

V. VISITOR EXPERIENCE & GUEST AMENITIES



Site Circulation

The Master Plan aims to enhance and clarify circulation paths for visitor vehicles, pedestrians and service vehicles. Its approach creates a clear hierarchy of circulation routes for all visitors, staff and service needs beginning from Buena Vista Road, leading through the parking lot and throughout the Zoo.



Site Circulation

GETTING TO AND ARRIVING AT THE EDMONTON VALLEY ZOO

The existing approach to visitor and service vehicle access and circulation at the Edmonton Valley Zoo (EVZ) is being maintained in the 2025 Master Plan.

VISITOR ACCESS

Vehicular access for visitors to the Edmonton Valley Zoo passes through the Laurier Heights residential neighbourhood via the winding Buena Vista Road Northwest. At the end of Buena Vista Road, a roundabout directs visitors to three regional attractions: the Zoo, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Park and Buena Vista Park. Signage at the roundabout directs zoo visitors to the EVZ’s entry drive that then leads to the Zoo’s parking lot. The Master Plan concept includes the addition of new signage and a placemaking sculpture at the roundabout to improve zoo visibility and help establish a sense of place.

Visitors also utilize the pathway system through the adjacent park and neighbourhood to access the Zoo via non-vehicular modes of travel, including bikes, scooters, and pedestrian traffic. At present, the only public transit access to the zoo is via an on-demand system. As this limited access creates an access barrier for the Zoo, increasing public transportation options within the Edmonton Transit System could potentially expand the audience for the Zoo and benefit staff and volunteers in particular. The new parking lot design with interpretive boardwalk over the constructed wetland improves connectivity with the park and pathway system in the North Saskatchewan River Valley, encouraging more visitors to access the site. The entry plaza with café and Zootique are accessible to the public as they do not require an admission fee and are open outside the Zoo operation hours. Encouraging more park users to utilize those amenities increases their revenue potential.

BUS ACCESS

A new bus-specific drop-off/pickup route is adjacent to the proposed group entry. It is accessed off the main entry drive, with the drive aisles sized to reflect a bus turning radius. Up to 10 buses can park in a row along the curb and sidewalk, allowing students to disembark to the sidewalk without entering the path of traffic. After dropping off, buses can leave the Zoo campus or park in the oversized-vehicle lot to the east. Bus users gather under the bus shade shelter during inclement weather, where information on the solar panels and parking lot LID elements can be incorporated.

STAFF ACCESS

Vehicular access for staff as well as service deliveries to the EVZ passes through a secured gated entry on Buena Vista Road. The majority of staff parking is accessed from this entry, with staff parking for the Gift Shop, Café and EdVenture Lodge located behind the café and accessed through the main visitor lot. Staff who use non-vehicular modes of transportation require secure storage for bikes and scooters, and bike racks should be included in all staff parking areas. EV charging stations will be located near the Administration building.

SITE CIRCULATION

THE SITE CIRCULATION MAP (SEE NEXT PAGE) IDENTIFIES THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY PUBLIC PATHWAYS AND THE SERVICE ROADS.

Getting there is half the fun, if you know where you’re going.

The 2025 Master Plan addresses circulation and flow challenges by separating service vehicles from visitor pathways and developing a hierarchy of path widths to delineate major walkways from the more adventurous smaller side loops. Primary paths should be 3-5 m wide, while secondary paths are closer to 2 m. Combined, these strategies will ease guest navigation and enhance their experience of moving about the zoo. The internal pathways have been realigned to reflect accessibility grading requirements, provide better viewing of animal habitats and access to guest amenities.

Additionally, new weather protected viewing stations and warming stations along with restaurants and other amenities will offer visitors shelter and comfort from wind, rain and cold. These shelters will be broadly distributed throughout the zoo so that the average walking distance between shelters is a maximum of approximately 100 meters ranging from segments of 40 meters at the shortest to 100 meters at the longest. The southwest areas will have more shelters than currently exist giving visitors greater comfort throughout the year, especially in the colder months.

VISITOR CIRCULATION AND WAYFINDING

The current circulation pattern sees the majority of visitors veer right upon entry, drawn partly by instinct but also by the existing river otter habitat and by the lack of visual attractions to the left. During the Master Plan’s development, the Zoo Project Team expressed desire to balance circulation more evenly across the site and encourage more two-way traffic. As the phases in the outer zoo are developed, there will be incentive for more visitors to choose the left pathway route after entering the zoo, balancing the traffic flow in both directions.

