

## 5440 & 5450 - Whitemud Road NW

### Position of Administration: Support



## Summary

Bylaw 21050 proposes a rezoning from the Rural Residential Zone (RR) to a Direct Control Zone (DC) to allow for a health and wellness centre.

Public engagement for this application included a pre-application notice from the applicant, a mailed notice, information on the City's webpage, an Engaged Edmonton webpage and an in-person public engagement session. 93 people were heard from, with approximately 52% in support and 33% in opposition. Most concerns were related to traffic impacts and compatibility with the surrounding residential neighbourhood.

Administration supports this application because it:

- Aligns with The City Plan's intention to support Edmonton's identity as a winter city through its infrastructure, design, events, and economy

- Aligns with The City Plan’s direction to conserve, restore, and connect natural areas and ecological networks within the built environment for human and ecosystem health
- Provides an opportunity to introduce a Nordic spa and wellness centre for Edmontonians.

## Application Details

This application was submitted by Stantec Consulting Ltd. on behalf of Scandinave Group Inc.

### Rezoning

The proposed Direct Control Zone (DC) is intended to accommodate a Nordic spa, which is a unique development that includes a specific combination of land uses not found together in any standard commercial zone. The rezoning site is also adjacent to the river valley and includes a portion of land below the top of bank that requires specific regulations. As such the proposed rezoning is for a DC zone that would allow development with the following characteristics:

- Permitted uses which limit commercial development to the intended health and wellness centre
- A maximum building height of 16.0 m (approximately 4 storeys)
- A maximum allowable Floor Area Ratio of 0.37
- 6.0 m setbacks from surrounding properties
- No development allowed below the river valley top of bank.

### Site and Surrounding Area

	Existing Zoning	Current Development
<b>Subject Site</b>	Rural Residential (RR)	Vacant (Previously the location of Soaring House)
<b>North, South, &amp; East</b>	Small Scale Residential (RS)	Single detached houses
<b>West</b>	Rural Residential (RR)	Undeveloped public land (North Saskatchewan River Valley)



*The existing site entrance, facing west from Whitemud Rd NW*

## **Community Insights**

This application was brought forward to the public using an expanded approach. This approach was selected because the application was a unique proposal involving site specific features and was expected to elicit a strong public response. The expanded approach included an in-person public engagement event hosted by the applicant, pre-application notice by the applicant, an in-person public engagement event hosted by City Administration, an Engaged Edmonton webpage, mailed notices, and a rezoning information webpage.

### **Pre-Application Notice (from applicant), July 25, 2024**

- Notification radius: 600 metres
- Number of recipients: 1,118
- Number of responses (as reported by the applicant): 24
- Main comments received (as reported by the applicant):
  - Traffic congestion
  - Parking issues
  - Safety
  - Tree preservation

### **Mailed Notice, October 7, 2024**

- Notification radius: 400 metres
- Recipients: 428
- Responses: 17
  - In support: 6 (35%)

- In opposition: 9 (53%)
- Mixed/Questions only: 2 (12%)

### **Public Engagement Session, October 29, 2024**

- Attendees: 104

### **Engaged Edmonton Webpage, October 7, 2024 to October 17, 2024**

- Site visits: 1640
- Aware: 1640
- Informed: 661
- Engaged: 46
  - In support: 20
  - In opposition: 12
  - Mixed/Questions only: 7

### **Webpage**

- [edmonton.ca/rezoningapplications](https://edmonton.ca/rezoningapplications)

### **Notified Community Organizations**

- Riverbend Community League
- Southwest Community Area Council

### **Common Comments Heard**

- Mixed feedback about traffic and parking impacts
- Mixed feedback about preservation of the natural landscape
- Concerns about the compatibility of a commercial use and neighbourhood character
- Concerns about the viability of the proposed use and potential repurposing of the site
- Support for the potential local amenity in the community
- Support for the economic benefits of the proposed use

A “What We Heard” Public Engagement Report is found in Appendix 1.

## Application Analysis



*Aerial image of the surrounding context, including the 10 m wide strip of land within the City's option-to-purchase agreement and river valley top of bank.*

The proposed rezoning is intended to accommodate a Nordic spa, which is a type of development that typically includes hot and cold outdoor pools in a natural setting with supporting commercial amenities such as massage, food and drink services, and lounging areas. As the site is located next to the river valley with mature trees throughout the property, the proposed DC Zone contains regulations that accommodate the unique combination of uses while preserving the natural setting.

The rezoning site consists of two private parcels adjacent to the North Saskatchewan River Valley that are anticipated to be consolidated prior to development. The west portion of the site contains land below the top of the bank. While this area is private property, the proposed DC Zone prohibits development below the top of bank, which is consistent with standard practice throughout Edmonton's river valley and in the surrounding public land.

