



# breathe

EDMONTON'S GREEN NETWORK STRATEGY

What We Heard Report  
Phase 1: Foundations + Vision  
August 2016

**Project Website**

[www.edmonton.ca/breathe](http://www.edmonton.ca/breathe)



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PROJECT OVERVIEW</b>	<b>1</b>
What is Breathe?	2
What is the goal of the project?	3
What is included in the green network?	3
<b>ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW</b>	<b>5</b>
Communications	6
Phases of Engagement	6
About this Report	8
<b>HOW YOU PARTICIPATED</b>	<b>9</b>
Relationship Building	12
Ongoing Engagement	12
<b>WHAT YOU SAID</b>	<b>13</b>
Interactive Drop-in Sessions	14
Stakeholder Meetings	15
Stakeholder Workshops	16
Discussion Guide	17
Communities of Interest	18
Key Takeaways	21
<b>NEXT STEPS</b>	<b>22</b>







# PROJECT OVERVIEW





## What is Breathe?

### Edmonton's Green Network Strategy

Parks and open spaces are vital to a community's health. These open spaces provide places for people to play, gather, grow food, learn about nature and celebrate.

Because Edmonton Metro is projected to nearly double in population from 1.2 million people to 2.1 million people by 2050, the City has embarked on a process to plan the city's green network to meet the needs of growing communities.

### A Multi-Functional Green Network

Edmonton's Green Network Strategy will examine how open space in the City of Edmonton functions as an integrated network of public spaces that provide real, measurable value to Edmontonians. Open spaces contribute to human health and wellness, improve the urban environment, and provide places for people to come together. These contributions are the central themes of the Green Network Strategy, and provide the organizing framework for assessing open space.

## ECOLOGY

Supports and enhances the environment by sustaining healthy and resilient ecosystems.



## CELEBRATION

Connects people to each other and builds a sense of place by providing places for communities to thrive, gather and celebrate.



## WELLNESS

Promotes healthy living and fosters well-being through diverse kinds of recreation, mobility and environments.



## What is the goal of the project?

BREATHE is a transformative strategy to make sure that each neighbourhood in Edmonton will be supported by an accessible network of open space as the city grows.

The Green Network Strategy builds on the Urban Parks Management Plan and the Natural Connections Strategic Plan, and aligns with the goals identified in the City's strategic planning documents ("The Ways").

The Green Network Strategy will support the City of Edmonton commitment to:

- » Transform Edmonton's urban form
- » Enhance the use of public transit and active modes of transportation
- » Improve Edmonton's liveability
- » Preserve and sustain Edmonton's environment
- » Ensure Edmonton's financial sustainability
- » Diversify Edmonton's economy

## What is included in the green network?

In Edmonton, the green network is all of the city's outdoor land and water that is publicly owned or publicly accessible.

Some examples include:

- » Parks and plazas, like Churchill Square
- » Main streets, like Jasper Avenue
- » Natural areas, like the Saskatchewan River Valley and ravine system
- » Corridors and linkages, like Mill Creek Ravine
- » Green infrastructure, like the bioswales at Ellerslie Fire Station, green roofs, and the rainwater gardens at Government House Park



