

River Valley Mechanized Access

Environmental Review

Recommendation:

That Executive Committee recommend to City Council:

1. That the River Valley Mechanized Access Environmental Impact Assessment and the River Valley Mechanized Access Site Location Study as outlined in Attachments 1 and 2 of the February 23, 2016, Sustainable Development report CR_3268, be approved.
2. That the river valley location of the River Valley Mechanized Access described in the Environmental Impact Assessment included as Attachment 1 of the February 23, 2016, Sustainable Development report CR_3268, be deemed essential and approved pursuant to Section 3.5.1 of the *North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan*, Bylaw No. 7188.

Report Summary

To advance the River Valley Mechanized Access project, Administration seeks City Council's approval of an Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study in accordance with the requirements of North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan Bylaw No. 7188, and concurrence that the location of the River Valley Mechanized Access project as identified within the Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study be deemed essential to meet the requirements of the same bylaw.

Report

In 2011, City Council approved and the River Valley Alliance endorsed the Touch the Water Promenade and the River Valley Mechanized Access projects. Combined funding for these projects in the amount of \$34.4 million is based on a three way cost sharing partnership between the River Valley Alliance (one third) which has partnered with the Federal Government – Building Canada Fund (one third) and the City of Edmonton (one third). Funding for the City of Edmonton third is made up primarily of Municipal Sustainability Initiative funds, with a small portion coming from general financing and reserves.

Following Executive Committee's direction in 2013, Administration studied several potential alignments for the River Valley Mechanized Access project. These were presented to Committee in July 2014, and Administration was directed to prioritize the 100 Street alignment as the preferred location for the project. A *River Valley Access Concept Engineering Report* outlining the feasibility and costs to install a mechanized lift, urban staircase and pedestrian bridge on the 100 Street alignment was approved by Council on June 23, 2015, and the project was advanced into the preliminary design phase, which includes the completion of an Environmental Impact Assessment and Site

Please retain this report for future meetings

Location Study to address the requirements of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan Bylaw No. 7188.

The Environmental Impact Assessment examined impacts to valued ecosystem components. The report outlines an extensive list of mitigation measures for potential impacts related to the following areas: geotechnical and soils, hydrology and surface water quality, air quality, vegetation, wildlife, habitat connectivity, residential and recreational land use, traffic and parking, worker and public safety, visual resources, and historic resources. There are numerous mitigation strategies identified for each area. An example of a specific mitigation measure which will be implemented for each impact category is as follows:

- Following City of Edmonton Erosion and Sedimentation Control Guidelines.
- Development of an ECO Plan and implementing best environmental construction practices.
- Implementing City of Edmonton Emissions Management Plan.
- Reclaiming temporarily disturbed areas using appropriate native plantings and native seed mixes.
- Install through the use of vegetated swales and associated drain pipes, rain gardens, conventional deck drainage and planted areas so surface water flows are managed to minimize overland flow downslope and into the City storm water system.
- Replacing lost and damaged trees pursuant to the Corporate Tree Management Policy.
- Marking project clearing limits with highly visible flagging.
- Limiting construction working hours as per Bylaw 14600 (Community Standards Bylaw).
- Temporary fencing where construction is located near recreation areas.
- Construction schedule will seek to minimize lane closures during construction.
- Installing warning signs around staging areas, active construction and construction traffic access points.
- Ensuring that architectural design complements the existing river valley aesthetic.
- Suspending work and contacting Alberta Culture and Tourism if potential historic resources are discovered.

The Environmental Impact Assessment also highlights the following positive impacts from the River Valley Mechanized Access project:

- Improved connectivity between downtown and the river valley for residents.
- Improved accessibility to the river valley.
- Provide a sustainable approach to drainage.
- Provision of additional recreational amenities.
- River Valley Mechanized Access facility operation improving accessibility to river valley views.

Policy

Capital City Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan:

- Section 4.4.15.5: River Valley Connections: Embrace the North Saskatchewan River Valley as the defining natural space of our City, by enhancing stairway and pathway connections between the Downtown and the river valley; consider such options as re-introducing a funicular railway or providing a weather protected escalator as an attractive, inventive people mover.

The Way We Grow, Edmonton's Municipal Development Plan:

- 5.1.1.4: Seek opportunities to enhance civic pride and promote tourism by designing and constructing new civic buildings and spaces to feature the city's natural beauty and to meet high standards for urban design, architecture, landscape architecture and public art.

The Way We Live, Edmonton's People Plan:

- 2.2: The City of Edmonton provides for the well-being of its citizens through outstanding parks, natural, green and public spaces.

Corporate Outcomes

This project contributes to the corporate outcomes "Edmonton is attractive and compact" and "Edmontonians use facilities and services that promote healthy living" since it makes it easier for residents to access the North Saskatchewan River Valley and take advantage of the long network of recreational trails. While encouraging physical activity, the River Valley Mechanized Access also creates a signature public space that enhances the experience of enjoying the views and vistas of the river.

Public Consultation

An Open House for the River Valley Mechanized Access project was held on April 8, 2015, at City Hall. In conjunction with the open house, an online survey was conducted between the April 7 and April 22, 2015, which was promoted through social media, news media and signage next to the existing staircase into the river valley. The City received 539 responses to the survey.

Approximately two thirds of the respondents were supportive of the project, with numerous commenters pleased that the funicular would increase access into the river valley for wheelchair users, bicyclists, or parents with strollers. Based upon previous experiences with funiculars in other cities, many respondents also felt that the project will become a destination and potential tourist attraction in the central river valley.

A minority of respondents did not support the project due to the estimated construction budget, while others had concerns about the maintenance and operational costs associated with the mechanized components. The specific environmental concerns focused primarily on potential impacts to the river valley slopes, as well as visual/aesthetic impacts. Geotechnical and visual resources impacts are addressed in the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Budget/Financial Implications

Council approved a capital budget of \$34.4 million for the River Valley Alliance Connective Infrastructure (Profile number 12-17-6100) to develop the River Valley Mechanized Access and Touch the Water Promenade. A Master Agreement with the River Valley Alliance and Building Canada Fund is in place to fund these projects, which includes the River Valley Mechanized Access Environmental Impact Assessment and River Valley Mechanized Access Site Location Study costs.

Legal Implications

The terms of the agreements between the City and the River Valley Alliance and between the River Valley Alliance and the Building Canada Fund require all projects to be completed before year end 2017.

Justification of Recommendation

1. Approval of the River Valley Mechanized Access Environmental Impact Assessment and the River Valley Mechanized Access Site Location Study is required under the *North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan*, Bylaw No. 7188 (the “Bylaw”) to advance the project.
2. The River Valley Mechanized Access location must be deemed essential and approved under the Bylaw to advance the project.

Attachments

1. River Valley Mechanized Access Environmental Impact Assessment
2. River Valley Mechanized Access Site Location Study

(Note: Both of these attachments are available at www.edmonton.ca. Due to their size, Administration has not printed individual copies but will have copies available for public viewing at the Office of the City Clerk, 3rd Floor, City Hall and at the meeting)

Others Reviewing this Report

- R. Smyth, Acting General Manager, Community Services
- A. Laughlin, Acting General Manager, Integrated Infrastructure Services
- D. Wandzura, General Manager, Transportation Services
- T. Burge, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer