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EDMONTON'S GREEN NETWORK STRATEGY

Strategic Plan

August 2017

Edmonton

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From Policy to Action

5.1 Challenges and Opportunities

BREATHE establishes strategic directions for the green network — priorities based on a holistic network approach, concerns and aspirations, evidence and research. The *Green Network Strategy* presents policy actions that are intended to bridge the divide between vision and action, and address the key challenges and opportunities identified during the project development process.

- Edmontonians are proud of their city's extensive green network that provides diverse opportunities for supporting environmental health, community celebration and personal wellness. That passion presents an opportunity to leverage people and communities to support the green network through funding, engagement and stewardship.

- Respecting the special relationship of Indigenous peoples with their traditional lands, and implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission present an ongoing challenge for the City, Indigenous communities and all Edmontonians. However, reconciliation also promises opportunities for learning, community building and a more inclusive green network for everyone.

- Best practices and innovation present opportunities to improve the green network from good to great. This *Green Network Strategy* is intended not only to address concerns that may be compromising the green network, but also to push the boundaries of open space planning and move Edmonton forward on issues related to inclusive spaces, high-quality design and contemporary management techniques, among others.

- Edmonton has a functioning ecological network that relies on a system of cores, corridors and the urban matrix to sustain environmental health and biodiversity. However, the integrity of this network is threatened by urban development, climate change and other forces, both natural and human-made. Many opportunities are available to protect ecological integrity, such as protecting core areas of habitat and connectivity corridors, and enhancing habitat potential in the streets and backyards of the city.

- Many stakeholders and Edmontonians agree that open space planning should be more aware of the balance between quantity (supply) and quality (function). Some neighbourhoods are planned for population growth but already have a lower than average amount of open space. Other neighbourhoods have a significant amount of open space, but those spaces are challenged by a lack of functionality or poor maintenance. Resolving these challenges requires a suite of improvements, suggested in this Strategy and the *BREATHE* Implementation Plan, such as amending development guidelines to better balance quantity with quality, ensuring adequate operating budgets and exploring creative means for land acquisition in dense areas. This approach will help produce a better understanding of appropriate provision levels of open space throughout the city.

- The green network also supports opportunities for wellness and celebration; however, these opportunities are unevenly distributed across the landscape, and oftentimes are concentrated in the parks of the River Valley and Ravine system. This disparity could be corrected by providing residents with better access to existing opportunities, programming and activating open spaces to include wellness or celebration opportunities, and promoting multifunctional open spaces as development proceeds citywide.

- Open space planners and operators are challenged by rapidly developing new communities, a growing inner city, aging infrastructure and evolving demand for amenities. As a result, capital and operating budgets struggle to meet the standards placed on existing open spaces, let alone proposals for new amenities or higher-quality spaces. Solutions should involve not only 'finding more money' through expanded revenue and land acquisition tools, but also revisiting how we plan open spaces to make more efficient use of existing resources.

The *Green Network Strategy* provides policy guidance on how to address these challenges and opportunities. More specific actions related to recommended projects, development processes and funding are included in the Implementation Plan.

5.2 Next Steps

BREATHE is a tool that will be implemented to guide and inform all future decision making surrounding Edmonton's open spaces. It will do so by providing an understanding of open space priorities, processes and requirements to decision makers — such as land use planners, developers, private landowners, community partners and citizens.

IMPLEMENTING BREATHE

BREATHE will become effective following approval and adoption by Council. A variety of other processes serve to implement *BREATHE*:

- **Guiding strategic open space decisions:** This includes detailed planning and design, open space acquisitions and programming, and any necessary amendments to existing bylaws and regulations.
- **Facilitating private sector investment in open spaces:** *BREATHE* will help private developers understand open space priorities, processes and requirements.
- **Supporting community-based open space initiatives:** Communities can use *BREATHE* to inform local initiatives and partnerships with the City.
- **Informing local area plans:** This involves guiding open space content and processes when undergoing comprehensive planning exercises in new and existing communities.

To provide further detail about actions and processes required to achieve implementation, including specific projects, targets and timelines, *BREATHE* includes an accompanying Implementation Plan and Procedures and Standards guide.

