



## *Louise McKinney Riverfront*

*A Vision  
for the Future*







# Connecting land with water, resident with city, tradition with potential

## **A riverfront vision**

“Cities inevitably begin because of their location and natural endowments, but they become great cities when they are able to extend themselves into self generating centres of quality and prosperity” (Edmonton City Council’s Visions for Economic Prosperity, 1996). To achieve City Council’s Vision for Edmonton, objectives were defined for Edmonton’s river valley (Community Services):

- To develop Edmonton’s river valley as a premier attraction.
- To preserve and conserve the natural beauty of the river valley in a balanced context with development.
- To identify opportunities for private, non-profit and public sector involvement in delivering the identified programs and projects.

Edmonton’s river valley is our jewel and greatest natural asset.

The creation of an urban waterfront, such as Louise McKinney Riverfront, along with the establishment of river activities and riverbank amenities, is a significant means to achieving these objectives. This means comprehensive year round activities appropriately integrated within the river valley park system. Edmonton will be home to an unsurpassed environmental amenity, which includes appropriate recreation, cultural, education, and entertainment activities, benefiting Edmontonians and visitors alike. As a result, Edmonton will grow and prosper as a city which attracts new business, new residents, and worldwide visitation.

## **A hallmark park**

Louise McKinney Riverfront is Edmonton’s hallmark park. The conceptual planning and design presented within this Vision Plan enhances prior planning initia-



*Courtesy of Edmonton Journal*

tives, demonstrating the park’s potential and desirable future, with particular regard to the river’s edge. This Vision Plan demonstrates the intimate relationship that Louise McKinney Riverfront has to the North Saskatchewan River, and the greater metropolitan area. The plans and ideas presented stem from extensive discussion and consultation with commu-

nity stakeholder groups and a review of other river edge developments throughout North America, including Calgary, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Portland, and Cleveland. The park’s context shapes a future development that is uniquely Edmonton’s - borrowing and building from the experience of others.

# Connecting tradition with potential

## Project background

For almost 90 years, municipal, regional and provincial authorities have promoted and protected Edmonton's river valley for parkland purposes. It began 1915, when the provincial government adopted landscape architect Frederick Todd's recommendation to protect the river valley environment. As a result of this early vision, Edmonton has the largest continuous stretch of urban parkland in North America, encompassing over 7400 acres.

In 1985, the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan (Bylaw No. 7188) indicated that the river valley and ravine system shall be primarily used for major urban and natural parks and environmental protection uses. In 1992, the Ribbon of Green - North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System Master Plan - outlined the planning framework for open space development in the river valley into the year 2000.

"The North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System is a ribbon of green running through the city of Edmonton. The natural features, wildlife, vegetation, and cultural heritage of Edmonton will be conserved for present and future generations by management of these resources to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect. Trails, paths and parks will tie Edmonton together providing a change from urban living and an opportunity for recreation in the tranquility of nature." (Vision Statement, 1992)

## Site history

The Louise McKinney Riverfront site was the subject of a major landslide between 1901-05, and has been relatively unstable since that time. Since 1949, repeated geotechnical and slope stabilization measures have been undertaken. In 1986, serious flooding of the river necessitated extensive riverbank stabilization. These efforts have