Neighbourhood access to the river valley and the Fort Edmonton Footbridge is currently limited. There is an existing Agreement between the City and the University of Alberta that involves the potential purchase of a 10 meter wide strip along the north property line that would connect Whitemud Road NW to existing public land below the top of the bank. The Agreement will be triggered at the development permit stage at such time, the City will consider the purchase of this land. Purchase of this land will provide future access for the public, forestry maintenance, and wildland fire fighting through this 10 m wide strip.

## The City Plan

The proposed health and wellness centre is an outdoor commercial land use that remains open during winter months. This type of development aligns with The City Plan's intention to support Edmonton's identity as a winter city through its infrastructure, design, events, and economy.

The site is currently an equal mix of mature trees and cleared land where the previously existing mansion, tennis court, and grounds were located. The proposed DC Zone contains regulations that encourage development to preserve existing trees throughout the site which contributes to the big city move of achieving a community-wide carbon budget of 135 megatonnes. Focusing development in the areas that are already cleared also aligns with The City Plan's direction to conserve, restore, and connect natural areas and ecological networks within the built environment for human and ecosystem health.

## District Plans

This site is subject to the Whitemud District Plan where it is designated as Urban Mix. The Urban Mix land use category includes housing, shops, services and offices and allows for stand alone commercial development such as the proposed health and wellness centre.

## Land Use Compatibility

The maximum building height in the proposed zone is 16.0 metres, which is 4.0 metres above the maximum height in the surrounding Rural Residential Zone (RR). This increase in height is mitigated with 6.0 metre setbacks adjacent to surrounding residential properties. A maximum Floor Area Ratio of 0.37 will also apply to enclosed buildings, with unenclosed features such as outdoor pools being constructed only at ground level. Regulations in the proposed DC Zone require existing trees to be retained in the setback areas, with certain exceptions, and these trees will provide visual screening for the surrounding properties. The topography of the site also slopes towards the river valley which reduces the visible height of any buildings that are constructed.

Limited staff housing opportunities are allowed in the zone; however, it is understood that it is not the developer's intent to include this as part of the development. Nonetheless, the DC Zone limits residential development to a maximum of 24 sleeping units, which can accommodate a maximum of 2 people in each unit and must have shared cooking, dining, and laundry facilities. No sleeping units will be allowed on the site unless the primary commercial development already exists. Food and drink services, such as restaurants, are also not allowed on the site unless another of the spa's indoor uses already exists, such as the massage services.

The prerequisite land uses for sleeping units and food and drink services are included in the DC Zone to ensure that only a Nordic spa can be developed on the site. This is reinforced by the 10 uses allowed in the DC Zone, which is a small number compared to a standard commercial zone such as the General Commercial Zone (CG) which has 36. If the intended use of the land changes, Council's approval would be required for a subsequent rezoning to accommodate it.

	<b>RR Zone Current</b>	<b>DC Zone Proposed</b>
<b>Typical Uses</b>	Country Residential	Nordic spa
<b>Maximum Height</b>	12.0 m	16.0 m
<b>Maximum Floor Area Ratio</b>	None	0.37
<b>Setbacks Adjacent to Residential Areas (north &amp; south)</b>	7.5 m	6.0 m

## Mobility

The site will maintain its existing vehicular access to Whitemud Road NW. A secondary access for service vehicles may be permitted and will be reviewed in further detail at the development permit stage.

Based on information from the applicant, the typical operating hours for health and wellness centres occur outside of peak traffic hours which minimizes the impact to the surrounding neighbourhood. The existing local roads in the neighbourhood are able to accommodate the anticipated increase in traffic volume, and the increase in neighbourhood traffic is limited by the appointment-based nature of the proposed use.

ETS operates local, crosstown and school special bus routes near the site on Riverbend Road NW. The site is less than 400m walking distance to bus stops on Riverbend Road NW.

## Open Space

A top-of-bank walk was completed for the subject property, to confirm the river valley boundary and slope crest. The top-of-bank was delineated, as illustrated in the DC Appendix and associated North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System Protection Overlay amendment. Regulations to protect the area below the top-of-bank are included in the proposed zone, to support its preservation.

## **Geotechnical**

The site is located adjacent to the North Saskatchewan River Valley and to assess ground stability throughout the property, a geotechnical study was completed. The study's findings are included in the site plan of the proposed DC zone with a Structure Development Line that is 15 to 30 metres uphill from the top of the bank, showing where buildings and pools can be located. Regulations in the proposed zone also require future development permits to comply with the accepted study.

