

CREATE

What We Heard Report Northeast River Valley Park

January 2025

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edmonton.ca/NERiverValleyParkStrategicPlan

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Introduction

Purpose

This report summarizes feedback received during the second phase of public engagement activities for the Northeast River Valley Park Strategic Plan. The Phase 1 What We Heard report is available at: edmonton.ca/NERiverValleyParkStrategicPlan. Phase 1 engagement results identified how people currently use the park and helped inform a vision for the future.

Phase 2 Engagement activities occurred in the summer and fall of 2024 and sought feedback from two main groups: the Indigenous community and Edmontonians across the city.

The goal of the public engagement activities is to gather input to guide the development of a Strategic Plan, in conjunction with other City of Edmonton policies such as Breathe: Green Network Strategy and the Ribbon of Green.

The following document provides a summary of what we heard from the general public engagement events.

Indigenous engagement

A separate Indigenous engagement process was completed in parallel with the public engagement. Ten presentations and site tours were completed for Indigenous community members in early fall 2024. A separate report on feedback received from Indigenous Elders and First Nation representatives has been prepared.

Project overview



The Strategic Plan for Northeast River Valley Park will establish a unique vision, guiding principles, and recommendations for the future use of the park. The 77-hectare (190-acre) property was previously known as Our Lady Queen of Peace Ranch and joined the City of Edmonton’s River Valley Park system in fall 2023. The park is uniquely positioned within the “Quarry Node,” as identified in the Ribbon of Green SW+NE planning framework. [Public Engagement Overview](#)

Public engagement was completed in November and December of 2024 and consisted of an open house event at Northeast River Valley Park (November 23), a pop-up at the Santa Shuffle event at Rundle Park (December 7), and an online survey (November 21 - December 15). Content for the public engagement was prepared and included guiding principles, preliminary land use zones and proposed future uses. Results from these engagement activities are summarized below.



Photo from public open house event

Who we engaged

Northeast River Valley Park is part of the City of Edmonton's River Valley Park System and is classified as a Metropolitan Park. These types of parks are large, feature parks intended to provide value to residents and visitors throughout Edmonton and the greater Metro region. As such, the Public Engagement process aimed to gather feedback from residents across the city.

This public engagement was conducted with the Create level of the public engagement spectrum. This level sees the public as collaborators with the City to develop and build solutions.



City of Edmonton Public Engagement Spectrum

Event marketing

The public engagement events were marketed across the City of Edmonton via the following methods:

Engagement Opportunity	Audience	Event Marketing	Location / Format	Participation
Public open house	General public	Social media & Google ads	Northeast River Valley Park	10 participants
Community event	General public and recreation groups	Email notification	Rundle Park	12 participants
Online Engagement (digital survey)	General public	Social media & Google ads	Northeast River Valley Park Website	477 responses



Examples of Google and Social Media marketing ads

This social media campaign achieved the following results:

- 1) Overall, the campaign surpassed both click targets and click-through rate benchmarks. The campaign was successful in generating engagement (shares, comments, reactions)
- 2) In total, there were 1.9 million ad views and over 11,200 clicks to the project web page

How we engaged

Public open house

The open house was planned as an in-person event designed to inform people about the strategic planning and gather their feedback. The in-person event was branded as a fun, family-friendly event. Attendees were encouraged to participate in discussions about the future vision for Northeast River Valley Park.

The project team had an indoor station with 12 display boards sharing the proposed guiding principles, park zones and desired elements. Participants were asked to identify their priorities through sticker activities, written comments and a “jar game.” This asked attendees to identify their preferred park zone and tradeoffs by dropping poker chips into the corresponding jars.

Weather permitting, the event planned to have an outdoor station at the amphitheatre with a bonfire.

Proposed interactive activities included: a bonfire with hot chocolate and marshmallows, a scavenger hunt with prizes, a colouring table, nature take-home kits and ranger tours.

Members of the project team were available to explain the project and engagement topics in easy-to-understand ways, answering questions about the process (including funding) and gathering feedback through note-taking.

Event facilitation

A major snow event occurred overnight and through the morning of the in-person open house. This drastically limited the amount of visitors to the park and attendees at the in-person event. The outdoor components of the event plan were unavailable.

Due to the poor weather, the project team quickly planned a supplementary event (described below) to provide an alternative for in-person public engagement.

Santa Shuffle community event

The project team attended a community event, the Santa Shuffle at Rundle Park, on December 7 to gain additional public feedback. Anyone attending the park, including those at the event, could provide feedback.



Photo from the pop-up at the Santa Shuffle event

Online engagement

An online survey was developed to reach a wider audience who perhaps couldn't attend the open house. The online survey was open for 25 days.

What we asked

Both the in-person event and online survey provided the public with the same information and questions. (see appendix for open house boards with graphics and prompting questions). Here is an example:

Northeast River Valley Park Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are a set of values or beliefs that inform and shape decision making. They provide a framework for actions and ensure consistency in achieving a desired outcome.

The following Guiding Principles have been developed based on feedback from the first round of public engagement, Indigenous engagement, and discussions with key community and internal City partners.

- 01 Restoration**
A place that is a unique mix of disturbed and undisturbed land. Northeast River Valley Park restores and rehabilitates landscapes for people, wildlife, and plants.
- 02 Connection**
A place in which to connect with nature and people through gatherings of all sizes.
- 03 Teaching**
A place for all to learn from the land through interpretation, hands-on experiences, Indigenous knowledge-sharing and guidance.
- 04 Recreation**
An all-season park with diverse passive and active recreational opportunities.
- 05 Accessibility**
A place that is welcoming, safe and provides barrier-free access to all, celebrating and supporting each visitor's unique experiences.

