

Engagement Summary

Targeted stakeholder engagement and an online survey were conducted from May to June of 2024. Engagement efforts were primarily focused on informing opportunities for future projects, programs and initiatives to support the planting, maintenance, and expansion of Edmonton's urban forest, but were also intended to gain an understanding of Edmontonians' sentiments towards trees on private property. This document summarizes engagement efforts and what we heard.

Engagement was conducted at the **ADVISE** level, which means the City consulted the public to gather feedback and perspectives that were considered for this project.

Targeted engagement with Indigenous groups was not conducted during this phase of engagement. Administration and various stakeholders identified the need to incorporate Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge into the City's tree programs and initiatives to meaningfully inform future work.

Additional work would be required to fully understand the benefits, risks, and costs of the potential future programs or initiatives outlined in the report. If directed to pursue any of the options provided in this report, part of that work would include assessing potential engagement and communications needs. This may include conducting further engagement, including Indigenous engagement.

Who We Heard From and How We Listened

A variety of engagement tactics were used to gather stakeholder feedback, including:

- Targeted stakeholder Interviews held with representatives from the development industry and environmental stakeholder groups
- A presentation to the Energy Transition and Climate Resilience Committee (ETCRC)
- Sharing the draft report and attachments to targeted stakeholders via email for feedback
- An online survey open to all Edmontonians for three weeks

Targeted Stakeholder Interviews

Ten targeted stakeholder interviews took place with development industry representatives and representatives from environmental stakeholder groups throughout May 2024. The goal of the interviews was to gather feedback on opportunities for future work to support Edmonton's canopy targets.

Attachment 4

Four interviews were conducted with stakeholders representing the development industry. Participants represented the perspectives of industry stakeholders working in both redeveloping (infill) and developing (greenfield) contexts.

Participants included:

- Infill Development in Edmonton Association (IDEA)
- Canadian Home Builders Association – Edmonton Region (CHBA-ER) and the Urban Development Institute – Edmonton Metro (UDI-EM)¹
- Landscape Architects

Six interviews were conducted with representatives from environmental stakeholder groups whose mandates are related to tree retention and planting, community partnerships, and environmental conservation in Edmonton. Participants included:

- Edmonton and Area Land Trust
- Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition
- Tree Canada
- Edmonton Native Plant Society
- Sierra Club
- North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society

A presentation to the Energy Transition Climate Resilience Committee (ETCRC) was made on May 17, 2024. ETCRC is made up of 15 Edmontonians who provide advice to Council and strategic perspectives on issues relating to energy transition and climate resilience in Edmonton.

A draft version of the report and attachments was shared with external stakeholders via email for feedback from June 18 to July 9, 2024. Recipients included industry stakeholders, environmental stakeholders, community leagues, and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL).

Ten responses were received from:

- Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues
- Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition
- BILD-EM (formerly CHBA-ER and UDI-ER)
- Windsor Park Community League
- Ritchie Community League
- North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society
- Scona District Community Council
- Glenora Civics Committee
- Residents at large

¹ Canadian Home Builders Association – Edmonton Region and Urban Development Institute – Edmonton Metro have now consolidated into BILD-Edmonton Metro (BILD-EM)

Online Survey

An online survey was open for feedback from May 2 to May 20, 2024. The objectives of the survey were to understand Edmontonians' sentiments towards trees on private property and awareness of existing City programs to inform opportunities for future projects, programs and initiatives. The survey was distributed to the Edmonton Insight Community, made available on the City's website and promoted through the City Building Newsletter. The survey received 5,572 responses.

What We Heard

Targeted Stakeholder Engagement

Industry stakeholders have expressed that City priorities including density targets, tree canopy goals, and housing affordability are difficult to achieve at the same time.

Industry stakeholders generally do not support introducing a private tree bylaw, and advocate that tree retention on public land should be the City's focus. Stakeholders outlined that tree retention is challenging because it can compromise a site's buildability. If a tree impacts the buildability of an individual site or new neighbourhood, it will be removed. Industry stakeholders identified that the lack of tree retention and landscaping regulation compliance comes down to homeowner preferences. At times, developers observe homeowners removing landscaping that complies with the Zoning Bylaw once the homeowners receive all of their City approvals.

