

THE WAY WE LIVE

Buena Vista/ Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park Master Plan

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THE CITY OF
Edmonton



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Executive Summary

The Buena Vista/Laurier Park Master Plan is a strategic document describing capital and management recommendations for the next ten years. This is the first master plan created for the park area and is an important step in balancing formal development and environmental preservation. The master plan will support increasing and ever-changing patterns of use, while ensuring that the long-term ecological integrity of the river valley is preserved.

The master plan is supported by strong design rationale gathered throughout the study process from site analysis, stakeholder involvement and public consultation.

Public Involvement

Adjacent residents and a wide range of city-wide user groups have developed a strong attachment to Buena Vista/Laurier Park. In response to the high user demand and high level of public interest regarding any future site redevelopment, this project focused the design process around a comprehensive public involvement process. The public and stakeholder engagement process included:

- **Advisory Committee** – the Buena Vista / Laurier Park Advisory Committee was a designated group of 15 individuals who represent the key stakeholder groups and the general public for the project. The advisory committee provided insight into the use and functions of the park sites and was the sounding board for design decisions throughout the project. A total of 5 Advisory Committee meetings were held.
- **Stakeholders** – Through telephone interviews, a total of 17 stakeholders were provided observations on the current functions of the park, opinions as to future development of the park, and guidance for engaging stakeholders and public interests throughout the process.

A half-day stakeholder workshop was held to review site opportunities and constraints, refine the vision statement and discuss potential park improvements and reuse of Yorath House. Of the 56 stakeholder groups invited to send a representative, a total of 22 stakeholders attended the workshop.

- **General Public** – A total of 3 public workshops and open houses were held to engage the public in the process and review design materials developed for the master plan. A total of 412 people attended the public open houses and workshops held during the project.

Surveys were used to elicit responses to design questions and proposed scenarios. Participants were asked to provide their opinion on different design topics or provide their preferences for uses or improvement elements. This information allowed the design team to better understand the project through a wide range of different user groups. Surveys were incorporated into the format of the stakeholder/public events and were provided online through the website. A total of 5 survey opportunities were provided and a total of 636 people responded.

Project Process

In order to understand the site and develop the master plan, the project progressed through a series of tasks. The public involvement component, as described above, was integrated into each project phase. The project phases include:

- **Existing Conditions Analysis** - A number of studies regarding environmental and recreational conditions in Buena Vista/Laurier Park have been conducted over the years. However, the majority of these studies focused on very specific areas or themes. In order to have a strong and up-to-date understanding of the area, existing





documents were compiled and confirmed on-site through four specialized assessments; landscape, biophysical, environmental, and architectural (Yorath House).

- **Opportunities and Constraints Analysis:** Using the detailed information provided by the assessments an itemized list of on-site opportunities and constraints was developed. The opportunities and constraints analysis was confirmed and refined through the public involvement process.
- **Visioning:** The visioning process was founded on collaboration between stakeholders with an understanding of the City's vision for the overall park system. The vision formed a positive future image of the park that could be used as a sounding board for design decisions. The following vision statement was developed during this process:

"A park characterized by interplay between two distinct settings: maintained and natural. These settings support a diverse range of year-round outdoor activities, provide access to the North Saskatchewan River and connect park users to attractions in the central west end of the City's river valley."

- **Program Development** A concise and practical list of programming needed to be developed in order to ensure that the right mix of activities could occur within the park. This list was refined as part of the public involvement process and was used as the building blocks for concept plan development.
- **Preliminary Concept Development:** Three preliminary concept plans were developed showing a range of different programming elements and spatial configurations. The plans provided a kit of parts that was discussed with the public to understand preferences and opinions.
- **Preliminary Master Plan:** Based on public feedback, site constraints, and project objectives, the preferred programming elements and spatial arrangements were combined into a preliminary master plan. The master plan was reviewed by the public for additional refinement.
- **Master Plan Report:** The master plan report (this document) summarizes information on project methodology, site conditions and important highlights from the consultation process. More importantly, the report fully describes the recommendations for improvements and management practices over the next ten years.

Site Context

Buena Vista / Laurier Park is located on a flood plain within an inside bend of the North Saskatchewan River and, as a result, ranges from generally flat to having significant slopes at the transition from the river valley flood plain to the top of bank. The parks and surrounding area generally slopes toward the North Saskatchewan River.

Buena Vista/Laurier Park is located within the 88 kilometre Capital Region North Saskatchewan River Valley (CRNSRV). An estimated 14 million visits are made to the CRNSRV, including 4 million visits related to events (Plan of Action, 2007).

Buena Vista/Laurier Park is a horse-shoe shaped site bordered by Laurier Heights and Parkview neighborhoods, the Edmonton Valley Zoo and Whitemud Drive on the west; the North

Saskatchewan River on the east and south; and a parkland preservation area on the north. Other nearby communities include: Rio Terrace west of Whitemud Drive; Windsor Park, Belgravia and Grandview neighborhoods east of the river.

Like many areas in Edmonton's river valley, Buena Vista/Laurier Park has a history of many different land uses, including agricultural crops, tree farming, gravel mining, lumber and storage yards, residential, and recreation. The site has been used for recreational activities for several decades with Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park being a premier picnicking site first used in the 1960's.

Master Plan Recommendations

The following provides an overview of the master plan recommendations for improving the park sites:

- **Park Entrance Improvements:** Park entrance improvements, including landscaping, new entrance signage, and a round-about.
- **Parking and Access:** Parking and access improvements, including:
 - Addition of 112 parking stalls through a phased process based on park user needs
 - Reversal of one-way vehicle movement in Laurier Park to improve access
 - Reopening a previously closed section of the Laurier Park loop road for better picnic site access
 - Increase the number of handicap parking stall quantities and locations
 - Addition of bike racks in key locations
- **Pathway Improvements and Viewpoints:** Pathway improvements, including:
 - Upgrading the shared-use pathway through Buena Vista Park to include a 3.0m wide asphalt pathway.
 - Innovative measures to respond to conflicts between off-leash dogs and cyclists using the shared-use pathway (i.e. signage, surface painting, planted landscape buffers, cycle-friendly rumble strips, post and rail fence, and kissing gates). These improvements will be installed on an as-needed basis, favoring the less intensive measures first.
 - Minor realignment, or closure of pathways, in response to environmental or functional challenges. This includes rerouting a small section of the bike route between Melton Ravine and the existing shared-use path.
 - Improved trail surfaces, minor regrading, and improved safety barriers in response to safety and erosion concerns along the river bank.
 - An existing pathway within the off-leash area will be improved with a compacted fine gravel surface to create a looping pathway with better accessibility for people with mobility challenges.
 - The addition of four small-scale viewpoints along the riverbank pathway to provide safe and accessible views to the river.
- **Signage:** A consistent and clear signage strategy for both park sites, including wayfinding, park entrance signage, information kiosks, interpretive signage, off-leash/on-leash/no dog boundary signage, pathway signage, access and parking signage.





- **Public Amenity Nodes and Washrooms:** Public washroom improvements, including two additional basic toilet facilities, replacement of the existing Laurier Park three-season washroom building and development of public washrooms within Yorath House.
- **Weed Removal and Vegetation Restoration:** Weed removal of invasive vegetation (i.e. caragana) and restoration to protect the natural forest and meadow areas within the park sites.

Succession tree planting strategy for the long term replacement of large mature canopy trees in Laurier Park that are nearing the end of their lifespan.

- **Yorath House and Property:** The historically and architecturally significant Yorath House and property is renovated and reused as a public multi-use facility with programming that includes:
 - Public washroom and water fountains
 - Meeting and multi-functional spaces
 - Arts programming that supports and encourages community engagement
 - Park programming “home base” for programs, such as geocaching, all-season survival/camping skills, orienteering and navigation, snow shoeing, nordic walking
 - Outdoor spaces that extend Yorath House’s public functions and highlight its historical significance
- **Off Leash Boundary Modification:** Increased size of the off-leash area from 48.5ha to 54.1ha (increase of 5.6ha). Clear signage and communication are important strategies supporting this boundary change.
- **Off Leash Shoreline Access Improvements:** Improved shoreline access in the off-leash area through the addition of a trail and wooden stairway.
- **Off Leash Training Area:** A small fenced and gated off-leash area for service dog training and for barrier-free access for elderly and mobility impaired off-leash dog walkers.
- **Boat Launch Viewpoint Area:** A boardwalk viewpoint area, complete with benches, wayfinding, information and other small amenities, near the existing boat launch on the top of the bank. The viewpoint has an accessible ramp down to riverside trail adjacent to the boat launch.
- **Picnic Site Improvements:** Upgrades to select picnic sites along the southwest extension of Laurier Park shared-use pathway and all group picnic sites to accommodate people with mobility impairment issues.
- **Playground Improvements:** Replacement of two small and old playgrounds with natural playgrounds (i.e. ropes and boulders, etc).
- **Laurier Heights / Edmonton Valley Zoo Stormwater Management Facility:** Identified location for potential Laurier Heights/Edmonton Valley Zoo Stormwater Management Facility that may need to be located on-site.