## **Utilities**

The applicant has submitted a Drainage Servicing Report that has been reviewed and accepted by Development Services for the purpose of supporting this rezoning application. Development allowed under the proposed zone would be required to include on-site stormwater management techniques utilizing a controlled outflow rate to mitigate its impact on the existing drainage infrastructure.

The applicant/owner will be responsible for all costs associated with providing the required water supply including any changes to the existing water infrastructure required by the proposed zoning.

## **Appendices**

1. "What We Heard" Public Engagement Report

Written By: Tom Lippiatt

Approved By: Tim Ford

Branch: Development Services

Section: Planning Coordination



# What We Heard Report

## Brander Gardens

### LDA24-0354

Edmonton

## Public Engagement Feedback Summary

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**Project Address:** 5440 & 5450 - Whitemud Road NW

**Project Description:** The City has received a rezoning application from Stantec Consulting Ltd. The current zone is the Rural Residential Zone (RR) and the proposed zone is a Direct Control Zone (DC). The proposed zone would allow for commercial uses adjacent to the North Saskatchewan River Valley, a maximum building height of 16.0 m, and 6.0 m development setbacks from adjacent property lines.

The intended development is a thermal spa that is integrated with existing trees on the site. Regulations in the proposed DC Zone limit this integrated development to the uplands of the parcel. Structures and pools associated with the thermal spa will not be allowed below the top of bank, which is an area that makes up approximately 30% of the site, facing west towards the river valley.

**Engagement Formats:** Online Engagement Webpage - Engaged Edmonton:  
<https://engaged.edmonton.ca/brandergardensspa>

In-person Open House:  
*John Janzen Nature Centre, located at 7000 - 143 Street NW in Fort Edmonton Park*

Phone and Email Engagement:  
*Postcard notices sent to 427 residents*

**Engagement Dates:** October 7, 2024 - October 17, 2024 (online)

October 29, 2024 (in-person)

- Number Of Visitors:**
- Online Engagement Webpage
    - Visited the page: 1640
    - Submitted a question or forum response: 46
  - In-person Open House
    - 104 in person

- Phone/email
    - 17 individuals
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## About This Report

The information in this report includes summarized feedback received between October 7, 2024 and October 17, 2024, through online engagement via Engaged Edmonton. It also includes feedback received through in-person engagement via an open house on October 29, 2024, as well as emails and phone calls received by the file planner.

The public feedback received will be considered during the planning analysis to ensure the review of the application takes local context into consideration and is as complete as possible. It will also be used to inform conversations with the applicant about potential revisions to the proposal to address concerns or opportunities raised.

This report is shared with all web page visitors who provided their email address for updates on this file. This summary will also be shared with the applicant and the Ward Councilor, and will be an Appendix to the Council Report should the application proceed to a Public Hearing.

The planning analysis, and how feedback informed that analysis, will be summarized in the City's report to City Council if the proposed rezoning goes to a future City Council Public Hearing for a decision. The City's report and finalized version of the applicant's proposal will be posted for public viewing on the City's public hearing agenda approximately three (3) weeks prior to a scheduled public hearing for the file.

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## Engagement Formats

An Engaged Edmonton web page was hosted on the City of Edmonton website that included an overview of the application, information on the development and plan amendment process, and contact information for the file planner. Two participation tools were available for participants: one to ask questions and one to leave feedback.

In addition to the online engagement, an in-person open house was hosted at the John Janzen Nature Centre, near the Brander Gardens neighbourhood on October 29, 2024. The open house included information similar to the Engaged Edmonton website, with display board presentations and representatives from City Administration and the applicant speaking with attendees.

The comments are summarized by the main themes below, with the number of times a similar comment was made by participants recorded in brackets following that comment.

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## Feedback Summary

This section summarizes the main themes collected.

Number of Responses:

- In Support: 20 online, 22 In-person, 6 by phone/email **(48 total)**
- In Opposition: 12 online, 10 in-person, 9 by phone/email **(31 total)**
- Mixed: 7 online, 5 in-person, 2 by phone/email **(14 total)**

The most common **concerns** heard were:

**Traffic & Safety:** Concerns were heard regarding increased local traffic as a result of the proposed development. Negative impacts to traffic flow and pedestrian safety were common themes.

**Neighbourhood Character:** Disruption to the residential character of the neighbourhood and potential nuisance conditions associated with the proposed spa were raised as concerns.

**Long-Term Viability:** The potential repurposing of the site for less desirable commercial uses than a spa, once commercial zoning was in place, was noted as a common concern throughout public engagement.

The most recurring comments of **support** heard were:

**Enhanced Community and Economic Benefits:** Positive impacts on local tourism and surrounding property values, as well as the potential community benefits of a world-class amenity were common themes.

**Preservation of the Natural Landscape:** Support for the minimal impact of the proposed development on the natural features of the River Valley was heard frequently throughout public engagement.