MONITORING AND REVISION

As part of an adaptive management approach (see **Strategic Direction 4.8 Adaptive Management and Flexible Spaces**), the green network must be continually monitored to enable planners, managers and operators to evaluate what is working well and what needs improvement, and to adjust their activities accordingly. The *BREATHE* Implementation Plan will establish quantifiable indicators, targets and timelines to measure the performance of the green network over time. Monitoring the green network not only allows the City to track and respond to change, but also to measure progress toward the goals of this Strategy.

An adaptive approach to green network planning and management enables decision makers to adjust their activities on an ongoing basis, but the gradual accumulation of changing conditions and management activities eventually results in processes that are misaligned with the goals and policy actions of this Strategy. For this reason, *BREATHE* will be amended on a continuing cycle to evolve with the growth of the City and its changing environment. Opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement may be identified depending on the size and scope of the amendment; City Administration will assess and develop appropriate engagement processes for each future *BREATHE* amendment as needed.

Appendix A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

access
The ability of a person to reach or enter an open space. The degree of access depends on the distance to a place, the infrastructure to support access (e.g. sidewalks, fences) and characteristics of the person attempting access (e.g. mobility challenges, mode of transportation). Note that an open space that can be accessed from a given location or using a particular mode of transportation is called "accessible", but should not be confused with an open space that is barrier-free.

accessibility
The degree to which an open space can be accessed. Although closely related to the definition of **access**, accessibility often relates more specifically to the ability of persons with cognitive or physical disabilities to access or use an open space or its amenities.

active transportation
Travel by means of non-motorised locomotion, e.g. walking, cycling, roller blading, cross country skiing.

adaptive management
Adaptive management is a cycle of monitoring, evaluation and adjustment used to improve decision making in conditions of uncertainty. The process emphasizes continuous learning as a means to keep abreast of changes and correct outdated understanding.

barrier-free
Absent of obstacles, allowing persons with physical, cognitive or sensory impairments safer or easier access to pathways, open spaces, amenities, facilities, services or activities.

biodiversity
The variety and variability of species within an ecosystem.

biodiversity core area
A habitat area capable of supporting entire populations of plants, animals and associated ecological processes.

bioswale
Gently sloped, vegetated channel engineered primarily for stormwater retention and filtration. Bioswales are commonly associated with Low Impact Development, and sometimes complete streets.

buffer
Low-impact land uses surrounding core biodiversity areas, providing a separation between more intensive human uses.

community partners
Non-municipal agents or organizations with whom the City collaborates to provide open spaces and related services. In Edmonton, important community partners include community leagues, school boards and other community interest groups.

complete streets
Streets that are designed to integrate all road users safely, including pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, commercial (truck) drivers and public transportation users of all ages and abilities.

connectivity
The degree to which a landscape facilitates or impedes movement among habitat and natural areas. Connectivity may be provided through corridors, stepping stones or compatible adjacent land uses.

core
A component of the green network that serves a critical role for a specific function or species, such as a centrally located community park (providing an important activity hub for the neighbourhood) or large natural area (providing key breeding habitat for birds and amphibians).

corridor
A linear connection that facilitates through-movement across the landscape, such as greenways, utility corridors and the River Valley and Ravine system. Some corridors are contiguous (i.e. physically connected) while others are a linear series of spaces (stepping stones).

demand
Community needs with respect to open space resources. Demand may be expressed as participation/visitation rates or usage habits (e.g. method of access, preferred amenities) among existing users of open spaces, but may also include latent demand that has been suppressed by an undersupply of appropriate spaces or amenities, or potential demand residing in people not currently maximizing their use of open spaces.

density
The number of dwellings or population per unit area. Low density development typically means a residential pattern featuring single family dwellings, while a high density development features town homes, apartment buildings or high rise condominiums.

distribution
The spatial arrangement of open spaces across the landscape, or the share of open spaces available to different groups or neighbourhoods.

diversity
A range of difference among various elements of a group. In the context of demographics, a diverse population contains many different ages, ethnicities, incomes or abilities. In the context of open space planning, a diverse green network contains many different types of parks and open spaces, or a wide range of uses and functions.

ecological barriers
Elements that inhibit or prevent the movement of wildlife through the landscape, such as roads, fences or heavily used areas. Barriers in the landscape reduce connectivity.

ecologically sensitive area
Area of land or water that is particularly sensitive or vulnerable to ecological disturbance, such as fragile grassland habitats or riparian areas prone to erosion.

