

## RIVER VALLEY PLANNING MODERNIZATION - UPDATE ON PHASES 3 AND 4

### Recommendation

That the September 17, 2024, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE02475, be received for information.

<b>Requested Action</b>	Information Only		
<b>ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle</b>	<b>ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals</b>		
<b>CONNECTED</b> This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	<b>Climate Resilience</b>		
<b>City Plan Values</b>	PRESERVE.		
<b>City Plan Big City Move(s)</b>	Greener as we Grow	<b>Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities</b>	Healthy City
<b>Corporate Business Plan</b>	Transforming for the Future		
<b>Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C531 - Natural Area Systems Policy, C594 - Open Space Policy</li> </ul>		
<b>Related Council Discussions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• June 10, 2024, Council Memo, River Valley Planning Modernization Phase 3 Update</li> <li>• June 29, 2021, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE00544, River Valley Planning Modernization Phase 1 Update</li> <li>• May 31, 2022, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE01049, River Valley Planning Modernization Phase 2 Update</li> <li>• July 10, 2020, Council Memo, City Planning Branch Project Release</li> </ul>		

### Executive Summary

- Phase 3 of the River Valley Planning Modernization (RVPM) project focused on developing planning direction to guide preservation, access and activation within the River Valley, and on identifying opportunities to update decision-making processes for proposed development in the River Valley. Phase 4 finalized policy and spatial guidance in the draft Ribbon of Green, and updated the land use concept and policies of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan.
- This update provides Council an opportunity to review the draft plans before the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan is brought forward for consideration through the public hearing process in Q4 2024.
- Following adoption of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan, several important pieces of work will be completed to implement the strategic and policy direction set out in the Ribbon of Green and North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan. The action plan will be prioritized and resources may be required in future budget cycles.

### REPORT

Edmonton's North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System (the "River Valley") is a highly valued ecological, recreational and active transportation corridor through the city. It is also a place of cultural significance, a place that supports individual and community wellness, a draw for tourism, and the core of Edmonton's open space network.

The River Valley experiences pressures from a number of sources, including increasing demand for access as a result of growth in population and interest in outdoor recreation. There is growing demand for events and commercial opportunities, as well as facilities, amenities, utilities, and other municipal infrastructure.

Existing policy, planning and regulatory guidance is outdated and does not reflect today's complex planning context. The River Valley Planning Modernization (RVPM) project is updating that guidance through the renewal and alignment of the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan ("Ribbon of Green") and the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan ("River Valley ARP"). These plans were originally adopted in the 1990s and 1980s, respectively, and have not been subject to comprehensive renewal since that time.

The River Valley Planning Modernization provides the following opportunities:

- Renew, streamline and clarify Edmonton's approach to planning the River Valley, including planning processes and priorities.
- Reaffirm Edmonton's commitment to preserve the environment and enhance public access to the River Valley.
- Address gaps in programming and access while modernizing the City's approach to environmental management and stewardship.

This report provides an overview of the work and engagement completed in Phases 3 and 4, the final phases of the project, and a summary of next steps.

### Overview of the Ribbon of Green and River Valley ARP

Together, the Ribbon of Green and River Valley ARP provide an overarching planning and land use policy framework for the River Valley.

- The Draft Ribbon of Green<sup>1</sup> provides strategic direction: the City's overall vision for the future of the River Valley, high-level plans for the connected open spaces within it, and the policy direction that guides decisions about what happens in those spaces. The Ribbon of Green Plan Guide (Attachment 1) provides a concise overview of the plan and was included as part of public engagement materials in Phase 3 of the project.
- The Draft River Valley ARP<sup>2</sup> formally identifies open space as the predominant land use in the River Valley and identifies high level land use policies to help guide future development decisions. The draft was included as part of public engagement. Administration continues to refine the draft plan based on internal, public, and stakeholder feedback. A summary of key updates to the ARP was shared as part of public engagement and is included in Attachment 2.

### Phase 3 and Phase 4 Outcomes

Phases 3 and 4 were focused on developing planning direction to guide preservation, access and activation within the River Valley, and on updating decision-making processes for proposed River Valley development. Key outcomes in these phases included:

- Drafting program and ecological guidance for each "reach," or segment, of the River Valley. This guidance includes spatial planning, program statements, design ideas, and circulation direction (access points, connections, and trail types), and will be refined and confirmed during future site-specific planning processes.
- Finalizing the Ribbon of Green Land Management Classification (LMC) framework. LMCs outline the level of protection and appropriate development and use for different areas in the River Valley.
- Refining Ribbon of Green system-wide policies to better reflect topics such as Indigenous reconciliation, nature-based solutions and river access. System-wide policies will guide the planning, stewardship and activation of River Valley open spaces, and engagement with the public and partner organizations.
- Developing a draft statutory land use concept and map. The proposed concept designates the majority of river valley lands as River Valley Open Space, protecting them for nature, recreation and culture. It directly references the Ribbon of Green for more detailed planning guidance on those lands.
- Developing draft statutory land use policies, including policies to limit intensive development in the River Valley, require application of environmental impact mitigation to proposed development, and ensure that specific consideration be given to Indigenous and public engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> City of Edmonton. Draft Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan. June 2024.  
[https://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/initiatives\\_innovation/ribbon-of-green](https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/ribbon-of-green)

<sup>2</sup> City of Edmonton. Draft River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan. June 2024.  
[https://www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/initiatives\\_innovation/ribbon-of-green](https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/initiatives_innovation/ribbon-of-green)

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- Drafting a proposed decision-making process for future development proposals, including updated assessment requirements and new triggers for when a proposal might require City Council approval or when they will be assessed and approved by Administration.

