

RIVER VALLEY PLANNING MODERNIZATION



Ribbon of Green & River Valley ARP

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated: June 2024

River Valley Planning Modernization FAQ

Ribbon of Green Completion and River Valley ARP Renewal

Updated June 2024

Table of Contents

PROJECT INFORMATION	2
What is the River Valley Planning Modernization Project?	2
What is the Ribbon of Green Plan?	3
What is the River Valley ARP?	3
Why is the City doing this project?	3
Why are the two streams of work being completed together?	4
Didn't the City already start the Ribbon of Green project?	4
What is the status of the Ribbon of Green SW+NE Plan?	5
Will this project replace the Ribbon of Green plans created in the 1990s?	5
What is the study area for this project?	5
What is the timeline for this work?	5
What technical studies are included in this work?	5
How does the Ribbon of Green direct planning in the River Valley?	6
ENGAGEMENT	6
How are Indigenous Nations and Communities being engaged?	6
What are the public engagement opportunities?	7
How will decisions be made?	7
PHASE 2 PROJECT INFORMATION	7
What is the purpose of Land Management Classifications (LMCs)?	7
What process informed the mapping of the LMCs?	8
Which trails are shown on the LMC maps?	9
Why are private lands shown in the LMC?	9
PHASE 3 PROJECT INFORMATION	9
What project information was shared and discussed in Phase 3?	9
LAND MANAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS	10
What changes to the Land Management Classifications were proposed in Phase 3?	10
How and when would the Preservation: Trail-based Recreation sub-classification be mapped?	11
What criteria might be used in deciding which lands should be designated Ecological Protection?	12
How will the Preservation: Trail-based Recreation sub-classification help with ecological protection?	12
PROGRAM AND ECOLOGICAL GUIDANCE	12
What planning guidance was shared for the study area in Phase 3?	12

What informed this draft planning guidance?	13
PHASE 4 PROJECT INFORMATION	14
What project information is being shared and discussed in Phase 4?	14
RIVER VALLEY AREA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN	14
What approach was taken to the renewal of the River Valley ARP?	14
What fundamental ARP guidance has NOT changed from the original plan?	15
What HAS changed in the new ARP?	15
How has direction for public engagement changed in the new ARP?	17
How has direction for Indigenous engagement changed in the ARP?	17
How is the Council approval process for development in the River Valley changing?	17
How is the environmental impact assessment requirement changing?	18
How are cumulative impacts of development in the River Valley being evaluated?	19
RIBBON OF GREEN	19
What are some of the key changes to the Ribbon of Green since draft plan materials were shared in Phase 3?	19
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	20
What were some of the main themes heard in Phase 3 engagement?	20
INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT	21
What were some of the main themes heard in Phase 3 engagement with Indigenous Nations and Communities?	21
RELATED PROJECTS/INITIATIVES	22
National Urban Park Initiative	22
The City Plan	22
Zoning Bylaw Renewal	23
Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy	23
Natural Connections Strategic Plan	23
Downtown Public Places Plan implementation	23
River Crossing	24
Climate Resilient Edmonton: Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan	24
Mill Creek Daylighting	24

PROJECT INFORMATION

What is the River Valley Planning Modernization Project?

- This project will create an integrated planning and regulatory framework for the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System (the “River Valley”) to ensure that it remains a vibrant and ecologically resilient green network as the city grows. There are two streams of work within this project:
 - Completing the Ribbon of Green Plan

- Modernizing the [North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan, Bylaw 7188](#) (“River Valley ARP”)

What is the Ribbon of Green Plan?

- The Ribbon of Green is our highest-level strategic plan for the River Valley.
- It was initially developed in the early 1990s to guide appropriate public use and enjoyment of the River Valley and to protect ecologically sensitive areas.

What is the River Valley ARP?

- The [River Valley ARP](#) was adopted in 1985 and is the City’s main tool for regulating development within the River Valley. It guides the City in evaluating proposed River Valley projects.
- The main goal of the River Valley ARP is to ensure the protection of the river valley and ravine system over the long term.

Why is the City doing this project?

- Currently, planning guidance for the River Valley is spread across multiple documents, some dating to the 1970s.
- The planning context has evolved considerably in the last 50 years, which means that our River Valley plans don’t reflect the current state of the system, or help us navigate today’s challenges and opportunities.
- The River Valley ARP has not been substantially updated since it was adopted in 1985. Since that time, the City has grown, our approach to planning and environmental protection has evolved, and new challenges, such as climate change, have emerged. As part of this work, the River Valley ARP will be updated, or “modernized,” to reflect today’s planning context.
- Existing River Valley planning tools are not well-aligned, which means that it can be difficult to make decisions that support our vision for the future.
- With the completion of The City Plan, we have a clear sense of the planning priorities for our city, and how the River Valley fits into that future.
- This project will help improve the function of open spaces in the River Valley, while prioritizing the protection or restoration of important ecological areas and corridors.