environmentally significant area
Area of land or water that is important for the long term maintenance of biodiversity, landscape features and other natural processes, either locally or within a larger spatial context.

flexible open space
Open space whose size or programming can adapt to changing needs, including seasonal parkettes, solar-ready fixtures, movable furniture, pop-up events and performances, etc.

functional connectivity
The realized connectivity of a specific landscape from the perspective of a particular individual. This is affected by both the structural connectivity of the landscape itself, and the unique movement and behavioural characteristics of the organism in question.

geospatial
Data or technology with a specific geographic or locational component. Geospatial technology can include GIS (geographic information systems), GPS (Global Positioning System) or remote sensing.

GIS (geographic information system)
A computer-based system for recording, storing and displaying data related to geographic locations on the Earth's surface. GIS software enables the user to visualize multiple types of data about a place, and to manipulate that information to understand patterns and relationships.

greenfield development
Land development of agricultural or natural areas that have not previously been developed, typically at the urban fringe.

green infrastructure
A living system of green spaces and technologies that provide society with the basic services (provisioning, regulating, supporting, cultural) for sustaining life.

green network
An integrated system of public open spaces, connections and functions that provide value to humans and the environment. The green network includes all the outdoor land and water that is publicly owned or publicly accessible, such as parks, plazas, main streets, natural areas, greenways and green infrastructure.

green roof
The roof or top of a structure (e.g. office building, parking garage) that has been covered with living vegetation. Plantings on a green roof may vary from ground covering forbs to gardens or trees. Typically the green roof comprises a layer of vegetation planted within a growing medium (soil or other material) that rests upon a synthetic, waterproof membrane designed to protect the building from leaks and roots.

hazard
Condition or situation that could cause harm to people, property or the environment. Common hazards include erosion, flooding or faulty equipment.

infill
Development or redevelopment of urban areas that are already considered developed, such as mature or established neighbourhoods. Infill development includes both the "filling in" of neighbourhoods parcel by parcel (e.g. constructing laneway homes, replacing single family dwellings with multiple family dwellings) and transformational projects such as Transit Oriented Development or area redevelopment.

intensification
Creating or promoting greater urban density.

landscape permeability
The degree to which the landscape encourages or impedes the movement of wildlife, as a factor of both the structural connectivity of the landscape, the activities taking place and the biological characteristics of the wildlife.

matrix
Areas of a landscape that are not core areas, stepping stones or corridors. In an urban environment like Edmonton, the matrix generally comprises developed areas.

mobility
The ability to move from place to place.

multifunctional
Able to accommodate multiple services or uses (functions) simultaneously.

natural area
Area of land or water that is dominated by native vegetation in naturally occurring patterns, including wetlands, grasslands, woods or riparian areas.

network approach
A method of analyzing and understanding the world based on network theory, which recognizes the interactions and structural relationships among the diverse components of a complex system.

open space
An area of outdoor land or water that is publicly owned or publicly accessible, including municipal parks, civic spaces, provincial or federal parkland, institutional campuses, and other public spaces.

provision
How much open space is provided to Edmonton residents and visitors. Open space provision encompasses four interrelated measures: distribution, quality (i.e. functionality and condition), diversity and supply (i.e. quantity or amount).

reconciliation
According to the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Reconciliation requires awareness of the past, acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes and action to change behaviour.

resilient
Able to withstand, recover and persist in the face of a shock or stress upon the system, such as climate change, disease or flooding. Resilience may involve adaptation over time to create a system that better withstands future stresses or shocks.

right-of-way
A piece of land subject to a legal right to passage (easement) for the general public or some other specified party. Streets are municipal rights-of-way that allow public access, while rail or utility rights-of-way may reserve access exclusively for the corporation whose infrastructure is located there.

smart growth
Development patterns that attempt to minimize urban sprawl in favour of more dense and compact urban environments. Such patterns are characterized as "smarter" than the conventional alternative because they are theorized to reduce per capita municipal infrastructure expenditures, preserve agricultural or natural landscapes at the urban fringe, improve public health outcomes, and reduce the socio-economic and environmental impacts of automobile-oriented transportation modes, among other benefits.