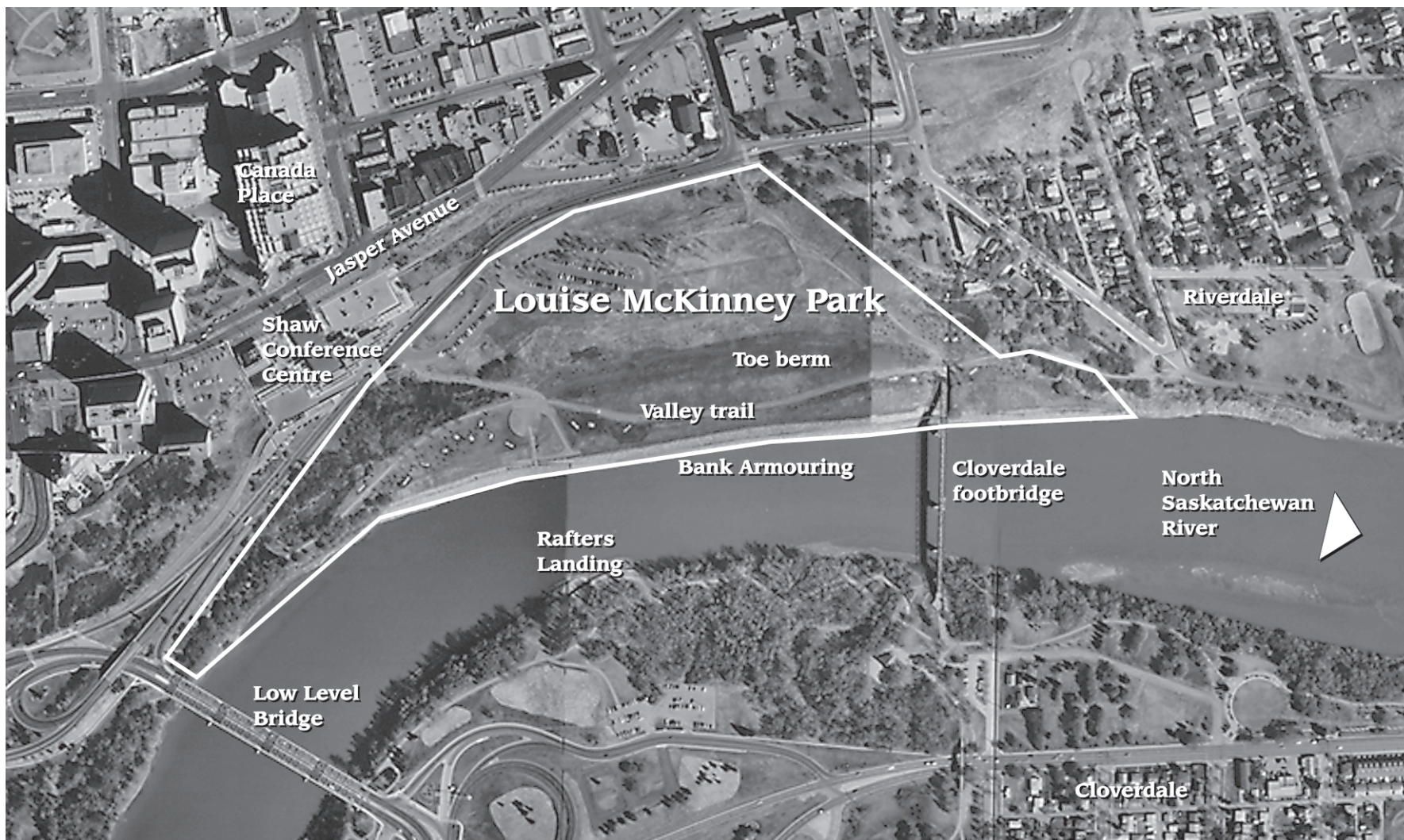


*Aerial view of the park site*

resulted in the park being left in a relatively undeveloped state, with the exception of a cycle path bisecting from east to west. In 1992, it was home to the Dinosaur project World Tour. Presently, the site is a conspicuous open patch amongst the existing green canopy of the river

valley. In 1998 City Council adopted phase one of the Louise McKinney Riverfront as Edmonton's official millennium project. Phase one has begun the transformation of this pivotal site at the core of our river valley parks system.





Airphoto mosaic (1995)



# Connecting land with water

## River use

Our Ribbon of Green is a vital community amenity unrivalled in North America. Louise McKinney Riverfront occupies a commanding position within the river valley and is a pivotal entrance to the river valley parks system. The river currently provides recreation opportunities for canoeists, jet boaters, rowers, and those who love to fish. It has also been the venue of such special events and races as the Klondike Days' Sourdough Raft Races and those between various city paddlers' clubs. Increased

commercial activity on the river has begun, with both jet boat operators and the Edmonton Queen offering passenger tours.

## River attractions

The attraction of the river valley is its natural state, providing a 'wilderness' setting within an urban core, enhancing the otherwise flat nature of our city. The river provides water-based connections to many of Edmonton's tourist and heritage facilities, including Fort Edmonton Park, the Valley Zoo, and the John Walter Museum.