As phases of the Master Plan are developed, the site wayfinding strategy will need to be continuously updated to reflect construction projects and new experiences as they come online. Each capital project should hold a budget allowance for updates to the wayfinding system including maps and signage posts. Clear, concise, and accurate wayfinding signage is critical to circulation legibility. New visitor maps should be developed, and it is recommended that site maps match their onsite orientation to better help visitors understand where they are and where they are trying to go. Special event maps can be created to encourage alternative flow patterns based on the event itinerary. Wayfinding signage and maps should provide clear guidance to every one of the zoo’s animal habitats, guest amenities, restaurants, play areas, event spaces and educational facilities.

SERVICE CIRCULATION

Currently, the service and guest circulation routes are shared in many locations which causes conflict and diminishes the visitor’s experience as well as operational efficiency. The goal of the Master Plan is to define dedicated service access and circulation routes whenever possible. The Master Plan creates a new perimeter access route with service roads on either side of the Zoo for staff to reach holding buildings, service buildings, and life support buildings. Short segments of shared visitor/service access are still required in interior locations, but the service needs can be handled outside of visitor hours in many locations, and during hours conflicts can be reduced through signage, changes in pavement, and gates.

Separating services allows some existing visitor paths to be narrowed, reducing the heat island effect in the summer as well as reducing the amount of snow plowing required in the winter. Further information on site servicing and snow removal is discussed on page 171.

OTHER TRANSPORTATION ELEMENTS

The Edmonton Valley Zoo currently operates two seasonal “trains” which will continue to be part of the visitor experience in the foreseeable future. A train “track” consisting of a graphic applied to the pavement will identify the train route to visitors and directional signage will point to the train stations for boarding and alighting points. Storage space for the two trains is located in the Administration Area.

SITE PLAN

SITE CIRCULATION



NOT TO SCALE

Guest Amenities

The Edmonton Valley Zoo has been a cherished city destination since its inception in 1959. As the city and region continues to expand, and visitor expectations for animal care and conservation evolve, the EVZ continually re-examines how its animal habitats, programming outreach, and guest amenities enhance the visitor experience and public perception. In consideration of the broad range of weather conditions experienced in Edmonton, the EVZ looks to expand the onsite amenities to create a more comfortable year-round experience where guests can enjoy the Zoo with reprieves from the elements, whether they be cold, heat, snow, or wildlife smoke. The Zoo is also committed to ensuring all visitors are fully able to access the site, meet their needs, and that they feel welcome and gain a sense of belonging.



CREATING POWERFUL EXPERIENCES

Today’s digitally-saturated visitor seeks real-time, groundbreaking, compelling, and dynamic attractions that help them make lasting connections to the natural world. The Zoo’s ability to highlight its leadership in wildlife conservation and sustainability to its visitors creates a sense of pride they can then share with their family, friends and followers. The Zoo is not only an essential part of the experience of Edmonton, but also a destination for guests from further afield.

Improvements identified in the Master Plan are inextricably linked between animal wellbeing and the guest experience. The Zoo’s ability to care for both animals and their guests is reflected in the implementation of the Master Plan’s hospitality elements to enhance visitor experience. These improvements will also highlight the Zoo’s sustainability ethos and demonstrate to visitors that sustainability can be accomplished in different ways.

The Guest Amenities Plan ensures all visitor needs can be met across the site, including food, shelter, washrooms, caregiving support and sensory relief*, safety and first aid, retail, education and interpretation, and perhaps most importantly, fun. One of the core tenets of interpretation is understanding the impact of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs on a person’s capacity to learn and process information. When our basic or physical needs are met, we are far more prepared to consume information and be inspired to make positive change.