For redeveloping (infill) contexts, industry stakeholders identified that maintaining housing affordability is essential, therefore tree retention often faces challenges when it increases project costs. Industry stakeholders suggested incentives to enhance tree retention during redevelopment include shortening the landscaping securities period, offering additional height or flexibility for setbacks, providing grants or tax incentives to developers, and waiving fees when trees are preserved.

In developing (greenfield) contexts, industry stakeholders identified that while existing tree stands may be preserved during the initial development of new neighborhoods, they are often removed as lots are prepared for future use. Tree retention incentives outlined in Zoning Bylaw 20001 are seldom applied as greenfield lots rarely have existing trees. The placement of underground utilities also poses a significant challenge to planting and retaining trees in new neighborhoods. Educating homeowners on the benefits of retaining planted trees on their properties could positively influence their behavior and support tree retention efforts.

When speaking to landscape architects, they expressed that the utility service providers' approach to installing utilities often restricts the retention and planting of trees. Updating the City's Design and Construction Standards and the Complete Streets Guide to better accommodate unique sites and existing trees could create more opportunities for tree preservation. Additionally, design incentives are needed to encourage projects to surpass minimum landscaping standards. Partnering with environmental agencies, which are often willing to support stewardship efforts, could further advance the City's tree retention and planting goals.

Feedback from environmental stakeholders included different perspectives regarding private tree protection bylaws. While some groups saw them as essential, others argue that without cultural shifts, financial incentives, and rigorous tree canopy goals, a private tree bylaw may not be effective. It was also expressed that canopy loss is occurring due to lack of enforcement, homeowner preferences, fear of tree roots interfering with utilities, removing mature trees and replanting with new smaller ones, and inadequate tree protection during construction. Achieving Edmonton's canopy goals will require a holistic approach that combines education, maintenance, and the promotion of native species, along with financial and regulatory incentives.

In response to the May 17, 2024 presentation, ETCRC highlighted the need to consider the negative impact of tree shade on solar panels and other renewables. The Committee also recommended balancing natural species with climate change-resistant trees to ensure they thrive in Edmonton's future climate.

The Committee suggests engaging the public in tree care and planting, such as through schools and public sector entities, and adopting a coordinated approach between different business areas and partners, with the Climate Task Force as a potential facilitator. A holistic approach to selecting and communicating an optimal mix of tree species is also advised, ensuring that if fruit trees are selected, they contribute to food security efforts. Additionally, including exhibition lands in greening discussions presents a significant opportunity for urban enhancement.

A draft of the report and attachments were shared and open for feedback from June 18 - July 9. A summary of the comments are noted below:

- Industry and community groups shared support for the work the City is doing to grow the tree canopy
- There were mixed sentiments with regards to whether a private tree bylaw should be explored further and whether it would be effective

- Residents shared their preference for the City not to further regulate trees on private property. Mature trees require maintenance and sometimes removal to prevent hazards, and homeowners should not have to incur the costs and delays of seeking City approvals.
- Some stakeholders expressed concerns that canopy loss occurs when existing tree stands are removed as new neighbourhoods are developed.
- Some community groups did not support the proposed enhanced zoning incentives.
- Community groups shared their concerns about low levels of compliance with the landscaping requirements and lack of enforcement for small-scale development.
- Community groups shared their concerns that funding has not been appropriately allocated to the maintenance efforts needed to meet the City's canopy goals.

Online Survey

Sentiment around trees on private property

The majority (92 per cent) of survey respondents had trees on their property. Among those (n=5,142), the majority of survey respondents indicated the reasons for having trees were beautification (84 per cent), shade (63 per cent), privacy (59 per cent), environmental benefits (58 per cent), among other reasons.

Survey respondents who do not have trees on their property (n=430), indicated the top reasons to be:

- They don't have space for trees on their property (21 per cent)
- They were unsure as they didn't own the property (16 per cent)
- They preferred to have no trees on their property (14 per cent)
- They prefer other landscaping features (13 per cent)
- They can't afford to purchase or install trees (9 per cent)
- 41 per cent respondents indicated other reasons in the open text box which included living in an apartment, perceiving trees as a danger to the property, and removal (due to disease, damage to property, and interference with utilities)

About two-thirds (63 per cent) of survey respondents indicated that they had removed trees from their property. Among those (n=3,513), the top five reasons for removing trees on their property include:

- The tree was damaged, diseased, infested, or dead (66 per cent)
- The tree was growing too close to their house and/or other structures on the property (26 per cent)

- The tree was growing too close to fences and/or the property line (19 per cent)
- The tree was growing too close to the foundation of the house (19 per cent)
- The tree was too much maintenance and/or created a mess (16 per cent)

Awareness of programs

The majority of survey respondents (63 per cent) are aware that the City requires landscaping for new residential development.