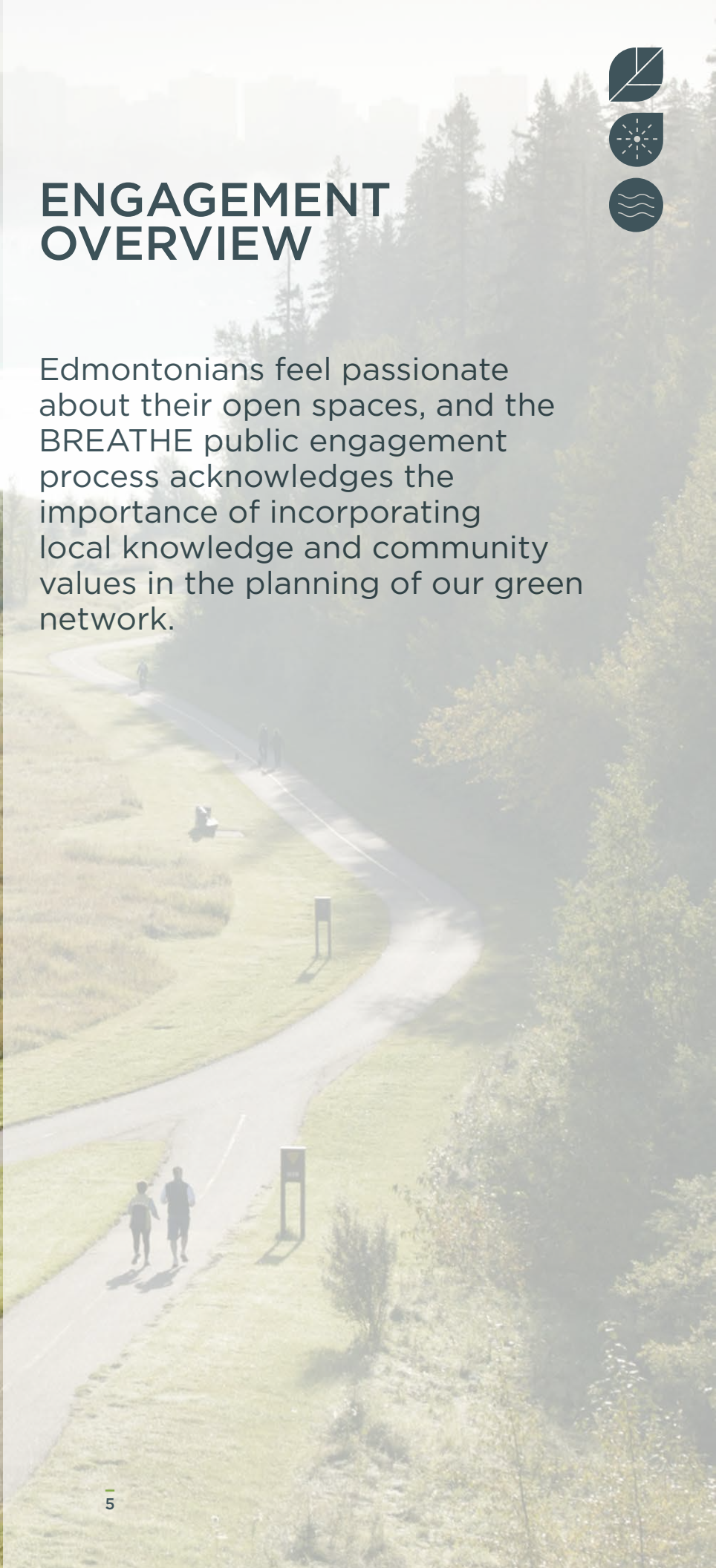






# ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Edmontonians feel passionate about their open spaces, and the BREATHE public engagement process acknowledges the importance of incorporating local knowledge and community values in the planning of our green network.



## Communications

A variety of mechanisms were used to inform the community about BREATHE and about opportunities to share their thoughts on Edmonton's open spaces. Messaging was broadcast through the use of the City's website and the project page itself (www.edmonton.ca/breathe). E-newsletters, public service announcements, media advertisements, road signs, project postcards, and Twitter posts were used to promote engagement opportunities, as well. Project team members even "popped up" at 6 locations and events throughout the city to spread the word and speak with Edmontonians about the project.