GUEST AMENITIES SUMMARY

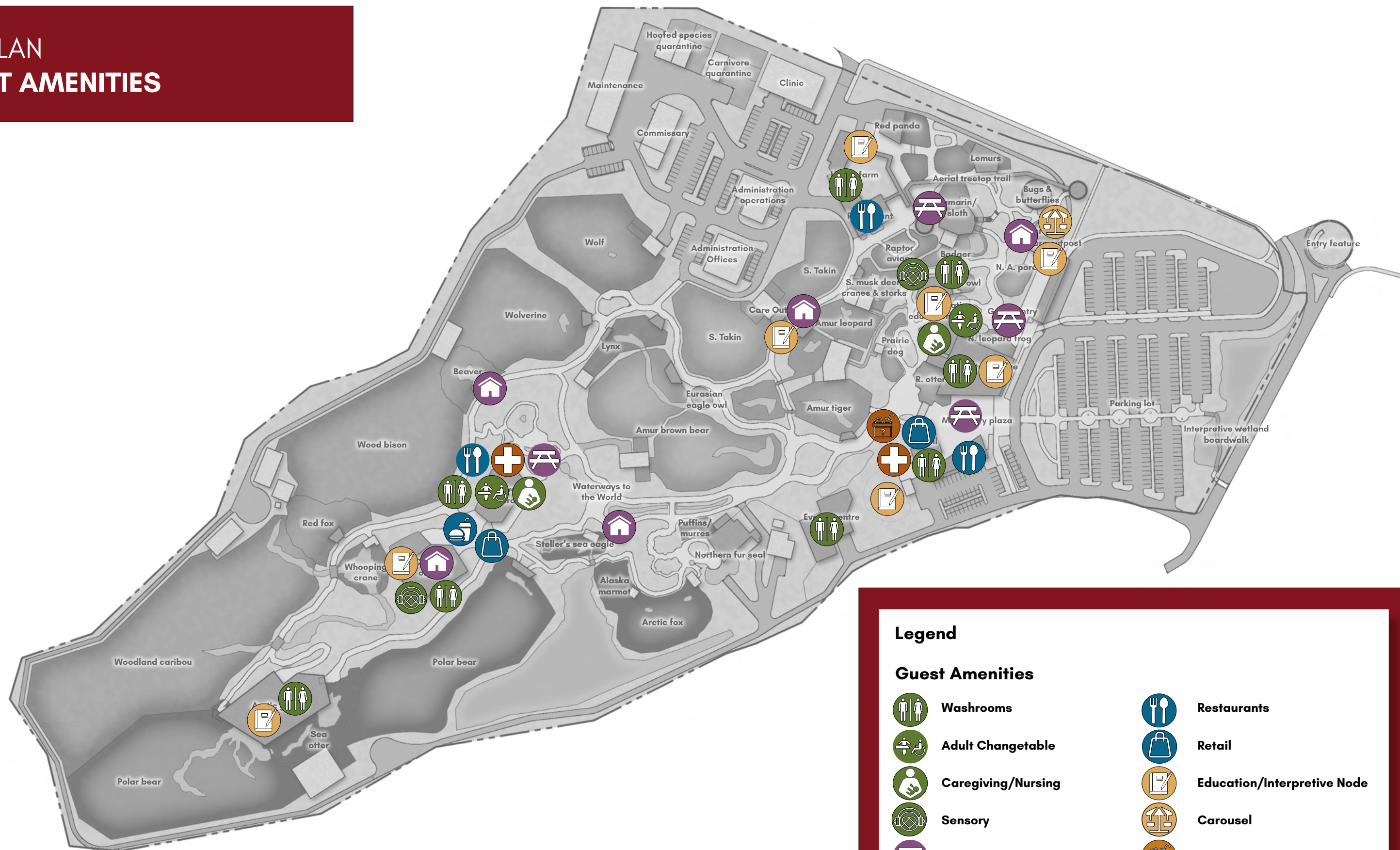
The Guest Amenities Plan (see next page) expands the offerings across the site, but particularly in the outer zoo area where few amenities currently exist. Further discussion on expanding accessibility is detailed on page 116, but in summary:

- Pathways across the site will be modified to ensure the grades and elevation changes are wheelchair and stroller accessible;
- Outpost Shelters spaced less than 100 meters apart will allow for all-season respite from the elements, providing both hot and cold weather comfort, water bottle filling stations, education and interpretive opportunities;
- New washrooms will be added that accommodate families, additional caregiving spaces will be provided to support infant care, and universal, barrier-free washrooms with adult change tables will ensure all visitors are able to access and meet their needs at the EVZ; and new sensory rooms will be placed in key locations to provide sensory input relief;
- An new first aid station will provide an additional location for care.
- A new restaurant and new locations for food/beverage vending will be added to evenly distribute food services throughout the Zoo. Picnic areas are identified, and pop-up retail opportunities are available to increase retail sales in the high-season months.

A specific diagram highlighting winter experiences and activations is shown on page 109.

