

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW OF CITY-LED PROJECTS

RECOMMENDATION

That the January 17, 2023, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE01463, be received for information.

Requested Council Action	Information Only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Climate Resilience and Healthy City		
City Plan Values	PRESERVE		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Greener as we Grow	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Climate Adaptation and Energy Transition
Corporate Business Plan	Transforming for the Future and Managing the Corporation		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Administration Bylaw 16620 • Policy C512 Environmental Policy • Policy C505 Edmonton's Environmental Management System Policy • Policy C627 Climate Resilience Policy • City Plan Implementation • Enviso, the City of Edmonton's ISO14001 environmental management system 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of Cosmetic Pesticide (Community and Public Services Committee August 8, 2022) 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the August 22, 2022, Community and Public Services Committee, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report outlining options and any corresponding resource requirements, including the reallocation of existing resources, to coordinate environmental

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review of City plans and projects within Administration and identify environmental risks and opportunities.

Executive Summary

- Administration is continually improving environmental management processes, including environmental reviews.
- With the growing stresses on the environment, this work is critical and will require Administration to develop new environment and climate review processes.
- Administration will include an environment and climate review section in select reports in Q2 2023 and will broaden the inclusion to all applicable reports in Q4 2023.
- Administration will identify if there are additional options to coordinate environmental reviews of City plans and projects and update Council via a report in Q1 2024.

REPORT

Background

Cities are well positioned to take action to mitigate and adapt to climate change in ways that are effective for communities. One of the purposes of a municipality, outlined in the *Municipal Government Act*, is to foster the well-being of the environment. City Policy C512 - Environmental Policy and Policy C505 - Environmental Management System Policy provides direction for Administration to maintain an environmental management system. After Policy C505 was adopted in 2004, Administration implemented environmental management systems. In 2019, the City of Edmonton was the first city in Canada, and only the second in North America, to have its entire corporation third-party certified to the ISO 14001 environmental management standard, an international best practice.

Administration analyzes environmental risks and opportunities related to City activities and creates and improves practices to enhance environmental performance. Environmental review of non-City activities is also integrated within land development processes. Administration reviews environmental studies and information on historic oil and gas infrastructure to determine suitability of intended property use. Provincial regulations, City Plan and policies including City Policy C531 - Natural Systems Policy establish environmental information requirements, such as environmental or ecological assessments, which the City reviews during the development process.

Administration implements international best practices for environmental management, but the coordination of environmental resources, risks and opportunities requires continual review and evolution. Administration needs to upgrade environment and climate review processes, including the environmental information provided to Council to inform governance and decision making.

Complexity of Environmental Decision Making

The Community Energy Transition Strategy - Annual Update Report provides City Council with a high level overview of the progress towards the City's priority of climate change mitigation. The Annual Report includes corresponding corrective actions to continue, and to accelerate progress. One corrective action brought forward to City Council in June 2022 (Community Energy Transition

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Strategy - Annual Update, UPE00604, June 15, 2022 Executive Committee) included the development of new decision-making processes, data and tools to support the advancement of climate action and to provide decision makers with additional information.

The implementation of a Carbon Accounting Framework in the 2023-2026 budget process was an important step to integrate climate considerations in decision making. The individual decisions made within the four-year budget cycles for the City's services can result in impacts to natural resources, ecosystems and climate. Environmental data and subject matter expertise are necessary to understand the scope of these environmental impacts, opportunities and implications of new research.

Current Environmental Reviews of City Plans and Projects

Different types of environment or climate reviews are needed to understand the impacts of potential City service decisions. Currently, City plans and projects use a suite of reviews outlined in the table below.

Types of Environmental Reviews	City of Edmonton Examples
Strategic environment or climate reviews to identify nation leading opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical studies and jurisdictional reviews such as Edmonton's Green Energy Economy Study and the Edmonton Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, which were completed to develop Edmonton's Community Energy Transition Strategy and Action Plan and Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan
Broad environment or climate reviews to understand environmental impacts, opportunities or alternatives of current/proposed projects, plans or policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desktop review completed to identify impacts that could occur to Edmonton's drinking water supply based on the proposed provincial Coal Policy changes (e.g. UPE00424 Potential Impacts to City of Edmonton Headwaters, August 27, 2021 Utility Committee)
Local impact focussed environmental reviews (reviews often required under legislation or policy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration's ISO14001 system has reviewed over 1,300 City activities for environmental risks • Environmental Construction Operations (ECO) Plans to review how an infrastructure project will meet environmental compliance obligations and reduce or control environmental impacts • Environmental Site Assessments to understand contaminated site risk information for land purchases • Environmental Impact Assessments required through the River Valley Bylaw (e.g. Valley Line LRT Environmental Impact Assessment)