## Phases of Engagement

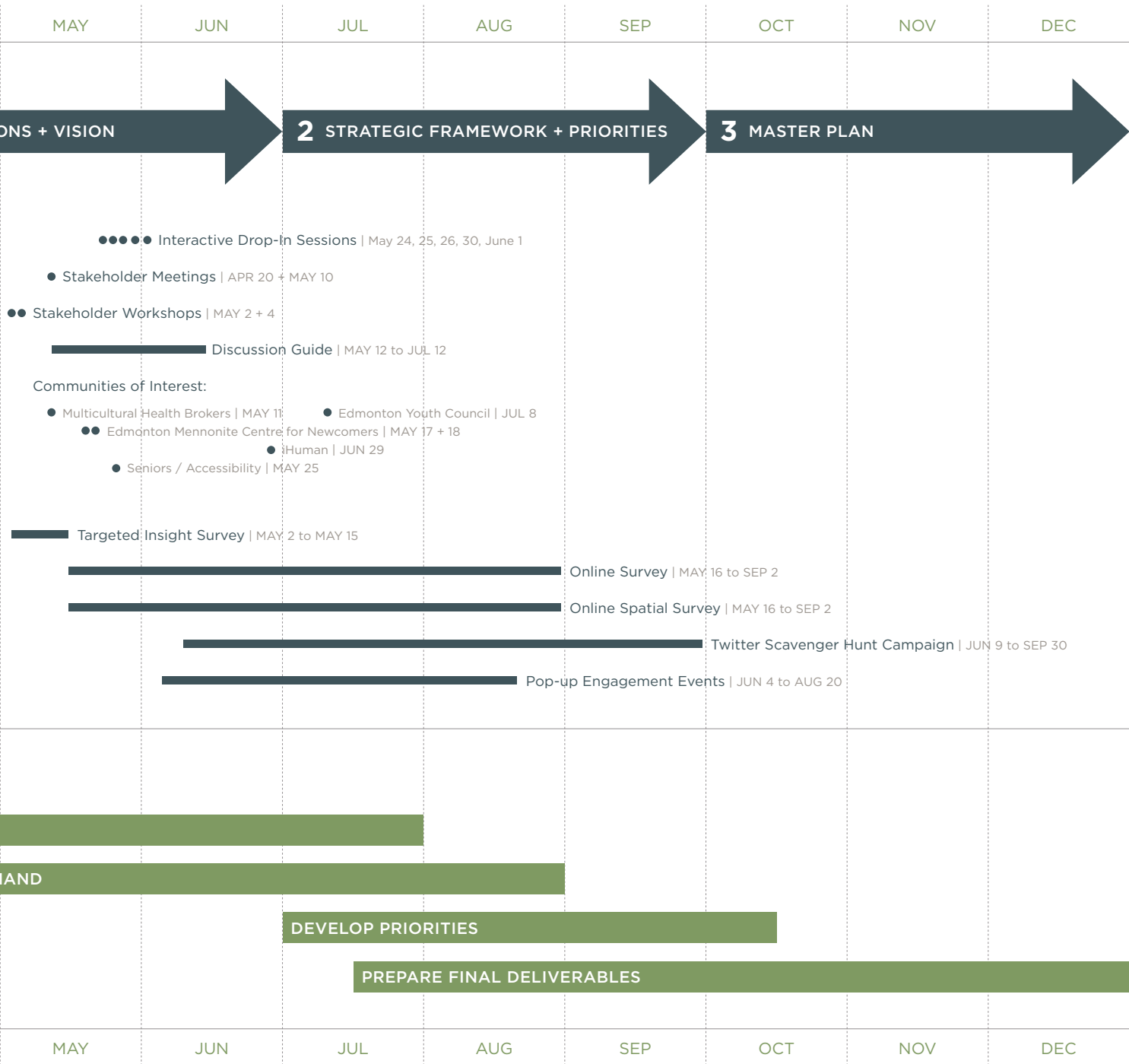
The engagement process is structured in three phases, which each inform project development in different ways:

**PHASE 1: FOUNDATIONS + VISION** is designed to identify demands, opportunities and barriers to use. Input will provide the foundation for developing strategic objectives and priorities.

**PHASE 2: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK** is designed to validate priorities and key planning directions. Major components of the Green Network Strategy will be developed based on feedback gathered during this phase.

**PHASE 3: MASTER PLAN** is designed to present the draft Green Network Strategy and obtain final feedback from stakeholders and citizens.





## About this Report

During the first phase of engagement, the BREATHE team asked about how the current open space system is working well, issues that are affecting open spaces, and improvements that could be made.