*Sourdough Raft Races - Klondike Days*

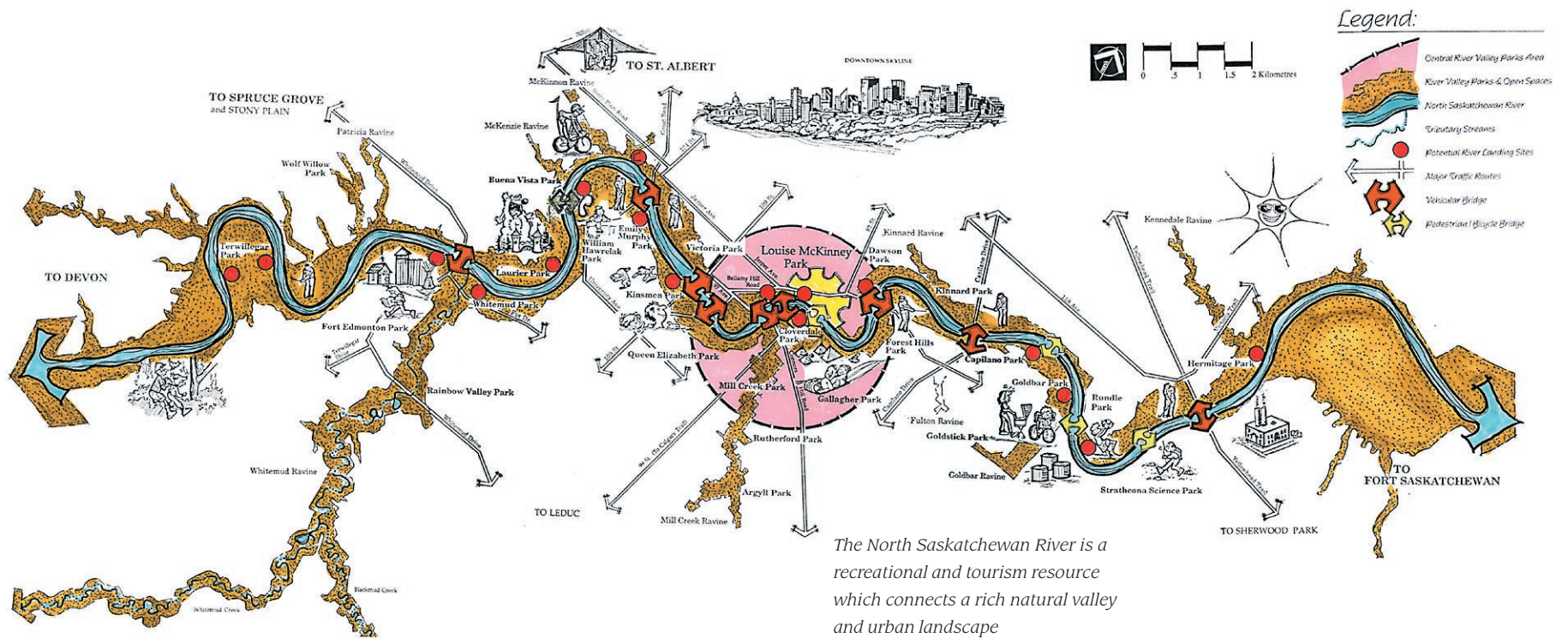


*Chinese Dragon Boat Races*



*World Firefighter's Games*





### Future river use

Part of the long range plans for our river valley include sites for additional docking and launching areas throughout the river valley. This will lead to increased river use, including

sightseeing river charters, taxis, and a variety of personal watercraft. River oriented docks, launches and related shore facilities will become more common with increased recreation opportunities on or along the river. This water-based

recreation attraction is immediately accessible to a large metropolitan population. Regional water-based recreational opportunities have become increasingly crowded and overdeveloped. The river's proximity to a large market, and high quality

resource attraction will ensure increased use for personal and commercial watercraft. The vision of Louise McKinney Riverfront is to be the hub of river activity.

# Connecting resident with city

## Developing downtown... naturally

Edmonton's downtown offers an attractive place to live, work and socialize. It is a well-established district for culture, arts, entertainment, and restaurant facilities. The downtown contains Edmonton's largest congregation of hotels, convention facilities, and retail business establishments. Developed downtown green space is limited to Sir Winston Churchill Square and small pockets of landscaped urban parks. An extensive pedestrian environment, the downtown area is connected through a series of pedways, LRT, and transit links. The pedway connection through the Shaw Conference Centre ties in directly with Louise McKinney Riverfront.

## Downtown renewal

As part of the downtown renewal initiative, the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan recommends developing a river valley edge park - creating quality trails with ornamental planting and natural landscaping. The Downtown Plan also suggests building a docking facility, river's edge boardwalk with viewpoints and rest areas, improved pedestrian and bicycle connections to the river valley from downtown and a funicular rail to the river's edge.