Why are the two streams of work being completed together?

- Ideally, these two planning tools work together to provide guidance on River Valley protection, management and use:
 - The Ribbon of Green provides the **strategic direction**: our overall vision for the future of the River Valley and how it is connected to the broader open space network, and to other networks; our high-level plans for the connected open spaces within it; and the policy that guides our decisions about what happens in that space.
 - The River Valley ARP provides the **regulatory framework**: the standards and rules that guide our evaluation of individual project proposals, and impacts, in the River Valley.
- Currently, these tools are not well-aligned with other City policies and strategic goals. This has led to a lack of clear guidance, as well as inconsistency, in how decision makers evaluate and prioritize land use proposals - especially when it comes to understanding tradeoffs, competing priorities and the cumulative impacts of River Valley development projects.
- Our intent in updating these tools together is to bring them into alignment to support better decisions for the future of the River Valley.

Didn't the City already start the Ribbon of Green project?

- Yes - the first part of the renewal of the Ribbon of Green plan took place from 2017-2020 and was called the [Ribbon of Green SW+NE](#).
- That project:
 - updated the vision, guiding principles and policy framework for the River Valley as a whole, and
 - developed direction for activity nodes, ecological protection and trail development for the [southwest and northeast parts of the system](#).
- At that time, we didn't have the resources available to complete planning for the whole system, so we focused on the unplanned parts of the River Valley (SW and NE) and committed to come back to finish the rest as soon as we could.

What is the status of the Ribbon of Green SW+NE Plan?

- Due to the restrictions on Council meetings in place due to the COVID pandemic, there was not an opportunity to present the plan at Urban Planning Committee.

As a result, the Ribbon of Green SW+NE was advanced to Council by memo in July 2020, and now forms part of the City Administration's guiding policies for the River Valley.

- The Ribbon of Green SW+NE represented an interim step, and has now been incorporated into the final Ribbon of Green Plan, which is being shared in Phase 4.

Will this project replace the Ribbon of Green plans created in the 1990s?

- Yes. At the end of this project the original Ribbon of Green Master and Concept Plans will be retired, and the new Ribbon of Green Plan will come into effect.

What is the study area for this project?

Project Study Area Map

- The **Ribbon of Green** study area includes all of the lands within the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System.
- The area of application of the **NSRV ARP** includes the entire River Valley as mapped in Schedule A of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan. In addition, the plan area is being updated to include lands south of 41 Avenue SW, annexed from Leduc County and the Town of Beaumont in 2019.

What is the timeline for this work?

- The project is planned for completion in 2025.
- The work is occurring in four phases. We are currently in Phase 4.
- Recommendations and planning direction developed through this project will be brought forward to City Council for consideration in 2024.

What technical studies are included in this work?

- This project includes a wide range of technical studies, including ecological, environmental, cultural/archaeological, wellness, celebration and geotechnical assessments. For the most part, these studies will be done at a desktop level.
- Current-state mapping, environmental/jurisdictional scans and policy alignment backgrounders were also completed at the outset of the project.
- The results of the technical studies, together with City policy direction and engagement input, will form the basis for decision-making for the project.

How does the Ribbon of Green direct planning in the River Valley?

The Ribbon of Green provides guidance in a number of ways:

- The **Vision** defines the ideal state of the River Valley and Ravine System and the **guiding principles** describe the elements and actions required to achieve the vision.
- **System-wide policies** guide decision making and direct planning, design, and management throughout the River Valley.
- **Land Management Classifications** guide design and programming decisions to create park amenities and operations standards appropriate to their location within the River Valley and Ravine System.
- **Ecological and program guidance** provides initial spatial direction to function as a starting point for future site-specific planning - including restoration areas, high-level trail network, trailheads and amenity nodes (key destinations).
- **Implementation items** direct the management, stewardship, programming, and development of publicly owned land within the River Valley.

ENGAGEMENT

- The public, Indigenous Nations and Communities and stakeholders play a critical role in shaping the planning of Edmonton's river valley to create a stronger, more relevant and effective framework and approach.

How are Indigenous Nations and Communities being engaged?

- The City is committed to keeping First Nations and Métis communities informed and engaged on projects in the North Saskatchewan River Valley that may be of traditional cultural, historical and environmental interest.
- We know that this land is important to many Indigenous Nations and Communities, historically and culturally, and it is important that these Nations and Communities are part of conversations about the past, present and future of Edmonton's River Valley.
- The City has invited 32 regional Indigenous Nations and Communities with historical, cultural and environmental interests to engage in each phase of this project.
- Additionally, Indigenous peoples living within Edmonton are invited to participate through stakeholder and public engagement activities.

What are the public engagement opportunities?