Management Plan Recommendations

The master plan report includes a management plan with guidelines for the short and long term management of Buena Vista / Laurier Park. The need for good and consistent management of the parks, particularly in regards to the parks' various uses, has been well-documented throughout the public consultation phases of the study. Insufficient management is a significant concern of users.

The recommended management guidelines are designed to provide basic measures and strategies for managing the parks natural resources, facilities, amenities, infrastructure and uses. The following outlines the recommendations in the management plan:

o Environmental Management

- Respect the natural areas of Buena Vista/Laurier Park as places for habitat and wildlife. Minimize development in these areas and use already altered areas for major park activities.
- Minimize additional pathway development (more trails) to prevent ecological community fragmentation, introduction of weed species and soil erosion.
- Avoid development along the riverbank, including trails, in areas where riparian plant communities help stabilize slopes. Protecting riparian plant communities will also help maintain nearby fish habitat.
- Develop a staged removal plan for weeds and invasive species in Buena Vista Park.
- Conduct additional environmental surveys, as required during future design and implementation phases, to ensure that changes in Buena Vista/Laurier Park do not cause adverse environmental impacts.

o Park Infrastructure

- Add additional trash and recycling receptacles and related amenities (i.e. dog bag dispensers, etc) throughout the park spaces in areas that are convenient to users.
- Add two additional emergency "blu-phones" to the southwest areas in Laurier Park.
- Update park furnishings, such as benches and picnic tables, as required throughout park areas.
- Small placards with City department contact information should be installed on all major amenities (washrooms, shelters, kiosks, viewpoints, etc) and at information kiosks to allow park users to report damage, maintenance needs or enforcement problems.
- Rehabilitate existing closed drinking fountains.
- Investigate potential removal or replacement of speed bumps with removable ones. The speed bumps prevent Laurier Park from hosting any events that use the loop road for running or walking and they interfere with snow clearing.

o Resource Management

- Various recommendations are made regarding the frequency of park maintenance activities and inspections.





○ **Management Practices**

- Various recommendations are made regarding how maintenance activities are carried out. A special focus is on the protection of the park site's natural environment.

○ **Managing Use**

- Various recommendations on promoting park etiquette, cooperation and bylaw enforcement. This is especially important due to conflicts between various activities that can occur on-site (i.e. cycling, rowing and off-leash dog walking). A marketing and education campaign is included to raise awareness about the park and proposed improvements and to encourage shared use and enjoyment.
- Various recommendations are made for policies regarding new programming within the site (i.e. Yorath House).
- Official naming of the site currently known as Buena Vista as part of establishing its identity as a unique park within the city.
- Expand four-season use of Laurier Park.

Implementation Plan

As an important part of the implementation plan, an order-of-magnitude cost estimate has been provided for the capital costs associated with the master plan.

Operations and management costs, such as park maintenance and programming, are not included in the order-of-magnitude cost estimate, as they are outside of the capital improvement budget for this project.

Based on consultation with the City project team, it is recommended that the Buena Vista/Laurier Park Master Plan be implemented through two phases. The first phase is recommended to be completed within four years. Items listed under Phase 2 may be broken up into a series of phases, as required, with the intent that all improvements be completed within the ten year master plan period. A contingency is factored into the total cost of each phase.

An overview of the costs associated with each phase of development is provided in Appendix H.

Conclusion

The Buena Vista/Laurier Park Master Plan defines an overall plan for the implementation of improvements and the management of Buena Vista/Laurier Park. It recognizes the uniqueness and its importance as one of Edmonton's premier recreation destinations.

The Buena Vista/Laurier Master Plan has been designed as a balanced strategy for the protection and enhancement of the natural resources of the parks, while providing managed access for the recreation and enjoyment of individuals, families and groups. The master plan has been designed with careful consideration of the needs and desires of current users and the opportunities that exist for meeting the needs of a growing population in Edmonton.



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1.0 Introduction

The Buena Vista/Laurier Park Master Plan is a strategic document describing capital and management recommendations for the next ten years. This is the first master plan created for the park area and is an important step in balancing formal development and environmental preservation.

The following sections provide background information about project goals and objectives, and the design and public involvement processes.

1.1 Project Goals and Objectives

With the city's growing population increasing demand on all City parks and a revitalization plan underway for the Edmonton Valley Zoo, the City has identified the need for a new park master plan as a means of supporting increasing and ever-changing patterns of use, while ensuring that the long-term ecological integrity of the river valley is preserved. The end result of this project is a solid master plan that is supported by strong design rationale gathered throughout the study process. Both adjacent residents as well as a range of other city-wide user groups have developed a strong attachment to Buena Vista/Laurier Park. In response to the high user demand and high level of public interest regarding any future site redevelopment, this project focused on strong communication with the public and stakeholder groups throughout the project.

The City is moving towards having master plans for each of its parks. According to the *Urban Parks Management Plan (2006)*, master plans and/or management plans should be developed for areas within the river valley that do not currently have plans. A master plan for Buena Vista/Laurier Park was noted as a high priority from the 1992 Ribbon of Green Master Plan. The reason for the park changes include:

- Increases in the population of Edmonton means increased park use with more demands on existing facilities and impacts on the natural environment.
- Specific proposed changes will:
 - Increase barrier-free access.
 - Determine the future use of the Yorath Property.
 - Improve signage and wayfinding.
 - Provide improved definition of use areas and the boundaries between them.
 - Address improvements to ageing park facilities and infrastructure.
 - Provide improved facilities and amenities for users.
 - Protect and enhance natural areas.
 - Improve river access and views.
 - Provide more opportunities for year-round use.

The strategic direction provided by the Buena Vista/Laurier Park Master Plan will guide the future development, use and management of the park area over the next ten years. This Master Plan provides recommendations to address increasing user demands being placed on the park, and the need to upgrade or replace ageing infrastructure. The master plan is a high-level strategic document that:

- Provides a vision and clear sense of direction for the park.
- Incorporates the City's Vision, strategic planning initiatives and policies.
- Integrates with other City plans and initiatives.

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- Identifies public needs and priorities and guides the City to achieve high standards for public parks and green spaces.
- Provides direction for environmental protection.

1.2 Master Plan Process

The Buena Vista /Laurier Park Master Plan project involves two major phases of work, with each phase integrated into the public involvement process. Each phase contains a variety of tasks and deliverables:

Concept Development

- **Public Involvement Plan (PIP) and Communications Strategy:** These were developed to ensure that public consultation practices aligned with project objectives and the City's public involvement strategies. The objective of the PIP and Communications Strategy was two-fold: to provide information about the project and keep the public informed of opportunities for input and educated about the opportunities, constraints and purpose of the project; and second, to facilitate a comprehensive and meaningful public and stakeholder consultation. See Section 1.3 Public Involvement Overview.
- **Site Assessments:** A number of studies regarding environmental and recreational conditions in Buena Vista / Laurier Park have been conducted over the years. However, the majority of these studies focused on very specific areas or themes. In order to have a strong and up-to-date understanding of the area, existing documents were compiled and confirmed on-site through four specialized assessments; landscape, biophysical, environmental, and architectural (Yorath House). See Section 2.2 Existing Conditions.
- **Opportunities and Constraints Analysis:** Using the detailed information provided by the assessments an itemized list of on-site opportunities and constraints was developed (See Section 3.1 *Opportunities and Constraints Analysis*). The opportunities and constraints analysis was confirmed and refined through the public involvement process (See Section 1.3 *Public Involvement Overview*).
- **Visioning:** The visioning process was founded on collaboration between stakeholders with an understanding of the City's vision for the overall park system (See Section 3.2 *Visioning*). The vision formed a positive future image of the park that could be used as a sounding board for design decisions.
- **Program Development:** A concise and practical list of programming needed to be developed in order to ensure that the right mix of activities could occur within the park. This list was refined as part of the public involvement process



Fig.1: View towards Boat Launch

and was used as the building blocks for concept plan development. See *Section 3.3 Program Development*.

- **Preliminary Concept Development:** Three preliminary concept plans were developed showing a range of different programming elements and spatial configurations. The plans provided a kit of parts that was discussed with the public to understand preferences and opinions. See *Section 3.4 Concept Plans*.

Master Plan Development

- **Preliminary Master Plan:** Based on public feedback, site constraints, and project objectives, the preferred programming elements and spatial arrangements were combined into a preliminary master plan. The master plan was reviewed by the public for additional refinement, see *Section 4.0 Master Plan*.
- **Master Plan Report:** The master plan report (this document) summarizes information on project methodology, site conditions and important highlights from the consultation process. More importantly, the report fully describes the recommendations for improvements and management practices over the next ten years.