*Some of downtown Edmonton's many features and amenities*



*Edmonton fireworks*

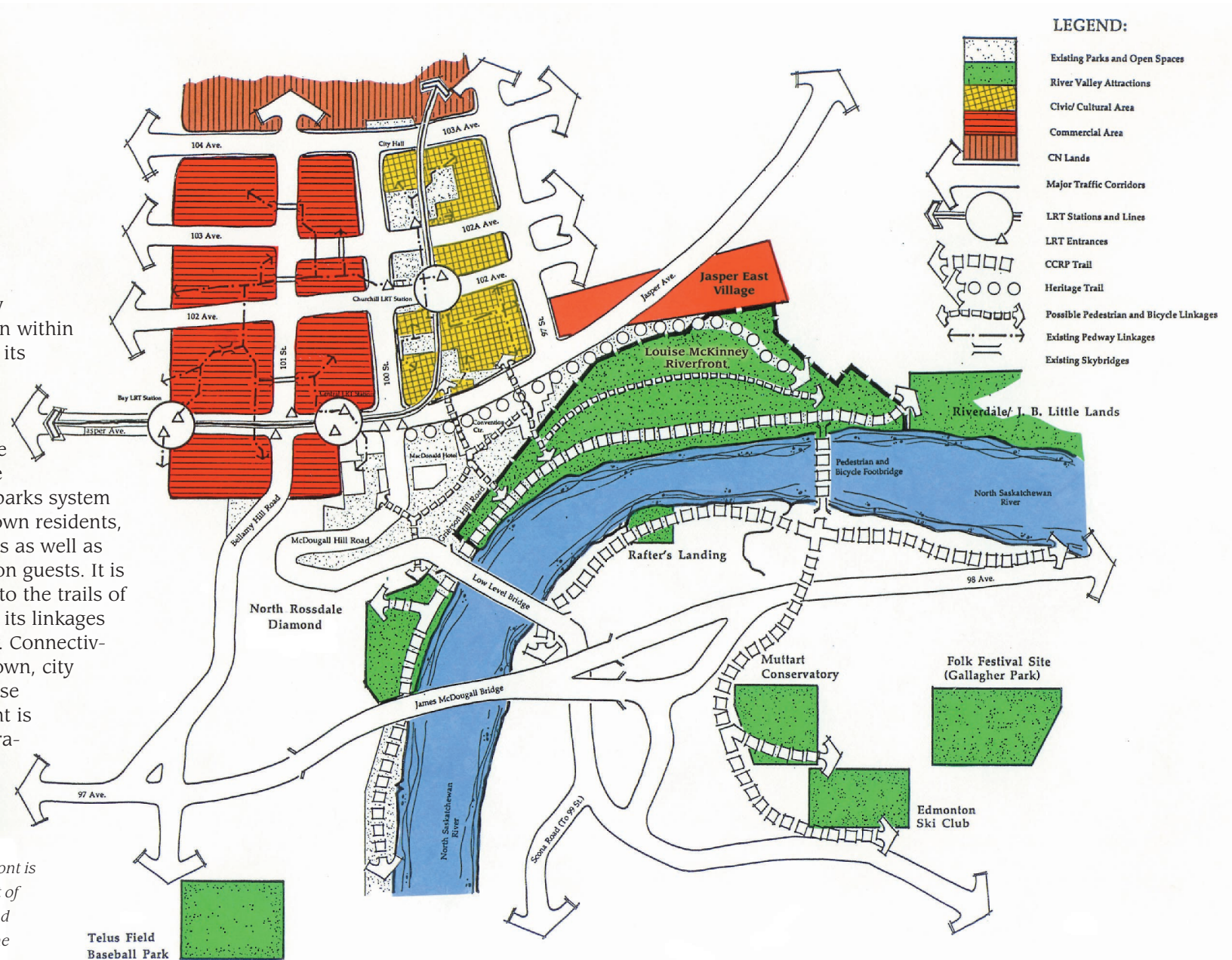




## Connectivity

Louise McKinney Riverfront's location within the river valley and its proximity to the downtown core makes it the premier entry to the river valley. It is the 'front door' to the parks system for city and downtown residents, workers and visitors as well as hotel and convention guests. It is a primary gateway to the trails of the river valley and its linkages throughout the city. Connectivity between downtown, city amenities and Louise McKinney Riverfront is shown in the illustration.

*Louise McKinney Riverfront is an important component of Edmonton's civic core and downtown. Trails from the south, east and west all merge onto the site.*





# Connecting tradition with potential

## Celebrating our river tradition

The river valley is the site of our early history and an ideal setting to interpret our story to others. Complementing Fort Edmonton Park and the John Walter Museum, Louise McKinney Riverfront has a unique story to tell. With its commanding view of the river and its proximity to the downtown hospitality and convention



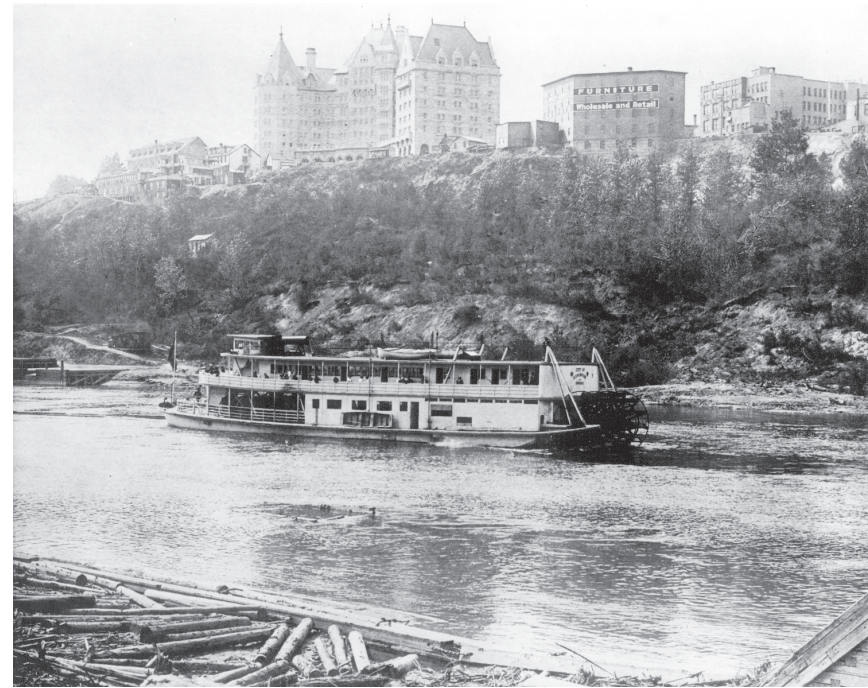
York Boat

core, Louise McKinney Riverfront is the most appropriate place to interpret the historical significance of the North Saskatchewan River on Edmonton's development.