**Lower impact on Traffic and Neighbourhood:** The relatively low neighbourhood impact and traffic volumes anticipated from the proposed spa was considered to be favourable by multiple residents when compared to alternative development proposals.

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## What We Heard

The following section includes a summary of collected comments with the number of times a comment was recorded in brackets (comments received once do not have a number).

## Reasons For Opposition

### Traffic & Safety

- Increased traffic from spa attendees and employees (13)
- Exacerbated congestion and safety issues within the neighbourhood (8)
- Overflow parking into the neighbourhood (6)
- Impeded traffic flow causing negative impacts to pedestrian safety (5)

### Neighbourhood Character

- Disruption to the neighbourhood's established residential identity due to commercial zoning
- Desire to preserve residential character and to prioritize housing, given Edmonton's growing population and housing needs (5)
- Noise pollution if the spa attracts large crowds or hosts outdoor events (3)
- Potential straining of local infrastructure due to on-site employee housing (3)
- Proposed development may be better suited to a location already zoned for commercial activities elsewhere in the city
- Potential decreases in property values

### Long-Term Viability

- Potential for the site to become underutilized or repurposed for less desirable commercial uses in the future if the spa project is abandoned (2)
- Rezoning sets a precedent for future commercial developments that might not align with the character of the neighbourhood or the surrounding natural area

## Reasons For Support

### Enhanced Community and Economic Benefits

- Brings a unique and high quality amenity to the city (32)
- Allows locals and visitors to enjoy the River Valley in a way that a residential development would not, contributing to increased neighbourhood vibrancy and property values (12)
- Positive impacts on the local economy through increases in tourism revenue (6)

### Preservation of the Natural Landscape

- Will maintain green space, trees, and other existing natural features, offering a less ecologically disruptive alternative to other proposed developments, such as high-density residential housing (9)
- Designed to integrate seamlessly into the surrounding natural environment of the River Valley (2)

### Lower Impact on Traffic and Neighbourhood

- Expected to generate less traffic than alternative developments, such as residential housing complexes and other forms of commercial development, which would result in more vehicles at all hours (3)

- Quieter, more controlled use of the site compared to other proposed options, which could bring more disruption to the neighbourhood (3)
- Most visitation occurs at off-peak hours, minimizing its impact on traffic (2)

## Suggestions For Improvement

- Ensure adequate on-site parking to prevent overflow into the surrounding residential area (11)
  - Add another access route to the site to alleviate traffic pressure (6)
  - Relocate the entrance of the site to a less congested area (such as 53rd or 54th Avenue) to mitigate traffic and safety concerns (3)
  - Limit driving speeds by reassessing traffic calming measures and signage (3)
  - Offer lower-cost options or resident discounts to ensure local accessibility and mitigate potential exclusivity (2)
  - Secure dedicated River Valley access and walking trails as part of the development plan, for community use and accessibility (2)
  - Ensure that the final design maintains the tree line, limits building height to 12.0 meters, and includes structures that complement the landscape
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## Web Page Visitor Definitions

### Aware (1640)

An aware visitor, or a visitor that we consider to be 'aware', has made one single visit to the page, but not clicked any further than the main page.

### Informed (661)

An informed visitor has taken the 'next step' from being aware and clicked on something. We now consider the visitor to be informed about the project. This is done because a click suggests interest in the project.

### Engaged (46)

Every visitor that contributes on the page, either by asking questions or leaving a comment, is considered to be 'engaged'.

Engaged and informed are subsets of aware. That means that every engaged visitor is also always informed AND aware. In other words, a visitor cannot be engaged without also being informed AND aware. At the same time, an informed visitor is also always aware.

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## Next Steps

The public feedback received will be considered during the planning analysis and will be included in the administration report for City Council. The administration report and finalized version of the applicant's proposal will be posted for public viewing on the [City's public hearing agenda](#) website approximately three (3) weeks prior to a scheduled public hearing for the file.

When the applicant is ready to take the application to Council (the Administration makes a recommendation of Support or Non-Support):

- Notice of Public Hearing date will be sent to surrounding property owners and applicable nearby Community Leagues and Business Associations.
- Once the Council Public Hearing Agenda is posted online, members of the public may register to speak at Council by completing the form at [edmonton.ca/meetings](http://edmonton.ca/meetings) or calling the Office of the City Clerk at 780-496-8178.
- Members of the public may listen to the Public hearing on-line via [edmonton.ca/meetings](http://edmonton.ca/meetings).
- Members of the public can submit written comments to the City Clerk ([city.clerk@edmonton.ca](mailto:city.clerk@edmonton.ca)).

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If you have questions about this application please contact:

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