This report presents the findings from the Phase 1: Foundations + Vision engagement activities. It includes a description of the consultation activities including when they occurred, who participated, and the findings from each. Engagement activities that extend into Phase 2 — including the online questionnaire and spatial survey — will be addressed in subsequent What We Heard reports.

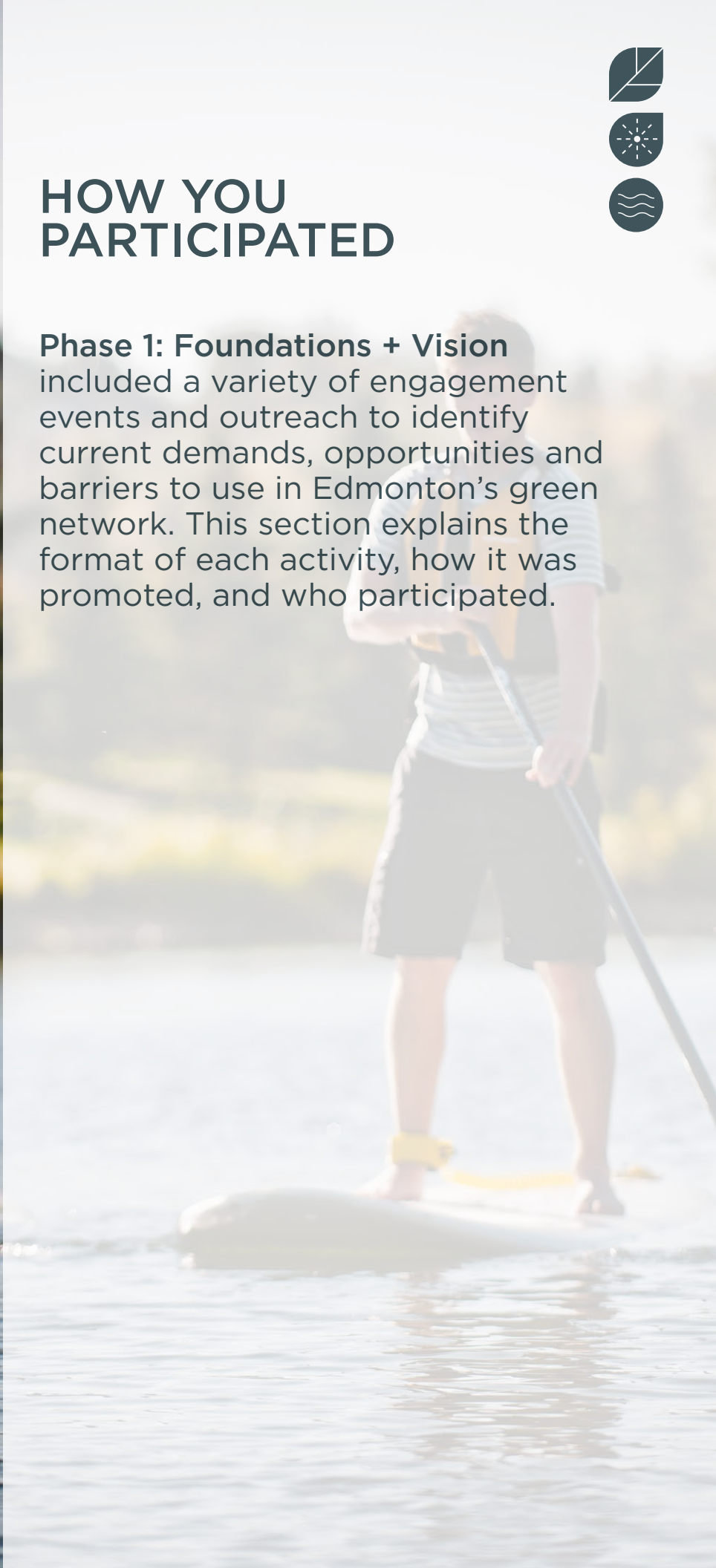




## HOW YOU PARTICIPATED



**Phase 1: Foundations + Vision** included a variety of engagement events and outreach to identify current demands, opportunities and barriers to use in Edmonton's green network. This section explains the format of each activity, how it was promoted, and who participated.





