

## RIBBON OF GREEN STRATEGIC PLAN

### Recommendation

That Urban Planning Committee recommend to City Council:

That the Ribbon of Green North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System Master Plan (Enclosure I of the Parks and Recreation Department report dated May 21, 1992) be repealed.

<b>Requested Action</b>	Council decision required
<b>ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle</b>	<b>ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals</b>
<b>CONNECTED</b> This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	<b>Healthy City</b>
<b>City Plan Values</b>	PRESERVE
<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</li> <li>• C594 - Open Space Policy</li> <li>• North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan, Bylaw 20996</li> <li>• Natural Connections Strategic Plan</li> <li>• Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy</li> <li>• River Valley Trail Strategy</li> </ul>
<b>Related Council Discussions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• November 27, 1990, City Council report Ribbon of Green: North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System Concept Plan</li> <li>• July 28, 1992, City Council report Urban Parks Program, Phase II - Extension of Capital City Recreation Park</li> <li>• July 10, 2020, City Council memo, Ribbon of Green (Southwest and Northeast). (Note: the original City Council report CR_6693 was cancelled and advanced to City Council as a memo due to COVID-related disruptions to City Council meetings)</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>• September 17, 2024, Urban Planning and Economy report UPE02475, River</li> </ul>

- Valley Planning Modernization Phase 3 and 4 Update
- August 18, 2025, City Council Public Hearing, Bylaw 20996 - To adopt a new North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan

### Executive Summary

- The value of the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System and the importance of protecting it for environmental purposes and public recreational access have long been acknowledged.
- The Ribbon of Green Concept Plan (1990) and Ribbon of Green Master Plan (1992) provided early planning direction for the long-term use, care and management of the river valley.
- The Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan (2025) has been developed to replace the original Ribbon of Green Master Plan. It provides updated planning guidance to address modern-day challenges and opportunities: climate change mitigation and adaptation, Indigenous reconciliation and engagement and current best practices in parks and ecological planning.
- Renewing the Ribbon of Green involved conversations across City departments and with Indigenous Nations and Communities, partner organizations and the public.

### REPORT

Edmonton's North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System (River Valley) is a highly valued ecological, recreational and active transportation corridor through the city. It is a place of cultural significance, supporting individual and community wellness, a draw for tourism and the core of Edmonton's open space network. The river, creeks, riparian areas, woodlands and geological features provide habitats and corridors for diverse wildlife and plants, forming an ecological network that maintains wildlife movement and healthy ecological flows across the Edmonton region.

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

#### Early Plans for the River Valley: Ribbon of Green Concept Plan and Master Plan

The value of the River Valley and the importance of protecting it for environmental purposes and public recreational access have long been acknowledged. Enabled by funding made available through the provincial Urban Parks Program (Phase II) in the early 1990s, the Ribbon of Green Concept Plan<sup>1</sup> (1990) and Ribbon of Green Master Plan<sup>2</sup> (1992) were developed to undertake

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<sup>1</sup> City of Edmonton. Ribbon of Green: North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System Concept Plan. November 1990.

[https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PDF/Ribbon\\_of\\_Green\\_Concept\\_Plan.pdf](https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PDF/Ribbon_of_Green_Concept_Plan.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> City of Edmonton. Ribbon of Green: North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System Concept Plan. July 1992.

[https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PDF/Ribbon\\_of\\_GreenMaster\\_Plan.pdf](https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PDF/Ribbon_of_GreenMaster_Plan.pdf)

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planning for the long-term use, care and management of the River Valley. Together, these plans established a publicly supported vision, management approach, general development program and prioritization criteria for the entire River Valley, as well as specific plans for priority areas. City Council approved the Ribbon of Green North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System Master Plan at its July 29, 1992 meeting.

### **A New Chapter: The River Valley Planning Modernization Project**

Over the last several years, Administration has worked with Indigenous Nations and communities, partner organizations and the public on the River Valley Planning Modernization (RVPM) project. Along with renewing the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan (River Valley ARP), the project included developing an updated plan for the River Valley to replace the Ribbon of Green Concept Plan (1990) and Master Plan (1992). The new plan, the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan (Attachment 1), draws upon the philosophy, vision and principles from the original plans, acknowledging the continued value and importance of these commitments. It also provides updated planning guidance to address modern-day challenges and opportunities: climate change mitigation and adaptation, Indigenous reconciliation and engagement and current best practices in parks and ecological planning.

The Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan was developed in tandem with the renewed River Valley ARP, which was approved by Council in August 2025. Where the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan provides high-level planning guidance for the River Valley, the River Valley ARP is a statutory plan, providing land use policies that set the development pattern for the plan area and guide the evaluation of future development proposals. Together, the Ribbon of Green and River Valley ARP provide an overarching planning and land use policy framework for the River Valley.

With the new Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan in place, Administration is seeking Council's approval to rescind the approved 1992 Ribbon of Green Master Plan to ensure there is no conflicting direction. The 2025 Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan is being shared with City Council for information. Given that the new plan is within the City Manager's delegated authority, City Council's formal approval is not required.

### **Overview of the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan (2025)**

The Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan:

- Outlines a vision for the future of the River Valley.
- Contains policy direction to guide decision making, further planning, monitoring and management of the River Valley and Ravine System.
- Informs collaboration, public engagement and partnerships with communities, organizations and other orders of government.
- Defines and applies land management classifications (LMCs) to outline the protection and level of programming appropriate for different locations within the River Valley and Ravine System, including areas for Preservation, Conservation and Active/Working Landscapes.