- In each phase, there will be a variety of opportunities for the public and stakeholders to provide input.
- The project will strive to engage a diverse public, as well as relevant stakeholder organizations, partners and landowners. The [River Valley Planning Modernization Public Engagement and Communications Plan](#) outlines our approach to engaging the public and stakeholders, and gathering their insight and feedback to inform the Ribbon of Green and North Saskatchewan River Valley ARP projects.

How will decisions be made?

- The City of Edmonton values Indigenous and public engagement processes and activities that contribute to project decisions by providing City Council and Administration with the best possible information to support decision making.
- Engagement is one factor in the decision making process. Other important factors that inform project-level recommendations include:
 - Findings and recommendations from technical studies
 - Direction from existing City policies and plans
 - Budget considerations
 - Council direction

PHASE 2 PROJECT INFORMATION

What is the purpose of Land Management Classifications (LMCs)?

LMCs help us to identify our desired future for the River Valley. While they are driven to some extent by the existing condition of the land (is it of high ecological sensitivity? Is it currently developed?), they may also point us towards a different future use/state. The LMCs will be supported by Program and Ecological Guidance (to be developed in Phase 3), which provide additional detail on desired future state, and help the City and community partners to advance planning for preservation/restoration, renewal/development and programming.

What process informed the mapping of the LMCs?

The LMCs were initially delineated using a variety of spatial data criteria to identify areas that would be suitable candidates for each class. Following this initial assessment, manual refinement was conducted to resolve identified areas of conflict (which could be placed into a number of potential classes), as well as areas that conflicted with existing management plans (in parks where the master planning process had been completed in the past 10 years), or other existing zoning (such as the Whitemud Ravine). This refined classification formed the content of the maps shared in Phase 2.

Preservation criteria were defined, including:

- major landslide areas
- flood hazard areas
- 60 m buffer around the North Saskatchewan River as well as any major streams, wetlands and natural waterbodies
- ecology score polygons with a rating of “very high”
- “core” and “habitat” class polygons
- very or extremely high environmental sensitivity polygons

Active/Working Landscape criteria were defined, including:

- Footprint of existing developed areas (buildings, parking lots, etc.)
- Intensively-used areas such as Fort Edmonton Park, Valley Zoo, ski hills, golf courses, and event spaces
- Areas that are planned for more intensive uses in Council-approved plans
- Roads that fall outside of park boundaries

Conservation criteria were defined, including:

- The primary trail network:
 - Existing improved (paved/granular) trails
 - Trail buffers: 15m for paved trails and 5m for granular trails (note: any trails within 30m of the river’s edge had a special buffer applied to them to remove the conservation designation on the river side of the trail)
- Pedestrian bridges
- Areas for informal, unstructured recreation and gathering

Which trails are shown on the LMC maps?

- The Ribbon of Green maps show only existing City-maintained trails - not the complete network of unimproved/informal trails that currently exist in the River Valley.

- The Ribbon of Green defines only a high-level trail network, including major access points and regional connections, and is not a comprehensive trail inventory. It functions as a starting point for further site-specific planning, where field assessments and public engagement will define the complete recreational trail network.

Why are private lands shown in the LMC?

- The Ribbon of Green is a long-term, strategic plan that provides direction for all lands within the River Valley and ravines. As such, a Land Management Classification has also been applied to private parcels, while acknowledging that any proposed future uses identified for lands that are currently privately-held are dependent on those lands coming into City ownership, should that take place at any point.
- The Ribbon of Green does not change the existing development rights of private landowners set out in the Zoning Bylaw and any applicable statutory plans for the area.
- Private lands are identified in the Land Management Classification mapping with a unique colour-scheme (darkened, with dashed-white border) to acknowledge that they are not currently within City ownership.

PHASE 3 PROJECT INFORMATION

What project information was shared and discussed in Phase 3?

In Phase 3 engagement, we invited community input to help us:

- Finalize our **vision** for the River Valley, and the **guiding principles** that will help us to realize it
- Refine the **Land Management Classifications** to clarify direction for appropriate uses in different parts of the River Valley
- Refine draft **planning guidance** for the study area, including opportunities for ecological protection and restoration, access, gathering and enjoyment in the river valley
- Refine draft **direction for River Valley decision-making**, and public involvement in those decisions

LAND MANAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS

What changes to the Land Management Classifications were proposed in Phase 3?