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Sample open house presentation board

Eight prompting questions were used to encourage discussion during the site event and online survey. The framing of the questions aimed to gather feedback on guiding principles, park zones and park improvements.

What we heard

Public open house event summary

Ten people attended the event, representing both the general public and people with an interest in outdoor recreation such as paddling, canoeing and biking. Participants engaged by responding to the engagement boards, having discussions with the project team and participating in the tradeoff “jar game” while event notes were recorded by project staff.

Key themes of comments:

Community building through recreation

- Ideas were presented to build the outdoor recreational community with programming such as demonstration days, volunteering, gear swaps/sales

- Interest in creating NEP as a paddling centre with boat storage, lifejackets, convenient access to the lakes and teaching/coaching facilities
- Consideration for organizing bike/paddling races and cross-country ski trails to enhance recreational offerings
- Encouragement of City partnership with recreation groups

Environmental restoration

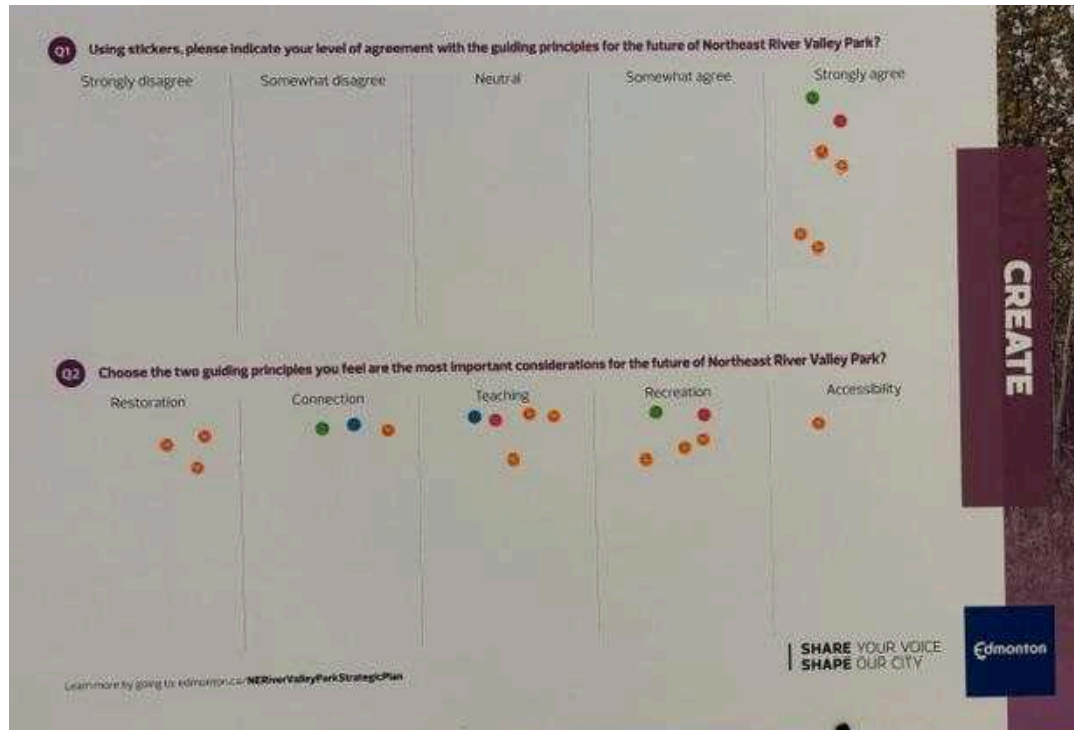
- Tree planting is necessary to provide a wind buffer and provide shade
- Water quality is perceived as clean

Access and infrastructure

- River access is desired at the end of 17 Street NE
- Support for removing the public access road through the park
- Support for adjusting the location of the parking lot and park entry
- Recommendations for lake layout, such as widening the loop connection for better boating access and use
- Recommendations to adjust the playground island away from the water's edge for safety and space

Principles and planning approach

- Most attendees strongly agreed with the guiding principles for the park's future
- Recreation and teaching were identified as the most important considerations
- Agreement was expressed regarding the proposed future park zones
- Participants prioritized the inclusion of the following elements in future planning: Restoration, water recreation, recreation equipment rentals, formal programming and an enhanced trail network



Sample of sticker exercise completed at open house event

Santa Shuffle community event summary

Twelve attendees representing the general public and water recreation enthusiasts spoke with the project team at the Santa Shuffle community event. Participants were also able to play the tradeoff “jar game,” if they were interested. The discussions focused on recreational opportunities for the lake and highlighted the following points:

Support for water-based recreation and events

- Strong support was expressed for hosting water-based recreational activities at the park and maintaining non-motorized boat access only. Participants reinforced their desire for partnerships with the city to bring water events and related infrastructure to the park
- The park was recognized as an ideal location for water recreation due to its existing infrastructure, including washrooms and indoor facilities. It was identified as a rare and valuable resource in the city, deserving of thoughtful planning and use
- The proximity to the city proper was touted as a major advantage for water recreation access. Additionally, the water quality of the lake was cited as being higher than other locations around Edmonton and surrounding areas

Consideration of event facilitation

- It was expressed the park is a good location to host water recreation events and gatherings. The importance of accounting for event specifications, such as straightaway length, wind exposure, water access and event set-up was emphasized
- Concerns were raised about the affordability of the Event Centre for community and recreational events

Infrastructure needs

- Attendees identified the need for a boat launch, short- and long-term boat storage and other supporting water recreation infrastructure
- Recommendations included locating a boat launch or dock closer to the main access and parking areas to improve accessibility, addressing challenges with the current launch site's distance from parking
- Some concerns were raised about increasing vegetation presence on site as this was perceived as contributing to decreased water quality while this appealed to others as a common-sense approach

River access

- Encouragement was given to improve access to the river within this quadrant of the city
- Respondents felt the river environment (running water versus standing water at the lake) would allow for a diversity of water and paddling activities and experiences

This feedback underscores the community's enthusiasm for enhancing water recreation while addressing practical infrastructure and accessibility considerations.