Master Plan Implementation (Future Phases)

The master plan is intended to direct improvement in the park for the next ten years. There are two types of improvements that will need to be implemented: capital improvements and management improvements.

- **Capital improvements:** Physical changes that are required to support site programming. These include elements such as Yorath House renovations, additional parking lots and trail upgrades. These improvements are the more tangible parts of the master plan and are the building blocks that make activities possible on site. See *Section 4.0 Master Plan*.
- **Management Improvements:** Changes in operations, maintenance and management practices. These improvements help the park function better and support site programming through effective use of labour and maintenance resources. These items are the less tangible parts of the master plan and are the mortar that holds park elements together and keeps the park functioning effectively. See *Section 5.0 Management Plan*.

The master plan provides a road map for phasing and implementing both types of improvements. As the recommendations become projects of their own, they will be taken through an additional design phase (detailed design). As mandated by City policy, each improvement (design and construction) will be reviewed by the appropriate regulatory bodies to ensure that it is compatible with environmental requirements and fits within the City's policy context. For many of the improvements, additional public involvement will be required.

1.3 Public Involvement Overview

Buena Vista/Laurier Park has the potential to become a park that balances intensive active and passive recreation within the City of Edmonton's river valley. As part of developing the plan to achieve this potential, the design team needed input from all stakeholders and potential user groups. The objectives of the public involvement process for this design project was to provide a variety of opportunities for key stakeholders and the general public to participate in defining the vision and objectives for the parks, as well to provide input into review of the draft concept plans

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and the recommended plan. Provision of a range of opportunities for people to share ideas and concerns helped to create support and enthusiasm for the development of the park.

One of the key aspects of the design process was the interaction of the consultant design team with the City project team, an advisory committee, stakeholders, and the general public. This strategy facilitated clear directions for project decisions and allowed for a balanced approach when addressing user needs and wants. To clarify the relationship between all of the parties involved in the project, the roles of each of these groups is defined below:



Fig.2: Stakeholder Workshop

Design Team - ISL and all of its sub-consultants who manage and undertake all of the proposed work plan tasks and provide project deliverables to the City Project Team.

City Project Team - Management for the project was made up of City of Edmonton Park and Facility Development staff members who review and provide input into the design process and convey deliverables to the City of Edmonton senior managers for review, approvals and master plan recommendations to council.

Advisory Committee - The Buena Vista/Laurier Park Advisory Committee was a designated group of 15 individuals who represented the key stakeholder groups and the general public for the project. Stakeholder interests represented by the advisory committee include:

- o Edmonton Whitewater Paddlers
- o Edmonton Rowing Club
- o Wild Rose Ramblers
- o Dog Walkers
- o Edmonton Bicycle Commuters
- o People with Disabilities
- o Running Club (Running Room)
- o Natural Areas Advisory Committee
- o Trails, Paths & Routes Advisory Committee
- o Laurier Heights Community League
- o Parkview Community League
- o Windsor Park Community League
- o City of Edmonton (2 members)
- o Project Design Team (1 member)

The advisory committee was the primary sounding board for the design team and provided hands-on, design-oriented input through a series of meetings at key times during the project process. The committee also provided input into the design of public consultation and information sessions, and shared insight in de-briefings following such sessions. A total of 5 advisory committee meetings were held.

Stakeholder Groups - other large and small interest and user groups who did not have representation on the advisory committee were identified and provided with opportunities to have direct input during the project. This allowed for focused discussions and insight, providing a balance between the smaller advisory committee meetings and the general

public sessions. Stakeholder groups invited to participate in the project include:

- Advisory Committee Members
- Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues
- Rio Terrace Community League
- Lynnwood Community League
- Crestwood Community League
- McKernan Community League
- Belgravia Community League
- Edmonton Valley Zoo
- Windship Aviation (hot air balloons)
- Klondike Jet Boats
- Canoeheads
- River Valley Cycle
- Edmonton Masters Cycling Club
- Edmonton Mountain Bike Alliance
- Alberta Whitewater Association
- Ceyana Canoe Club
- Edmonton Trout Fishing Club
- Edmonton Nordic Ski Club
- Edmonton Overlanders Orienteering Club
- Alberta Trail Net Society
- Edmonton Road & Track Club
- Waskehagan Trail Association
- Edmonton Festivals Consortium
- Royal Astronomical Society of Canada
- Edmonton Nature Club
- River Valley Alliance
- Dogs with Wings
- Edmonton Seniors Council
- Edmonton Public Schools
- Edmonton Sports Council
- City of Edmonton (key departments)

Early in the project, the project team conducted telephone interviews with 17 stakeholders. Through a series of questions, participants were invited to provide observations on the current functions of the park, opinions as to future development of the park, and guidance for engaging stakeholders and public interests throughout the process. This information helped form the basis for the project team to develop a public involvement process for the master plan and the project opportunities and constraints. As well, the interviews also allowed participants to be informed about the upcoming public involvement process and the role of public involvement in the master plan process.

For the stakeholder workshop on April 28, 2012, a total of 56 stakeholder organizations were invited to send a representative to participate in the half-day workshop. The 22 participants attending the session were shown a short presentation that included a brief history of the project and Yorath House, opportunities and constraints that were identified in the stakeholder interviews, advisory committee meetings and public visioning workshop (see section below). This workshop reviewed and modified the vision statement (see *Section 3.2 Visioning*), discussed preferred uses of the park, associated park amenities and improvements, and discussed potential uses for Yorath House.

The Public – Interested individuals or users of the park had opportunities through public open house events, workshops and the City's website to provide input and review and comment on the parks vision and concept plans at various stages of development. This allowed for verification and validation of ideas and selection of improvement options.

Throughout the project, the general public was provided with the opportunity to become informed about the project through the City of Edmonton's Buena Vista/Laurier Park Master Plan website.

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Beyond general project information (i.e. background material, advisory committee/ stakeholder members, timelines and FAQ's) the website was continually updated to provide on-going review and feedback opportunities. Through the website, interested parties could view information about upcoming events and the results of previous events. As events occurred and project milestones were reached, information such as survey results, concept plans, and reports were uploaded to the site for public viewing.

Public open house and workshop events were held to update interested parties on the progress of the project and provide input into project development and provide confirmation and/or modification on work completed. Public events were held at key times in the project, including a visioning workshop, review of draft concepts and review of the final concept plan. A total of 3 public workshops and meetings were held and 412 people attended.

Surveys were used to elicit responses to design questions and proposed scenarios. Participants were asked to provide their opinion on different design topics or provide their preferences for uses or improvement elements. This information allowed the design team to better understand the project through a wide range of different user groups. As well, the surveys were designed to recognize gaps in the public involvement process or where additional information needed to be provided to foster public understanding of project decisions and issues. Surveys were incorporated into the format of the stakeholder/public events and were provided online through the website. The online component of the survey was an integral part of this process, as it has allowed for a greater number of respondents from a broader group of park users. A total of 5 survey opportunities were provided and a total of 636 people responded.



1.0 Project Introduction



MacKenzie Ravine

William Hawrelak Park

Parkview

River Valley Park Preservation Area

Windsor Park

Preservation Area

Melton Ravine

87 Avenue

Buena Vista Road

Buena Vista Park

Laurier Heights

Edmonton Valley Zoo

Belgravia

Whitemud Drive

Rio Terrace

Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park

North Saskatchewan River

Whitemud Equine Learning Centre Association

Fort Edmonton Park

Fox Drive

Grandview Heights

Whitemud Ravine

142 Street

87 Avenue

Buena Vista Road

Coar Road

Pedestrian Bridge

Queensell Bridge

2.0 Site Assessments

2.1 Context and History

Site Context

Buena Vista/Laurier Park is located on a flood plain within an inside bend of the North Saskatchewan River and, as a result, ranges from generally flat to having significant slopes at the transition from the river valley flood plain to the top of bank. The parks and surrounding area generally slopes toward the North Saskatchewan River.

Buena Vista/Laurier Park is located within the 88 kilometre Capital Region North Saskatchewan River Valley (CRNSRV). An estimated 14 million visits are made to the CRNSRV, including 4 million visits related to events (Plan of Action, 2007).

Edmonton's river valley park system is the largest urban park system in Canada, with more than 160 kilometres of maintained pathways and 20 major parks (from City of Edmonton website). According to the *Citizen Satisfaction Survey (2011)*, the City service that received the highest satisfaction was parks, playgrounds, sports fields, and green spaces (81% of 800 respondents).

Buena Vista/Laurier Park is a horse-shoe shaped site bordered by Laurier Heights and Parkview neighborhoods, the Edmonton Valley Zoo and Whitemud Drive on the west; the North Saskatchewan River on the east and south; and a parkland preservation area on the north. Other nearby communities include: Rio Terrace west of Whitemud Drive; Windsor Park, Belgravia and Grandview neighborhoods east of the river.