stakeholders
Parties or agents who hold an interest in a process or decision. Stakeholders in Edmonton include community leagues, non profit organizations, special interest groups, other levels of government, school boards, for profit service providers, the development industry and the general public. Note that because they hold Constitutionally protected rights and interests, Indigenous communities are not considered "stakeholders" for the purposes of engagement.

stepping stone
A component of the green network that serves a non-critical habitat role for a specific function or species. Stepping stones may provide valuable resources, but may have insufficient size or quality to support essential habitat requirements or functions. Multiple stepping stones arranged in a linear fashion may be used as corridors between more important core areas, providing connectivity and areas of refuge critical for the integrity of the overall ecological network.

structural connectivity
The physical connectiveness of the landscape, based on the distribution of disturbances and land cover types.

supply
The stock of available open spaces or amenities. While supply is often synonymous with amount or quantity, the *Green Network Strategy* also acknowledges that the meaning can encompass other aspects of community need or demand (e.g. access, function) as well.

sustainable
Able to persist over time. Sustainability generally involves a balance of values (like social equity, environmental integrity and economic viability) in order to accommodate present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. In the context of municipal finance, sustainability means balancing revenues and expenditures to avoid excessive deficits.

traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)
A cumulative body of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations maintained and developed by Indigenous peoples over a long period of time. TEK includes spiritual relationships, historical and present relationships with the natural environment, and the use of natural resources. TEK is generally expressed in oral form, and passed on from generation to generation through story telling and practical teaching.

traditional uses
In this document, traditional uses mean land uses, activities and cultural modifications that Indigenous peoples historically practiced and continue to practice in relation to their natural environment. Traditional uses include (but are not limited to) sacred and ceremonial sites, historic trails and other storied places, burial grounds, culturally modified landscapes or features (e.g. rocks, trees), and harvesting activities such as hunting and trapping, fishing and gathering.

wayfinding
Signage, cartographic materials and design techniques that provide information about location, orientation and surroundings in order to support navigation around the city.

Appendix B

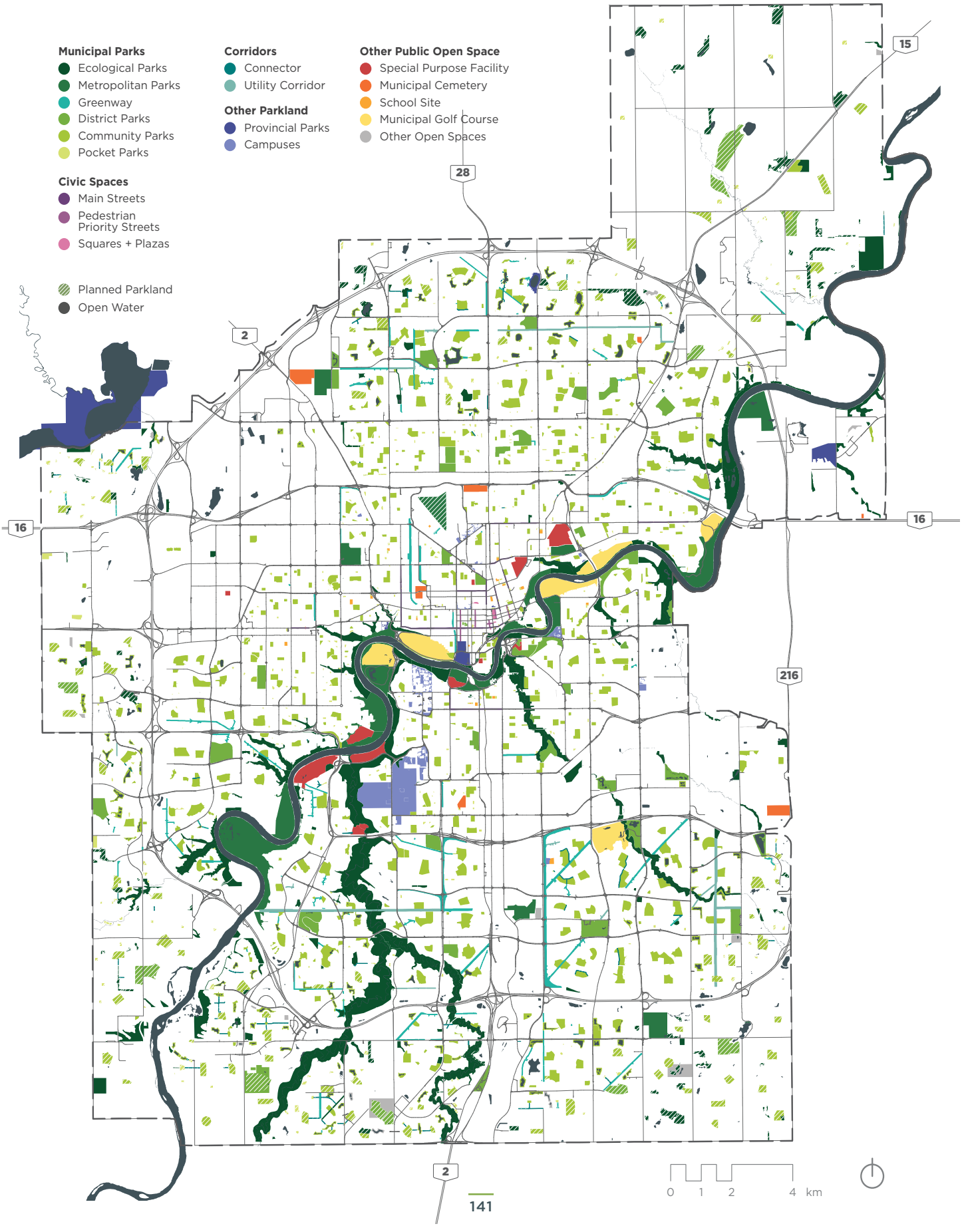
OPEN SPACE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

