

**Site Location Study for  
Kihciy Askiy (Sacred Earth)  
in Whitemud Park**

**Final Report**

*Prepared for:*

**City of Edmonton Infrastructure Planning and Design**  
Edmonton, Alberta

*Prepared by:*

**Spencer Environmental  
Management Services Ltd.**  
Edmonton, Alberta

*Under contract to:*

**Manasc Isaac Architects Ltd.**  
Edmonton, Alberta

Project Number EP 706

November 2017



**SPENCER ENVIRONMENTAL**  
M A N A G E M E N T S E R V I C E S L T D.

Suite 402, 9925 – 109 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2L9  
Phone (780) 429-2108 Fax (780) 429-2127

Katharina Kafka, AALA, CSLA  
Landscape Architect  
Principal  
Manasc Isaac  
10225 100 Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 0A1

13 November 2017  
EP 706

Dear Ms. Kafka,

**Re: BD17-61- Site Location Study for Kihciy Askiy (Sacred Earth) in Whitemud Park – Final Report**

As requested, please find enclosed a pdf copy of the above-mentioned final Site Location Study (SLS) for your files and for distribution to City of Edmonton Urban Form & Corporate Strategic Development. A final Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is provided under separate cover.

Please contact either of the undersigned if you require additional information.

Sincerely,

**Spencer Environmental  
Management Services Ltd.**



Kesia Miyashita, M.Sc., P.Biol.  
Environmental Scientist



Andra Bismanis, M.Sc., P.Biol.  
Project Manager and Senior Environmental  
Scientist

attch.

cc: Richard Isaac, Manasc Isaac

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## 1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City of Edmonton and Native Counselling Services of Alberta propose to develop Kihciy Askiy (Cree for “Sacred Earth”), a permanent, 2.5 ha Indigenous ceremonial and cultural site located in Whitemud Park on the former Fox Farm lands (Figure 1) (Manasc Isaac 2017). Prior to settlement of Edmonton, the proposed site was used for many centuries by Indigenous people foraging for medicines to heal their communities.

The City of Edmonton currently does not have a permanent cultural/ceremonial site for Indigenous peoples to gather and host events and ceremonies (Manasc Isaac 2017). The proposed project, in full build out, will provide an excellent site for the Capital Region Indigenous community to host spiritual ceremonies, sweat lodges, cultural camps and talking circles; grow medicinal herbs, practice traditional crafts and facilitate intergenerational learning (Manasc Isaac 2017). This is consistent with the City of Edmonton’s continuing work in support of recommendations resulting from the federal government’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In addition, Kihciy Askiy will be accessible to the non-Indigenous community for cross-cultural education. For the project partners, Kihciy Askiy measures of success include: welcoming the general public while being a sacred space for intimate gatherings and spiritual celebrations; serving as a place for healing and reconciliation; serving as a place to share the world view of Indigenous people; respectful integration with the existing land and Whitemud Creek; and successful integration of fire into site activities.

Development of the Kihciy Askiy site will proceed in phases. Manasc Isaac was commissioned by the City of Edmonton in 2015 to develop an overall site plan as well as develop, design and implement the first phase of the proposed project. As described in the *Kihciy Askiy Schematic Design* (Manasc Isaac 2017), Phase 1, which is the subject of this Site Location Study, will involve 1.99 ha of land and will consist of the following facilities or components: 1) site access/parking; 2) sweat lodges and permanent, ceremonial fire pit; 3) storage facility 4) change rooms, washrooms, and gathering place; 5) granular walking trails; 6) tipis; 7) amphitheatre. Phase 2 is expected to include space for special event tents, a healing garden and a connection to the trail system along Whitemud Creek. Phase 2, which will be undertaken in the future at an unspecified date on lands to the south, is not part of this SLS.