The majority of survey respondents indicated that they know how to plant trees (72 per cent strongly to somewhat agree) and how to maintain (81 per cent agree) trees on their property. 44 per cent of survey respondents agree that they would like more information from the City about how to plant and maintain trees.

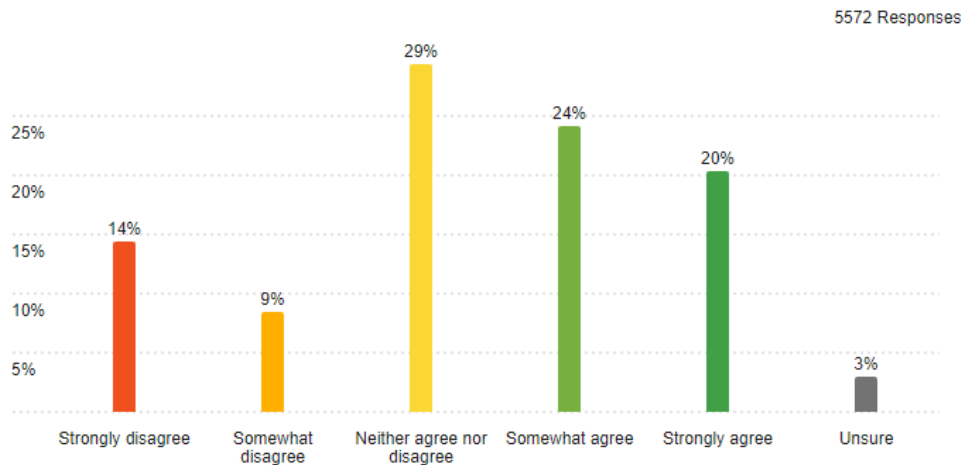


Figure 1. Responses to statement “I want more information from the City of Edmonton about how to plant and maintain trees”.

About half of the survey respondents indicated they had not heard of any of the City initiatives and programs (54 per cent). Among those who have heard of the City initiatives and programs, the majority have not participated in them. Where survey respondents indicated awareness of existing City programs, respondents were most familiar with the Root for Trees program (31 per cent of respondents) and the Commemorative Tree program (28 per cent of respondents).

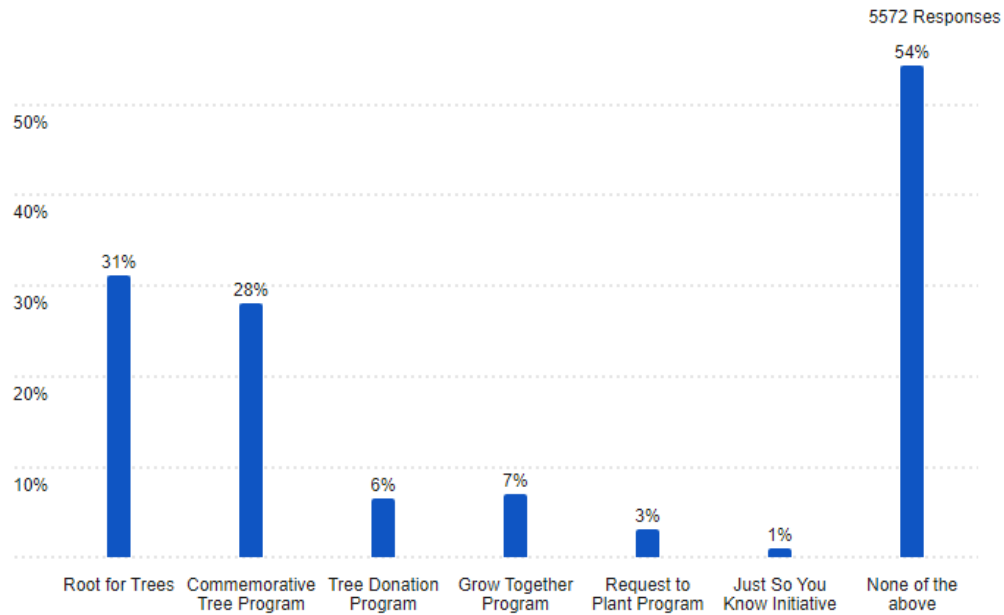


Figure 2. Responses to statement “Before today, have you heard about any of the following initiatives and programs provided by the City of Edmonton? Select all that apply.”