- Land Management Classifications (LMCs) outline the level of protection, compatible development and use within portions of the River Valley and Ravine System. In the future, they will guide design and programming decisions to create park amenities and operations standards appropriate to their location and surrounding context.
- The LMCs were developed during the Ribbon of Green SW+NE project, based on public engagement, best practice and analysis, and in alignment with the project's vision and principles. They provide a tool to guide and inform decisions and actions within the river valley.
- In Phase 2 engagement, we heard a lot of feedback regarding unimproved (informal) trails in Preservation areas, including a strong desire for continued opportunities for natural trail experiences in these areas, including for mountain biking, as well as concern about the ecological impact that continued unmanaged use and proliferation of these largely user-created trails may be having.
- The original Preservation Land Management Classification did not include biking as a compatible use, and also did not provide clarity about where recreational trail uses that *were* considered compatible (foot-based travel: walking, hiking, running, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing) should or should not take place within Preservation areas.
- For consideration in Phase 3, we proposed that the Preservation LMC be adjusted to include two sub-classifications: **Preservation Trail-based Recreation** (natural surface trails, which the Ribbon of Green defines as “non paved narrow-width trails” only) and **Ecosystem Protection** (see table below)

PROPOSED LAND MANAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (with new Preservation sub-classifications)

PRESERVATION		CONSERVATION		ACTIVE/WORKING LANDSCAPES		
Protect the integrity of the natural environment and restore natural functioning with limited access and recreational opportunities.		Connect people to nature by allowing people to enjoy and appreciate the System while minimizing environmental impact and restoring ecological functioning, when possible.		Facilitate gathering and recreation within the System, recognize existing uses and encourage restoration.		
NEW Ecosystem Protection	NEW PRESERVATION Trail-based Recreation	CONSERVATION Trail-based Recreation	Natural Recreation	Intensive Recreation	Agriculture + Horticulture	Urban Services + City-wide Attractions
Protect the highest-value and most sensitive ecosystems and features, ensuring that these systems continue to thrive as the city's population grows. Compatible uses include conservation and stewardship activities.	Provide a network of trails in Preservation areas to support low-impact trail recreation opportunities while minimizing ecological impacts. <i>Trail type: non-paved narrow width trails.</i> Compatible uses include a variety of low-impact trail uses. Foot-based travel and biking are considered compatible unless explicitly prohibited (e.g. through signage).	Facilitate access to and regional connectivity through the System in harmony with the natural environment. <i>Trail types: non-paved variable width OR paved variable width.</i> Compatible uses include all types of trail use.	Provide opportunities to rest, linger and enjoy nature. Compatible uses include all types of trail use, plus picnicking, unstructured play and river access.	Provide a wide range of recreational opportunities tailored to the River Valley setting. Compatible uses include events and festivals, fitness courses and boat launches.	Recognize existing agricultural and horticultural uses. Compatible uses include farms and supporting uses.	Support city-wide attractions while acknowledging the importance of urban services to accommodate a growing city. Compatible uses include existing development, golf courses and city-wide attractions.

How and when would the Preservation: Trail-based Recreation sub-classification be mapped?

- Defining the Preservation: Trail-based Recreation trail network will take time and resources. It will involve site visits and assessment, and engagement with trail users and partners, and will be guided by policies in the Ribbon of Green (e.g. see Ribbon of Green SW+NE Section 2.6: Public Access and Connectivity).
- We are continuing to highlight the need for a comprehensive River Valley Trail Strategy, which would help to plan and map that network.
- In the interim, City Council has directed that use of **existing** unimproved trails may continue, and the City is working with partner organizations to review and permit trail maintenance in locations where it does not impact ecologically/environmentally sensitive areas.
- People riding bikes should always respect direction not to ride where it is explicitly prohibited (e.g. with signs, such as in Whitemud Ravine Nature Reserve and on designated trails in Buena Vista Park).
- Trail construction in the River Valley without authorization from the City is **not permitted**. The City's Parkland Bylaw prohibits the cutting and removal of

vegetation, and the removal of soil, on City parkland except where a permit to do so has been obtained.

What criteria might be used in deciding which lands should be designated Ecological Protection?

The Ecological Protection designation is intended to be applied to areas with the highest ecological sensitivity/risk, including (for example):

- Known or suspected areas of slope failure or instability
- Springs/seeps/drainages
- Unvegetated, exposed slope faces
- Locations of uncommon plant species
- Habitat features of wildlife species of concern
- Wildlife breeding sites (e.g., dens, hibernacula, ground nests, etc.)

The criteria will be confirmed with input from partner organizations and conservation experts.

How will the Preservation: Trail-based Recreation sub-classification help with ecological protection?

If a trail network is planned and managed well, it can help to:

- Keep trail users on a designated path, protecting more ecologically sensitive areas;
- Support safe and enjoyable trail experiences;
- Introduce people to natural areas, building a sense of ownership and stewardship;
- Prioritize resources for trail management, invasive species removal, trail closures, restoration and natural area expansion.

In creating these two new Preservation sub-categories, we are acknowledging demand for diverse uses on these trails, and committing to work towards a network that meets this demand without compromising the ecologically sensitive areas that the Preservation LMC is intended to protect.

PROGRAM AND ECOLOGICAL GUIDANCE

What planning guidance was shared for the study area in Phase 3?

