

Engagement Highlights

Citywide Strategic Level Engagement, Communications and Education

The City Plan (all four phases from fall 2018 to winter 2019)

Phase I - The City Plan

A number of environmental themes and priorities emerged pertaining to Edmontonians wanting to “PRESERVE what matters most” to maintain a healthy city, urban places, regional prosperity and for climate resilience, including the following key points:

- Edmontonians protect and steward the natural environment, local biodiversity, agriculture and food systems and cultural landscapes.
- Edmonton's river valley, natural environment, parks and open spaces are protected and expanded for future generations to connect with, explore and enjoy.

Phase II - Identifying City Moves

Edmontonians identified a number of areas requiring attention, relating to preserving what matters most, leading to the City Move “Greener As We Grow”. These included the following key points:

- Preserve and enjoy the city's ribbon of green as a city of green neighbourhoods all connected to the river valley system and as a transportation corridor on and beside the water.
- Ways to make it happen
 - Supporting biodiversity in the city by design.
 - Greening our infrastructure.
 - Becoming biophilic and bringing about ecological restoration.
 - Preserving natural areas and open spaces.

Phase III - Choices for our Future City (City Wide)

Edmontonians contributed knowledge and voices to inform the development of policy intentions and draft land use concepts. Greener As We Grow feedback included the following themes:

- Design everything with a lens on climate resilience and adaptation.
- Increase and protect natural greenspaces for ecosystem integrity and education.

- Enhance and restore natural areas to support plant and animal life (identified by 55 of Insight Community respondents as being Very Important).

Phase III - Choices for our Future City (Indigenous)

The Indigenous engagement component of Phase III revealed the following emergent themes that would pertain to the environment and impact the Greener As We Grow City Move:

- Increase the density of our city.
- Focus on the river valley.
- Be a city of climate refuge.

Phase IV - Intentions and Directions for our Future City

This phase of engagement was intended to refine policy intention, policy direction and land use concepts. Themes carried from prior engagement phases, including the following key points:

- Environmental Preservation - 15 per cent of all public comments received
- Climate Resilience - 10 per cent of all public comments received
- Participants expressed a wide range of aspirations related to environmental preservation and climate resilience, including:
 - Ideas to protect, restore and expand natural areas in the city, such as preventing development from disturbing natural areas and buying back land in the River Valley/ravine system.
 - Ideas to build climate resilience into new developments, such as low impact stormwater management systems.

Parkland Management Community Relations Strategy (2016-2019)

Administration conducted research in the form of an Insight Community survey on weed control and naturalization (December 2016), as well as an analysis of 311 data. Some key findings from the survey are described below. This data informed operational tactics and a public relations campaign focused on park service levels and naturalization that was implemented from 2016 to 2019.

- There is widespread understanding of the term naturalization, with 57 per cent associating the term with our preferred definition and 82 per cent associating the term with an appropriate definition.
- There is significant support for the practice of naturalization with 49 per cent strongly supporting public property naturalization and 31 per cent somewhat supporting.

- When asked about the type of public property where naturalization should take place (by the use of pictures to show sample locations), 87 per cent supported roadway naturalization and 88 per cent supported storm water management facility naturalization.
 - This finding can also be indicative of the fact that visuals of naturalization are a more effective medium for communicating about naturalization.
- While support for these forms of naturalization was high across the city, certain wards had lower levels of support.
 - The different types of stormwater management facilities found throughout the city seem to relate to the different levels of support.
 - Younger demographics and people residing in core neighbourhoods support naturalization more
 - The north of the city has lower levels of support for naturalization when compared to the rest of the city

311 Data demonstrated the following:

- 47 per cent of weed removal requests were for weeds located around roadways, with a significant amount of those roadways being newly naturalized areas.
- Certain locations were over represented inside the natural area category
 - Stormwater management facilities made up 22 per cent of natural area weed calls
 - Parks with off leash dog areas made up close to 25 per cent of natural area weed calls
- Of all 2016 complaints
 - 45 per cent were about Terwilliger dog park
 - 30 per cent requested better signage
 - 25 per cent were requests for how to access information

Corporate Tree Management Policy (fall 2019)

3,499 people participated in a variety of engagement activities and generally supported the Policy updates with emphasis on providing more community education. Participants encouraged the City to plant more trees, plant a diversity of species, and to expand naturalization efforts. Key themes included:

- All trees that make up the Urban Forest should be managed, preserved and protected.
- Strong support for naturalization adjacent to arterial roadways, on unsafe slopes, stormwater ponds and seasonally wet turf areas, underutilized

areas of the river valley and expanding naturalization to include other public areas, providing that noxious weeds are controlled.