According to *Population and Employment Forecast 2003-2030*, Edmonton's population is anticipated to grow by approximately 160,000 people between 2005 and 2030 (however, the actual growth rate may be even greater given that Edmonton's current population, 817,498 in 2012, is greater than what was forecast, 795,530 in 2015). Populations in the adjacent neighborhood will grow very moderately, because the housing market remains relatively stable. Current population in these adjacent neighborhoods as of 2009 are as follows:

- Laurier Heights (population 2,847)
- Parkview (population 3,307)
- Rio Terrace (population 1,337)
- Windsor Park (population 1,379)
- Grandview Heights (population 1,134)
- Belgravia (population 2,135)

Site History

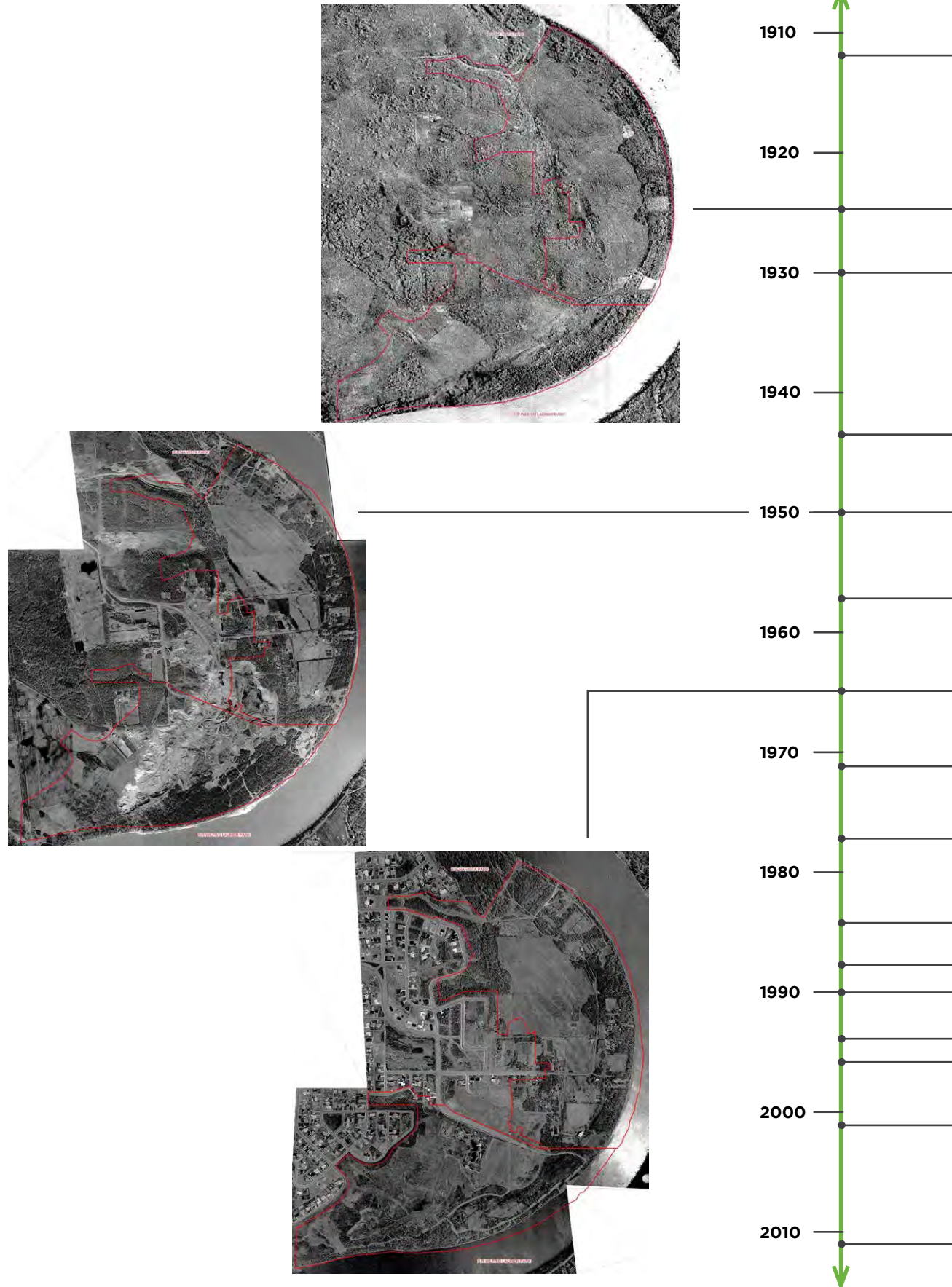
Like many areas in Edmonton's river valley, Buena Vista/Laurier Park has a history of many different land uses, from mining to residential to parkland. The following provides a list of these land uses:

- agricultural crops
- tree farm
- gravel mining
- lumber and storage yards
- rinks and ball diamonds
- residential property
- zoo
- rowing/paddling lease facilities
- parkland
- power utility corridor

Figure 3 (following page) provides a timeline for Buena Vista/Laurier Park's historical land-uses.

- Project Introduction
- Site Assessments
- Concept Development
- Master Plan
- Management Plan
- Implementation Plan
- Conclusion
- Appendices

Fig. 3 Site Land-Use Timeline (1910- 2011)



In **1912** a map of Edmonton shows the area as parcelled for future development as “Buena Vista Subdivision”.

By **1924 & 1925**, some lot clearing has occurred (one parcel along southwest edge of Laurier Park, three parcels in Buena Vista along river).

By **1930** - The cleared parcel along southwest edge of Laurier Park is now a tree farm with additional land clearing between tree farm and river. A gravel pit is in operation just west of Buena Vista / Laurier Park.

By **1943**, gravel pit extends into the western portion of Buena Vista/Laurier Park. Additional land in Buena Vista/Laurier Park is cleared for agriculture.

By **1950**, gravel pit covers approximately half of Laurier Park. A lumber yard, City storage yard, a couple ice rinks and several residences, including Yorath House, are located on Buena Vista.

By **1958**, gravel pit declines in use and several pits remain unchanged. A slough is located in one of the mined areas in the south central part of Laurier Park.

By **1965**, gravel operation ceases and Laurier Park is redeveloped into a park space with zoo, boat launch and access roads.

By **1971**, Laurier Park now has two baseball diamonds and a public washroom (existing building). Ice rinks and some of the storage yards and residences have been removed from Buena Vista Park.

By **1978**, the Edmonton Valley Zoo property has expanded. Access roads in Laurier Park are realigned to accommodate zoo expansion. Additional residences are removed from Buena Vista Park and 81 Avenue is closed. The Whitewater Paddlers and Edmonton Rowing Club are located in Buena Vista Park. The City's distribution yard is expanded and large stockpiles of soil are located on the north portion of Buena Vista Park.

By **1984**, Edmonton Valley Zoo is expanded and Laurier park has added additional baseball diamonds. City storage yard in Buena Vista Park is no longer used. Stockpiles are slowly disappearing.

On **March 18, 1987**, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park is officially named.

By **1990**, the soil stockpiles are completely removed from Buena Vista Park. Laurier Park access road is realigned and a portion of the zoo parking lot is converted into green space. One baseball diamond is removed.

In **1992**, Yorath property is vacated and purchased by the City of Edmonton.

By **1995**, Rowing club tank is constructed.

By **2001**, Rowing club and off-leash area parking lots are constructed.

By **2011**, The Edmonton Valley Zoo is undergoing extensive renovations and redevelopment within its existing site. A second boathouse is constructed on the Rowing Club lease property.

Current Land Uses

Covering over 110 hectares, Buena Vista/Laurier Park offers a wide variety of amenities for a broad range of users. There are two distinct parks, Buena Vista Park and Laurier Park, which offer two distinctly different user experiences.

The majority of Buena Vista Park is designated as one of Edmonton's premier off-leash areas. Park users are able to experience a range of different natural spaces, including forested areas, open meadows, and river shoreline areas. In the southern portion of Buena Vista Park, the Yorath property was the final residential property acquired for Edmonton's river valley park system. The Yorath House remains in its original location and has been vacated for a number of years.

Two not-for-profit organizations have City lease agreements for small parcels of land along the shoreline in Buena Vista Park. Both groups have boathouses and seasonal docks. The following describes the organizations:

- o **The Whitewater Paddlers** - a registered non-profit society, formed in 1973 for the purpose of promoting canoe and kayak paddling for recreation and competition.

They are a member club of Whitewater Canada (amateur canoeing and kayaking), the Canadian Canoe Polo Committee and the Alberta Canoe Polo Association. (from the Whitewater Paddlers website).

The Whitewater Paddlers have a boathouse near their seasonal dock area.

- o **The Edmonton Rowing Club** is a non-profit organization whose mission is to stimulate, advocate, and develop the sport of rowing through targeted training programs and cooperative work with other organizations actively involved in the community.