For each [River Valley reach](#), the Ribbon of Green includes the following; this draft guidance was shared in Phase 3:

- **Vision:** describes a proposed future for the reach
- **Ecology/Culture/Recreation overviews:** describes the reach and related recommendations
- **Program Statements for each Amenity Node and Primary Trailhead:** define the proposed activity and amenities for each Amenity Node and Primary Trailhead and informed by project analysis and public feedback
- **Ecological Guidance map:** shows existing natural features (e.g., wetlands, waterbodies, floodways, wildlife corridors), habitat areas and proposed restoration areas
- **Program Guidance map:** shows Primary Trailhead and Amenity Node locations, program direction (e.g., washrooms, pedestrian bridges, parking and river access), and circulation (access points, connections, and trail types)

What informed this draft planning guidance?

Direction for these plan elements was informed by the following:

- Land Management Classifications: Defined appropriate uses, facilities, and infrastructure for each area within the System
- City Policy: Identified opportunities to align with other City policies and initiatives as well as provide a guiding framework to define management and use practices within the System
- Site Understanding: Accomplished through site analysis and research (including the analyses discussed above)
- Amenity Node, Primary Trailhead and High-level Trail Network: Identified the major locations and routes for recreational activity to start shaping the program guidance
- Public Engagement: Provided ideas for future use, protection, and restoration
- Strategic Locations: Distributed facilities and amenities throughout the system that require equitable and appropriate distribution (e.g. boat launches, bridge crossings, parking, washrooms)
- Restoration Areas: Located restoration areas in disturbed areas within Preservation and Conservation areas as well as locations in Active/Working Landscapes to help shape and concentrate development in appropriate locations while improving ecological health

PHASE 4 PROJECT INFORMATION

What project information is being shared and discussed in Phase 4?

In Phase 4, we are inviting community input to help us:

- Finalize the Land Management Classifications to clarify direction for appropriate uses in different parts of the River Valley
- Finalize draft planning guidance for the study area, including opportunities for ecological protection and restoration, access, gathering and enjoyment in the river valley
- Refine proposed direction for land use planning and decision-making in the River Valley

RIVER VALLEY AREA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

What approach was taken to the renewal of the River Valley ARP?

Our focus through River Valley ARP renewal was on:

Clarifying its purpose and bringing the plan content into alignment.

- The River Valley ARP currently in effect was written and adopted in 1985, before even the original Ribbon of Green was prepared in the 1990s, meaning that the ARP played a role in guiding detailed design considerations and other aspects of land use planning that are now housed in the Ribbon of Green. The direction in the current draft of the Ribbon of Green better reflects modern environmental conservation principles and practices, and how Edmonton has evolved as a city, since the 1985 ARP.
- Going forward, we intend for the document to be focused on providing high level land use policy, with a focus on development and development proposals, and smaller emphasis on detailed design and environmental planning considerations. This better aligns with the structure and function of area redevelopment plans, which are a type of statutory geographic land use plan enabled by the Municipal Government Act.
- We do not address activities and behaviours in the ARP, as these are better addressed through other City plans and policies, such as the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan, the Public Spaces Bylaw, operational plans, and administrative procedural documents.

Improving our ability to adapt quickly.

- In the 40 years since the original ARP was approved, our planning context and practice have evolved substantially, and some of the direction that was in the

- original plan has created interpretive and implementation challenges (e.g. potentially requiring City Council approval for minor infrastructure such as a new picnic shelter or bench in the River Valley).
- In addition, the City's experience and expertise with regard to ecological network planning, urban ecology, environmental impact assessment, and, more recently, climate change adaptation and mitigation, have grown substantially since 1985.
 - The renewed plan proposes updated definitions and decision-making processes that better reflect existing City practices, provide clarity on Council approval requirements, or implement new ways of approaching River Valley planning that better reflect emerging opportunities and challenges.
 - The draft document reflects a policy and evaluation framework that connects directly to the Ribbon of Green and supports the development of detailed procedures, technical standards, and interpretation guides. These supporting documents will be kept up-to-date and revisited on a more regular basis than the statutory plan itself. This will allow the documents to keep pace with changes to the City processes and procedures, conservation and land use planning best practices, and technological improvements (e.g., virtual engagement practices; technical expertise and ability to assess environmental conditions and potential impacts based on things like satellite imagery and scientific models using contemporary scientific knowledge and technology).

What fundamental ARP guidance has NOT changed from the original plan?

- The majority of the plan area is still designated for open space use.
- Developments on lands designated for River Valley Open Space are limited to those that are compatible with environmental protection, recreation, and cultural heritage, or provide critical transportation or utility services.

What HAS changed in the new ARP?