### Interactive Drop-In Sessions

Five drop-in sessions were held throughout Edmonton to provide city residents the opportunity to learn about the project and to provide input about project goals and approach. The sessions featured a short video introducing the project, included information panels about BREATHE, and offered the opportunity for people to share their comments by attaching sticky notes to a large map of Edmonton. The sessions were promoted through Twitter, Facebook, Edmonton Journal and Edmonton Examiner ads, emails to project stakeholders, road signs and posters / postcards.



### Stakeholder Meetings

Three stakeholder meetings were convened with organizations identified as having a significant stake in the Green Network Strategy, including the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, Edmonton Public School Board, Edmonton Catholic School Board, and the Urban Development Institute. The intent of the meetings was to outline the project and provide attendees with the opportunity to ask questions, raise concerns, and bring forward ideas.

### Stakeholder Workshops

Three workshop sessions were convened to gather input from stakeholder groups in Edmonton, including organizations that deliver programs or services with a direct relation to the city's open spaces, or whose activities suggested a particular interest in how open spaces are planned. 145 stakeholder groups were invited to send representatives to attend one of the sessions using email and follow-up telephone calls; a total of 32 organizations participated. The workshops provided the opportunity to discuss the project and identify concerns from an organizational perspective. Each workshop began with a formal presentation about the project, followed by small group discussion around the strengths, limitations, and opportunities for improvement in Edmonton's green network.



54

ORGANIZATIONS

### Discussion Guide

An online discussion guide was also distributed to community organizations, in addition to all Community Leagues, to gather their collective thoughts about Edmonton’s green network. 319 organizations were invited to participate; 54 submitted responses. The guide asked groups to identify how they used open spaces, and their perspective on the strengths, limitations, and opportunities for improvement in Edmonton’s green network.

### Communities of Interest

Communities of interest are groups of people who have an interest in how open spaces are planned, but who might not be formally represented by a community organization or who might be difficult to engage through conventional techniques. For BREATHE, the project team attended eight events (convened discussion groups or attended scheduled meetings/activities) with communities of interest representing the following perspectives:

#### ETHNO-CULTURAL AND NEWCOMER COMMUNITIES:

- » Multicultural Health Brokers | 12 people
- » Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (2 sessions) | 110 people

#### CHILDREN AND YOUTH:

- » City Hall School | 50 people
- » Edmonton Youth Council | 5 people
- » iHuman Youth Society | 12 people

#### SENIORS AND PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY ISSUES:

- » Seniors and accessibility focus group | 2 people
- » Interagency Committee on Inclusive Recreation | 8 people

The format of these events varied, but discussion generally aligned with other engagement events (strengths, limitations, opportunities for improvement) with a particular emphasis on the perspectives relevant to each group. Organizations that contributed to stakeholder workshops, discussion guides, and interactive drop-in sessions may represent these interests, as well.

8

MEETINGS

199

PARTICIPANTS



## Relationship Building

The City of Edmonton is committed to keeping First Nations and Métis (Indigenous) communities informed and engaged when projects intersect with Indigenous interests and concerns. Since April 2016, the City has facilitated several one-on-one and small group meetings with Indigenous communities to share project information, gather input, and continue to build relationships between the City and Indigenous communities.

## Ongoing Engagement

In addition to the events, conversations, and discussion guide reviewed above, Edmontonians have been able to share their thoughts online as well. An online questionnaire is ongoing, as well as a spatial survey that allows people to identify and comment on specific places using a map. The findings from this online engagement will be reported in a subsequent What We Heard report, together with findings from a survey of Edmonton's Insight Community (an online citizen panel made up of Edmonton residents and property owners over 15 years of age).



## WHAT YOU SAID

From the BREATHE engagement activities completed to date, it is clear that Edmontonians care about their green network: over 350 individuals and organizations participated during Phase 1 alone.

