
- › **Budget Increases:** Explore the impacts of modest capital or operating budget increases
- › **Economies of Scale:** Review opportunities for pooling resources and modest fee/charge increases

##### Analysis + Monitoring

- e) Implement community needs assessments and a comprehensive monitoring and reporting program to proactively identify potential capital requirements, in accordance with **Strategic Direction 4.8 Adaptive Management + Flexible Spaces.**

#### 4.10.2 ACQUISITIONS

##### Planning + Design

- a) ~~Establish a land acquisition fund tied to population, such as a specific dollar amount per resident, to ensure open space provision grows with city growth.~~
- b) Based on the direction provided in *BREATHE* and other municipal policies, develop a Green Network Implementation Financial and Reserve Strategy. The Strategy should address how reserve dedications (as land or cash in lieu) can best be leveraged for park acquisition and development, and the financial implications of various reserve management and parks funding scenarios.
- c) In recognition that open space is a scarce asset and that conversion to other land uses is effectively irreversible, pursue options to maintain the existing green network intact whenever possible. Ensure

REPLACE

Investigate the feasibility and impacts of establishing a land acquisition fund tied to population, to ensure open space provision grows with city growth.



that community needs assessments are current in mature and established neighbourhoods, and exercise right of first refusal on school sites declared surplus wherever supported by such needs assessment and the provision guidelines established in this Strategy.

d) Ensure that conversions of open space (including undeveloped school sites being used as temporary public open space) to other land uses are supported by City policy and by a community needs assessment establishing that the open space in question is surplus to community needs, in accordance with **Strategic Direction 4.5 Distribution + Supply**. Where the open space is surplus to the needs of the community, release such land for other City uses or sale. Proceeds from the sale of surplus lands must be used for open space or amenity (e.g. trails, pathways) acquisitions.

e) In accordance with the provisions of the *Municipal Government Act*, Section 671, money collected in lieu of parkland must be paid into a reserve account and can only be used for land acquisition (for parks and other public recreation uses) or the development of parks and recreation facilities.

~~f) In accordance with the provisions of the *Municipal Government Act*, collect Municipal Reserve dedications in the amount of 10% of gross developable land area or cash in lieu at the time of subdivision. Developments with densities exceeding 30 dwelling units per gross developable acre will require dedication of 15% of land or cash in lieu. The relative amounts of land and cash in lieu collected in association with any given development, and the acceptable size and distribution of open spaces, will be determined in accordance with the development guidelines of this Strategy and planned future Procedures and Standards.~~

g) Investigate the feasibility of collecting land acquisition funds from density bonusing, community revitalization levies or redevelopment levies for use within the same community or towards a community investment fund. This fund could be used for either land acquisitions or for park and recreation capital improvements in the vicinity of the development site.

### 4.10.3 OPERATIONS + MAINTENANCE

#### Management + Operations

a) Highlight operations, maintenance and administration efficiencies and cost savings as a key consideration in the design process. City Operations staff should be involved in the planning, design and (re)development of open spaces from the beginning of a project through completion.

b) Establish a maintenance classification system and categorize parks based on that system:

› **Natural Spaces:** Restore or preserve the open space in its natural state

› **Nature Focus:** Maintain trails and trail heads but restore or preserve other areas in their natural state

› **High:** Special, high-visibility areas like metropolitan parks and special purpose facilities

› **Average:** Average standard of maintenance acceptable for community and district parks

› **Low:** Reduced frequency of maintenance, which is primarily safety focused, for low priority areas

c) Identify the maintenance responsibility for all existing and planned open spaces and facilities.

d) Coordinate with other City branches and sections to share the maintenance burden where possible and practical.

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In discussion with the land development industry, require reserve dedication in accordance with the provisions of the *Municipal Government Act*, the details of which will be determined in accordance with the open space development guidelines, procedures and standards, as amended.