In March 2016, the City’s Biodiversity and River Valley Planning Unit indicated that the proposed Kihciy Askiy project is situated within Bylaw 7188 boundaries and constitutes work that has been deemed a major facility as defined by Bylaw 7188. For proposed major facilities, the Bylaw requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Site Location Study (SLS), and submission to City Council for approval. This document represents the SLS; the associated EIA has been completed and submitted under separate cover. The approved EIA will support the Development Permit application for the project.

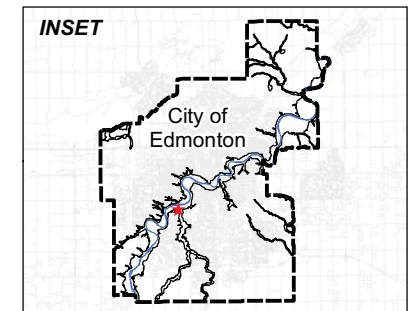


**Figure 1.**  
**Project Setting**  
**and Location**  
*Kihciy Askiy in*  
*Whitemud Park*



**Legend**

- Study Area
- Bylaw 7188 Boundary
- City of Edmonton River Valley Natural Areas (2010) (with ID)



Date Map Created: 17 July 2017  
 Aerial Photograph Date: May 2015

***Project Location/Setting***

The proposed project will be located in Whitemud Creek Ravine at the former Fox Farm site, south of Fox Drive and west of Whitemud Creek (Figure 1.1). The proposed Kihciy Askiy site is open, gently sloping and was most recently used as a pasture for Fort Edmonton Park horses. Much of the proposed site is situated within the flood fringe area of Whitemud Creek. The site is loosely bounded on the southwest by steep slopes and on the east by a meandering Whitemud Creek. A narrow but variable width of land and a formal unpaved recreational trail separate the project area from the west bank of Whitemud Creek. Neighbourhoods on the tablelands above the site include Brookside to the west and Grandview Heights to the east. Fort Edmonton Park horse pastures are located to the northwest, and Fox Drive is further to the north. The Whitemud Creek Ravine recreational path parallels the east site boundary, connecting to Alfred H. Savage Centre to the north and to the more distant Rainbow Valley Park and Snow Valley Ski Club to the south.

**2.0 PROJECT SCOPE*****Scope of Work/Project Components***

The proposed Kihciy Askiy Phase 1 project comprises the following individual component facilities, shown in Figure 2, and briefly described here based on information taken from Manasc Isaac (2017).

- *Parking/Site Access*
  - The site's existing gravel access road will be widened by approximately 2 m to the north, to a width of 6 m. A gravel parking area comprising fifty (50) angled car stalls, including two disabled parking stalls, two bus stalls and a 15 m radius emergency vehicle /bus turn-around is proposed for the main (west) site entrance. The car parking stalls will be configured as three rows, spanning 37 to 50 m in length. Access from the existing SUP to the east will be pedestrian only. Plantings and boulders will be used to mark the perimeter of the parking area.
- *Site Regrading and Landscaping*
  - Prior to construction, the entire Phase 1 area will be stripped of topsoil and regraded slightly, to ensure positive drainage and to suit the anticipated programmed activities (K. Kafka, *pers. comm.*). All areas will be reseeded with an appropriate river valley seed mix. The easternmost margin of the Phase 1 lands, which will not support facilities, will be seeded with a native seed mix and native trees and shrubs from the adjacent balsam poplar forest community allowed to encroach, creating a transitional zone between the grass-dominated site and adjacent forest. There will be no changes to the existing fencing at the site as part of Phase 1; the site will remain partially fenced, with a chain link fence along the north and east boundaries and a barbed wire fence along some of the south boundary.





SITE PLAN

- REGULARLY MOWED AREA
- NATIVE GRASSES
- SWALES
- NATIVE TREE GROVES WITH NATIVE UNDERGROWTH
- NATIVE GRASS AREA ALLOWED TO NATURALLY TRANSFORM INTO ASPEN WOODLAND
- CONSERVATION AREA - AS PER RIBBON OF GREEN



KIHCIY ASKIY SITE PLAN

Figure 2.