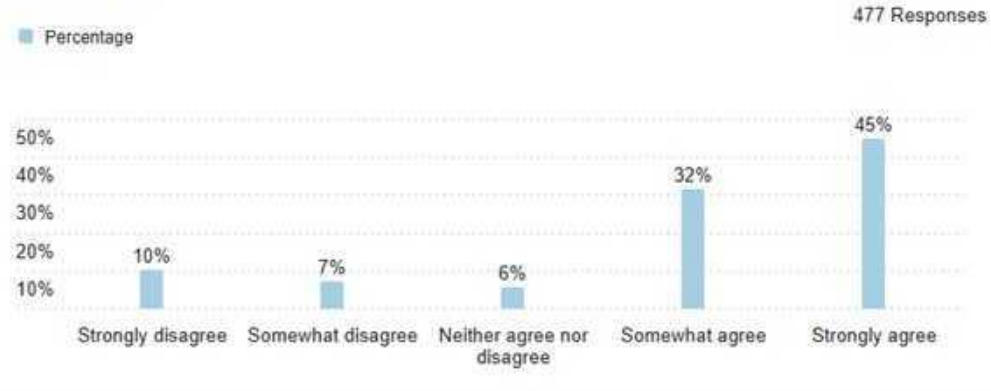
Park zones tradeoff "jar game" at the pop-up event

Online engagement (digital survey) summary

There were 477 respondents to the survey. The results are summarized below.

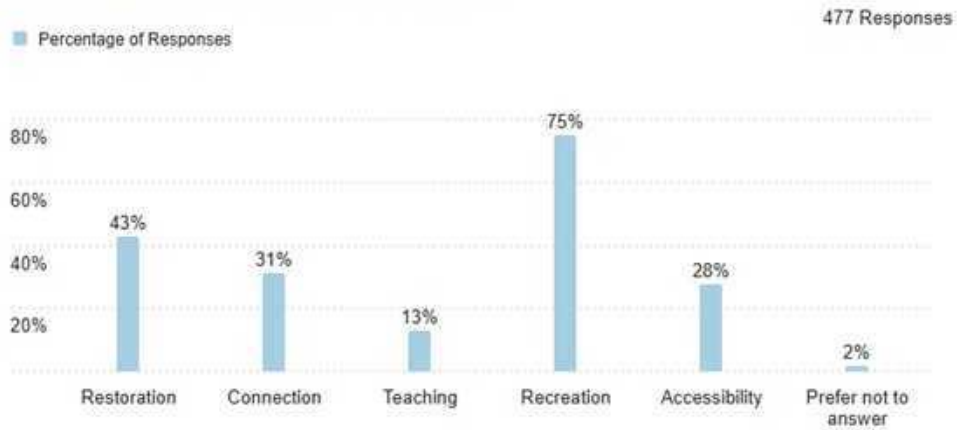
Q1, 2 and 3 Guiding Principles:

Q1 - Please indicate your level of agreement with the guiding principles for the future of Northeast River Valley Park.



Survey results indicate there is much support from the general public for the proposed guiding principles for the future of Northeast River Valley Park.

Q2 - Choose the two guiding principles you feel are the most important considerations for the future of Northeast River Valley Park. Choose up to 2.



Survey results indicate the general public prioritises recreation (75 per cent) and restoration (43 per cent) as the top two priorities for the future of Northeast River Valley Park.

Question 3 asked respondents to provide reasoning for their answers to Questions 1 and 2. Survey respondents' written comments reinforced the results above. A summary of written comments is provided below.

Restoration:

- Strong support for preserving and protecting natural areas
- Concerns about balancing restoration with other park uses (e.g., recreation and accessibility)
- Desire to protect ecosystems, wildlife and the natural beauty of the river valley

Connection:

- Many articulated the desire for connection with the land and nature, especially within the city limits.
- A stronger connection to the river (and trail) was articulated by many

Recreation:

- Need for diverse recreational opportunities for all ages and seasons
- Concerns about maintaining a balance between recreational activities and environmental preservation
- Recreation is seen as a way to attract families and foster engagement

Teaching:

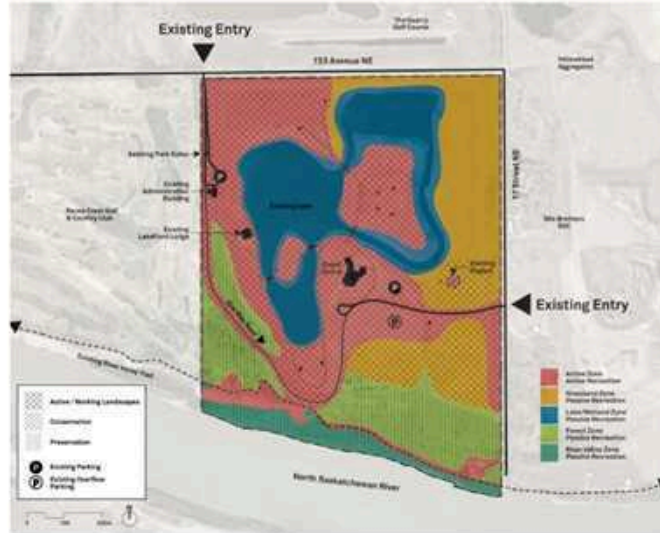
- Interest in educational opportunities, particularly teaching history and Indigenous knowledge
- Calls for hands-on learning experiences that interpret the park's landscape, pre-colonial history and ecology

Accessibility:

- Calls for improved accessibility, including barrier-free pathways, parking and inclusive spaces