- The maps in the ARP identify current and future lands in the River Valley and Ravine System as "River Valley Open Space" (previously "Metropolitan Recreational Use and Environmental Protection") and **refer directly to the Ribbon of Green** for more detailed planning guidance for those lands. When the original ARP was created in 1985, the Ribbon of Green did not exist. Now, the Ribbon of Green is an important "sister" plan to the ARP, providing more detailed planning guidance and policy.
- **Clearer limits on intensive or high impact uses**, including prohibiting natural resource extraction (in alignment with the City Plan) and residential development

- (with the exception of existing River Valley neighbourhoods) in the River Valley; and placing limits on intensive open space facilities, intensive utility infrastructure, and intensive transportation infrastructure.
- **Updated assessment requirements** for development proposals in the river valley, including:
 - A **Strategic Assessment**, which will outline the rationale and benefits of a project, the reasons for its proposed location, its alignment with the strategic direction in the Ribbon of Green and other City policy documents, and an early indication of potential environmental impacts and how they might be mitigated; and
 - An **Environmental Assessment**, for which existing requirements will be carried forward, with the addition of a section on climate adaptation and mitigation. Supporting documentation will be created to guide proponents, and the assessment requirements will be scaled to the project scope and anticipated impacts.
 - **Updated triggers for when a proposal might require City Council approval**, including: new or significantly expanded intensive utility facilities, intensive transportation facilities and intensive open space facilities
 - An expectation that due consideration be given to **Indigenous and public engagement**, including reference to the City's Indigenous Framework and Public Engagement Policy and Framework
 - A policy to adopt and apply the **mitigation hierarchy** to development in the River Valley:
 1. avoiding project impacts wherever possible (e.g. through changes to scope, site, timing);
 2. minimizing impacts that cannot be avoided;
 3. restoring impacted areas; and
 4. as a last resort, offsetting permanent losses to native ecosystems through restoration or protection of ecosystems elsewhere.

How has direction for public engagement changed in the new ARP?

- While the original (1985) River Valley ARP specifically highlighted public hearings as an opportunity to provide feedback, the new plan will reference the City's Public Engagement Policy and Public Engagement Framework (updated every four years).

- The public hearing process will still apply for formal plan amendments, as directed by provincial legislation (the Municipal Government Act). However, there will be an additional expectation that individual development proposals, including those that don't require a plan amendment or City Council approval, will be subject to the City's public engagement policy.
- This will allow for different kinds of opportunities for public engagement on a project-by-project basis to make sure there is meaningful engagement on various City projects.
- The above approach formalizes City practices that have been in place for a number of years, and which are subject to continuous improvement.

How has direction for Indigenous engagement changed in the ARP?

- The renewed ARP recognizes the significant historical and traditional connections of Indigenous peoples to the River Valley and Ravine System.
- Updated policy language in the ARP reflects the importance of Indigenous engagement for proposed development in the River Valley, and directs Indigenous engagement to be completed in alignment with the direction of The City Plan.
- Feedback received through Indigenous engagement completed over the course of the River Valley Planning Modernization project suggests that individual Nations and communities have varying levels of interest and capacity with regard to providing feedback on future proposed River Valley development. Further dialogue between the City of Edmonton and Nations and communities will be critical in exploring the different ways in which Indigenous Nations and communities would prefer to participate in engagement and decision-making.

How is the Council approval process for development in the River Valley changing?

- The previous definition of "major facility" that was used to determine if Council approval would be required has been updated. The draft River Valley ARP proposes that intensive open space facilities, intensive utility infrastructure, and intensive transportation infrastructure require Council approval.
- The draft River Valley ARP also contains a draft policy to allow the City's open space planners to request that Council approval be sought by the proponent if the proposed development poses risk of permanent, adverse impacts that can't be mitigated, as evaluated by open space planners, including ecological planners.

- As part of the proposed process, City Council would be asked to review and approve a strategic assessment, and in doing so, consider whether the proposed development aligns well with the City's strategic and policy goals, including the Ribbon of Green; whether the proposed project requires a River Valley location; and, whether the proposed project is in the public interest. Proponents would seek Council approval relatively early, before all the decisions about a project have been made. This would allow any significant concerns to be flagged early and for changes to a project (including the option of not proceeding with a project at all) to be considered by Council and Administration before significant time and financial resources were dedicated to the project. If the details of the proposed development or its impacts were to substantially change following further design work, the proponent would be asked to return to Council to seek approval again.

How is the environmental impact assessment requirement changing?

- The environmental impact assessment has been renamed to just "environmental assessment" to reduce confusion with provincial and federal environmental impact assessment requirements, which are mandated under provincial and federal legislation, apply to only specific types of projects (i.e., those that trigger provincial and federal regulatory requirements), and are generally considered separate from the City of Edmonton's environmental assessment process.
- Appendix 1 of the draft River Valley ARP replaces the previous Schedule D, and lists the key environmental categories that have to be evaluated when completing an environmental assessment. More detailed information on how to complete the assessment, including technical guidance intended for proponents and environmental professionals, will be provided outside of the River Valley ARP itself. This will make it possible to update the guidance more frequently, meaning that it can better keep pace with technological improvements, survey and study methodologies, conservation best practices, mitigation best practices, design and engineering standards, and changes in City procedures. These more detailed procedures, which will not form part of the River Valley ARP itself, are under development, and will be available publicly in late 2024 or early 2025.

