

# RIVER VALLEY PLANNING MODERNIZATION



Ribbon of Green & River Valley ARP

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*Updated: May 2023*

# River Valley Planning Modernization FAQ

## Ribbon of Green Completion and River Valley ARP Modernization

Updated May 2023

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## 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 represents an interim step, and will ultimately be incorporated into the final Ribbon of Green Plan once the next phase of renewal is complete.

### 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 with the exception of those lands addressed through the Ribbon of Green SW+NE (Phase I). It includes the central River Valley, Mill Creek Ravine, Fulton Ravine, north Whitemud Ravine, the Big

Lake area, Horsehills Creek, as well as River Valley lands south of 41 Avenue SW that were annexed to the City of Edmonton in 2019.

- The **Central River Valley**, which includes the River Valley lands between Hawrelak Park and Dawson Park, and the parks themselves, has been identified as an area of focus. Because of its higher level of development and use compared to other portions of the River Valley, the current and anticipated demands on this area are higher and the ecological pressures and impacts of existing use are more significant. As a result, a more detailed level of analysis and planning will be undertaken for this area.
- 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 started in late 2020 and is planned for completion in 2024.
- The work is occurring in four phases. We are currently in Phase 3.
- 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.
- For the Central Reach, the project will recommend additional studies that should be completed at more detailed stages of planning, including field studies.
- 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 acquisition, management, programming, and development of publicly owned land within the River Valley.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

- It is important that the public, Indigenous Nations and Communities and stakeholders be involved 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 will invite 31 regional Indigenous Nations and Communities with historical, cultural and environmental interests to engage in this project.
- Additionally, Indigenous peoples living within Edmonton are invited to participate through stakeholder and public engagement activities.

### What are the engagement opportunities?

- Four phases of public and stakeholder engagement are planned for this project. 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 is being shared and discussed in Phase 3?**

In Phase 3 engagement, we will be inviting 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 are being considered 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 are proposing that the Preservation Land Management Classification 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 **Ecosystems 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.  <b>Compatible uses</b> 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>  <b>Compatible uses</b> 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>  <b>Compatible uses</b> include all types of trail use.	Provide opportunities to rest, linger and enjoy nature.  <b>Compatible uses</b> 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.  <b>Compatible uses</b> include events and festivals, fitness courses and boat launches.	Recognize existing agricultural and horticultural uses.  <b>Compatible uses</b> include farms and supporting uses.	Support city-wide attractions while acknowledging the importance of urban services to accommodate a growing city.  <b>Compatible uses</b> 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 is being shared for the study area in Phase 3?**

For each [River Valley reach](#), the Ribbon of Green includes the following; this draft guidance is being shared in Phase 3 (visit the interactive map to share your input):

- **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

## 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.
- An update on work completed to date will be brought forward to City Council for consideration in summer 2023.
- Should there be interest from City Council, Parks Canada, and other partners in continuing with the partnership, the initiative would enter the planning phase. This would not represent a commitment to designate a park - rather, it would provide further opportunity to identify potential park boundaries and a preferred governance model, develop a vision for the park, and understand financial requirements for designation and operations.
- 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 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 is conducting a [complete review](#) of Edmonton's Zoning Bylaw, including analyzing current land use zones used in Edmonton.
- The timing of this work presents an important opportunity to align our city-building tools to ensure clear, consistent, and integrated guidance - from strategy to land use regulation - for the River Valley.

### 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 Rosedale 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.*"

## River Access Strategy

- The River Access Strategy was initiated in 2013 to inform the development and location of infrastructure and amenities for river-based activities. Following public and stakeholder engagement, the [River Access Guiding Principles](#) (Policy C586) were presented to Council for approval in 2015.
- These principles, along with further work completed internally on site criteria, design guidelines, and a draft river use plan which identifies appropriate locations and intensity of use at each location, will inform the Ribbon of Green completion.

### 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.