Q4 and 5: Park Zones

Existing Park Zones



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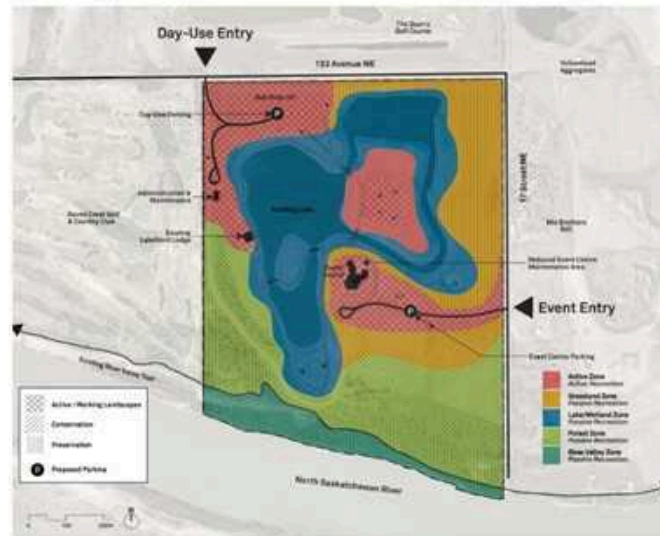
Highlights

- Large areas of maintained active zones across the park.
- Plant and wildlife corridors are interrupted by active zones.
- Lake zone provides little opportunity for wildlife habitat.

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Proposed Park Zones



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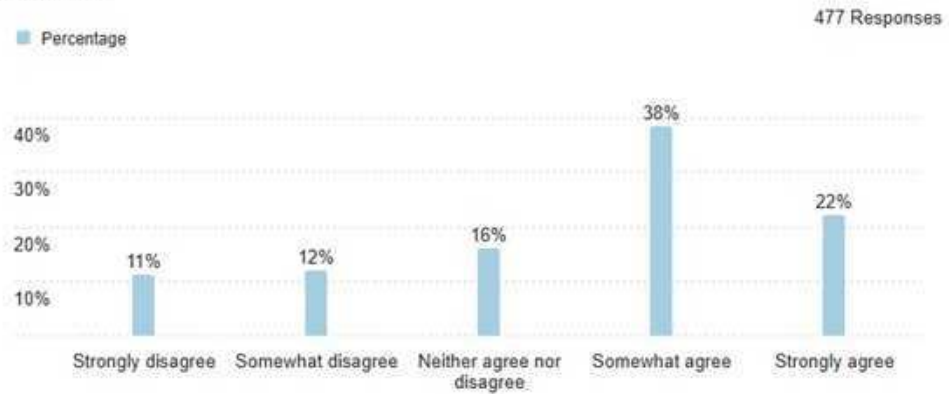
Highlights

- Active zones are consolidated around entry areas and existing event infrastructure.
- Forest and grassland zones are expanded to connect plant and wildlife corridors.
- Lake/wetland zone is expanded to increase habitat area.
- Forest zone is renaturalized to better protect the river valley zone.

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Q4 - Looking at the park zone map, please indicate your level of agreement that the proposed future zones offer the right balance between active and passive recreation in Northeast River Valley Park.



The majority of respondents (60 per cent) somewhat or strongly agreed with the proposed land use zones for the park.

Survey respondents' written comments generally supported the proposed future zones for Northeast River Valley Park. A summary is provided below:

- Overall, support for the proposed zones and the expansion of passive recreation and restored/conserved natural areas
- Some respondents desire larger active recreation areas to attract visitors and have space for programmed and unprogrammed activities for families, and local communities
- Some were concerned removing the internal road may negatively affect accessibility within the park
- Respondents were concerned the existing "playground island" could be moved and wanted it to remain in the active zone
- Some desired more active zones near the river
- Many commented the lake (or part of it) should be classified as active recreation

Several respondents wanted clarity on the meaning of active and passive recreation and if existing features such as bridges, picnic spaces and buildings will be maintained.

Q6: Park Improvements

Park Improvements

01 Restoration
Reclaiming space for ecological restoration and renaturalization, including designating areas to be closed to public access.

06 Wayfinding & Interpretive signage
Signage to provide directional guidance in and around the park for people walking, biking and driving, as well as interpretive signage to provide historical, ecological or educational information to visitors.

02 Outdoor gathering spaces
Spaces including picnic tables, covered/shade structures and firepits.

07 Water recreation
Non-motorized water activities, including paddleboarding, kayaking, canoeing and fishing.

03 Amenities for events & festivals
Retaining and restoring existing event facilities and consideration for amenities to support events, such as power, water or other features.

08 Winter recreation
Activities including tobogganing and cross-country skiing.

04 Enhanced trail network
Trails for walking, biking, dog walking, cross-country skiing and more, including nature trails and/or boardwalks.

09 Recreation equipment rentals
Opportunities to rent recreation equipment on site, such as paddleboards, kayaks, snowshoes, etc.