Fig.5: Rowing Club Boathouse

The club has called Buena Vista Park "home" since the early 1970's. While searching for a permanent site for a boathouse, the club stored their equipment on the front lawn of the Yorath property. Later that summer the club began leasing their current location from the City of Edmonton (from The Edmonton Rowing Club website).

The club has two boathouses near their seasonal docks and a rowing tank building adjacent to the Yorath Property.

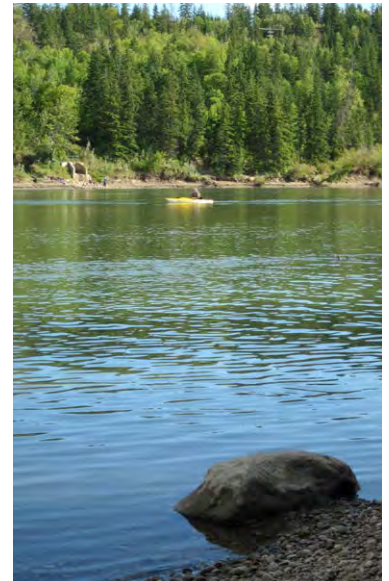


Fig.4: Kayaker on river

Laurier Park is one of Edmonton's most popular picnicking areas. A wide range of individual and group picnic sites, including a picnic shelter, are scattered throughout Laurier Park's manicured lawns and mature ornamental and natural tree canopy. Additional amenities offered on-site includes, two playgrounds, two washroom facilities (one is a basic toilet), ball

diamonds, open event lawns, and a motorized boat launch.

Both Buena Vista Park and Laurier Park are well connected with a range of different pedestrian pathways, including a section of the Trans Canada Trail. A pedestrian bridge, located at the far north side of Buena Vista Park, connects to Hawrelak Park and communities on the other side of the river.

2.2 Existing Conditions

In order to gain a strong understanding of the project area, four areas of investigation have been conducted; Landscape Assessment, Biophysical Assessment, Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment, and Yorath House Architectural Assessment.

Landscape Assessment

The design team conducted both desk-top and on-site investigations to gain a stronger understanding of the current condition of the site. The following outlines key items from the assessment (see *Section 3.1 Opportunities and Constraints Analysis* for additional details):

- o **Vehicle Access and Parking:** Since Laurier Park provides a large number of picnic areas scattered throughout the large park site, parking is distributed in smaller groups of stalls (typically 10-15 stalls). Parking is predominantly perpendicular with access to stalls directly off of the Laurier Park loop road. Two small lots are located adjacent to the zoo site and contain 25-30 stalls each. Handicap parking is distributed throughout the site at locations near accessible picnic areas.

Only the south portion of Buena Vista Park is accessible by vehicle, not including trailer access to the Edmonton Rowing Club and Whitewater Paddlers. As a result, parking is contained within a relatively small area. Parallel parking is permitted along 132 Street. A small parking lot of 30 stalls is located just off of the Rowing Club access road (79 Avenue). An additional 30 stall parking lot is located adjacent to the rowing club tank facility. Approximately 15 stalls are restricted to rowing club use during the club's peak hours. The remaining 15 stalls are for public use at all times. Each parking lot has two designated handicap parking stalls.

Parking is often at or over capacity during peak hours of park use (summer evenings and weekends) and during events. A full analysis of parking conditions, including traffic counts, in Buena Vista/Laurier Park is located in *Appendix G Rationale for Parking Expansion in BVLP*.

- o **Pedestrian / Pathway Connectivity:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park is a destination partly because of its extensive trail network. A major shared-use pathway runs through the site from a pedestrian bridge (to Hawrelak Park) in the north to Whitemud Drive in the south. This pathway is part of the Trans Canada Trail system.

A popular secondary trail runs along the river bank through Buena Vista Park and Laurier Park. It is commonly referred to as the "riverside trail" by park users. Because of bank erosion several areas along the pathway need improvement.



Fig.6: Riverside Trail

A spider web network of secondary and natural trails (goat trails) runs through Buena

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Vista Park and the natural areas of Laurier Park. The majority of these trails have been formed by park users over time rather than through an extensive planning process. Because of the heavy use of some of these trails some of these are in relatively poor condition, while others are in fair to good condition.

Cyclists are accommodated through the shared-use path and a designated bike route from the Hawrelak pedestrian bridge to Melton Ravine. Cyclists are not permitted on any of the other pathways, though they can use the access roadways.

- **Recreation and Programming:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park is well used for both informal and organized recreation. Laurier Park is well used as a picnic area, including large groups who take advantage of group picnic sites, shelters, and ball diamonds. Laurier Park is also one of Edmonton's premier destinations for organized events, such as charity walks.

Buena Vista Park is a destination facility for off-leash park users. Its off-leash area is one of the largest in the city.

There are two water sport facilities on leased properties within the Buena Vista Park. The Edmonton Rowing Club and Whitewater Paddlers. Both groups have been active on the site since the 1970's.

- **Interface Between Different User Groups:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park is home to a wide range of uses as note above. At times there are programming and safety conflicts between different uses. The main conflicts appear to be between: off-leash dogs and cyclists; off-leash dogs and rowers; off-leash dogs and hot air balloon operators.
- **Landscape Condition and Quality:** The park sites have a range of different landscape conditions. Laurier Park is a combination of mature native forest vegetation and manicured lawns with large mature shade trees and shrubs. Buena Vista Park consists mostly of naturalized vegetation that has partially filled in agricultural and cleared areas. In some areas weeds and invasive plant species are prevalent.
- **Amenities and Support Facilities:** The support facilities in Laurier Park include furnishings (benches, moveable picnic tables, garbage cans, fire pits and barbeques), group picnic shelters, a three-season washroom facility, two playgrounds, drinking fountains/water taps (permanently closed), baseball diamonds, boat launch with boat trailer parking. Some of the support facilities and amenities are nearing the end of their lifespan.



Fig.7: Boat Launch Ramp

As a more informal site, Buena Vista Park has minimal facilities and amenities. The amenities include benches, trash receptacles and dog bag dispensers. The two leased sites, Whitewater Paddlers and Edmonton Rowing Club have private facilities that serve their recreational functions (i.e. boat houses, docks, rowing tank). Yorath House is vacant and has secured access.

- **Signage:** The existing signage through both sites is confusing and inconsistent. Because of incremental construction of signage over the years, many signs, including off-leash boundary signs, are contradictory, damaged or inadequate.
- **Existing Maintenance and Operations:** In general the park is well maintained and in good shape. However, because of extensive use of the area, some places are showing their age. In addition, some maintenance practices, could be improved to help preserve the park area and better serve users, see *Section 5.2 Operations and Maintenance*.

Both park sites are closed at night with a locked gate. Buena Vista Park is open all months of the year. Laurier Park is open during winter, though there is no snow removal for roads and parking areas inside the park. All buildings are closed during the winter.

Biophysical Assessment

A Biophysical Assessment was conducted by Spencer Environmental in Spring 2012 in order to assess the environmental conditions of the site and propose recommendations towards conservation and development. The following provides a quick overview of the various ecological guidelines, recommendations and considerations outlined in this report. A complete report of the findings is located in *Appendix A Biophysical Assessment*.

Buena Vista/Laurier Park represents the great diversity that exists within the City of Edmonton's network of river valley parks. From the largely undeveloped, natural environment of Buena Vista Park to the comparatively manicured environment of Laurier Park, Buena Vista/Laurier Park is valued both as a natural park, but also as an amenity ideal for family picnics, informal sports and hosting special events. The future use and management of Buena Vista/Laurier Park must respect this broad range of values and functions. Buena Vista/Laurier Park is biologically diverse and an important component of Edmonton's ecological network. There are, however, no environmental features that are sensitive to the point that all development should be avoided. Instead, a planning process that is sensitive to the ecological qualities of the park should result in a park space that can accommodate a certain amount of recreational activity and development, but that at the same time remains in balance with the ecology of the park.

The following guidelines were developed in response to identified environmental sensitivities within Buena Vista/Laurier Park. Planning the future of Buena Vista/Laurier Park in accordance with these guidelines will help minimize the impacts to the ecology of park:

- Maintain the area of Buena Vista Park north of the main manicured area in a natural state.
- Avoid development that will hinder wildlife and ecological connectivity through the park.
- Minimize the creation of new trails/new edge habitat.
- Avoid development along the riverbank.



Fig.8: Trail closure due to bank erosion

Restoration opportunities in Buena Vista/Laurier Park focus primarily around weed control and the associated re-naturalization of specific target areas. The City may also consider the decommissioning and restoration of certain trails as a mitigation measure if future developments

are identified as having the potential to result in adverse impacts.

Acknowledging that further development of the park to some extent is likely, whether it is increased infrastructure, paving of trails or other modifications, the following areas were identified as being better suited for development so as to minimize ecological impacts.

Those areas were:

- The manicured area immediately north of Buena Vista Road and west of 132nd Street.
- The relatively wide and well-established trails in various locations throughout the park.