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- Provides spatial program and ecological guidance for each “reach,” or segment, of the River Valley and Ravine System to inform future site-specific planning.

The Ribbon of Green Plan Guide<sup>3</sup> provides a concise overview of the plan.

### **Implementing the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan**

Several key implementation items will be critical to the successful delivery of the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan. A high-level action plan for implementation of the Ribbon of Green and River Valley ARP is included as Attachment 2 - River Valley Planning Modernization Action Plan. The action plan outlines both program and partnership items for advancing the direction within the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan, including: a River Valley monitoring and reporting plan, River Valley trail strategy, land assembly and capital program and Indigenous partnerships. In the coming months, Administration will work to prioritize these items and build out their scope in more detail.

Administration will review the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan at regular intervals to address changes to the planning context, emerging trends, implementation progress and policy gaps. This will ensure that the plan remains relevant and reflects adaptive management best practices.

### **Budget/Financial Implications**

The proposed plan presents no immediate financial implications. Any subsequent financial impacts resulting from the new plan will be requested through the City's established four-year or supplemental budget processes, as necessary.

### **Legal Implications**

In accordance with Section 4.1.2 of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan lands identified as River Valley Open Space (as shown on Map 1 of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan) should be planned in accordance with the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan. The Ribbon of Green is not a statutory document and does not need to be formally approved by Council. The Ribbon of Green provides administrative policy direction and guidance for these specific lands which are held by the City of Edmonton and does not impact privately held land within the River Valley.

### **Community Insight**

The August 18, 2025 Urban Planning and Economy report Bylaw 20996 To adopt a new North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan included findings and actions for all phases of engagement for the River Valley Planning Modernization, including What We Heard Reports.

#### Public Engagement

A comprehensive, multi-year engagement process was delivered as part of the RVPM project, with engagement activities at both the Refine and Advise levels of the City's public engagement spectrum. Engagement opportunities were designed to be accessible to a wide audience, including Edmontonians who live, work and play in and around the River Valley, as well as community

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<sup>3</sup> City of Edmonton. Ribbon of Green Plan Guide. June 2024.

<https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/Ribbon-of-Green-Plan-Guide.pdf?cb=1767728191>

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organizations representing a variety of existing and potential River Valley users and uses. Across all four phases of the project, more than 10,000 responses were recorded through engagement activities including in-person and online workshops, surveys, pop-up/intercept engagement sessions and online interactive maps.

### Indigenous Engagement

A separate, parallel stream of engagement focused on inviting input from Indigenous Nations and communities with connections to the River Valley lands and the region. While the same opportunities were provided to share feedback on the draft plan materials, the RVPM project was also the 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. The Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan's spatial and policy guidance reflects input at a strategic level, but there is work ahead and ongoing engagement with Nations and communities to define a path forward together.

### **GBA+**

As a city-wide shared asset, the River Valley 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 was essential that the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan reflect and account for the diverse perspectives, abilities and lived experiences of Edmontonians.

The RVPM project applied a GBA+ process in two primary ways:

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

Administration's review of existing literature found that a number of socially vulnerable communities 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.

To help address barriers to participation that some communities may face, as part of the engagement process, the project team worked with community agencies to organize accessible pop-up sessions that engaged community members from previously underrepresented groups.

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.

### **Environment and Climate Review**

The River Valley is an important natural asset for Edmonton and the surrounding area. It has many environmental benefits that include support for biodiversity, removal of atmospheric pollutants, mitigation of climate change by capturing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, mitigation of urban heat island effect by cooling the surrounding area and acting as a natural

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stormwater management system by slowing runoff and filtering pollutants before they enter the North Saskatchewan River.

The Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan considers the many potential and desired uses of the River Valley and provides guidance on balancing environmental protection with access for Indigenous uses, health, recreation and some level of commercial activity. It defines the three land management classifications that will direct future levels of development, as well as land uses and activities within the system. This plan also provides appropriate guidance for assessing potential environmental and climate impacts of new development in the River Valley by protecting sensitive areas, minimizing development in the River Valley, aligning developments to City Policy C627 - Climate Resilience Policy and how to plan and assess site-specific locations for future proposed developments.

- Ongoing, stable funding is required to deliver on the items outlined in Attachment 2 - River Valley Planning Modernization Action Plan, including monitoring and assessment of impacts of development in the River Valley. A strategic approach to these activities is needed to support the overall ecological health of the system.

Beyond the actions outlined in the River Valley Planning Modernization Action Plan, there could be additional consideration in the following areas.

- As the Ribbon of Green is implemented, including through the delivery of RVPM Action Plan projects, consider updated information about how Edmonton's changing climate will impact the River Valley and whether any additional actions could or should be proactively taken to better protect the health of the ecosystem and support climate action.
- Due to the interconnectedness of the North Saskatchewan River watershed, consideration could be given to establishing and maintaining communication and coordination with relevant partners and other municipalities regarding the ecosystem health, strategies and plans for the River Valley so that learnings can be shared and actions can potentially be coordinated.

Additional details are provided in Attachment 3 - Environment and Climate Review.

### **Attachments**

1. Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan (2025)
2. River Valley Planning Modernization Action Plan
3. Environment and Climate Review