05 Formal programming
Programmed activities including day camps and guided tours.

10 Improved parking
Parking for both events and recreational use, consolidated and organized to reduce impact.

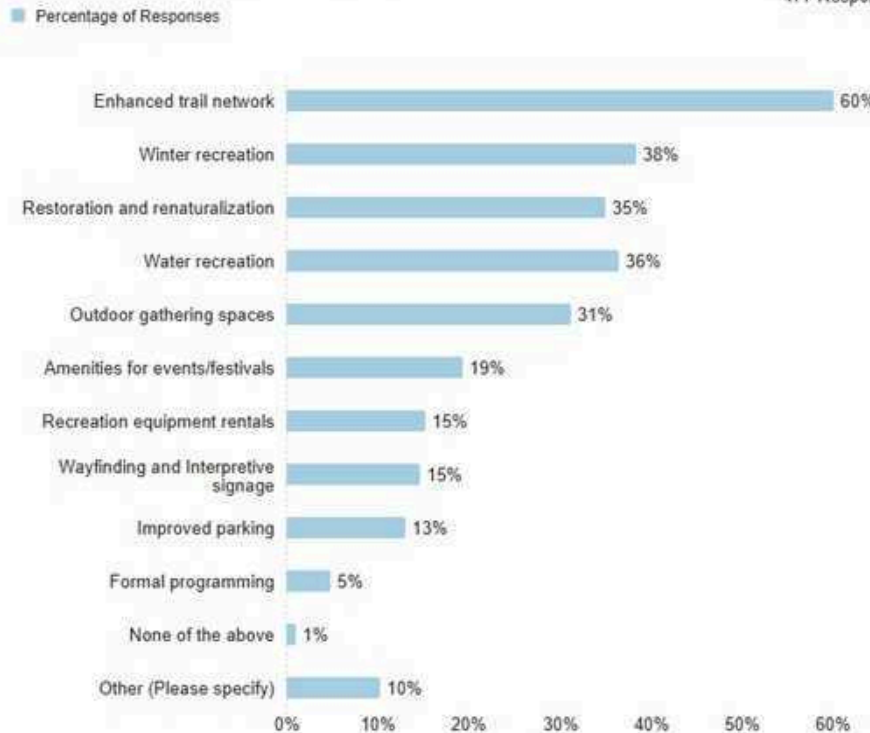
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Q6 -Choose three elements that are most important to you to include in future planning for Northeast River Valley Park. Choose up to 3.

477 Responses



Survey responses indicate the priority elements for the future planning of Northeast River Valley Park are an enhanced trail network (60 per cent), winter recreation (38 per cent), water recreation (36 per cent) and restoration and renaturalization (35 per cent). Outdoor gathering spaces were also identified by many as a priority (31 per cent).

Some respondents shared mixed views through written comments about establishing an off-leash area for dogs at the park. In addition, participants identified park improvements including:

- Fishing
- Boat docks and accessible boat launch
- Swimming
- Skating
- Fire Pits
- Winter warming shelters
- Tree planting
- Improved washrooms
- Enhanced play area
- Restaurant/food service
- Opportunity to host paddling events
- Bike park (mountain bike skills)
- Disk golf

Q7: Is there anything else you would like to share with the project team as the Strategic Plan for Northeast River Valley Park is developed?

A summary of feedback is provided below.:

- Access:
 - Recommended transit/shuttle to the nearest LRT station
 - Recommended paved trails for improved accessibility

- Maintenance and ensuring the park is well-maintained
- Programming:
 - Booking opportunities for groups
 - Variety of facility rental price points
 - Children camps
 - Picnic sites
- Seen as a good location to provide access to the river
- Winter:
 - Provide a variety of winter recreation including improved and dedicated cross-country ski trails
- Lake:
 - The lake is seen as a unique aspect of the park, with many recreational opportunities
- Many comments were received regarding collaboration with Indigenous nations and Elders to guide the development of the plan

Demographics summary

Almost all survey respondents indicated they live in Edmonton (96 per cent), with the majority (69 per cent) from the northeast quadrant of the city. Most participants (81 per cent) visited the park within the past year.

Overall summary

The feedback received through the survey, open house and community event includes many thoughts and recommendations for the future of Northeast River Valley Park. Public input highlights a strong desire for balanced park improvements that integrate accessibility, recreation and natural preservation.

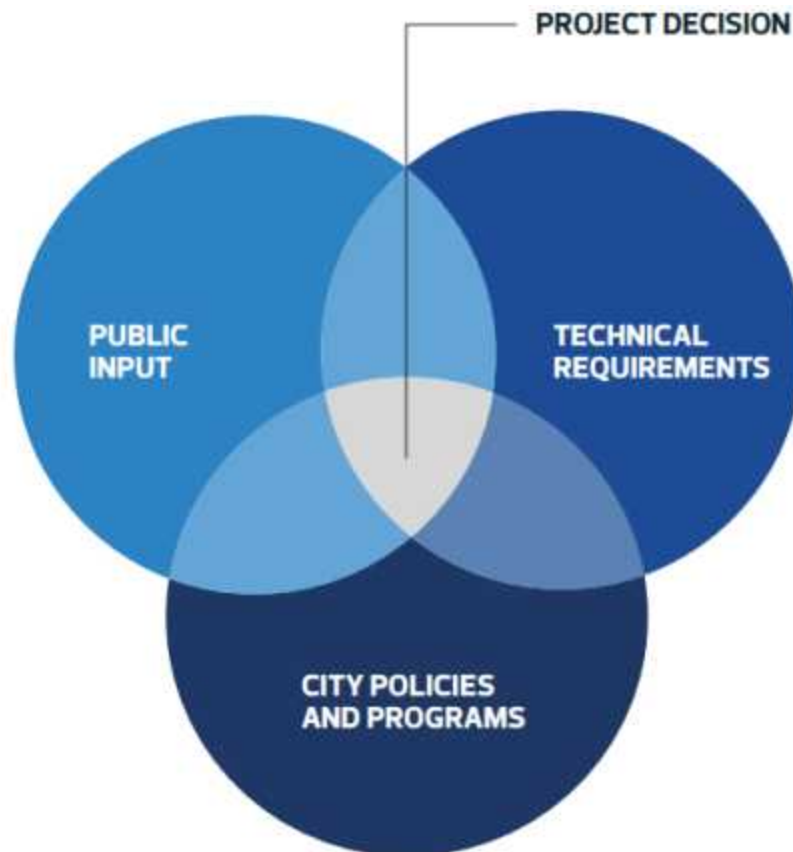
Key priorities include enhancing accessibility with paved pathways and barrier-free connections, improving recreational opportunities such as winter activities, thoughtful boat launch location and non-motorized water access and improving practical facilities like washrooms and parking. The community also emphasized the

importance of natural features, with calls for planting more trees and support for preserving and improving grasslands, wetlands and riparian forest.