- *Sweat Lodges and Ceremonial Fire Pit*
  - A dedicated sweat lodge area will support four sweat lodges constructed around a permanent, ceremonial fire pit. Each sweat lodge can accommodate up to 25 people. The lodges will be constructed of willow branches, covered with tarps, and will be erected by members of the Indigenous community. Tarps will be changed twice a year, in spring and fall. A permanent, ceremonial fire pit will be the central element to sweat lodge ceremonies. It is expected that sweats will operate from 9:00 am to 7:00 pm, approximately three to four times a week. It is anticipated that about three sweats per day will be held at the facility and that the start and end of consecutive sweats will be spaced approximately one to one and a half hours apart. It is understood that up to two lodges may host sweats concurrently.
  
- *Storage Building*
  - A locked storage building, designed to house two utility vehicles, firewood, grass-cutting equipment, fuel, tipi poles and canvas, will be located north of the parking area. The storage area will occupy a footprint of approximately 75 m<sup>2</sup>. The storage building will not be insulated or heated.
  
- *Change Rooms, Washrooms, Indoor Gathering Space*
  - To the south of the proposed storage building, a second, stand-alone building will house two gender-specific change rooms, three barrier-free washrooms and an indoor gathering space. Each change room will be provided with benches and lockable storage lockers and has been designed to accommodate 20 people. Washrooms are sized to accommodate up to 40 people. The change room and washroom areas will occupy a footprint of approximately 31 m<sup>2</sup>. A third area (approximately 57 m<sup>2</sup>) will house an indoor gathering space that can accommodate 40 people. The gathering space will house a kitchenette for food preparation, but will not have a stove or refrigerator, as it is expected that food will be brought to the gathering room, rather than prepared on-site. The building will, however, have gas service and electricity (see utilities below). The gathering space is proposed as part of Phase 1; however, construction of the gathering space is funding-dependent.
  
- *Granular Walking Trails*
  - Compacted gravel walking trails, with widths varying between 2-3 meters, will provide pedestrian circulation throughout the Kihciy Askiy site as well as off-road emergency vehicular access to the proposed storage building, change and washroom building, sweat lodges, and tipi area.
  
- *Tipis*
  - The site includes a dedicated area for tipis, which will be used by Indigenous patrons for prayer ceremonies, group workshops, or other



cultural purposes and, at times, for overnight use. For any events or usage exceeding regular park hours (i.e., 5:00 am to 11:00 pm, as stated in the *Parkland Bylaw*, Bylaw 2202), a special application will be made to the City. For any events/usage exceeding regular park hours, a special application to the City of Edmonton will be required. Apart from the sweats, the tipi area will be the most frequently used event space on site. Each tipi will accommodate 16-20 people, with the largest tipi measuring about 22 feet in diameter with a height of 30 feet. Tipis will be erected on site on an as-needed basis. When not in use, the poles and canvas will be stored in the storage building.

- *Amphitheatre*
  - While Kihciy Askiy is primarily a ceremonial site, it will also offer educational programs about Indigenous culture and traditions. An amphitheatre is proposed to form the educational and showcase component of Phase 1. The roof of the storage building has been designed to double function as an amphitheatre (Figure 2).
- *Utilities*

A new 12,000 litre sanitary holding tank is proposed to be located adjacent to the parking area, approximately 190 m west of Whitemud Creek. Its location close to the access road will allow it to be pumped out from the parking area turn-around. A new 25 mm metered water service will replace the existing 20 mm service, which will be abandoned. Both proposed buildings will have electrical, domestic water and telephone services. The existing natural gas service will be extended to the location of the proposed gathering space. The existing electrical system (meter and underground distribution cables) will be extended to the new buildings.