It is identified that certain aspects of the ecology of Buena Vista/Laurier Park may influence the future management of the park and, therefore, warrant consideration during the development of the master plan. Those considerations include the following:

- The presence of dead and dying trees and the hazard they present to park users.
- The presence of beavers and the threat they pose to trees in the park.

Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment

A Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) was conducted by Thurber Engineering in Spring 2012, in order to assess the impact of former uses on the site. The following provides a summary of the findings. A complete report of the findings is located in *Appendix B Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment*.



Fig.9: View of shoreline from bridge

The Phase I ESA was based on researched history of the subject property, interviews with persons familiar with the subject property and surrounding area, a site reconnaissance and documentation from various regulatory and third party agencies. An assessment of structure interiors on the subject property was not included in the scope of work; however, observations of the interiors were made from publicly accessible areas. These are generally accepted environmental practices to identify available information on the property relating to environmental contamination for a Phase I ESA.

Prior to development as a municipal park and Edmonton Valley Zoo starting in the late 1950's, portions of the subject property included residential housing, commercial yards and a gravel pit dating back to the 1930's. Prior to commercial and residential development, the subject property had been used for agricultural land or as undeveloped parkland since at least 1912.

In general, the inspection performed for this Phase I ESA did not encounter visual or historical evidence (aerial photographs, past reports, agency and third party records) indicating that the subject property has been impacted by contaminants above generally accepted levels associated with sites of this nature. However, identified items of potential environmental concern include:

- Untested backfill material, related to a former gravel pit, outside of the Edmonton Valley Zoo site;
- Residual soil stockpiles / windrows in the north portion of Buena Vista Park;
- A soil stockpile beneath the William Hawrelak Park footbridge; and,
- A former commercial yard (CoE Northwest Distribution Yard) in the east-central part of Buena Vista Park.

Phase 2 Environmental Site Assessment

The City of Edmonton (Transportation Services) conducted a soil sampling and site investigation of the above areas as part of a Phase II ESA. The environmental concern is low with respect to the fill material in the areas investigated.

Yorath House Architectural Assessment

An Architectural Assessment was conducted for Yorath House to understand its historical and cultural significance to Edmonton and to assess its current condition and potential future uses and limitations. The following provides a summary of the findings. A complete report of the findings is located in *Appendix C Yorath House Condition Assessment & Adaptive Reuse Summary*.

The Yorath Residence was one of the last portions of privately owned river frontage properties to be acquired by the City of Edmonton for inclusion within the River Valley park system. The house is believed to be one of few remaining outside of established neighbourhoods located on the river flats and is representational of some of the large estate properties that once existed alongside the North Saskatchewan River.

The house was built in 1949 for Dennis K. Yorath MBE, an Alberta business man, and his family. The single family home is of early modern style with west coast influences and was designed by the prominent architectural firm of Rule Wynn Rule. The master bedroom suite was renovated and expanded in 1978 and in 1985 a small 2 storey addition was constructed and the building interior modified to create a self-contained one bedroom suite. Both modifications were undertaken in a manner sympathetic to the original house.



Fig.10: Yorath House

The property was vacated in 1992 and the land consolidated into Buena Vista/Laurier Park. The house has stood empty since and is used periodically as a training venue for the Edmonton Police Service.

The house is in relatively good condition given its age and that it has stood vacant for over 20 years. There are items of general maintenance that should be addressed to support the long-term preservation of the structure but these will be generally assumed into works designed to provide an alternative use for the house as part of the master plan. The timing of undertaking any upgrades and the level of interventions proposed to support alternative uses for the property must be understood when recommending any short-term measures to correct immediate deficiencies.

The house has recently been added to the City of Edmonton's Inventory of Historic Resources. While this acknowledgement does not preclude development of the property, any proposed works will be reviewed by a heritage planner. As such, the proposed development options have been considered in conjunction with the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada.



Fig.11: Yorath Family Cairn

It is strongly recommended, given the current condition, the historical significance and the potential for redevelopment that the house is retained and incorporated into the long-term plans for Buena Vista/Laurier Park. As a result, the City is pursuing a formal historical designation.



Fig.12: Rear of Yorath House

2.3 Policy Context

Because of the long history of the Buena Vista/Laurier Park area and its location in the river valley, there have been several studies completed prior to undertaking this master plan. These reports and studies, which were examined for valuable content and project context, include:

Regional Planning Documents

- River Valley Alliance Plan of Action, 2007
- City of Edmonton Planning Documents
- Ribbon of Green Master Plan, 1992
- North Saskatchewan River Valley Redevelopment Plan, 1985
- The Way We Green, 2011
- Urban Parks Management Plan, 2006
- Trans Canada Trail Registration through the City of Edmonton, 2000
- Dog Off-leash Program, 1997

City of Edmonton Guidelines, Bylaws and Policies

- River Valley Parks System Signage Study & Design Guidelines, 2006
- Bylaw 13145: Animal Licensing And Control Bylaw
- Bylaw 12308: Unauthorized Use Of Parkland
- Bylaw 2202: Parkland Bylaw
- City Policy C531: Natural Area Systems
- City Policy C307: Parkland and North Saskatchewan River Utility Installation Policy
- City Policy C456: Corporate Tree Management Policy
- City Policy C512: Environmental Policy

City of Edmonton Environmental Policies and Reports

- Natural Connections Biodiversity Report, 2008
- Natural Connections Biodiversity Action Plan:2008-2018, 2008
- Natural Connections Strategic Plan, 2007

- Edmonton State of Natural Areas, 2006

Environmental Impact Assessments

- Rowing Club Facility Development, 1994
- Edmonton Valley Zoo Facilities (multiple), 2009, 2011
- Edmonton River Valley and Ravine Trails Development Program, 2004

City of Edmonton Lease Agreements

- Edmonton Rowing Club Lease Agreement, 2011
- Edmonton Whitewater Paddlers Lease Agreement, 2011

Edmonton Valley Zoo

- Edmonton Valley Zoo Master Plan Update, 2005

Previous Studies, Plans, and Public Consultation

- Buena Vista/Laurier Park Development Program Statement, 1993
- Environmental Strategic Plan, 2006
- Buena Vista/Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park Management Plan: Public Consultation Report, 2009
- Buena Vista/Laurier Park Traffic Counts, 2008
- Buena Vista Off-leash Boundaries, 1997, 2008, 2010
- Bikes in Buena Vista: User Counts, 2004
- Yorath Estate Redevelopment, 1996
- Yorath House: Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI 919199), 2011
- Yorath House Facility Analysis, 2003
- Yorath House Inspection Report, 2010



3.0 Concept Development

3.1 Opportunities and Constraints Analysis

Information gathered in all previous stages of investigation influence site opportunities and constraints for concept planning. The following constraints were identified based on the background documents, on-site analysis of the park, as well as input from City of Edmonton staff. An overview of constraints was provided to participants at the beginning of the stakeholder workshop. Ideas discussed at the workshop and reflected in the What We Heard Report provided the basic ground work for developing the program elements, but were required to reflect consideration of the constraints.

A map of site opportunities and constraints is provided in Figure 13 on the following page.

Project Constraints

Project Boundaries: The limitations of this project are set within the current park boundaries. The surrounding river valley uses and connections are important for the project decision making; however, they are not considered to be part of the project scope.

Current Lease Locations are considered fixed in location: Relocation of lease holders' facilities will not be considered at this time.

River Access: The potential for additional river access is limited to specific locations that have a relatively stable bed and shore area (areas north of the current rowing club access location). Development along the steep bank on the south/southeast park edge should not be considered.

Preservation Areas: Expansion of uses into the preservation area identified on the north end of Buena Vista Park will be explored on a limited basis. Preservation of river valley parkland is an important tenet of the City's Urban Parks Management Plan (2006). Natural, easily identifiable boundaries (i.e. trails, or vegetation changes) and signage will be used to identify dog on-leash and off-leash boundaries.