This section explains the findings from each engagement activity, which have been compiled and summarized according to the three major questions being asked: what works well, issues and concerns, and opportunities for improvement.

## Interactive Drop-in Sessions

### WHAT WORKS WELL

- » Variety of open spaces (scale and distribution)
- » River Valley, dog-off-leash areas, amenities (e.g. splash pads, outdoor exercise equipment)
- » Open spaces facilitate social interaction, gathering, and celebration
- » Open spaces are generally clean
- » Wildlife viewing and connectivity

### ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- » Limited non-motorized access to open spaces
- » Preservation of agricultural land in the city
- » User conflicts on multi-use trails
- » Dedication of valuable open space to dog off-leash areas, to exclusion of other uses

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- » Improved active transportation and public transportation access to open spaces
- » Maintenance of open spaces (e.g. additional litter containers)
- » Open space accessibility for people with mobility limitations
- » Promotion and communication of open space opportunities
- » More encouragement of naturalization in public and private open spaces
- » Use of vacant, transitory or private open spaces for parks or urban agriculture
- » Enhanced fitness amenities (e.g. exercise equipment, climbing walls) and programs for adults
- » Maintain complementary City policies (e.g. limiting sprawl, preserving natural and agricultural areas, encouraging volunteerism in parks)
- » More green roofs, community gardens, and public orchards
- » Improved public education about wildlife and ecological preservation
- » Improved wayfinding and publicly available, comprehensive map of trail network
- » Additional amenities to support use (e.g. washrooms, seating, drinking fountains, shade features)



## Stakeholder Meetings

In contrast with most of the other engagement activities, the stakeholder meetings were intended to facilitate a more focused discussion of issues relevant to the stakeholder groups.

The **Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues** emphasized the importance of Community Leagues in the programming, development, management and stewardship of open spaces throughout the city. They recommended that the Green Network Strategy address the means and process of land dedication to Community Leagues. Alignment with other plans (e.g. transportation planning) and accounting for urban wildlife were also identified as important topics to include in the Strategy. Finally, the Strategy should be flexible enough to accommodate changing trends, and should continue to involve stakeholders in its development.

The **Edmonton Public School Board** and **Edmonton Catholic School Board** expressed that open spaces associated with school sites are designed to serve the surrounding community, and that co-location with other community facilities should be encouraged to reinforce this role. Open spaces should be developed with attention to the sites' users, and should carefully consider the provision of adequate non-motorized access (e.g. pathway network) and the safety risks of locating

stormwater management ponds (e.g. dry ponds) near schools. The groups recognized that surplus school sites are a controversial issue for residents, and that the Boards are careful in designating such sites. From a management perspective, they welcome a less prescriptive, more visionary approach from BREATHE than the Urban Parks Management Plan provided.

The **Urban Development Institute**, which represents the land development industry, echoed the other stakeholder groups in encouraging a less prescriptive, more flexible Strategy. While rigid standards can lead to homogeneity, good design can be encouraged by offering incentives to developers for exceeding minimum standards. The group emphasized that the Green Network Strategy must account for the varying spatial scales of the open space network, and the varying departmental responsibilities for its implementation, particularly with respect to funding. They also recommended that UDI remain actively involved in the process, as they represent a market perspective that has a large bearing on future open space development in the city (e.g. planned redevelopment of the 160-acre Northlands site).

## Stakeholder Workshops

### WHAT WORKS WELL

- » Edmonton's River Valley and natural spaces
- » Variety of open spaces
- » Maintenance of outdoor spaces
- » Good balance between development and preservation

### ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- » Needs of non-motorized commuters
- » Linkages between open spaces
- » Lack of amenities that support people's use of open spaces (e.g. bathrooms, litter containers)
- » Open space planning and development (e.g. surplus school sites, municipal reserve allocation levels)
- » Insufficient appreciation for native plant and animal species among users
- » Cleanup of dumping sites, snow clearing
- » City administrative processes to use and develop open spaces
- » Recognition of natural and cultural heritage
- » Accessibility to open spaces
- » Wayfinding signage and amenities to enhance the safe use of spaces
- » Enticements to bring people into the River Valley