How are cumulative impacts of development in the River Valley being evaluated?

- Evaluating the combined impacts of different types of human development and activity is a challenging, but critical, component of protecting the natural environment of the River Valley. By evaluating development proposals in

- isolation, we risk not seeing the “big picture” with regard to the combined environmental impacts of human use.
- In order for a cumulative impact assessment approach to be truly successful in the River Valley, an understanding of system-wide baseline conditions and ecosystem-based targets, as well as a framework for ongoing monitoring and associated management actions, must be in place. To date, resources to complete this work have not been available.

RIBBON OF GREEN

What are some of the key changes to the Ribbon of Green since draft plan materials were shared in Phase 3?

- The Ribbon of Green is now a consolidated plan with direction for the entire river valley and ravine system. The content developed through the [Ribbon of Green SW+NE](#) project (including system-wide policies and planning direction for the southwest and northeast parts of the River Valley) and the content developed through the first three phases of the RVPD project have been brought together.
- The full plan is being shared in Phase 4.
- Some **system-wide policies** have been added or revised to speak to:
 - No net loss of natural areas and ecological function, and a goal of net gain, especially in more developed/impacted parts of the river valley
 - Ensuring that tourism projects pursued align with Ribbon of Green goals
 - Pursuing opportunities to advance reconciliation and strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities and peoples through River Valley planning, programming and stewardship, in keeping with the City's Indigenous Framework commitments.
 - Incorporating nature-based solutions, which support both human well-being and biodiversity, to increase ecosystem function in areas of existing and planned development.
- The **Land Management Classification framework** has been updated to:
 - Formalize the inclusion of two Preservation sub-classifications: *Ecosystem Protection* and *Preservation: Trail-based Recreation*, as proposed during Phase 3 engagement. Draft policy has been developed for each of these new sections and included in the plan.
 - Replace the term “Compatible Use” with “Compatible Activity”

- Adjust some Compatible Activities and Compatible Facilities + Infrastructure to clarify language and capture in the appropriate classification
- Include “Restoration and Naturalization” to the Compatible Facilities + Infrastructure table for each of the LMCs
- The **Program and Ecological Guidance** for the reaches has been updated to:
 - Reflect recent changes to parks (e.g. Hawrelak Park Rehabilitation and other renewal projects) and park planning processes underway (e.g. Big Island Provincial Park, Northeast River Valley Park)
 - Align with new/updated plans in adjacent neighbourhoods
- The **Implementation** section has been updated to:
 - Remove the **implementation actions** previously included in the Ribbon of Green SW+NE plan and move them into a joint draft work plan for both the Ribbon of Green and the River Valley ARP. The work plan has not yet been approved by City Council or received funding; it is intended to help inform discussions with Council about implementation resourcing.
 - The **implementation principles** and the guidance for **plan monitoring, evaluation and review** remain in the Ribbon of Green.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

What were some of the main themes heard in Phase 3 engagement?

- Protect trail experiences and connectivity that people enjoy
- Desire to prioritize ecological protection and restoration
- Desire for a greater focus on the river itself
- Support for the proposed Preservation sub-classifications as a way to enable diverse trail experiences while protecting the most ecologically sensitive areas
- Prioritize reconciliation with Indigenous Nations and Communities and find ways to integrate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in river valley planning
- Ensure accessibility to the river valley for all ages and abilities
- Concerns about encampments and people seeking shelter in the river valley - both a desire to support people with the services they need, and a concern for personal safety
- Interest in appropriately-scaled commercial opportunities (e.g. cafes, equipment rentals)
- Greater emphasis on climate resilience and adaptation

- Concern about conflict between different trail uses and desire to facilitate sharing of space by different users through education and collaboration.

INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

What were some of the main themes heard in Phase 3 engagement with Indigenous Nations and Communities?

The project team has heard a number of themes through engagement with Indigenous Nations and Communities over the course of the project, including the importance of:

- Including perspectives from the diverse Indigenous Nations and Communities with connections to this place in our planning and decision-making, and giving space for the sacred practices of ceremony and protocol in processes
- Prioritizing Indigenous knowledge and practices, including storytelling, medicine walks and harvesting of traditional foods
- Acknowledging the River Valley as a shelter or home for people experiencing houselessness, and considering how planning efforts and programs might support them, such as stewardship and outreach programs with cultural components
- Protecting the River Valley, and the river itself
- Creating and protecting places for ceremony, cultural activities and intergenerational learning, and for Indigenous Nations and Communities to reconnect with River Valley lands
- Opportunities to involve Indigenous youth in stewardship
- Creating employed roles (e.g., in program development) for Indigenous community members as a form of economic reconciliation