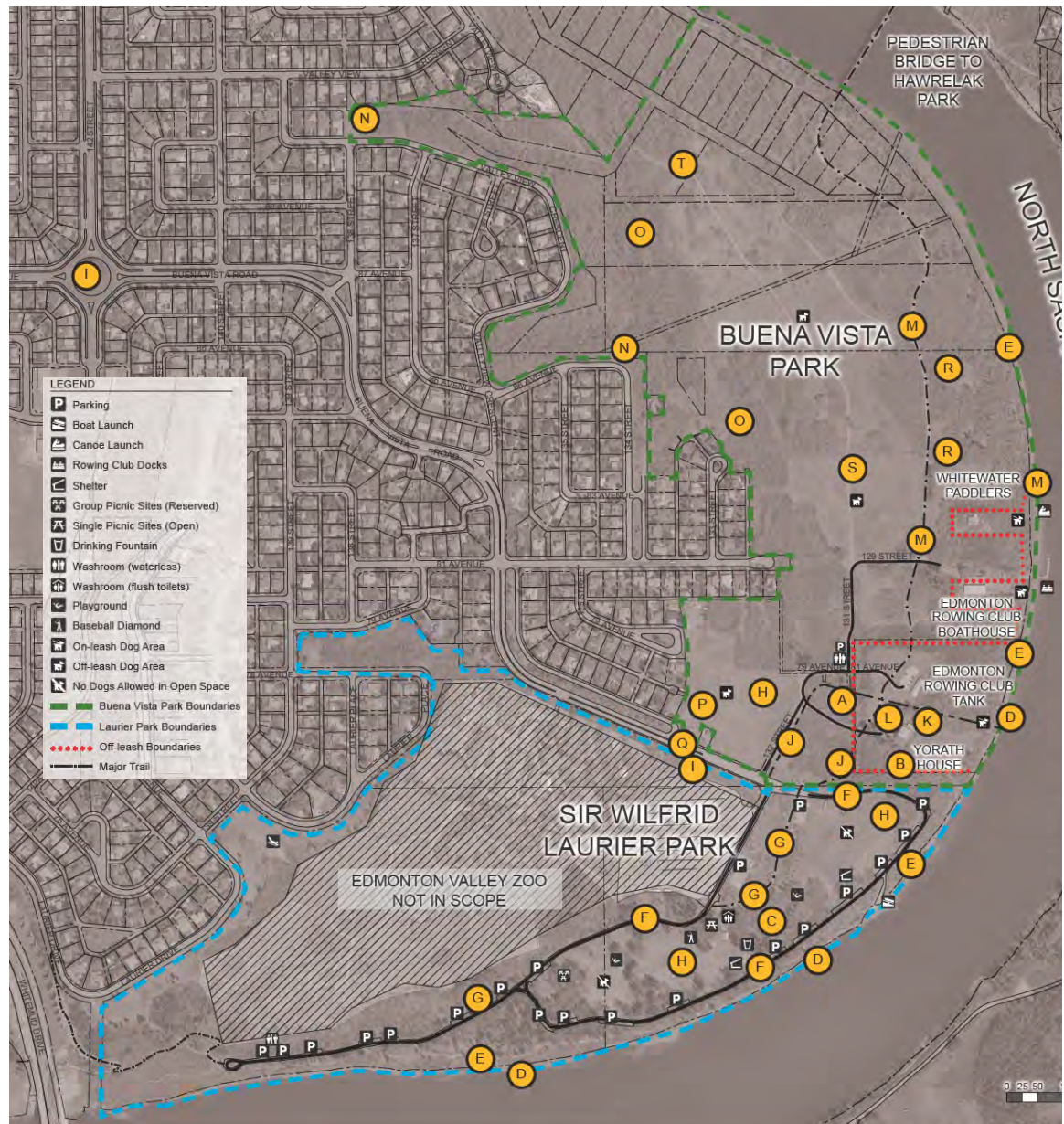
Duplication of Services: Development concepts will consider uses in surrounding park areas and current master plans and discourage duplication or overlap of services that would affect the viability of existing and planned facilities.

Building and Infrastructure Development: Development will be limited to areas accessible by existing roads. The Buena Vista area north of 81 Avenue, with the exception of the Whitewater Paddlers lease area, is recognized as conservation parkland limiting development to minor improvements with limited impacts (trails, small scale washroom facilities, and minor amenities including, but not limited to, signs, benches, garbage receptacles, information kiosks, etc.).

River Bank Stability: River bank stability along the south/southeast bank is a concern for safety and erosion. Limited development measures along the top of bank are available. The project encourages improvements that help to stabilize the bank and reduce human activity along sensitive areas of the bed and shore. Any shoreline/river work is subject to an environmental regulatory approvals process. Regulatory approval processes can be a risk to project success or cost.

Forest Preservation: Areas with quality habitat and vegetation will be conserved and improved where possible, limiting development to disturbed areas. Improvements include reforestation using native vegetation. Clearing between lawn spaces in the Laurier area will be minimized in order to manage the integrity of the natural tree stands surrounding the open lawns. The ecological integrity of the sensitive river's edge habitat will be maintained.

Fig. 13: Opportunities and Constraints Map



General Notes:

- Constraint: Summer destination (Closed to vehicle traffic during the winter months)
- Opportunity: Identify that two different park settings (use types) exist with Buena Vista/ Laurier Park.
- Opportunity: Market Buena Vista / Laurier Park to the general public increasing public profile and dispelling the notion that the park is an extension of the Zoo facility.
- Opportunity: Improve park signage including trails. Improve wayfinding to improve park user's sense of safety, and improve user experience.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park Notes:

- A** Opportunity: Adjust park boundaries to include Yorath house in the recreational activities of Laurier Park. Explore potential additional recreational uses of Laurier Park.
- B** Opportunity: Introduce a vehicular connection from the North east end of Laurier Park to Yorath House increasing opportunity for increased activity level while minimizing congestion.
- C** Opportunity: Tie lawn spaces together through improved trail and activity center design providing additional amenity value to park users.

Opportunity: Reduce sizes of lawn spaces reduce impacts of other opportunities mitigating additional trails and road accesses.

Constraints: Minimize clearing between lawn spaces to manage the integrity of the natural tree stands surrounding the open lawns. Be aware of the sensitive nature of the river's edge habitat, maintain ecological integrity.

D Opportunity: Reveal the river to park users. Provide opportunities along the river's edge for activities that highlight the importance of the river, and expand recreational opportunities for the park. Provide clear, intentional locations for river access (Visual & physical). Interpretive signage can help to inform park users of the sensitivity of the river's edge, use signage (education) to encourage location specific access. Low impact viewpoints would improve the trail experience along the river's edge trail.

Constraints: Be aware of the sensitive nature of the river's edge habitat, maintain ecological integrity. Design work around the river bank can require regulatory approvals that can be a risk to project success or cost. Unstable and steep bank areas present a hazard to trail users protection of the bank stability is important. Minimize access to lower slopes of the river bank, except in designated areas.

E Opportunity: Improve the grade of the river's edge trail. Review the opportunity to widen the trail and increase the opportunity for additional uses.

Constraints: Widening trail along the river increases risks of environmental damage in the river's ecologically and geologically sensitive areas.

F Opportunity: Reverse vehicular traffic flow to improve park entrance experience.

Opportunity: Review for opportunity for reducing park roads to a minimum lane width to increase prospects of parallel parking with minimal impact to the park.

G Opportunity: Increase the number of small (single family) picnic sites that are handicap accessible. Limited numbers of the sites are accessible. Also, improved infrastructure (i.e. paved sites and accessible furnishings) could provide a new image of Laurier park.

H Opportunity: Review need for additional local sports fields for "use vs. needs". Look at options for improving existing ball diamonds and adding soccer pitches.

Constraints: Parking for sports events is limited.

I Opportunity: Improve external park signage, providing clear identification of park destinations and uses. Provide electronic events board providing park users with decision making tools for park use.

J Opportunity: Improve trail connections through the park providing a clearly identifiable trail network.

Constraint: Be aware of possible trail user and vehicle conflicts. Review if any issues are noted in background information.

Opportunity: Add/ improve four-season uses of the park. Increased uses will further develop the park as a city wide destination.

Yorath House Notes:

K Opportunity: Improve outdoor setting including upper plaza surrounding the house, regrading the open lawn area to improve multifunctional use options (i.e. winter outdoor skating, summer games / event space, relocation of the green shack program.)

L Constraints: Upgrades, including water and sewer systems, are required if Yorath house becomes a public facility. Existing water and sewer service extend to the Zoo location.

Constraints: Upgrades to the structural capacity of the existing building are required if Yorath house becomes a public facility. Structural upgrades are considered minor. Upgrades are required to repair exterior water damage and are considered minor.

Opportunity: Upgrade Yorath house to a four season public facility to increase possible the draw to Buena Vista and Laurier Parks, providing a local destination and additional amenity. Upgrade to include seasonal or year round washroom facilities.

Constraints: To minimize structural upgrades required for second floor use, maximum occupancy is 60 people.

Buena Vista Notes:

M Opportunity: Clarify definition and boundaries for "off-leash area". Use easily identifiable natural and man-made features to strengthen boundaries. Initial enforcement of defined off-leash areas is key for success.

Opportunity: Separate or equalize opportunities for multiple park uses, without precluding different user groups.

N Opportunity: Improve trail connections for multiple uses including strengthening connections to the adjacent neighbourhoods.

O Opportunity: Develop / improve a clearly identifiable looping trail system reducing trail braiding throughout the natural area.

P Opportunity: Review development potential for Buena Vista's southwest field.

Q Opportunity: Develop a significant gateway along Buena Vista Road, creating a park entrance that services the zoo, and both park settings.

R Opportunity: Restore natural areas affected by significant land disturbance and weeds.