What happens next?

The project team will use the engagement results to develop a Strategic Plan for the park. We have heard support from the public for a balanced approach that respects the park's setting and character as a large riverfront park, while providing functional improvements to encourage visitors to the park, enhancing accessibility and low-impact recreational opportunities.

The Strategic Plan will be a guiding framework for the City of Edmonton and will align with both the Ribbon of Green and Breathe policies. It will also provide a clear structure/framework to guide future development while allowing flexibility to adapt to future opportunities. This will ensure the plan remains relevant and responsive over time.



Appendix

Northeast River Valley Park Engagement

Welcome!

Since Northeast River Valley Park opened in September 2023, the City has conducted public engagement and worked to further understand the park's landscape, ecology and existing infrastructure.

This learning has informed the development of guiding principles to help develop the Strategic Plan for the park that will guide future decision making.

You are now invited to provide feedback on the strategic direction, guiding principles and what you would most like to see and do at the park.

City policies such as The Ribbon of Green, technical requirements and engagement input will be considered as the project team completes a Strategic Plan for the park.



Share your feedback with us!

Take the survey to share your thoughts on the future of Northeast River Valley Park!

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Northeast River Valley Park

Guiding Principles

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Q1 Using stickers, please indicate your level of agreement with the guiding principles for the future of Northeast River Valley Park?

Strongly disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neutral

Somewhat agree

Strongly agree

Q2 Choose the two guiding principles you feel are the most important considerations for the future of Northeast River Valley Park?

Restoration

Connection

Teaching

Recreation

Accessibility

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Q3 What is the reason for your answer?

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Park Zones

01 Forest Zone

This zone preserves the existing forested areas and allows for restoration of disturbed areas. The plan will support public access to some areas of this zone, while protecting others for wildlife habitat and ecological corridors. It is expected this zone will expand in the proposed future state.

02 Grassland Zone

This zone preserves and restores the existing grassland areas for wildlife habitat and ecological corridors. The plan will support public trail access within some areas, while protecting others for wildlife habitat and ecological corridors. It is expected this zone will be slightly reduced in the proposed future state, with the remaining grassland areas being enhanced to support wildlife.

03 Lake / Wetland Zone

This zone restores the existing lake and provides opportunities to create places for animals, birds and plants. The plan will support public access to some areas, while protecting others for wetland creation and enhancement. It is expected this zone will expand in the proposed future state.

04 Active Zone

This zone combines parking, public vehicle access, maintenance facilities, active recreation facilities, event areas and buildings. It is expected this zone will be reduced in the proposed future state, with active areas focused away from the forest and grassland zones.

05 River Valley Zone

This zone facilitates access to the River Valley Trail Network, connecting from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan, and potential future access to the North Saskatchewan River. This zone will be maintained in the proposed future state.

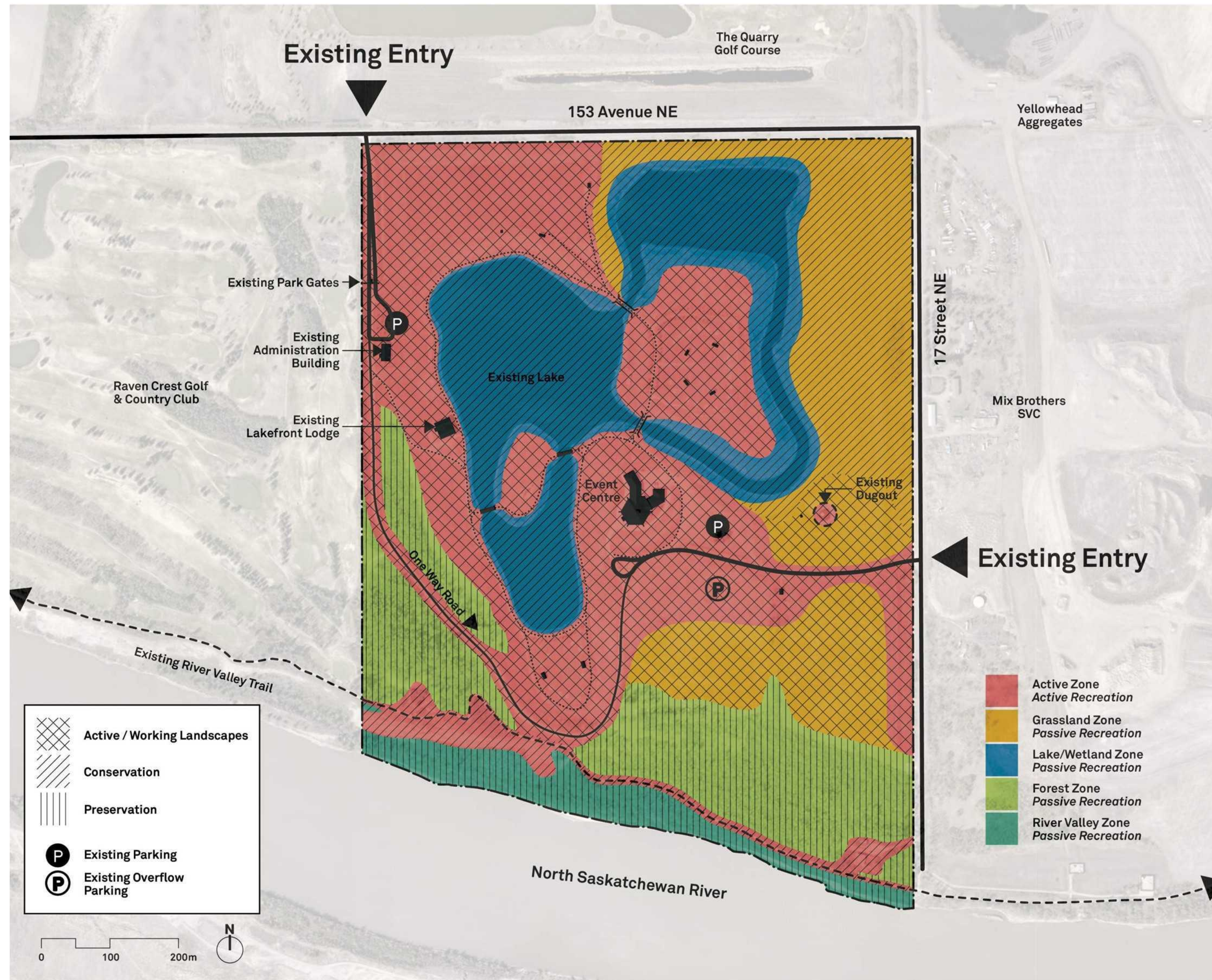
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Existing Park Zones