General feedback

As a final survey question, Administration asked participants “Do you have anything else you would like to share with us about trees on your property?”

Many Edmontonians had positive views of having more trees in the city because of their cooling, air purifying, and soil retention features.

Concerns about trees on private property include hazards during storms, falling leaves or fruit, pests, diseases, and root interference with utilities, along with maintenance burdens from neighboring trees. Many respondents preferred not to have further regulations on private property, citing the importance of private property rights, while a few supported increased intervention by the City and support for a private tree bylaw. Financial challenges related to buying and maintaining trees were also noted as barriers to having trees on private property.

Areas for improvement include better enforcement of landscaping requirements and maintenance of public trees. Future education programs could focus on disease prevention, native species, environmentally-focused landscaping, and incentives for tree preservation. Numerous survey participants urged the City to take a more

active role in managing both public and private trees, particularly those that are diseased.

Some respondents expressed concerns that trees are being removed to build more housing in infill settings. Additionally, lots are being subdivided to increase density, but yard spaces are being reduced, making it harder to have trees and meet the landscaping requirements.

GBA+ Analysis of Survey Results

The survey responses included perspectives from diverse respondents as outlined below:

Age Distribution

Among the 5,572 survey respondents:

- 1 per cent identified as a person under 24 years of age
- 8 per cent identified as a person between 25-34 years of age
- 35 per cent identified as a person between 35-54 years of age
- 22 per cent identified as a person between 55-64 years of age
- 29 per cent identified as a person over the age of 65
- 5 per cent did not answer

Identity Representation

Among the 5,572 survey respondents:

- 5.5 per cent identified as a person of a visible minority
- 9.6 per cent identified as a person with a disability
- 1.9 per cent identified as an Indigenous person
- 0.4 per cent identified as a newcomer to Canada
- 7.1 per cent identified as an immigrant
- 5.8 per cent identified as a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community
- 50.1 per cent identified that they were not part of any of these identified groups
- 4.7 per cent did not answer the question
- 22.2 per cent identified being part of other identity groups not listed

Renters versus Owners

- Owners were more likely to agree that they know how to maintain trees on their property (84 per cent), whereas 63 per cent of renters agreed that they know how to maintain trees on their rental property.

- Property owners were more likely than renters to have accessed resources to increase their knowledge about planting and maintaining trees (64 per cent for owners; 38 per cent for renters).

Developing versus Redeveloping Areas

- Survey participants living in both the developing and redeveloping areas shared that beautification, shade, privacy and environmental benefits were their top reasons for having trees on their property.
- Survey participants living in redeveloping areas were more likely to remove trees from their property (67 per cent of respondents in redeveloping areas had removed a tree from their property, versus 45 per cent in developing areas).

Age

- Survey respondents from older age categories were more likely to report having trees on their property (94 per cent among those 65+, compared to 83 per cent among those 34 years old or younger).

Income

- Respondents with higher incomes (\$150k+) were more likely to report having trees on their property (94 per cent) than lower income groups (82 per cent for the <\$30k income group).
- As participants' income levels increased, they reported more knowledge in their ability to plant trees on their property. Survey respondents with a household income lower than \$30,000 per year were less likely to agree that they know how to plant trees on their property (58 per cent compared to 76 per cent among those with a household income of \$150,000 and above).
- There was a slight trend observed between income levels and reported knowledge of maintaining trees – participants who disclosed having higher incomes were slightly more likely to report having knowledge of how to maintain trees on their property (85 per cent for those with a household income of \$150K or more) than respondents with lower incomes (70 per cent for those making less than \$30K).

Education

- The survey data indicates that the higher the level of respondents' education, the more likely they were to show interest in receiving additional information from the City about how to plant and maintain trees. Respondents with a high school education or less were less likely to agree that they want more information from the City on how to plant and maintain trees (36 per cent)

Attachment 4

than those with a post secondary certificate or diploma (42 per cent) and respondents who were university graduates (49 per cent).