## River vessels

The North Saskatchewan River was once the most significant transportation corridor and communication route in this region. Archaeological evidence indicates considerable activity

on the river by early indigenous people. The Hudson Bay Company and the North West Company used the river as their highway, maneuvering up the waterway in pursuit of valuable furs. The North West Company used the light, streamlined and comfortably portaged North Canoes. From about 1797, the Hudson's Bay Company used primarily York Boats - shallow-draft boats



with flat bottoms, capable of hauling twice the capacity of the North Canoe. In 1873, steamboats were introduced by the Hudson Bay Company to replace the less efficient method of shipping by York Boat. With settlement established outside the Fort, ferries and paddlewheelers ran by pioneer John Walter, serviced the needs of early pioneer Edmonton.

## Pioneer river settlement

The Hudson Bay Company established a trading post in this area as a springboard into the bountiful Athabasca country. Goods were portaged from Fort Assiniboine to Fort Edmonton, then shipped directly down the North Saskatchewan River to

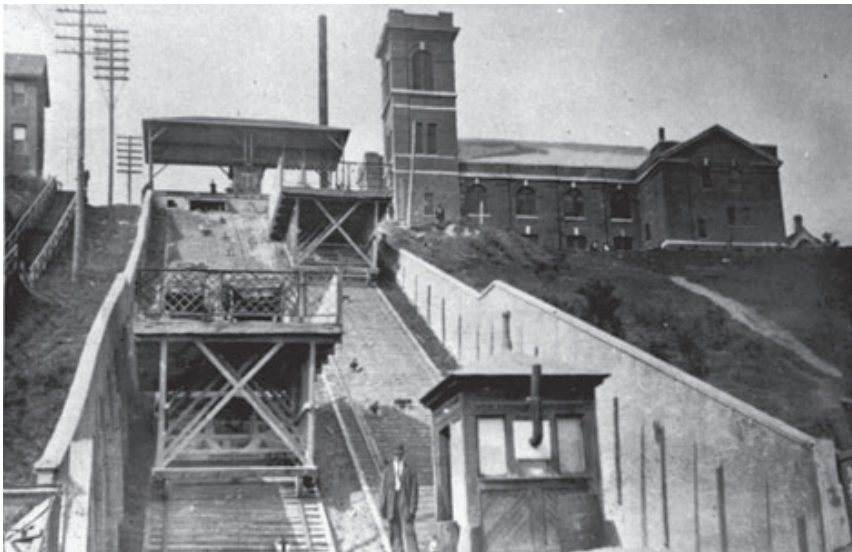
Hudson Bay and on to Europe. This was a fast, cheap and safe route, bypassing the deathly run on the Athabasca. It made Fort Edmonton the centre of the fur trade in the west. Eventually, a small community was established outside the walls of the fort on either side of the river. The land was divided into River Lots with each narrow strip fronting the river. With the opening of the west, a booming city mined the river and river valley for lumber, bricks, coal and even ice. Those who worked in these river valley industries established the communities of Rosedale, Walterdale, Cloverdale and Riverdale.



## Crossing the river

The surge of Klondike travelers through Edmonton highlighted the need for a bridge to cross the river. The Low Level Bridge was officially opened April 6th, 1900, making it the first bridge to cross the North Saskatchewan River west of Winnipeg. The first train crossed on October 20th, 1902. In 1908, local businessmen financed the building of the

Edmonton Incline Railway to move people and goods out of the valley. It was a funicular lift - when one platform went up, the other went down. This combination railway/elevator was located just east of where the Chateau Lacombe stands today. The Incline Railway was forced out of business in 1913 by a new competitor - the High Level Bridge. Unique for its time, the



Edmonton Incline Railway, Edmonton Archives

High Level Bridge was the first in Canada to carry four different modes of traffic - rail, streetcar, automobile and pedestrian. More than 90 years later, the High Level Bridge remains one of the longest, highest and heaviest spans in Canada.

## Who was Louise McKinney?

Champion. Activist. Person. As a member of the Famous Five, Louise McKinney devoted her life to the development of community and the advancement of personal rights and freedoms. She was a devoted activist, working not only for the people of her generation, but more importantly for generations to come. Together, Mrs. Louise McKinney, Judge Emily Murphy, Dr. Irene Parlby, Mrs. Nellie McClung, and Mrs. Henrietta Muir Edwards petitioned the Supreme Court of Canada to declare that women were persons under the BNA Act, and therefore eligible to be appointed



Louise McKinney, Edmonton Archives

to the Senate. The judges did not believe that women were persons under the Act. With the backing of the Government of Alberta, the five appealed to Canada's highest court of appeal. On October 18, 1929, the British Privy Council declared that women were indeed persons. The Persons Case became one of the most famous in Canadian legal history. Prior to this, Mrs. McKinney was actively involved in the suffragette movement. Louise McKinney was the first woman elected to a legislature in both Canada and in the British Empire, serving as a MLA from 1917 to 1921.