SITE PLAN

GUEST AMENITIES



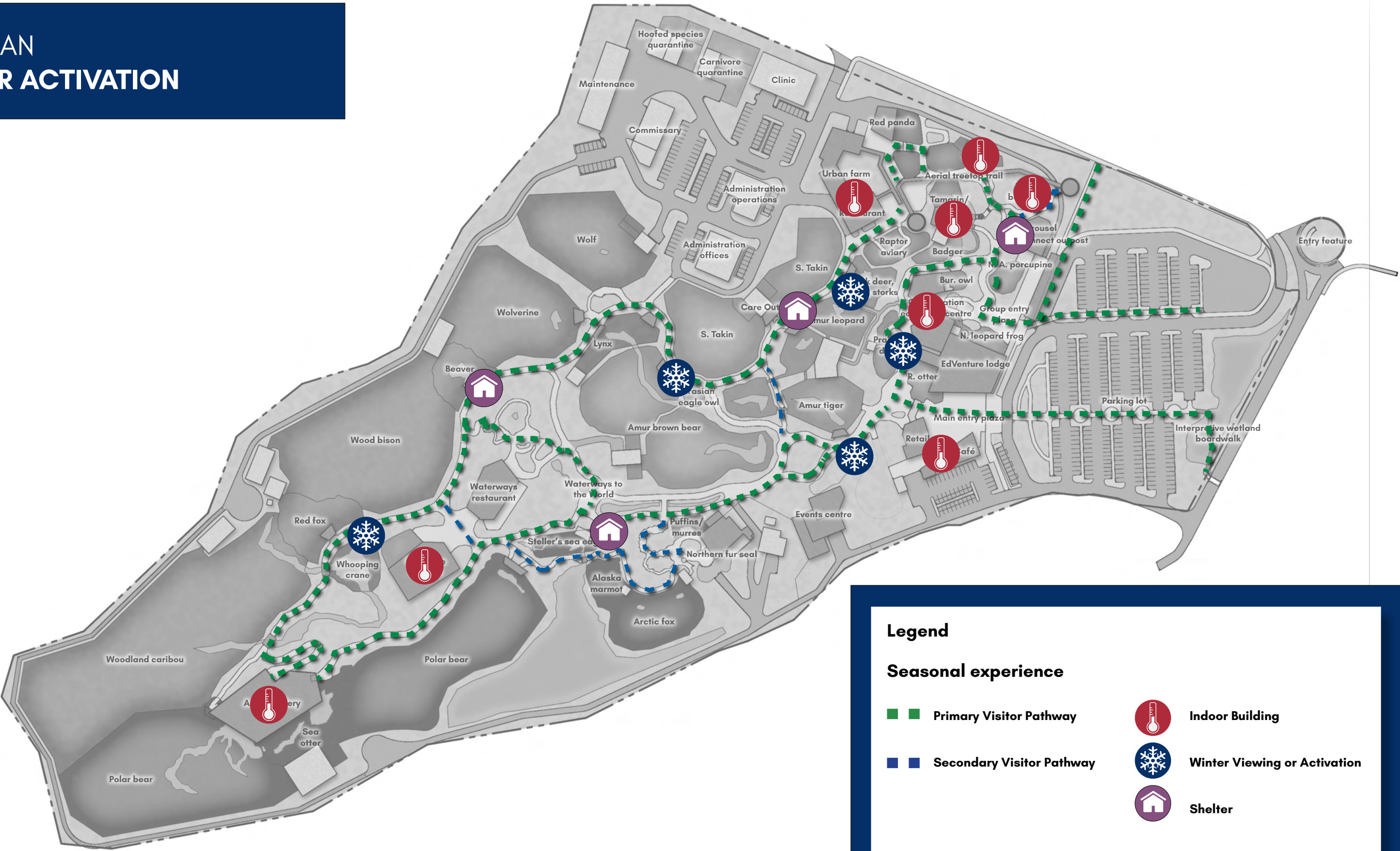
NOT TO SCALE

Legend

Guest Amenities

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
|  | Washrooms |  | Restaurants |
|  | Adult Changetable |  | Retail |
|  | Caregiving/Nursing |  | Education/Interpretive Node |
|  | Sensory |  | Carousel |
|  | Picnic Area |  | Lost + Found |
|  | Shelter - Warming/Cooling |  | Emergency & First Aid |
|  | Food/Vending | | |

SITE PLAN WINTER ACTIVATION



NOT TO SCALE

Connect, Care, Conserve Outposts

As discussed previously on page 43, the Master Plan Interpretive Framework introduces the *Connect. Care. Conserve.* umbrella concepts as narrative framing tools to guide the storytelling across the EVZ site. As part of this theming, three of the visitor amenities shelter spaces onsite are dedicated to those concepts and placed in their respective areas.

WHAT IS AN OUTPOST?

As part of the collaborative concept development with the Zoo Project Team, the notion of an Outpost shelter emerged to address many visitor needs in one space. Outposts are enclosed shelter spaces that offer respite from the elements providing warmth and cooling and reprieve from weather including snow, rain, or wildlife smoke. Amenities include water bottle filling stations, benches and overhead heating. Outside of meeting physical needs, the Outposts provide interpretive and educational opportunities to further explore respective concepts through a variety of interpretive media such as exhibits, physical or digital signage, or staff programming. The Outposts increase the number of indoor spaces that the Education team can program in, supporting more program offerings by providing the same protection from the elements for staff. This will allow programs to be relocated rather than canceled during inclement weather.