OPEN SPACE CLASS		DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Municipal Parks	METROPOLITAN PARK	Metropolitan parks are large, feature parks intended to provide value to residents and visitors throughout Edmonton and the greater Metro region. Metropolitan Parks may have a variety of functions and uses, but usually contain features and amenities that are not available elsewhere in the City.	Terwillegar Park Rundle Park William Hawrelak Park Borden Park
	DISTRICT PARK	District parks are designed to meet the needs of multiple communities, such as a City quadrant or collection of neighbourhoods under an Area Structure Plan. They may be more specialized than community parks, but also may provide multifunctional amenities. Some district parks contain unique attractions (e.g. Argyll Park Velodrome, Muttart Conservatory). The size and programming depends on the community where they are located, and the provision of amenities in the larger community.	Jackie Parker Recreational Area Castle Downs Park The Meadows District Park Argyll Park
	COMMUNITY PARK	Community parks are the basic units of the green network. They are intended to be frequent in the landscape, and flexible enough in programming to meet the social and recreational needs of most people in their catchment area. Some community parks are co-located with Community Leagues or schools (usually elementary schools) and may be managed under a Joint Use Agreement or Occupancy License.	Ermineskin Park Laurier Heights Park Kitchener Park Cumberland Park
	POCKET PARK	Pocket parks are small open spaces meant to serve the nearby neighbourhood and may contain only one amenity or serve one of the functions of open space (e.g. a playground, adult fitness, or seating area).	Otto Leslie Park Peace Garden Park Kainai Park John G Niddrie Park
	GREENWAY	Greenways are linear, publicly accessible open spaces that are large enough to operate as parkland, providing opportunities for active transportation, recreation or social encounters in addition to their role as connectors.	Edmonton Grads Park Ribbon of Steel Park Hazeldean Greenway
	ECOLOGICAL PARK	Ecological Parks are public open spaces specifically intended to protect an area of land or water (or both) that is dominated by native vegetation in naturally occurring patterns. Ecological parks are managed for the primary purpose of preserving natural processes, species and habitat elements. Human activities are primarily passive (e.g. nature interpretation, nature appreciation, etc.) with the exception of trails for walking, bicycling and jogging where those uses do not compromise the primary purpose of protection.	Woodbend Ravine Woodlot Clover Bar Natural Area Poplar Lake