### 3.0 LOCATION ANALYSIS AND JUSTIFICATION

The following section addresses key questions and statements provided by the City's Biodiversity and River Valley Planning Unit to assist in complying with the requirements of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan (NSRV ARP). Each question/statement is presented in bold italicized font and the response follows immediately. Because the project footprint is relatively small, all project components are located in proximity to each other and are vital to the site's purpose and programming, the following sections pertain to the project as a whole, rather than to individual components.

***Identify other locations that were considered for this project including other river valley and non-river valley locations.***

Prior to European settlement of the river valley, the proposed site, the former Fox Farm lands in Whitemud Park, was used for many centuries by Indigenous people foraging for medicines to heal their communities and is recognized among Indigenous people as a sacred place (Indigenous Peoples' Arts and Culture Coalition 2011; Manasc Isaac 2017).

Considering the historical and cultural significance of the proposed site, the proposed project represents a reinstatement of a former, pre-settlement, Indigenous land use. For that reason, it was not feasible to consider alternative river valley or non-river valley project locations.

***Could the proposed project reasonably function at a location outside of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan boundary? Please describe.***

A similar project (i.e., an Indigenous cultural/ceremonial site) could possibly function at a location outside the NSRV ARP boundary, if an undeveloped site having a suitable history, cultural significance, appropriate natural features and suitable neighbouring land uses were available. No such site has been identified.

***Is the project dependent on either the river valley and ravine location or the users of the park system? Please describe.***

A cultural/ceremonial site of this type for Indigenous people must be located on lands in a suitable natural setting, with appropriate topography, and having natural features and cultural significance to local Indigenous peoples. The proposed location in Whitemud Creek Ravine meets all of these requirements. The location happens also to be situated in a relatively central, accessible part of the City, with existing road access. Specifically, the nearest roads include 142 Street, which dead-ends immediately west of the site access road; Fox Drive, approximately 200 m north; and Whitemud Drive, approximately 300 m west of the Kihciy Askiy site. The site's location in Whitemud Ravine, accessible by vehicle and by a formal pedestrian trail system is well-suited to the proposed offering of cross-cultural educational programming that illustrates the connection between Indigenous people and the land. The site also has cultural significance, as ochre, a rare mineral used in spiritual and traditional ceremonies has been found in the vicinity (Indigenous Peoples' Arts and Culture Coalition 2011).

***Please list the relevant Bylaws/Plans/Policies which support the project's location within the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan boundary.***

The proposed project is consistent with the City of Edmonton's: *Ribbon of Green Master Plan* (1992); the goals of the *North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan* (Bylaw 7188); *The Way We Grow: Municipal Development Plan* (Bylaw 15100); *The Way We Live: Edmonton's People Plan*; *The Way We Move: Transportation Master Plan*; *The Way We Green: Environmental Strategic Plan*; *the Urban Parks Management Plan*; and *BREATHE: City of Edmonton's Green Network Strategy*.

## **4.0 OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS ANALYSIS**

The following is an analysis of the financial, social, environmental and institutional opportunities and constraints that limit the feasibility of locating this project outside the NSRV ARP (Bylaw 7188) lands. Because the project footprint is relatively small and all project components are located in proximity to each other and are interdependent, the following sections pertain to the project as a whole, rather than to individual components.

### ***Financial Opportunities and Constraints***

The project will be undertaken as a partnership between City of Edmonton and Native Counselling Services of Alberta. The proposed Kihciy Askiy site is currently owned by the City of Edmonton and is unprogrammed, leading to three financial opportunities that are favourable to this location:

- the project does not require new land purchase or termination of an existing lease;
- the site currently supports services (water, electricity and gas), that have been determined suitable to accommodate the proposed facilities with minimal relocation/extension or updating;
- the site has an existing access road that needs minimal upgrading.