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- » Promotion and communication of open space opportunities
- » Education about natural spaces and greater attention to natural area preservation
- » Greater focus on non-motorized linkages between open spaces and the active transportation network
- » Recognizing and facilitating contributions to the open space network from non-municipal stakeholders and partners
- » Enhanced open space amenities to encourage widespread use throughout the year
- » Ensure open spaces are multifunctional
- » Additional greening of the urban area including food production

# Discussion Guide

## WHAT WORKS WELL

- » Open spaces provide for exercise and rejuvenation, supporting physical and mental health
- » Open spaces facilitate social interaction, gathering, and celebration, helping build communities
- » Large inventory and diversity of open spaces
- » Good trail network and connectivity, especially in River Valley
- » Opportunities for nature appreciation and wildlife viewing
- » Community gardens as connection with the natural world, social gathering, and food production
- » City efforts to improve neighbourhood walkability (e.g. repairing and leveling sidewalks)
- » Variety of amenities (e.g. skating rinks, benches, fire pits, hard court surfaces, public art)

## ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- » Conflict among users of multi-purpose spaces (e.g. neighbourhood fields, multi-use pathways)
- » Administrative processes to use, reserve and develop open spaces
- » Lack of some amenities (e.g. washrooms, drinking fountains, seating, lighting, shade)
- » Lack of open space in central core and other dense areas, especially for families
- » Accessibility for people with mobility issues, especially to River Valley

## ISSUES AND CONCERNS CONT.

- » Safety concerns (e.g. undesirable activities, homeless individuals, trail lighting)
- » Field maintenance (mowing, weeds)
- » Loss or fragmentation of natural areas

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- » More opportunities to use open spaces during the winter
- » More amenities for comfort (e.g. washrooms, seating) and fitness (e.g. exercise or climbing equipment)
- » Completing connectivity of trail network
- » Wayfinding and interpretive signage that celebrates natural and cultural heritage
- » Streamlined permitting processes for using open space
- » Additional litter containers and increased frequency of collection
- » Commercial opportunities in River Valley
- » Improved recognition of ecological values: preservation and restoration of natural areas, use of native plantings, ecological education, foraging opportunities
- » Involvement of stakeholders in stewardship and monitoring of park bylaws/rules of use
- » Developing transportation corridors with active transportation connectivity in mind
- » BREATHE as an opportunity to recognize other City plans and guide open space development from holistic perspective

## Communities of Interest

### Ethno-cultural and Newcomer Communities

#### WHAT WORKS WELL

- » Open spaces facilitate social interaction, gathering, and celebration
- » Variety of open spaces
- » Opportunities for interaction with nature and wildlife
- » Availability of play structures
- » Open spaces are generally safe and free to use

#### ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- » Some parks less safe due to users' behaviour and/or large natural areas
- » Public transportation makes access to some parks challenging
- » Awareness of open spaces and opportunities lacking, in part due to poor wayfinding
- » Lack of open space in the centre of the city
- » Accessibility issues for people with mobility limitations or low incomes (e.g. cost of picnic site rental)
- » Insufficient public washrooms

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- » Greater variety of amenities within neighbourhood-level parks (e.g. water features, picnic spaces, performance spaces, camping, washrooms)
- » Improved communication and promotion about open spaces, amenities, and how to access them
- » Improved access to water features and the River
- » Additional commercial opportunities, urban orchards, and amenities to encourage year-round use
- » More park space downtown and improved public transportation to open space



# Communities of Interest

## Children and Youth

### WHAT WORKS WELL

- » Variety of open spaces, especially multi-purpose spaces
- » Open spaces facilitate social interaction, gathering, and celebration
- » Interpretive signage and amenities that celebrate natural and cultural heritage
- » Public art
- » Green Shack Program

### ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- » Lack of awareness about parks bylaws
- » Youth and adults made to feel unwelcome in some spaces (e.g. near schools)
- » Lack of open space in the centre of the city
- » Fees and advertising compromise the public aspect of some open spaces