OPEN SPACE CLASS		DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Civic Spaces	SQUARES, PLAZAS, AND PROMENADES	Squares, plazas and promenades are primarily hardscaped areas developed as gathering spaces for people. Some may contain markets, event venues, or small shops and food vendors. Most include seating areas. Most promenades, and some squares and plazas, may be linear or part of a streetscape.	Sir Winston Churchill Square Centennial Plaza Victoria Promenade
	MAIN STREETS	Main streets are 'enhanced' streets intended to act as important social places or grand boulevards. They are pedestrian-friendly streets that also serve as major transportation links with a mix of active street-oriented land uses. They often include seating areas, street trees, vegetated traffic buffers, and room for street vendors and parklets.	Jasper Avenue Whyte Avenue 124 Street
	PEDESTRIAN-PRIORITY STREETS	Pedestrian-priority streets are road rights-of-way designed to prioritize pedestrian mobility over other modes of travel, in order to improve the pedestrian experience. Permanent pedestrian-priority streets may or may not also allow vehicular traffic, and may perform important social or ceremonial functions. Temporary pedestrian-priority streets are roadways that prohibit or limit vehicle traffic for a limited duration of time to accommodate pedestrian traffic for a ceremony, event or festival (e.g. Fringe Festival, parade, marathon, etc.).	104th Street NW The Armature 83 Avenue NW
Corridors	CONNECTORS	Connectors are primarily pathways with some associated green space, usually connecting two or more open spaces together, or two parts of a neighbourhood. The primary purpose of connectors is to provide access to and between neighborhoods, roads or open spaces, although they may also occasionally include park amenities such as small seating areas or landscaping.	
	ROADWAY GREENS	Roadway greens are green spaces on public property within right-of-ways: along roads or major walkways, or within roadways as traffic islands, medians or boulevards. Typically they are turfed/grass, planted with shrubs, or naturalized with native vegetation.	
	UTILITY CORRIDORS	Utility corridors currently provide some of the functions of open space by acting as green landcover, open space connections or other uses. These corridors may have a public access agreement in place, and may be maintained by the City.	Hodgson Altalink Corridor
Other Jurisdictional Parkland	PROVINCIAL PARKLAND	Provincial parks provide valuable regional and community open space services. Although these spaces are managed and operated by the provincial government, they are often integrated into the City's open space network through trails and pathways, and provide value to residents. In addition, the Legislature Grounds surrounding the provincial legislature buildings in Edmonton are publicly accessible, carefully managed open spaces that attract both tourists and residents.	Alberta Legislature Grounds Government House Grounds Big Island Natural Area
	FEDERAL PARKLAND	Federally owned or managed parks. Edmonton currently does not have any federal parkland within City limits.	
	CAMPUS	Publicly accessible provincial, college and university campuses, or teaching hospitals.	University of Alberta grounds

	OPEN SPACE CLASS	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Other Public Open Spaces	SPECIAL PURPOSE FACILITY	Major cultural, recreational or sporting venues that provide a unique leisure, memorial or entertainment value that draws users from across Edmonton and the greater metropolitan region. They typically involve more intensive investment in facilities and associated services. Often they require a fee or membership for entrance, or restrict the hours or activities that are permitted. Some are located within larger parks.	Edmonton Valley Zoo Fort Edmonton Park Commonwealth Stadium
	SCHOOL SITES	Lands set aside for schools and owned, managed, or maintained by the City of Edmonton or by an Edmonton school board (e.g. Public, Catholic, or Francophone School Board). These sites include the building envelope and other school facilities such as parking lots and drop off areas. Some of these sites are adjacent to larger parks, and most are managed through the Joint-Use Agreement which allow for public access. Some school sites have not yet been developed, while others have been identified as being surplus (i.e. a school is not required).	
	MUNICIPAL CEMETERY	Municipally-owned cemeteries provide important cultural services, and may also provide some of the same uses as municipal parks, such as passive recreation.	Northern Lights South Haven
	MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE	Municipally-owned golf courses often have restricted access (restricted to club members or require a fee for access) but the City retains ownership, allowing for other potential open space uses such as picnic areas or winter skiing opportunities.	Victoria Golf Course Rundle Golf Course
	SELECT VACANT CITY HOLDINGS	Select vacant City holdings include vacant lots and other City-owned spaces that have not yet been developed into other land uses or sold. They are spaces identified by the City as currently providing some open space services such as green space, and represent an opportunity for future open space developments such as civic spaces, greenways and parks.	
	UTILITY LOTS	Utility lots currently provide some of the functions of open space by acting as green landcover, stormwater management facilities or other uses. These lots may have a public access agreement in place, and may be maintained by the City.	

Open Space Classification



Appendix C

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EDMONTON'S GREEN NETWORK STRATEGY