### Next Steps

A number of implementation items will be critical to the successful delivery of the Ribbon of Green strategic actions and application of the River Valley ARP. A high level action plan for implementation of the two plans is included as Attachment 3: Draft River Valley Planning Modernization Action Plan.

Administration will bring forward the renewed statutory plan for Council consideration and approval as part of the statutory public hearing process in Q4 2024. The Ribbon of Green will be brought forward for information at that time. Administration is also exploring the use of a Council policy as the most appropriate tool for some governance and procedures traditionally contained in the River Valley ARP. Should an associated Council policy be advanced, Administration would bring it forward together with the River Valley ARP and Ribbon of Green.

### Community Insight

Draft plan materials were shared through Indigenous, public and stakeholder engagement in Phases 3 and 4. Participants were invited to review and share input on the Ribbon of Green plan, including system-wide policy, land management classifications and ecological guidance. Input was also invited on the draft River Valley ARP, including the land use concept and policies and proposed decision-making process for future development proposals.

#### Public Engagement

More than 3,300 participants took part in Phase 3 public engagement, and 2,500 in Phase 4. Public and stakeholder engagement methods included virtual and in-person workshops, online surveys, an interactive portal and map, and a series of pop-up engagement sessions at River Valley parks. Pop-ups were also held at locations easily accessed by communities the project team specifically intended to reach, including Indigenous Edmontonians, seniors, newcomers, people experiencing and at risk of houselessness, and LGBTQ2S+ youth.

#### Indigenous Engagement

In Phase 3, the project team hosted engagement sessions in the River Valley to meet with Indigenous Nations and Communities. Those sessions, in which 11 Nations participated, included a series of site tours to seek input on proposed planning approaches. In Phase 4, the project team will reconnect with Indigenous Nations and Communities to share back what has been heard throughout the project, and how that input has been reflected in the plans or will be advanced through implementation. The RVPM project was a beginning of important conversations about shared governance, co-management and co-stewardship with Indigenous Nations and Communities in the context of River Valley planning and management. Ribbon of Green planning and policy guidance reflects that input at a strategic level, but there is work ahead, and ongoing engagement with Nations and Communities, to define a path forward together.

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### Engagement Input

A range of perspectives were heard through Indigenous and public engagement. The input received is summarized in Attachment 4: Public and Indigenous Engagement Summary, and was considered as plan materials were developed and finalized. For a more detailed overview of input, see Attachment 5: Phase 3 What We Heard Report and Attachment 6: Phase 4 What We Heard Report.

### **GBA+**

As a citywide shared asset, the River Valley and Ravine System needs to provide opportunities for diverse community members to access and enjoy a connected network of open spaces through the heart of the city. It is essential that the River Valley Planning Modernization work reflects and accounts for the diverse perspectives, abilities, and lived experience of Edmontonians.

The River Valley Planning Modernization project is applying a GBA+ process in two primary ways:

- In planning public and Indigenous engagement
- In developing/refining River Valley policies and planning direction

Administration's research has shown that a number of socially vulnerable communities may face barriers to participating in conventional engagement activities, including Indigenous community members, people with a disability, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, newcomers, seniors and children/youth. Research has also shown that open space planning and policies have the potential to lead to inequity, and the exclusion of marginalized community members. Spatial analysis has also shown that many neighbourhoods with high social vulnerability are at a considerable distance from the River Valley and do not have good multimodal access to open spaces.

To help address barriers to participation that some communities may face, as part of engagement in both Phases 3 and 4, the project team worked with community agencies to organize pop-up sessions to engage community members from previously underrepresented groups. In order to facilitate participation, the project team planned the pop-ups in places that were accessible, including at a National Indigenous Peoples Day event, an assisted living residence managed by the Bissell Centre, a social services agency for newcomers, a seniors centre, and a Gay-Straight Alliance drop-in session at a library.

Feedback received through these engagement sessions was included in What We Heard reporting for each phase, and, together with feedback heard from other engagement audiences, was considered by Administration in the development of River Valley policies.

Feedback related to future strategic or operational actions required to implement Ribbon of Green and River Valley ARP direction will be included with project documentation to ensure that what was heard can continue to shape the City's approach to planning and managing the River Valley and Ravine System.

### Environment and Climate Review

Protection of the natural environment in the River Valley and Ravine System supports Edmonton's Community Energy Transition Strategy & Action Plan's Pathway #4: Carbon Capture and Nature Based Solutions. Proposed policies and actions of the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan and River Valley ARP support the protection, maintenance, and restoration of healthy green and blue spaces which are important for climate mitigation and adaptation, as well as biodiversity. Benefits of these spaces include:

- helping lower net greenhouse gas emissions by protecting the natural carbon stores in, and continued carbon storage capacity of, soils and vegetation;
- mitigating the effects of flooding;
- mitigating urban heat island effects by providing shading and cooling;
- supporting healthy and diverse ecosystems that are more resilient to environmental changes caused by, or accelerated by, climate change.

Implementation of strategic direction proposed in the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan and River Valley ARP would further support and advance the City's efforts to protect its natural assets and advance climate goals, such as implementing a no net loss guideline and assessing the cumulative impacts of development.

Additional detail and considerations to further support environmental protection and climate resiliency are included in Attachment 7. These include economic valuation of natural assets, continued evaluation of the environmental impact of development in the River Valley and Ravine system in decision-making, and the potential to include Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge in the City's understanding of the River Valley and Ravine system.

### Attachments

1. Ribbon of Green Plan Guide
2. River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan Backgrounder
3. Draft River Valley Planning Modernization Action Plan
4. Public and Indigenous Engagement Summary
5. Phase 3 What We Heard Report
6. Phase 4 What We Heard Report
7. Environment and Climate Review