CONNECT OUTPOST

The Connect Outpost is located in Nature, Learn + Play, and forms part of the carousel structure. This zone focuses on **connecting people with animals**, and with its proximity to the entry, also speaks to the Zoo’s connection with the community.

CARE OUTPOST

The Care Outpost provides a viewing shelter opportunity and focuses on inspiring the public to **care about wildlife** and understand how the EVZ **cares for animals**. The space could be pursued as an opportunistic project timed with the Enclosure Enhancement Project. Initially, the space would focus on the Zoo’s commitment to care for Lucy and her story. Video monitors and other interpretive elements could provide behind-the-scenes glimpses into the Zoo’s excellent animal care, such as procedures in the clinic, animals in quarantine, or baby animals not yet on display. In future, the story would be updated to reflect the Sichuan takin resident and greater Amur River Taiga story.

CONSERVE OUTPOST

The Conserve Outpost will aim to inspire children and other guests to take conservation action and **conserve the natural world**. This refuge is part of a fully air-conditioned building and houses rotating ambassador animals to highlight conservation stories from all over the world. The people portion of this facility is an all-weather refuge in the outer zoo incorporating fun, interactive, nature-themed exhibits and ambassador animal education zones.



Education & Special Events

The Edmonton Valley Zoo strives to provide education programs and events that elevate community knowledge and inspire conservation actions. The Master Plan expands capacity for education programs, event bookings and special experience offerings with increased infrastructure for classrooms and informal programs, meeting/multi-purpose rooms, and rentable spaces for large and small corporate and event clients including weddings. This additional capacity creates increased revenue potential for the Edmonton Valley Zoo.



Education Programs

The Master Plan increases site capacity for educational programs including school field trips, camps, and informal programming. New physical spaces will require additional staff, supported financially by the increase in booking fees. Facilities for the additional staff and expanded volunteer programs are also included in the plan.

To support the large volume of school groups that access the Zoo, particularly in May and June, a new Group Entry has been added to the Master Plan. This space will facilitate entry into the Zoo near the bus drop off, separating group visitors from day visitors. The Entry Plaza supports education staff in marshaling groups upon arrival and when they return to their buses. The Group Entry Plaza can also be closed off from the rest of the Zoo as a rentable space in the Nature Learn + Play Zone or when no groups are expected.

As part of the updated Ambassador animal program, small ambassador animals will continue to reside in the EdVenture Lodge and in the new Conservation Centre. A contact yard will remain at the Urban Farm for interaction with goats, but this will be the only place where the public may touch an animal. Focus will be on ambassadors residing in their habitats and education led by keepers to demonstrate animal care and allow species to have control and make choices. The Conservation Outpost will include rotating ambassador animals to highlight global conservation and biodiversity in the outer zoo.

SPECIAL EVENTS

The Edmonton Valley Zoo hosts both internally produced (EVZ and/or VZDS) events and external client bookings, both during and after daily operating hours. The Master Plan expands capacity for these important revenue-generating opportunities with additional space for rental bookings and special experiences and reflects enhanced requirements for wayfinding, lighting, parking, group entry, facilities, and audio-visual equipment.

Sample Special Experience Offerings:

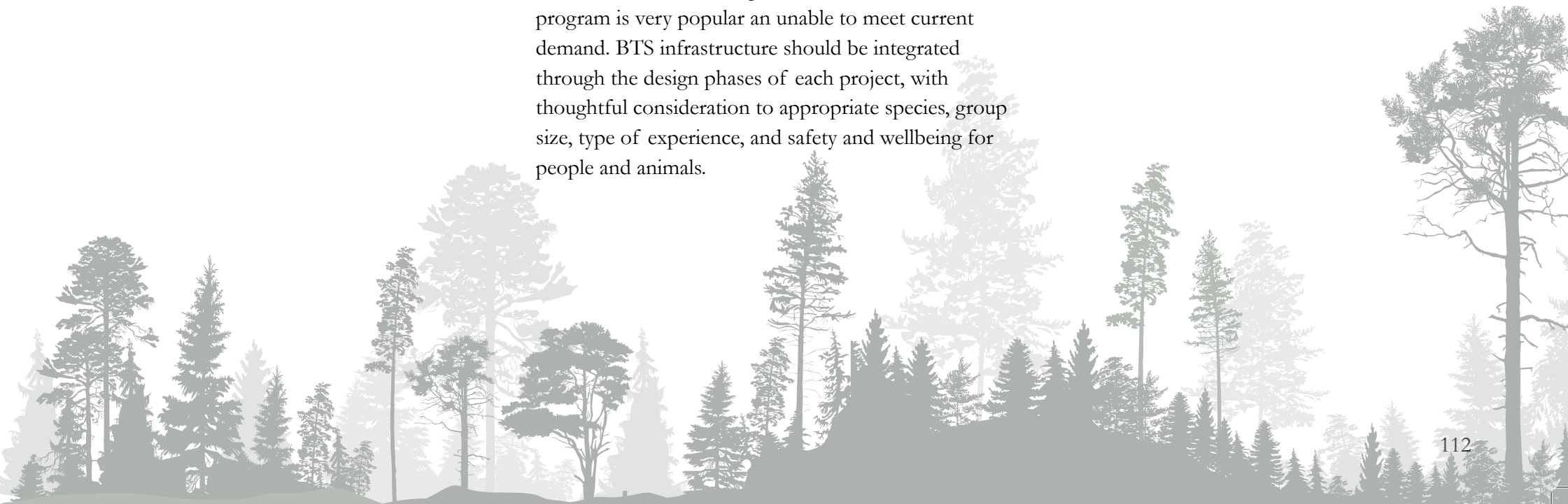
- Zoo Brew
- Adopt-a-Animal Appreciation Tea
- Boo! At the Zoo
- Zoominescence

BEHIND THE SCENES OPPORTUNITIES (BTS)

People are always curious about what it takes to operate a zoo and what the animals and staff are up to behind the scenes. Often opportunities to engage donors, enhance education programs, or generate revenue, BTS moments should be planned for within the framework of each new project. These experiences add significant depth to the zoo experience, and can inspire a career in animal care, wellbeing, and husbandry. Planning for BTS should always prioritize the safety of the animals and visitors, as well as flexibility to open or close this experience depending on season, animal condition, or other variables.

The current Zoo Builders program provides up-close encounter experiences with the animals and staff, allowing paying visitors the chance to experience the animals in a much more personalized manner. This program is very popular an unable to meet current demand. BTS infrastructure should be integrated through the design phases of each project, with thoughtful consideration to appropriate species, group size, type of experience, and safety and wellbeing for people and animals.

BTS experiences can also include use of remote technology, such as Teams, Zoom, or other meeting software to give visitors views to back-of-house operations and virtually interact with animal care staff. These could also be recorded and accessible on the Zoo’s website, similar to the Red Panda Twitch Streaming piloted by the VZDS this year. These types of opportunities can provide a great level of adaptability, be available on a 24-7 basis, provide variability in the viewing experience, and ignite curiosity. These digital BTS experiences can also be part of the pre- or post-visit experience, either reinforcing the messaging for the visitor, or inspiring potential guests to come to the Zoo and see for themselves.