### ***Social Opportunities and Constraints***

There are several social considerations that limit the feasibility of locating Kihciy Askiy outside of the NSRV ARP:

- There is no identified Edmonton tablelands location that holds the same cultural significance as the proposed site. The sacred nature of the site is in large part because of its location on the Whitemud Creek floodplain. Historically, floodplains were important harvesting/gathering places for Indigenous people.
- Some of the cultural and spiritual events to be held at the site demand a degree of privacy/screening from the greater public. The site topography (a floodplain within a deep ravine) and surrounding forest naturally provide this.
- Site activities will include some drumming and use of fire/smoke, and some bussing for special events. The site's location at the bottom of a ravine provides some desirable separation of these land use activities from tableland residential areas.
- Despite this relative natural seclusion, the proposed site is still in the City core and therefore accessible to the urban Indigenous population. A suitably-sized tableland location could only be found near the developed margins of the City and would not be as centrally located for Edmonton area Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

In short, the proposed site has several social advantages: it is a relatively central location, has special significance to Indigenous peoples, has natural attributes that are advantageous to Indigenous communities plans to host spiritual ceremonies, sweat lodges, cultural camps and talking circles, practice traditional crafts and desire to facilitate intergenerational and inter-cultural learning (Manasc Isaac 2017).

### ***Environmental Opportunities and Constraints***

The site topography, surrounding vegetation and proximity to Whitemud Creek are all integral to the suitability of the site for the proposed purpose. The site setting provides a

natural backdrop, including a nearby watercourse, and relative seclusion. The natural setting is critical to the proposed cultural practices and spiritual events. A setting with similar natural attributes would be difficult to find on Edmonton's tablelands. Proposed programming includes use of a permanent, ceremonial fire pit. Wood burning pit fires are compatible with a Whitemud Park setting but may not be compatible for many tableland settings.

The proposed project site will also realize an environmental opportunity in the form of site reclamation. The proposed site currently supports extensive populations of exotic species and noxious weeds. The site will be regraded and seeded with a native seed mix, native tree and shrub plantings will be integrated into the site landscaping, and at the northeastern margin of the site, adjacent Whitemud Creek, native forest will be encouraged to expand passively into the site, integrating with the adjacent natural surroundings.

### ***Institutional Opportunities and Constraints***

The proposed project assists in realizing the City of Edmonton's commitment to advancing truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, not only by providing a dedicated location for Indigenous cultural practices but because it represents a reinstatement of Indigenous land use in a relatively central Edmonton location. It also represents a new operational partnership between the City and Native Counselling Services of Alberta. Finally, it provides an opportunity for Indigenous people to educate non-Indigenous Edmontonians about Indigenous cultural practices and traditions, in particular, practices tied to the natural environment. The proposed location will assist in realizing the educational objective in a way that a location in the tablelands would not.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

As documented in this Site Location Study, this proposed project comprises development of Kihciy Askiy Phase 1 in Whitemud Park, in the North Saskatchewan River Valley system, on lands that were used for many centuries by Indigenous people. The City of Edmonton currently does not have a cultural/ceremonial site for Indigenous peoples to gather and host events and ceremonies, and Kihciy Askiy will provide a permanent site for the Indigenous community to host spiritual ceremonies, sweat lodges, cultural camps and talking circles, practice traditional crafts and facilitate intergenerational learning. The proposed Kihciy Askiy site requires a location on land recognized as sacred among Indigenous people and comprising a natural and screened location that is easily accessible and centrally located. The location in Whitemud Park satisfies all of these requirements. This report assesses potential financial, social, environmental and institutional opportunities and constraints and concludes that numerous considerations make undertaking this project at the selected location within the NSRV ARP essential.



## 6.0 REFERENCES

### ***Literature Cited***

Manasc Isaac. 2017. Kihciy Askiy Sacred Earth Schematic Design Report. January 2016. Prepared for City of Edmonton, Facility and Landscape Infrastructure. Edmonton, Alberta.

Indigenous Peoples' Arts and Culture Coalition. 2011. Spirit of Edmonton: Reclaiming Monto, a Collective Vision Connecting the River and the People. Edmonton, Alberta.

### ***Personal Communications***

Kafka, K. Landscape Architect. Manasc Isaac. Edmonton, Alberta.