RELATED PROJECTS/INITIATIVES

National Urban Park Initiative

- The National Urban Park Program is a new federal program aimed at establishing a network of national urban parks in major urban centres across Canada. Edmonton is one of seven cities currently under consideration.
- The program aims to:
 - support conservation in urban areas,
 - increase access to green spaces for city-dwelling Canadians, and
 - advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.
- The goals of the National Urban Park initiative are well-aligned with the vision and principles of the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan. The federal program provides an opportunity to partner in delivering a shared vision of a River Valley that supports environmental protection, provides opportunities for recreation and gathering, and supports Indigenous uses and leadership.
- The National Urban Park Initiative is expected to be a multi-phase, multi-year project, with opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement at all stages. Project partners are discussing what a national urban park could look like, but no decisions have been made to designate a national urban park at this time.
- The project remains in the pre-feasibility phase. Partners are working to move the project forward and are making progress. In August 2023, City Council reviewed the City administration's report on pre-feasibility phase outcomes and recommended moving forward to the planning phase.
- Additional information about the project and its current status can be found [here](#).

The City Plan

- The [City Plan](#), Edmonton's renewed municipal development plan and transportation master plan, sets strategic direction for the way Edmonton grows - its land use, mobility systems, open spaces, employment and social networks. The plan identifies the "Green and Blue Network," Edmonton's system of open spaces, of which the River Valley forms the backbone.
- The City Plan provides important, current guidance for the Ribbon of Green, in the form of policy intentions, guiding values, city-building outcomes and "Big City Moves".

Zoning Bylaw Renewal

- The City's Zoning Bylaw sets out the rules for the location and size of buildings constructed on all property in Edmonton. It also provides rules for the types of activities that are allowed to take place on those properties. The City recently updated [Edmonton's Zoning Bylaw](#).
- At the conclusion of the RVPM project, the project team will develop recommendations related to zoning in the River Valley to implement River Valley ARP and Ribbon of Green direction.

Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy

- [Breathe](#) is Edmonton's city-wide plan for open space. It provides strategic guidance to ensure that each neighbourhood is supported by an accessible, connected network of parks and open spaces as the city grows.
- The Ribbon of Green takes its direction from Breathe, applying the open space functions of Ecology, Celebration and Wellness and planning for the appropriate quantity, quality, distribution and connectivity of River Valley open space.

Natural Connections Strategic Plan

- [Natural Connections](#) is Edmonton's plan for the protection, management and restoration of local natural areas and biodiversity, and the engagement of the community in that effort.
- The Ribbon of Green will support the outcomes of Natural Connections, applying an ecological network approach to planning in the River Valley.

Downtown Public Places Plan implementation

- The [Downtown Public Places Plan](#) provides a 20-year vision and direction for the entire Downtown public places network, including strategies for improving the provision, connectivity, and functionality of Downtown public places.
- The plan identifies key recreation, active transportation and visual connections from downtown to the River Valley, which will help to guide the Ribbon of Green.

River Crossing

- River Crossing is a long-term city-building initiative focused on transforming the western area of the Rossdale neighbourhood into a vibrant community and a place that embraces and celebrates its rich history.
- The River Crossing Project includes a [Heritage Interpretive Plan](#), which guides how heritage and culture will be reflected and communicated throughout the area as it evolves over time and a [Business Plan](#), which lays out a framework for how the area can redevelop over the next twenty years.
- The [Touch the Water](#) project is also part of the River Crossing initiative. It is intended to improve access to and within the river valley, creating enhanced opportunities for recreation, celebration, heritage interpretation and social gathering.
- The plans for how this area, at the heart of the River Valley, will evolve over time will be an important catalyst for Ribbon of Green implementation.

Climate Resilient Edmonton: Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan

- [Climate Resilient Edmonton](#) focuses on understanding the climate impacts we are already experiencing and how they may shift in the future due to ongoing climate change, and how we can build resilience for those impacts.
- The River Valley provides many ecological services that, if protected, will help us to remain resilient to the effects of climate change - e.g. flood mitigation and carbon sequestration. The Ribbon of Green will identify opportunities to support Goal 10 of this plan: *"Edmonton's natural ecosystems continue to provide essential ecosystem goods and services such as clean air, clean water, and biodiversity."*

Mill Creek Daylighting

- In 2017, the City completed a preliminary study to assess the feasibility of restoring the natural connection and creek channel between Mill Creek and the North Saskatchewan River. "Daylighting" the creek in this way would restore fish and wildlife habitat, mitigate flooding issues in the area, improve water quality, and provide recreation and education opportunities.
- The study concluded that daylighting Mill Creek is technically feasible. It also provided initial cost estimates for three different restoration and development concepts that the City could explore.

- The project was not advanced for further design work due to resource constraints. At this time, a funding source for design and implementation has not been identified. The project is considered to be on hold until funding becomes available.