Visit our online exhibit on the history of our river valley - [www.louisemckinneyriverfront.com](http://www.louisemckinneyriverfront.com)

# Reclaiming the riverfront

## Riverfront case studies

The riverfront is a dynamic area where land and water meet. Over the last 30 years, the transformation of urban waterfronts has been a key strategy used to restore the economic and social health of cities and community centers. Community pride has been a powerful motivator in this regard. The riverfront can be a significant challenge and opportunity for a city. While it can be an escape from the pressure of city life, a bright breathing edge of the city, the urban waterfront has often been cut off from its surroundings, marred by utility plants and unapproachable. "Our bodies and spirits need the fresh breezes that blow from the water; its calm, its stimulus, the sense of community, opportunities for festivity, artistic expression, recreation and commercial bustle that urban waterfronts offer." (From W. Von Eckardt, *Urban Waterfronts '83*, Washington DC) If a city is made by the social congregation of people,



*The Forks, Winnipeg, Manitoba - aerial view*

for business, pleasure and ceremony, then why not create an accessible place along the river for residents and visitors

alike? Five North American case studies have been reviewed as models - borrowing from the experience of other river cities.



## The Forks

### Winnipeg, Manitoba - Red/Assiniboine Rivers

#### Developers:

The Forks Renewal Corporation (1987); the City of Winnipeg, Province of Manitoba, and Government of Canada

#### Features:

- 56 acres of transformed CN rail yards
- Public docking and boat rentals
- The Forks Historic Port
- City of Winnipeg Assiniboine Riverwalk
- The Forks Public Market
- Manitoba Children's Museum
- Aboriginal Cultural and Education Centre
- Riverboats relocated to the Forks

#### Benefits:

- Approximately 7 million visitors annually
- Employs 1,000 people

#### Financing:

Forks Renewal Corporation: \$20 million (initial funding)





**Riverfront Park  
Portland, Oregon -  
Willamette River**

Developers:  
Portland Development Commission;  
City of Portland, Oregon

Features:

- 73 acres along downtown waterfront
- Relocation of Harbour Drive Expressway to allow park development and improved access
- River Place public open space with:
  - 1,150 residential units
  - 75 room hotel
  - Retail shops Athletic club
  - 200 slip marina
  - Numerous tour boat operations

Benefits:

- Revitalization of central business district
- Approx. 4.3 million annual visitors
- Approx. \$1.4 billion annual revenue

Financing:

\$20 million public tax increment financing



**The Flats  
Cleveland, Ohio -  
Cuyahoga River**

Developers:  
City of Cleveland; Flats Oxbow Association

Features:

- Transformation from industrial sewer to award winning waterway
- “Nautica”
- 50 entertainment venues
- Water taxis between nightclubs
- Excursion & riverboats
- Trolley connection to downtown LRT links with Gateway/Tower City Complex and North Coast Harbour (R & R Hall of Fame and Great Lakes Science Centre)

Benefits:

- Over 7 million annual visitors
- Over \$100 million revenue \$3.9 billion overall economic impact
- \$1.6 billion payroll for 92,000 people

Financing:

\$100 million public; \$150 million private



**Prince's Island Park  
Calgary, Alberta -  
Bow River**

Developers:  
City of Calgary

Features:

- Calgary's premiere urban park
- The hub of Calgary's pathway and open space system
- Adjacent to Eau Claire Market and CBD
- Major venue for special events
- Weir controlled lagoon for winter skating
- River Café restaurant
- Currently undergoing an \$8 million upgrading program

Benefits:

- Over 4.5 million annual visitors
- Preferred site for city festivals
- A quiet refuge adjacent to the urban core



**Rideau Canal  
Ottawa, Ontario -  
Ottawa River**

Developers:  
National Capital Commission; City of Ottawa; Government of Canada; Parks Canada

Features:

- Park spaces & walkways
- Public docking facilities leased to private excursion operators
- Excursion boats on both waterways
- The 280 passenger Sea Prince II tour boat offers daily site seeing cruises on the Ottawa River
- “Paul's Boat Lines” offers cruises along the historic Rideau Canal
- National Arts Centre, Lansdowns Parks along Rideau Canal

Benefits:

- Attracts a large portion of Ottawa's 5.2 million annual tourists

# A vision for the future

## A venue to be envied

Louise McKinney Riverfront encompasses almost 40 acres of land. Towering above the banks looking over Louise McKinney are the buildings of downtown Edmonton. Flowing along its edge are 500 metres of unobstructed river view. In between, the park descends from Jasper Avenue to the river's edge in four natural terraces. The vision for Louise McKinney Riverfront is:

### **A new city destination**

We naturally gravitate towards water for enjoyment, socializing and relaxing. Louise McKinney Riverfront will attract Edmontonians and their visitors with amenities that meet the needs of both the active and not so active. A vibrant riverfront with boat docks, a river promenade, places to rent bikes and enjoy food and drink and an

unparalleled view of the river and city skyline will draw Edmontonians to the river's edge.