- Management and protection of natural areas must balance preservation and risks attributed to pests, disease, wildfire and public safety.

Public Tree Bylaw (fall/winter 2019-2020)

As part of the broader urban forest management, the City conducted public and stakeholder engagement regarding the proposed public tree bylaw. 3,522 people participated through a variety of engagement activities, and the following key themes emerged:

- Participants emphasized that trees are important for mitigating climate change, improving air and water quality, wind reduction and the aesthetics of a community. Boulevard trees and natural areas were most commonly identified as priorities for protection and preservation.
- In the online surveys, the most highly supported options to preserve and protect the City of Edmonton's Urban Forest were to plant more trees and educate the public.

Urban Forest Asset Management Plan (UFAMP) (July 2021)

As part of the broader Urban Forest Management engagement effort, the City facilitated stakeholder engagement sessions in July 2021 to discuss the proposed UFAMP, sharing key areas of the draft UFAMP to gather feedback that would be used in addition to the responses from online survey questions from fall 2019 specific to asset management. Stakeholders discussed ways to protect, expand and make the urban forest more interesting and sustainable through diversity. Key themes included:

- Growth targets and how they would be set and maintained, including the need to plant trees on private land to meet City canopy growth goals (with ideas such as incentivizing landowners).
- The Corporate Tree Management Policy, the Public Tree Bylaw and the UFAMP are three tools that need to work together.
- Other ideas included planting trees in large developments, allowing citizens to collaborate on planting trees in "dead spaces", neighborhood renewal trees and preserving land for tree planting when redeveloping school and park sites into housing.

Greener As We Grow Project (May 2022, Phase One)

4,647 people completed a city-wide survey as the first phase of engagement for the Capital Planning for Greener As We Grow project and to inform the new

Naturalization, Restoration and Reclamation Plan. The survey was used to gain insight about public awareness and support for naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting, as well as to understand how Edmontonians use naturalized and open spaces. The full What We Heard Report is available on the Engaged Edmonton website, under the project called “Naturalization and Tree Planting”). Highlights of the report are:

- Overall, Edmontonians expressed support for naturalization, tree planting and tree preservation:
 - The majority of survey respondents were aware of the term “naturalization” (82 per cent) and supportive of increased naturalization (83 per cent), including increased naturalization around stormwater management facilities (88 per cent) and in river valley parks and ravines (87 per cent).
 - 88 per cent of survey respondents think the City should plant more trees, protect older trees, remove sick trees and maintain the current trees to protect and enhance the City’s urban forests. Respondents would most like trees to be planted along boulevards (88 per cent), in existing parks (87 per cent) and around stormwater management facilities (84 per cent).
 - 81 per cent of respondents indicated that the most important benefits of urban trees are climate regulation, flood mitigation and providing shade.
- The most common concerns that Edmontonians identified about naturalization are that it will attract more litter (47 per cent), weeds (39 per cent) and insects (33 per cent) in the area.
 - Attracting wildlife (e.g. rodents, coyotes) was a lesser concern (19 per cent).
 - Some respondents indicated *no* concerns with naturalization (19 per cent).
 - Other concerns were low (1-6 per cent), such as cost, visibility, fire hazard, crime/safety, etc.

Community Level Level Engagement, Communications and Education

Parkland Care and Naturalization Campaign (results from 2021 campaign)

Administration developed the Parkland Care and Naturalization Campaign, launched in 2021, to continue to increase awareness and understanding of the City’s vision for sustainable green spaces and to clearly outline operational service levels. The campaign also focused on increasing citizen awareness about

what naturalization is, where it occurs, the benefits and how the process works. The 2021 campaign featured news releases, media events, updated 311 scripts, web page updates, postcards, a 6 week social media campaign featuring the benefits of naturalization and signage. An evaluation of the 2021 campaign informed recommendations for the 2022 campaign including:

- Optimize communications tactics from 2021 to increase clarity on service levels (turf, horticulture, pest management).
- Look for more opportunities for positive storytelling.
- Increase education on naturalization including around stormwater management facilities.
- Develop new tactics to “move the dial” on perceptions about naturalization.

Annual Public Engagement Plans for Naturalization

Administration is also developing a new process to determine and execute the appropriate level of public engagement, communication and education for its ongoing and annual operational naturalization work. The new process will require tactics and timing to be planned and carried out for each project according to an assessment of complexity and risk. This process is expected to be fully in place for 2024.