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- » Education and signage providing information about bylaws and rules of use
- » Balance between safety and making open spaces welcome for all individuals
- » More creative use of space (e.g. green roofs, community gardens) and better programming/amenities in core
- » Preservation of, access to and education about natural areas
- » Improved amenities to enhance use (e.g. washrooms, shade, safety installations, WiFi)
- » Recognize local culture, especially indigenous culture of Treaty 6 groups
- » Open spaces as hubs for creative expression, art, and community services
- » Improved communication and promotion about open spaces, amenities, and how to access them
- » Greater variety of amenities (e.g. camping, ziplining, water taxis, natural water parks, climbing walls)
- » Additional commercial opportunities in River Valley and elsewhere could enhance use

## Communities of Interest

### Seniors and People with Mobility Issues

#### WHAT WORKS WELL

- » Open spaces facilitate social interaction and gathering
- » Opportunities for nature appreciation and wildlife viewing
- » Markings, signage and maintenance of trail system is generally good
- » Neighbourhood parks and cemeteries offer good respite, amenities and peaceful experience in the city
- » Community gardens and Victoria Promenade as social and scenic amenities

#### ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- » Poor public transportation to some parks, especially River Valley
- » Trail accessibility (e.g. unpaved trails, damaged paved trails, trails without snow clearing)
- » Perception of safety
- » Lack of wheelchair accessibility to park amenities
- » Insufficient seating at some festivals and large events
- » Difficult to access North Saskatchewan River water edge
- » Inadequate fencing/separation of dog off-leash areas







#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- » Playgrounds to encourage park usage
- » Improved public transportation and reduced distance from bus stops/drop-off areas to amenities
- » Better distribution of neighbourhood-level parks throughout the city
- » More amenities to enable large social gatherings in neighbourhoods
- » Planning with an accessibility lens (e.g. universal design)
- » Lighting and good sight lines on trails
- » WiFi provided for education and safety purposes
- » Wheelchair accessibility to recreational amenities
- » Interpretive signage about natural and cultural heritage
- » Improved access to the North Saskatchewan River



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

Each engagement activity added a new and unique perspective on Edmonton's green network and how it should be planned in the future. In addition, a number of common findings emerged. This section presents the conclusions from **Engagement Phase 1: Foundations + Vision**, and relates these conclusions to the key themes of BREATHE.

## What Works Well

-  North Saskatchewan River Valley
-  Abundance of natural areas
-  Variety of open spaces
-  Trail system
-  Open space programming
-  Beneficial effects of open space on mental and physical health

## Issues + Concerns

-  Connectivity of spaces
-  Disregard of users for natural open spaces
-  Maintenance
-  Wayfinding and interpretive signage
-  Perception of personal safety
-  Lack of open space in the dense urban areas
- City processes to use and develop open space

## Opportunities for Improvement

-  Promote existing opportunities
-  Education about natural areas and natural aspects of open space
-  Access to the North Saskatchewan River edge and River Valley open spaces
-  Accessibility to and within open spaces for people with mobility issues
-  Enhance active transportation networks
-  Providing amenities (washrooms, fountains) based on user needs
-  Urban agriculture
-  More green space in urban core
-  Commercial opportunities in open spaces
- Streamline City processes
- Ongoing stakeholder involvement in planning and implementation

## NEXT STEPS



### **Analysis of Open Space Demand**

What will we need for open space over the next 5 years? 10 years? 30 years?



### **Develop Indicators**

Are we meeting our goals?  
What should our open space targets be?



### **Final Consultation**

Did we get it right?

## BREATHE IS ONLINE



Visit [edmonton.ca/breathe](https://edmonton.ca/breathe)  
to keep up to date on the project  
and stay involved!

## HAVE QUESTIONS?



[breathe@edmonton.ca](mailto:breathe@edmonton.ca)



[@PlanEdmonton](https://twitter.com/PlanEdmonton)



311





EDMONTON'S GREEN NETWORK STRATEGY

[edmonton.ca/breathe](http://edmonton.ca/breathe)