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Each of these types of environmental reviews provide different information and all of these reviews have limitations. The scope of the reviews can vary from onsite field investigation to quantitative or qualitative analysis. Some reviews can include a combination of all of these approaches. The scale and resource implications for these different reviews also varies. Some project specific environmental impact assessments that identify very localized impacts, require multiple months to complete and are typically documented in comprehensive reports. Some qualitative reviews can be completed quickly and summarized within a few pages. The scope of impacts or opportunities can also differ. For example, a site specific impact assessment would not identify broader environmental impacts, and it would not identify environmental opportunities.

Internal processes guide project teams when a review is required by legislation or policy. For example, Administration has processes to identify when a construction project requires an Environmental Construction Operations (ECO) Plan to identify how the project will meet environmental compliance obligations and reduce or control environmental impacts. Similarly, there are processes in place to share environmental information with Council. High level alignment to the City's environment and climate resilience objectives can be identified within standard Council reports, however, there is not a systematic process to ensure applicable types of environmental information are consistently updated and shared with Council.

Supporting Informed Decision Making

The process for reviewing environmental considerations is evolving as the City establishes enhanced systems to guide decision making. This evolving approach is linked to the City's priorities of implementing the Community Energy Transition Strategy and Adaptation Strategy.

As Administration assesses additional options to coordinate environmental reviews of City plans and projects, the first step will be to incorporate a new environment and climate review section into the standard Council Report template. As applicable council reports are generated, the section will be added and there will be a period of transition as the practice is adopted. Select reports will begin to include the new section in Q2 2023, with a targeted implementation for broad inclusion in reports by the beginning of Q4 2023. Not all Council reports will require an environment and climate review and council report content and the level of information in the section will vary based on the subject of the report.

Embedding environment and climate reviews within council reports will provide an expedited initial step to improving how Administration shares environmental impacts to support informed decision making. However, there is the possibility that this addition may have a limited impact on projects in phases between Council reporting touchpoints and as such more steps are required. For plans and projects that are at a later stage of progress and are close to completion, conducting an environmental review will not likely provide opportunities to make significant environmental improvement changes, when compared to earlier reviews. Also, some initiatives may be subject to an accelerated delivery, which will likely mean that the associated environmental reviews will have time limitations. Administration will return to Council in Q1 2024

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with an update on options for potential mitigations to these risks, once the review process is operational.

Budget/Financial Implications

Administration's initial estimate is that an additional two to three full-time equivalents (FTEs) with environment and climate expertise are required to include environment and climate information within council reports.

Options for additional steps that could be taken to further expand or increase environmental reviews are expected to be associated with a requirement for increased resources. These implications would be included in the update when Administration returns to Council in Q1 2024.

COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Environment themes often factor into many important city building engagement conversations. During The City Plan engagement, Edmontonians were asked how they want to experience their future city, and based on this engagement one of The City Plan's guiding values was "I want to PRESERVE what matters most" which includes Edmonton's environmental systems.

Through The City Plan engagement, many responses directly addressed ideas related to climate change, however, more often, Edmontonians were focused on local and tangible impacts on the natural environment: air pollution, habitat degradation and waste management.

Edmontonians who provided input on the Vision 2050 overwhelmingly described a desire to have Edmonton be a global leader in environmental sustainability. Also through The City Plan engagement, Indigenous communities shared that they need to be involved in City projects earlier to share perspectives about the environment and the impacts they are experiencing in their home communities surrounding Edmonton, as Edmonton regional projects impact rivers, air and wildlife in their communities. Administration will engage Council's Energy Transition and Climate Resilience Committee and Administration's Environmental Advisory Committee on this process and implementation.

GBA+

Administration is committed to incorporating GBA+ into all projects and initiatives within the City's two climate resilience strategies, as well as into other environment and climate related work such as the proposed environmental review of City plans and projects. To support equality of outcomes with the proposed environmental reviews, the following equity measures are recommended:

- Contributors to environmental reviews should be diverse to ensure more perspectives are included in the reviews and final reports.
- The team completing the environmental reviews should use a variety of sources for gathering information to ensure diversity.