S Opportunity: Identify hot air balloon launch days with signage at off-leash parking locations to reduce negative encounters.

T Constraints: Development at the north end of the park should be restricted to increase preservation area. Use natural, easily identifiable boundaries (i.e. trails, or vegetation changes) and signage to identify dog on-leash and off-leash boundaries.

Opportunity: Expand parking to accommodate off-leash area users.



Fig.14: Event at Laurier Park

Trail Widening: Widening trail along the river increases risks of environmental damage to the ecologically and geologically sensitive shoreline areas.

New Programming: Some forms of recreational programming (i.e. sports and events) may require additional parking beyond what currently exists within the site. Furthermore, some activities could conflict with existing programming or displace existing users.

Yorath House: Yorath House is an important historical asset to the City. Protocols for work on historical buildings will need to be considered if any renovation or retrofitting is required for the building.

Currently the building is in good structural condition though it requires some immediate repair work to ensure that the building does not sustain further damage. Upgrades, including water and sewer systems, are required if Yorath House becomes a public facility. Minor upgrades to the structural capacity of the existing building are required if Yorath House becomes a public facility if the upper floor is limited to 60 person occupancy; however, major structural work is required if the anticipated upper floor capacity exceeds this.

Project Opportunities

Unique Park Identities: Identify that two different park settings (use types) exist within Buena Vista/Laurier Park.

Destination Parks: Market Buena Vista/Laurier Park to the general public, increasing public profile and dispelling the notion that the park is an extension of the Edmonton Valley Zoo facility.

Park Entry: Develop a significant gateway or entrance feature along Buena Vista Road, to create strong first impressions for the Edmonton Valley Zoo, and both park settings. Improve external park signage, providing clear identification of park destinations and uses.

Signage: Improve park signage. Improve wayfinding to improve park user's sense of safety, and improve user experience. Install events board providing park users with decision making tools for park use.

Four Season Activity: Currently Laurier Park is mostly a summer destination because the roadway is closed to vehicle traffic during the winter months. Add or improve four-season activities in the park to further develop the park as a city-wide destination.

Laurier Park Boundaries: Consider adjusting Laurier Park boundaries to include the Yorath House site in the recreational activities of Laurier Park. However, boundary change may not be necessary given that boundaries between the parks is more of a theoretical boundary than it is a physical one.

Vehicular Movement: Reverse vehicular traffic flow to improve park entrance experience and improve wayfinding. Introduce a vehicular connection from the northeast end of



Fig.15: Existing trail sign

Laurier Park to Yorath House providing opportunity for increased activity level while minimizing congestion.

Connectivity: Tie Laurier Park lawn spaces together through improved trail and activity centre design providing additional amenity value to park users. Ensure that pathways provide clear and logical connections throughout the site and out into the adjacent neighbourhoods. Develop/improve a clearly identifiable off-leash looping trail system, reducing goat trail creation throughout the natural forested areas.

Naturalization and Restoration: Reduce the size of lawn spaces with increase to naturalized vegetation to mitigate the environmental impacts of improvements requiring tree removals. Restore natural areas affected by significant land disturbance, former stockpiling and weeds.

Reveal the River: Provide opportunities along the river's edge for activities that highlight the importance of the river, and expand recreational opportunities for the park. Provide clear, intentional locations for river access (visual & physical). Interpretive signage can help to inform park users of the sensitivity of the river's edge, use signage (education) to encourage location specific access. Low impact viewpoints would improve the trail experience along the river's edge trail.

Trail Improvements: Improve the grade of the riverside trail and upgrade granular surface. Review the opportunity to widen the riverside trail and increase the opportunity for additional uses. Improve the standards of the current shared-use pathway and highlight its designation as part of the Trans Canada Trail.



Fig.16: Picnic site in Laurier Park

Parking Improvements: Review the opportunity for reducing the Laurier Park road to a minimum lane width in order to increase prospects of parallel parking with minimal impact to the park. Expand parking to accommodate off-leash and other park users.

Picnic Sites: Increase the number of picnic sites that are barrier-free. Limited numbers of existing sites are accessible. Also, improved infrastructure (i.e. paved sites and accessible furnishings) will provide expanded barrier-free picnic sites.

Sports Programming: Review need for additional local sports fields for "use vs. needs". Look at options for improving existing ball diamonds and adding soccer pitches, if required.

Yorath House: Upgrade Yorath House to a four-season public facility to provide a destination and additional amenity in the park. Upgrade to include a four-season public washroom facility. Improve outdoor setting including upper plaza surrounding the house and regrading the open lawn area to improve multi-functional use options (i.e. winter outdoor skating, summer games/event space, relocation of the green shack program).

Off leash Boundaries: Clarify definition and boundaries for "off-leash area". Use easily identifiable natural and man-made features, including signage, to strengthen boundaries. Enforcement of defined off-leash areas is key for success.

Equitable Park Access: Ensure that a range of users and activities are available in both sites. Separate or equalize opportunities for multiple park uses, without precluding different user groups. Ensure that the park is accessible to people with mobility issues through barrier-free design. Revisit hot air balloon activities in off-leash area or identify mitigation measures, such as launch day signage at off-leash parking locations, to reduce negative encounters.

3.2 Visioning

The elements of the draft vision for Buena Vista/Laurier Park Master Plan were crafted through a review of previous City of Edmonton documents, which included significant public consultation, combined with input from a 2012 public visioning session. The document was then refined by the project's advisory committee and the Buena Vista/Laurier Park project team, which included the design team and City of Edmonton staff. The draft vision was then vetted through an online survey for the general public, the stakeholders and advisory committee, and the City of Edmonton through review and comments in April/May, 2012.

Throughout the design process, the vision was used as the foundation for considering, selecting and evaluating whether potential program elements and concept design decisions were appropriate for the master plan.

The overall vision for Buena Vista/Laurier Park is:

A Park on the Edge

"A park characterized by interplay between two distinct settings: maintained and natural. These settings support a diverse range of year-round outdoor activities, provide access to the North Saskatchewan River and connect park users to attractions in the central west end of the City's river valley."



Fig.17: Public workshop

The following themes support the vision and describe Buena Vista/Laurier Park in the next ten years.

- **Experience:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park offers a range of settings that allow users to experience the edges and transitions between preserved natural and maintained recreational landscapes.
- **Connections:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park has connections within it and along its edges to the surrounding communities, while providing linkages to adjacent river valley attractions including the Edmonton Valley Zoo, Fort Edmonton Park, Hawrelak Park, and the Trans Canada Trail.
- **Identities:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park has a unique and clearly defined identity, supporting a diverse range of uses that celebrate activity in nature and the outdoors.
- **Uses:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park has zones of structured and unstructured uses, which coexist in complimentary fashion, that overlap, transition, or have distinct edges.
- **Communication:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park clearly communicates transitions and edges between zones of designated use through appropriate signage, wayfinding, and landscape elements.
- **Access:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park provides amenities that support its current and future user types; providing defined areas of barrier-free access, year-round accessibility, shelter and safety.
- **Heritage:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park interprets and integrates relevant heritage resources, including Yorath House and the history of the river valley, revealing layers of the park area's history.
- **River:** Buena Vista/Laurier Park provides unique and valuable recreational activities along the water's edge and access for users to the North Saskatchewan River.

3.3 Program Development

The program elements for the park areas focus on areas that need some change or adjustment to improve their function or to provide additional amenity opportunities for park users that fit within the vision for Buena Vista/Laurier Park. Program elements were developed through review of previous documents, review of information gathered from the public, advisory committee and stakeholder events, and in consultation with City of Edmonton staff.

The public visioning process was developed to encourage idea collection on a broad range of scales from integration of the park into the surrounding community and river valley park system to individual park elements. Interviews with stakeholders also provided considerations for park developments. Finally, meetings with the advisory committee and other stakeholders have provided both context for park use as well as ideas for enhancement of the park facilities. Engagement evaluation forms provided from the various input sessions suggest that the public and stakeholders are engaged in the park master planning process and feel heard on issues surrounding the park use.

The program elements have been divided into four categories – recommended general improvements, recommended improvements to the Sir Wilfrid Laurier area, recommended improvements to the Buena Vista area, additional improvement ideas and options for Yorath House.

See *Appendix D List of Essential and Non-Essential Programming*.

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3.4 Concept Plans

Three draft concepts with design elements were created and presented to the public via a public workshop in June 2012 and then via an online survey in July/August 2012 to reach members of user groups and interested stakeholders. Though each concept plan creates a complete vision for the park, the plans were intended to be read together, forming a palette of design elements. It was anticipated that no one plan would be considered the ultimate solution for the park. Instead the concept plans were used as a tool for the public to review, discuss, and indicate preference for different project elements.

The three concepts and description for the elements and options that were presented to the public in the concept plans are provided in *Appendix E July 2012 Concept Plans*.



3.0 Concept Development