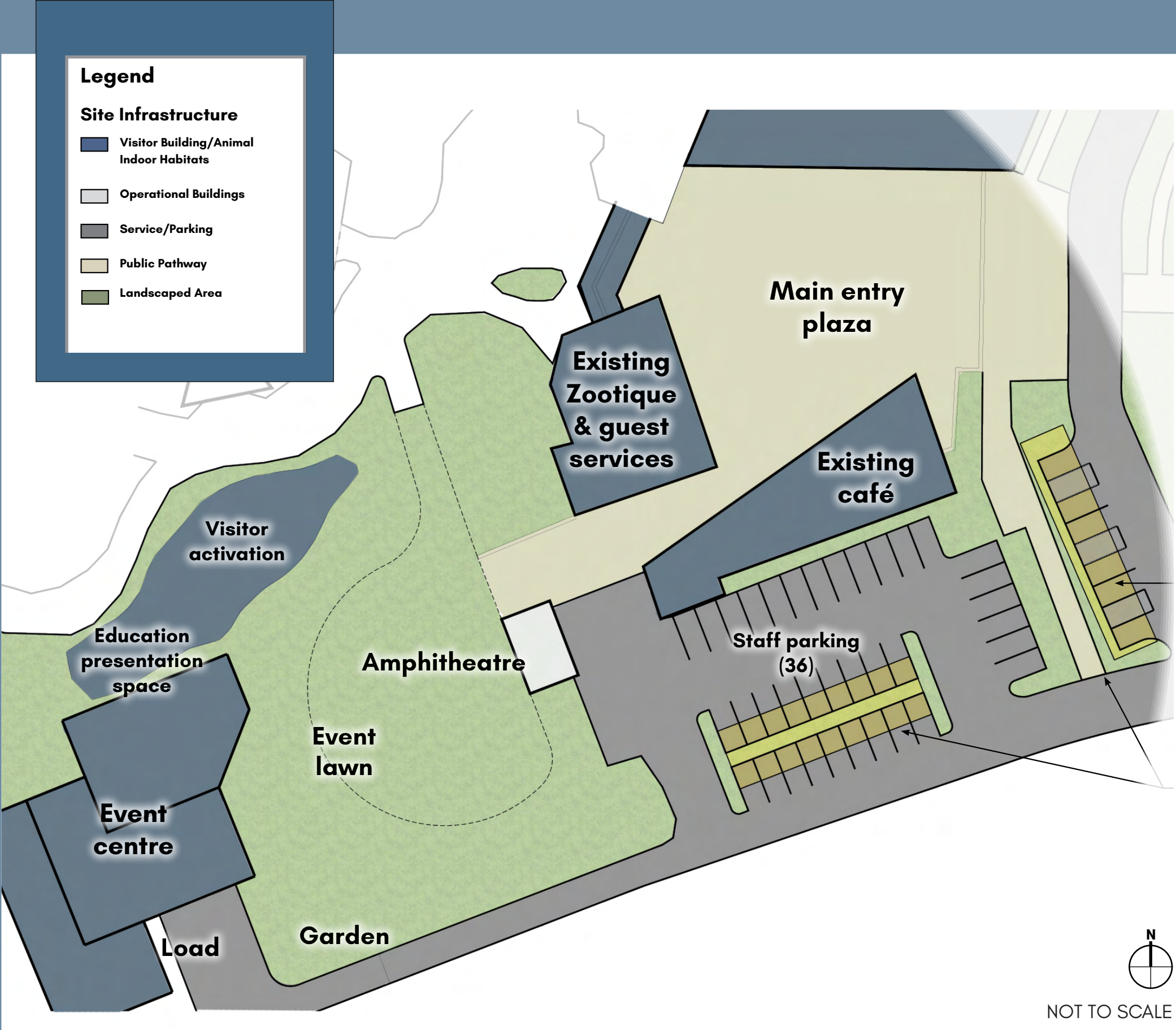
EVENT CENTRE

The new event center will be integrated with its natural environment, offering a unique year-round venue for hosting a variety of events and celebrations. The building will feature expansive windows and large doors that open onto a spacious patio, offering views to the new gardens and event lawn. Designed to accommodate up to 200 seated guests, the venue includes a prep kitchen, ensuring seamless external catering service.

For wedding parties, a private suite, complete with elegant vanity areas and a dedicated washroom, provides a comfortable space to prepare for the big day. Additionally, meeting rooms and office spaces will be strategically located within the back-of-house area, offering a professional setting for event staff to meet with clients and manage operations efficiently.

Adjacent to the event center, the amphitheater provides the perfect setting for large gatherings during events, as well as hosting animal encounters and education programs during zoo visitor hours. A green room at the stage will have a space for performance preparations as well as staging areas for ambassador animals about to be showcased. A new landscaped garden space will provide a lush and serene backdrop, perfect for guests to explore and capture photos. The addition of a beautifully landscaped event lawn further enhances the venue’s versatility, making it an ideal location for weddings, corporate functions, and special celebrations. Seasonal activations included sculptures, instagrammable walls, or partnership programs can also utilize this space. The Zoo currently rents a large event tent in summer, which will no longer be required.

With its connection to nature and flexible use, the Edmonton Valley Zoo’s new event center is a one-of-a-kind destination for unforgettable gatherings.



DETAILED SKETCH
EVENTS CENTRE

SITE PLAN EDUCATION AND EVENTS



NOT TO SCALE

Legend

Education, Special Event & Rental Spaces

Education Space

Event Space

Play Spaces

Carousel

Rental Space



EXPANDED EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Conservation Education Centre

- Multi-purpose room – similar to the EdVenture Lodge classrooms
- Biofact & program storage
- Ambassador animal habitats
- Outdoor plaza space, connect outpost and carousel, seating area

Event Centre

- Event space for 200 people with ability to split into two multi-purpose rooms
- Small meeting room
- Catering expo kitchen (external catering only)
- Pre-event space (wedding preparation area, event staging area)
- Storage
- Outdoor event lawn and amphitheatre

Bugs & Butterflies Pavilion

- Multi-purpose rentable space/birthday party room
- Storage
- Ambassador animal habitats

Waterways to the World

- 400 person multi-use dining/program venue

Diversity & Inclusion

The Edmonton Valley Zoo values ensuring all visitors are able to access and enjoy their experience at the Zoo. Removing barriers for access and designing for equivalency of experience requires an understanding of the diverse needs of the Zoo visitor audience, including those who already attend and those who do not because their needs are not met. The Master Plan reflects goals to exceed regulatory requirements and ensure all projects integrate inclusive, universal and equitable design practices.