Highlights

- + Large areas of maintained active zones across the park.
- + Plant and wildlife corridors are interrupted by active zones.
- + Lake zone provides little opportunity for wildlife habitat.

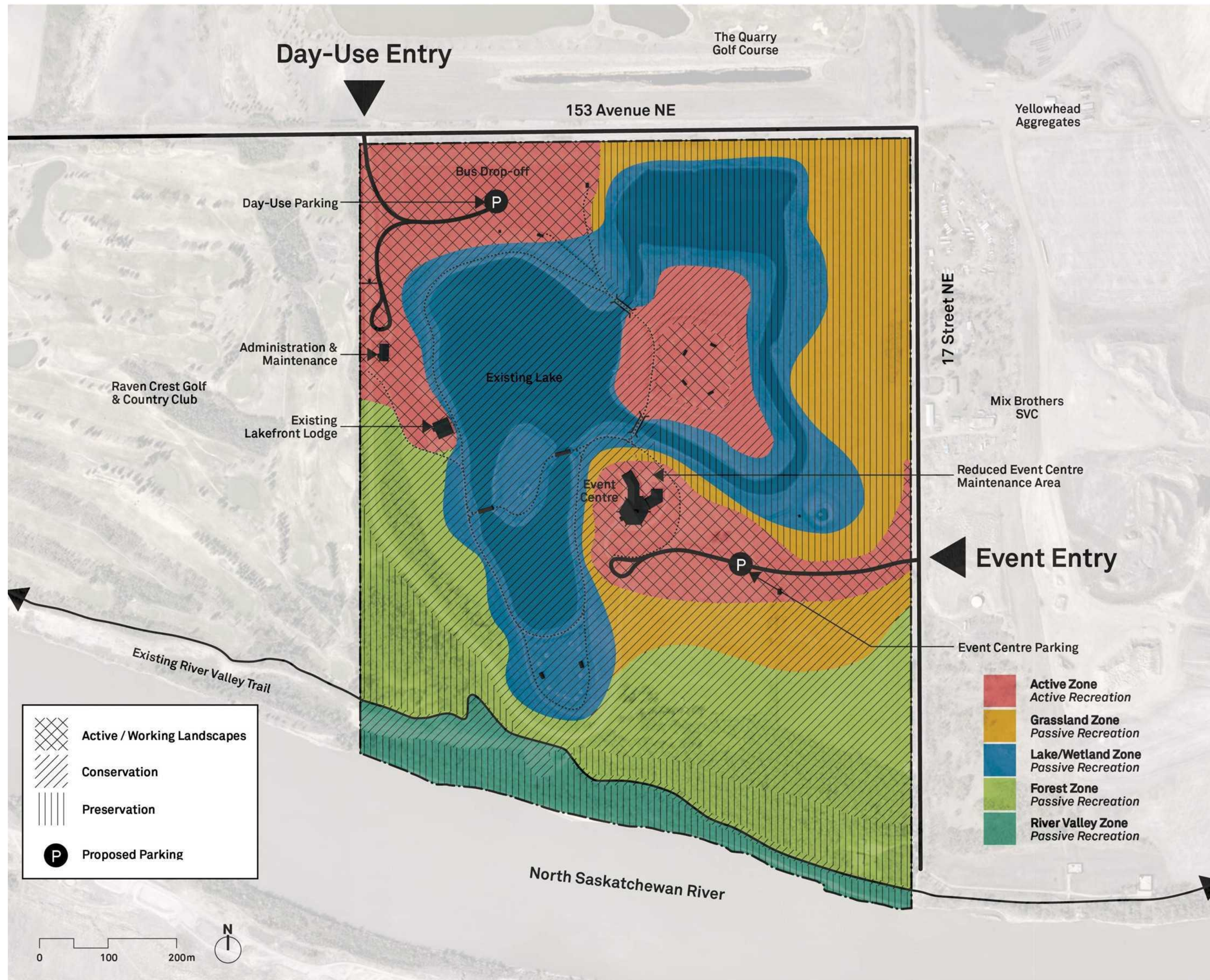
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Proposed Park Zones



Highlights

- + Active zones are consolidated around entry areas and existing event infrastructure.
- + Forest and grassland zones are expanded to connect plant and wildlife corridors.
- + Lake/wetland zone is expanded to increase habitat area.
- + Forest zone is renaturalized to better protect the river valley zone.

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Q4 Looking at the park zone map, please indicate your level of agreement that the proposed future zones offer the right balance between active and passive recreation in Northeast River Valley Park.

