

# What We Heard Report

## Riverside Trail Realignment Project

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## **Public Engagement Summary and Results**

### **Project Overview**

The Riverside Trail Realignment project focuses on an approximately 1.9 km stretch of trail that runs between the Riverside Golf Course and the North Saskatchewan River.



Given the close proximity to the river, the trail has been impacted by high water events, ongoing bank degradation (i.e. erosion) and instability. These factors have resulted in slumps in several sections, and the trail was closed to the public in 2013 due to safety concerns.

Consistent inquiries from the public indicated support for the trail to be reopened and the Riverside Trail Realignment project was initiated to determine a solution that would allow for the trail to be safely repaired and accessible to the public.

The project objectives are to:

- re-establish the trail as a safe and enjoyable space;
- balance the needs of all groups using and/or impacted by the trail, including those who walk, hike and bike, as well as those golfing on the adjacent Riverside Golf Course; and
- identify a plan to repair the trail that takes into account sustainability and ecological goals and values.

Starting in 2017, the project team began:

- reviewing existing City strategies and policies; and
- gathering technical information through an Environmental Impact Assessment, Site Location Study, Feasibility Study, Geotechnical Study and surveys.

Information about the studies and work done to date, including the Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study, can be found on the City's [Riverside Trail Realignment](#) project page.

Following the review of City policies and strategies, technical requirements and funding considerations, the City developed a proposed approach to reopen the trail that included:

- moving five areas, approximately 0.275 km, to stable ground closer to the golf course and connecting them to the existing trail;
- providing new sections to a 1.5 m width to allow for multiple users and maintenance;
- removing 35 trees within the 1.9 km project area, three of which are considered mature trees;
- naturalizing the five decommissioned sites by planting 70 native trees and 400 shrubs; and
- moving three sections of the fence line onto the golf course.



In February 2021, the City heard concerns from the public, particularly regarding environmental impacts of the project. The City paused the project to provide more information, gather additional feedback from the public and better understand concerns.

## What We Asked

Participants were invited to join an information session, ask questions, review the Riverside Trail Realignment project and share feedback on factors the City should be aware of regarding this area, as well as to identify any considerations that have been missed in the approach. As part of the Engagement Edmonton platform, participants also had the option to like or share comments about ideas offered by other participants.

## What We Heard

Participants shared that many people have continued to use the trail since its closure in 2013 and in general people supported a trail in the area. The comments which supported the proposed realignment identified that the Riverside Trail Realignment project would allow safe use of the trail while also providing a connection to the local trail system and the downtown core. They suggested that the project would offer opportunities to enjoy recreational activities and experience nature in the river valley.

**They also indicated that they appreciated efforts to:**

- minimize disruptions to the natural environment through the realignment design;
- replace trees and other vegetation;
- consider a range of factors including various users, project costs, and safety; and
- present the research, technical assessments, and feasibility studies used to inform the project.

In addition, many participants provided comments that supported a trail but they shared factors the City should be aware of and suggestions to consider regarding the realignment project.

There were also some comments that were not in support of a trail remaining in this area.

**FACTORS TO CONSIDER**

The following provided an overview of the common themes that were heard through the feedback.

**Environmental Impacts**

Participants indicated a desire to preserve the wildlife corridor and natural habitat, as well as maintain the integrity and beauty of the area. They suggested that given the extremely high value and the ecological sensitivity of the area there is a need to limit the impact of people on the ecosystem.

Participants offered alternatives to address possible implications of the realignment project on the natural environment. These ideas involved:

- ceasing the realignment project;
- moving trails further away from the river's edge;
- naturalizing the trail with native, non-invasive trees and other vegetation to restore the area;;
- conducting further engagement and studies on usage and environmental impacts;

- closing the trail;
- closing the southern portion of the trail, allowing access only to the north; and
- designating the trail as a nature reserve.

### **Relationship to the Golf Course**

Participants also shared input about the relationship between the realignment project and the Riverside Golf Course. They indicated that addressing the environmental impacts of the project, reducing disruption to wildlife, minimizing erosion, stabilizing the riverbank and preserving trees and other vegetation were factors for the City to consider.

They suggested that to help address these factors, the trail could be realigned onto the golf course by:

- moving the current fence and rerouting the trail further onto the outer edge of the golf course;
- allowing a narrow strip of fairway to be used for trails; and
- redesigning the golf course such as shortening the course to nine holes or creating more natural space to support the wildlife corridor.

Participants also suggested that the project seems to favor golf course users and identified a need to consider all users of the area. Other participants suggested closing the golf course and turning it into a natural park area which could then accommodate the trail.

### **Erosion**

Participants identified riverbank stabilization as another factor for the City to be aware of with the realignment project. They shared that the project may only provide a short-term solution and that a broader approach may be needed to mitigate erosion.

Participants offered suggestions to address erosion. These ideas involved:

- a review of potential erosion in the Forest Heights and Riverdale areas in addition to the Riverside Trail;
- planting additional trees and vegetation, as well as placing rocks along the trail to stabilize the riverbank and offset the removal of trees;
- maintaining the root systems of the existing trees and vegetation;

- closing the trail and working with trail users to find long-term realignment options;
- installing drainage to reduce slumping;
- keeping the trail as narrow as possible and repairing it as required;
- extending the natural vegetation further into the golf course to strengthen underground root systems, minimize erosion pressures and conserve the natural area; and
- investigating where the source of the erosion is coming from (e.g., the riverbank, spring run off, high river water events, and/or golf course irrigation).