Everyone is welcome here

The City of Edmonton’s commitment to cultivating a sense of belonging is demonstrated through the Diversity and Inclusion Framework (The Art of Inclusion). As a City facility, the Edmonton Valley Zoo looks to ‘walk-the-walk,’ ensuring the site and program offerings meet the diverse needs of the community and the staff who work there. Designing for belonging requires a meaningful understanding of the wide variability of visitor and staff needs.

The 2019 Accessible Canada Act strives to make Canada barrier-free by 2040. The EVZ seeks to improve by ensuring that all improvements follow or go beyond applicable regulatory requirements with built-inflexibility to accommodate new needs as they are identified.

A continuous effort is required to connect the wide spectrum of zoo visitor needs and design requirements as each project is constructed. There are three categories of accessibility design-focus within the built environment: Universal Design, Inclusive Design, and Equity Design.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Universal Design is the oldest of the three design categories and focuses on physical barrier-free design of buildings and sites to make them accessible to all people, regardless of age, disability, or other factors. It addresses common physical barriers to participation through the design of elements that can be used by the maximum number of people possible. Common examples of Universal Design inclusion are curb cuts and sidewalk ramps, restrooms, drinking fountains, etc., which are essential for people in wheelchairs or with mobility devices but are used by all. The Center for Inclusive Design at the University of Buffalo identified eight principles of Universal Design:

- Body Fit
- Comfort
- Awareness
- Understanding
- Wellness
- Social Integration
- Personalization
- Cultural Appropriateness

INCLUSIVE DESIGN

Inclusive Design builds upon Universal Design principles and concentrates on fulfilling as many user’s needs as possible, not just as many users as possible. Inclusive Design considers many aspects of human diversity that affects a visitor’s ability to use and understand the Zoo’s mission via sensory inputs, language, culture, gender, and/or age. One example of this is the non-profit Kulture City, who focus on sensory accessibility and acceptance for those with invisible disabilities. The EVZ is a Sensory-Inclusive certified location and participates in the Kulture City program by providing backpacks to visitors equipped to assist in limiting sensory inputs. As part of the Master Plan, sensory-relief rooms are included across the site to provide visitors with respite from the significant sensory input at a zoo, including sounds, scents, humidity changes and visual stimulation.

EQUITY DESIGN

Equity Design originates from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion movement of the early 2000’s and focuses on outreach to and inclusion of groups who have been historically underrepresented and/or subject to discrimination on the basis of identity or disability. This impacts the design of buildings and interpretive storylines by assessing the messaging for perception bias and cultural appropriateness. This is a relatively new design idea, but the Zoo’s ability to sensitively address this in the design process will aid in its success in the long term. As the EVZ develops infrastructure, signage and programs, consideration needs to be given to how stories, language, and design elements are presented in a cultural context. For example, while there is strong desire to advance Indigenous worldviews through art and storytelling, this work should not be conducted without appropriate engagement, consultation and compensation for the intellectual property and traditional knowledge of communities.



DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN THE MASTER PLAN

The 2025 Master Plan has ensured the above principles are considered in the physical site layout including pathways and visitor amenities. As phases are built out, these practices should be integrated into the design and operations of each space to further the EVZ commitment to DEI practices and being a leader in this space. While guidance is provided in the form of regulations and certifications, community engagement may provide projects with unique zoo-specific insights as the audience composition for the Zoo is likely different than the general Edmonton and region population. For example, families with young children are a higher percentage of the zoo visitor demographic than the general population. Families may also be able to provide deeper insights on meeting the needs of children of all abilities at the Zoo.

The Master Plan makes a commitment to inclusive language to reflect the diverse audience visiting the EVZ. Readers will notice terms such as caregiving (in lieu of parenting or nursing), wedding couples (in lieu of Bride/Grooms), mobility devices (in lieu of wheelchairs), universal washrooms (in lieu of handicapped). Language choices contribute greatly to cultivating or detracting from a sense of belonging, and inclusive language helps people feel seen and acknowledged when visiting a site. This approach should be incorporated into site signage upon construction and continue to evolve and improve.



EVZ IMAGE: TAKIN