Strongly disagree

Somewhat disagree

Neutral

Somewhat agree

Strongly agree

Q5 What is the reason for your answer?

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Park Improvements

01 Restoration



Reclaiming space for ecological restoration and renaturalization, including designating areas to be closed to public access.

02 Outdoor gathering spaces



Spaces including picnic tables, covered/shade structures and firepits.

03 Amenities for events & festivals



Retaining and restoring existing event facilities and consideration for amenities to support events, such as power, water or other features.

04 Enhanced trail network



Trails for walking, biking, dog walking, cross-country skiing and more, including nature trails and/or boardwalks.

05 Formal programming



Programmed activities including day camps and guided tours.

06 Wayfinding & interpretive signage



Signage to provide directional guidance in and around the park for people walking, biking and driving, as well as interpretive signage to provide historical, ecological or educational information to visitors.

07 Water recreation



Non-motorized water activities, including paddleboarding, kayaking, canoeing and fishing.

08 Winter recreation



Activities including tobogganing and cross-country skiing.

09 Recreation equipment rentals



Opportunities to rent recreation equipment on site, such as paddleboards, kayaks, snowshoes, etc.

10 Improved parking



Parking for both events and recreational use, consolidated and organized to reduce impact.

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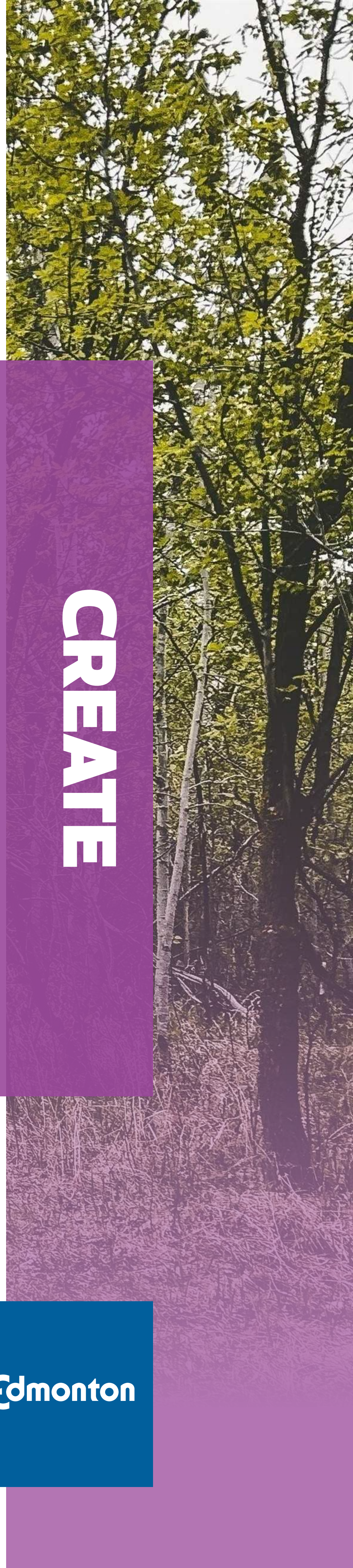
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Q6 Using stickers, choose three elements that are most important to you to include in future planning for Northeast River Valley Park.

Restoration	Outdoor gathering spaces	Amenities for events & festivals	
Enhanced trail network	Formal programming	Wayfinding & interpretive signage	
Water recreation	Winter recreation	Recreation equipment rentals	Improved parking

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Q7 Is there anything else you would like to share with the project team as the Strategic Plan for Northeast River Valley Park is developed?

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Park Zones Tradeoff Game

A tradeoff is a compromise. In order to get more of something, you have to have less of something else. Similarly, if you take something away, then you get to have more of something else. This is a simplified take on land use planning for the park.

Look at the Proposed Park Zones and how the ecology and park areas could change in the future.

Do we have the right balance? Should a zone be bigger? If so, which zone should be smaller?

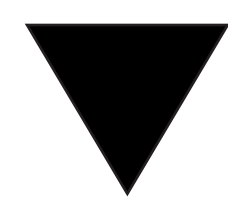
If you think a zone should be **bigger**, place a **red** chip in the jar for that zone and a **black** chip in the jar for the zone you would be willing to have **less** of.

If you think the zones are “just right”, you can place both the **red** and **black** chips in the **Just Right** jar.



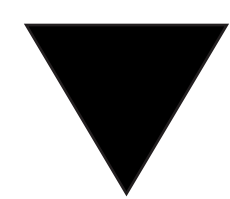
Forest Zone

This zone preserves the existing forested areas and allows for restoration of disturbed areas. It will support public access to some areas, while protecting others for wildlife habitat and ecological corridors.



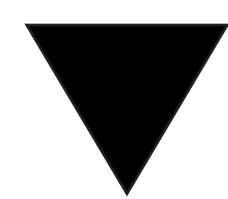
Grassland Zone

This zone preserves and restores the existing grassland areas for wildlife habitat and ecological corridors. It will support public access to some areas, while protecting others for wildlife habitat and ecological corridors.



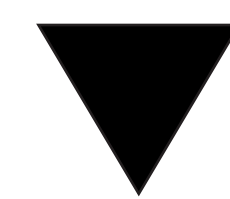
Lake / Wetland Zone

This zone restores the existing lake and provides opportunities to create places for animals, birds and plants. It will support public access to some areas, while protecting others for wetland creation and enhancement.



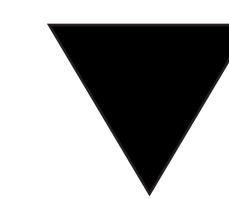
Active Zone

This zone combines parking, public vehicle access, maintenance facilities, active recreation facilities, event areas and buildings.



Just Right

The proposed park zones reflect the right balance of spaces within the park.



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