### **Trail Connections**

Participants also shared that the City should be aware of a need to enhance connections to the Riverside Trail by realigning or updating other trail sections. They suggested the City consider:

- extending the realignment project to improve the connection under the Dawson Bridge, as well as reducing ice buildup under the bridge;
- prioritizing the paved trail to the east of the project, based on heavy usage;
- looping the Capilano trails with the Riverside Trail and removing the fence at the Capilano bridge to provide better connections and alleviate dead ends;
- improving the trail from Riverside Golf Course to 98 Ave;
- realigning the trail below Forest Heights Park;
- updating the trail behind McNally School that connects from Dawson Bridge to the paved trail by St. Joseph Seminary;
- incorporating better trail drainage for areas that are particularly wet in spring and after heavy rainfalls; and
- allocating funding to repair, maintain and enhance other river valley trails.

### **Fencing**

Participants suggested the City consider the potential environmental and user experience impacts of the fencing identified as part of the project. Participants also indicated that guardrails may not withstand erosion, are not visually appealing and, if possible, should not be installed.

Participants offered suggestions about how fencing could be improved.

These ideas involved:

- ensuring the fence is permeable for wildlife;
- replacing the chain link fence with one made from natural materials (e.g., wood);
- planting more vegetation between the fence and the trail; and
- ensuring the fence does not restrict natural views.

### **Trail Width**

Participants identified trail width as another factor for the City to consider. They shared that the width could impact erosion and the ecosystem, as well as the natural backcountry feel. They also suggested that wider trails could attract more users, particularly cyclists, which may impact safety for those walking on the trail.

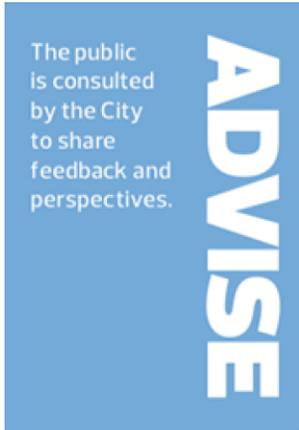
To preserve the natural environment and enhance safety, participants suggested installing a trail narrower than 1.5 meters, encouraging informal side trails, banning cyclists, or designating the trail to meet mountain bike standards only.

### **Amenities**

Participants also offered suggestions about other amenities for the City to consider as part of the project. These ideas involved:

- placing benches, logs, or stones along the trail to rest on;
- incorporating garbage receptacles either throughout the trail, along the Dawson Bridge, or at other entrances and exits; and
- opening a concession stand, particularly in the winter, and allowing outdoor firepits.

## How and Who We Engaged



While in-person public events are paused and physical distance is a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic, we remain committed to delivering project information and meaningful public engagement opportunities effectively and safely.

Between March 3 - 17, 2021, we invited the public to advise on the Riverside Trail Realignment project using the Engaged Edmonton online platform. To promote engagement, postcards were mailed to residents living in the Riverdale, Cloverdale and Forest Heights neighbourhoods as they are the closest to the trail. Road and yard signs were also placed near the trail entrance as well in the surrounding communities. Additionally, the Project Manager emailed engagement information to all stakeholders who had previously expressed an interest in the project or shared their concerns.

Throughout engagement, a total of 1,030 people visited the [Engaged Edmonton project page](#). Approximately 140 written submissions were received through the Engaged Edmonton project page or by email.

Description	Quantity
People who contributed ideas on Engaged Edmonton	77
Ideas submitted via Engaged Edmonton	97
Direct emails received by the project team in February and March	43
People who attended the online information session on March 3, 2021	82
People who viewed a video or photo, downloaded a document, visited the key dates page, contributed input via Ideas Tool, and/or visited multiple project pages	236
People who visited the project page	1,030

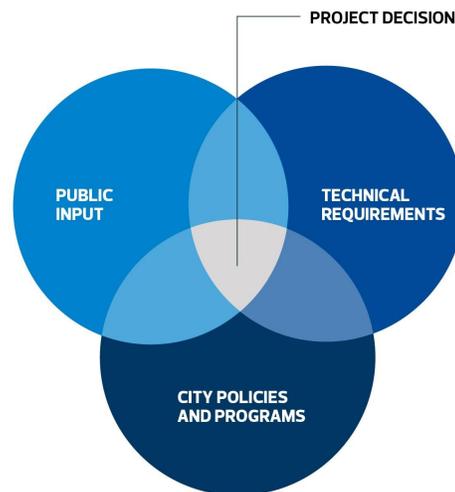
*\*A single engaged participant could perform multiple actions.*

Of the comments by respondents on Engaged Edmonton and direct emails\*

- 57 were supportive of the trail realignment as presented
- 36 comments supported keeping a trail, but provided alternative pathways or concerns with the proposed alignment
- 27 participants provided comments
- 20 comments did not support a trail or realignment.

## **What Happens Next?**

The project team will review the feedback received, along with technical requirements and City policies and programs, to inform next steps. The results of this work will be shared with the public in the summer of 2021.



Some of the comments received through this engagement relate to initiatives outside the parameters of this project. The project team will share this input with the relevant City project teams.

Updates about the Riverside Trail Realignment project will be posted to [engaged.edmonton.ca/RiversideTrail](https://engaged.edmonton.ca/RiversideTrail).