### **Developing downtown ... naturally**

Downtown Edmonton is the gateway to Louise McKinney Riverfront, which in turn becomes the link between the visiting guest and the river. Louise McKinney Riverfront offers a serene escape from urban commitments without leaving the centre of it all. It reclaims a disturbed area while preserving the pristine river valley we all champion. Tree canopies, open grassy areas, walkways and amenities are integrated in a way that both preserves an unspoiled vista and adds value to our city.

### **Celebrating the past**

The story of Edmonton is the story of the highway that brought people to this river

valley. The bends and turns of the North Saskatchewan first drew native populations who quarried the valley to make tools. Trading companies established posts to collect furs and dispense goods. With the opening of the west, a booming city mined the river valley for lumber, bricks and coal. First canoes and York boats, then ferries and paddlewheelers transported people and goods up and down the water highway. Louise McKinney Riverfront, with its design and interpretive program, will celebrate the heritage of our river highway.

### **A festive meeting place**

Louise McKinney Riverfront is situated in a natural amphitheatre. Its spectacular downtown backdrop provides an impressive stage for community celebrations and annual events such as Canada Day, Sourdough Raft

Race and Chinese Dragon Boat Races. The park will provide the infrastructure that meets the needs of those who want to host a corporate picnic, a fun run or a new festival. With an abundance of four-star hotels in close proximity, Louise McKinney Riverfront offers visitors an abundance of easily accessible and scenically breathtaking recreational opportunities.

### **Our river valley's front door**

Louise McKinney Riverfront lies in the centre of the largest stretch of urban parkland in North America. To meet the orientation needs of visitors and residents, the riverfront will serve as a clearly identifiable entry to our river valley parks system and become a key staging area for trail and river activity.

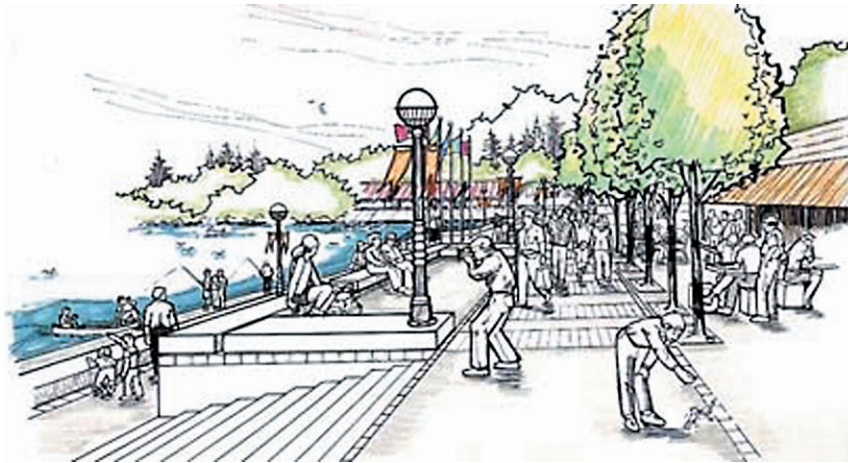




*Louise McKinney Riverfront 13*



# Louise McKinney Riverfront



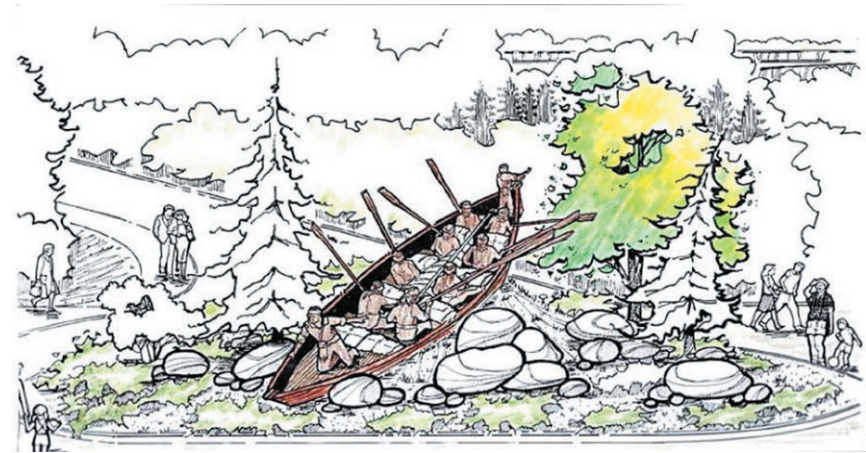
Riverfront Plaza

## Riverfront Plaza

- Public washroom facilities for trail users, park patrons and riverfront activities
- Street vendors
- River valley outfitters - rentals for bicycles, rollerblades and canoes
- Situated above 1:100 year flood elevation
- Winter shelter for cross-country skiers

