

COLLABORATIVE HIGHWAY 2 ROADWAY BEAUTIFICATION

Recommendation

That the April 9, 2024, Integrated Infrastructure Services report IIS01927, be received for information.

Requested Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle	ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals		
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	Climate Resilience		
City Plan Values	CREATE		
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		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban Forest Asset Management Plan (2022) 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May 2, 2023, City Operations report CO01328, City Plan - New Urban Trees 		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the May 16, 2023, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration work with key partners, the Government of Alberta and regional municipalities on a roadway beautification plan through tree planting on highway 2 from the Edmonton International Airport and into Edmonton on Gateway Blvd and report back to Committee.

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Executive Summary

- Within its urban boundary, Edmonton is advancing The City Plan goal of planting two million new urban trees by 2030, which supports the City's Urban Forest Asset Management Plan target to achieve 20 per cent urban forest canopy by 2071.
- Administration met with key partners on the potential roadway beautification initiative from Edmonton International Airport into Edmonton on Gateway Boulevard.
- There is initial support to continue discussions; however, a significant portion of the roadway is outside of the city limits and within provincial ownership.
- To proceed with a plan, further work would be required to define the extent of the corridor, the vision for the initiative and establish governance, funding and operating and associated agreements.
- Funding and resources have not been allocated to advance this initiative in the 2023-2026 Capital and Operating Budgets.

REPORT

Increasing Edmonton's urban tree canopy contributes to climate resilience by improving air quality, mitigating flood risks, increasing pollinator habitat, capturing carbon and reducing heat island impacts. Urban trees and naturalization also provide quality of life and economic benefits by contributing to the aesthetics and experiences for residents and visitors, improving Edmonton's brand and reputation, and increasing property values. The City Plan target aims to plant two million new urban trees, and the Urban Forest Management Plan targets 20 per cent urban forest canopy cover by 2071.

As outlined in City Operations report CO01328, City Plan - New Urban Trees, at the May 2, 2023, Urban Planning Committee meeting, both of these targets are focused within the city boundary and progress is being made. With federal funding from the 2 Billion Trees (2BT) program and matching capital investments, the City is expected to reach The City Plan goal of planting two million new urban trees by 2030. Planting as part of the 2BT program began in April 2022, and will continue until the end of 2030. Within the city limits, planting was completed within the Highway 2 corridor in 2023 (south bound, south of 23 Avenue), and a section is being reviewed for the 2024 planting season (south and north bound near 34 Avenue). Planting locations for 2BT have been prioritized based on a number of factors, however, only portions of the corridor within city limits meet the criteria. Additional initiatives for urban tree canopy growth on public and private land are being advanced to support reaching 20 per cent tree canopy coverage by 2071.

Following the direction provided by the motion to establish a plan for roadway beautification along Highway 2, Administration met with representatives from Alberta Transportation, Leduc County, the City of Leduc and the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority.

The purpose of these meetings was to introduce the Council motion and to gain an understanding of the level of support, as well as the potential challenges and opportunities. Generally, there was support to advance further discussions and it was recognized that this initiative has the potential to improve the travel experience of the corridor between Edmonton International Airport (including or up to the city limits of Leduc) to downtown or the Alberta

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Legislative grounds. It was also recognized that this work would support regional collaboration, economic development, both the City of Edmonton's and the Region's brand and reputation, and provide environmental/climate resilience benefits.

The initial exploratory conversations also highlighted the need to develop a regional, high-level vision for the corridor (e.g., a ceremonial route with structured plantings, a naturalized corridor, a combination of planting treatments, etc.), which clearly defines the boundaries and intent of the initiative. Some of the initial concerns identified included: governance, funding, Council support from Leduc County and the City of Leduc, provincial permit requirements, frontage of existing businesses, operations and maintenance, and future expansion plans for Highway 2.

Potential Next Steps

A significant portion of the right-of-way is owned by the Government of Alberta and will require additional discussions with the key stakeholders identified to advance this initiative. No commitments were made by the key stakeholders to put resources towards this initiative at this time. Should Council wish to advance this work further, the next step is defining the extent of the corridor and a vision with stakeholder partners. Additional work would be needed to determine governance, funding, operating and maintenance models and associated agreements. Prior to finalizing the vision, discussions should be held with other regional partners such as Alberta Tourism and Sport, Alberta Transportation and Economic Corridors, Alberta Jobs, Economy and Trade, Indigenous nations, regional economic development partners and adjacent businesses. General public and stakeholder engagement should also occur.

Budget/Financial Implications

Internal resources were allocated to initiate the exploratory conversations with key partners. However, funding and resources to advance this work further have not been identified within the 2023-2026 Budget. Should Council wish to advance this initiative, additional funding and resources will be required. If directed, Administration could explore advancing the visioning and agreement development work with internal resources; however, reprioritization of current work would need to be considered and funding would be required to support public and external stakeholder engagement activities.

With approximately 13 to 15 km of roadway plantings required to support this initiative, a high-level estimate of \$10 million would be required to advance visioning, planning, design and delivery. The level and extent of planting could be scaled up or reduced depending on funding availability. Grant opportunities for planting activities could be explored with partner organizations outside the city limits once the visioning, agreements, and planning and design work has been completed. For example, a second grant funding application could be jointly made with partners to the federal 2BT program.

Legal Implications

Should this initiative advance, provincial permits, funding and agreements will be required. Legal review of these documents will be necessary. It may also be necessary to assess potential jurisdictional or procedural requirements relating to the use of City funds towards a project that

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extends beyond the municipal city boundaries. Consideration will also need to be given to ownership of assets, including renewal and maintenance obligations after construction.

Community Insight

Comprehensive research and engagement was conducted through the development of The City Plan, updating the Corporate Tree Management Policy, the Urban Forest Asset Management Plan, and the Naturalization, Restoration and Reclamation Plan. Limited stakeholder engagement was completed for this exploratory phase of the project, but no formal public engagement was advanced.

GBA+

GBA+ was not conducted as part of this exploratory work. Should this initiative advance, the GBA+ process and associated reporting will be completed.

Environment and Climate Review

This report was selected as part of the phased implementation of a process change to provide environmental reviews of the City of Edmonton's plans and projects.

- Trees and naturalization provide a number of environmental benefits including, but not limited to: capturing carbon, reducing heat island impacts, improving air quality, mitigating flood risks, and increasing habitat for wildlife and pollinators. Should this initiative advance, tree and shrub plantings will be selected to ensure long-term climate resilience along the corridor.