## Public Dock

- Accommodates the river's seasonal fluctuations
- River promenade access to floating docks
- Floating docks for tour boats (e.g. Edmonton Queen) and private boats
- Handicap accessibility provided by mechanical lifts



Interpretive displays and artwork

## Interpretive Displays

- Public art, statues, interpretive panels scattered throughout the park
- Telling the stories of river travel, settlement and the Famous Five

## Cable Car/Funicular lift

- Connects downtown to the river bank
- Reminiscent of the Edmonton's early Incline Railway
- Improves accessibility of the river valley
- A novel tourist attraction



# Louise McKinney Riverfront



*North Saskatchewan River Promenade*

## **North Saskatchewan River Promenade**

- Hard surfaced river walk that runs parallel to the North Saskatchewan River on an existing bench of land above the armoured bank.
- A generous and inviting promenade, 5 metres wide
- Connects to the river valley trail system
- Abundance of seating, lighting, and lookouts

## **World Walk & Oval Lawn**

- Aesthetic horticultural walk through Louise McKinney Riverfront
- Rose garden features hardy northern roses
- Oval provides opportunity for recreation activities and special events
- Easy access to Heritage Trail and downtown
- Viewpoints of the entire riverfront



*World Walk and Oval Lawn*

## **Chinese Garden**

- Visually breathtaking and serenely relaxing
- Featuring formal architecture and landscaping
- A celebration of the heritage of our Chinese community in Edmonton

## **Accessibility**

- Direct connection to the LRT/ Downtown pedway system
- Access to lower terrace for tour, charter, DATS buses and taxis
- Private boats/tour boats/water taxis

# Towards 2005 - a community celebrates

## Our partners

Together with representatives from numerous organizations, the City of Edmonton has been working to produce a civic legacy.

Those who sit on various committees represent a cross-section of groups that care about our river valley, ranging from private individuals and city councilors to public institutions and festival organizations. Committee members are drawn from the:

- Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation
- Downtown Business Association
- Edmonton Public Library
- Dragon Boat Association
- Edmonton Catholic School Board
- Economic Development Edmonton
- River Valley Alliance
- Edmonton Chinese Garden Society

In crafting a vision for the site, numerous discussions, surveys and consultations were held with



*Winnipeg's waterfront investment - daily activity*

stakeholders. Soon after City Council endorsed the vision statement for Louise McKinney Riverfront, it was adopted as Edmonton's official Millennium project. Funding secured from three levels of government led to the design and construction of phase one. The project's millennium phase was officially

opened July 1, 2000 with over 30,000 people on hand to explore this new legacy and enjoy the Canada Day fireworks.

The Edmonton Chinese Garden Society is a community group that is actively working to design and develop their own component of the Riverfront experience, a traditional Asian garden.

## Project phases

Over the last ten years over \$2.7 million has been invested in the site to stabilize the slope and provide limited recreational experiences. To bring the Louise McKinney Riverfront vision to fruition, the park will be built in three phases.

### Phase 1 - A greener space

The first phase lays the foundation for future phases with landscaping and the creation of a walkway lined with elm trees that connects the Shaw Conference Centre with the Cloverdale Footbridge.

Completion: 2001

### Phase 2 - The Riverfront

The focus of phase 2 is to build those features that will draw visitors to the park and keep them there. This includes a riverfront walk, a central riverfront plaza featuring a public pavilion and private lease buildings, and floating docks.

Completion: 2003

### Phase 3 - A world class attraction

In phase 3, the potential of Louise McKinney Park is fully realized with the building of a funicular/cable car, completing the transformation of the park into a world class attraction.

Completion: 2005



# Benefits to the community



People enjoying the riverfront in an attractive setting (scene from The Forks, Winnipeg)

Investment in the Louise McKinney Riverfront vision has significant benefits:

## **Quality of life and sense of place**

- The Riverfront will enhance recreational opportunities, becoming a premier destination and the central hub for our River Valley Park system.
- As a signature park, this river edge development will enhance our city's quality of life, while giving Edmonton a beautiful, new postcard cityscape to show off to the world.

- Louise McKinney Riverfront is an exciting gift from the citizens of Edmonton to future generations.

## **Tourism and economic development**

- Employment as a result of construction is estimated at over 220 Alberta jobs, over 170 in Edmonton.
- The net economic impact from construction and increased visitor expenditure is expected to be in excess of \$25.4 million to Alberta; \$19.1 million locally.

- A riverfront development enhances the local hotel and convention industries.
- Increased employment in tourism services, and increased tax income for all levels of government is also predicted.

## **Downtown revitalization**

- Louise McKinney Riverfront conforms to the objectives and intent of the Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan.

- It complements downtown revitalization efforts, encouraging residential development and enhancing marketability of adjacent properties

## **Environmental benefits**

- Environmentally, the landscape enhancement will benefit the site, and restore a previously disturbed area.
- A riverfront park is a suitable development for the site, providing high benefits with low environmental impact.



