

Touch the Water

Phase One Public Engagement Report

February 2016



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Background

The City of Edmonton has partnered with the River Valley Alliance (RVA) to increase access and connectivity in the river valley.

River Valley Alliance

The RVA is a non-profit group formed by the seven Alberta Capital Region municipalities bordering the North Saskatchewan River. Their mission is to protect, preserve and enhance the river valley park system from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan.

In 2012, the RVA announced \$90 million in capital funding for 18 capital region projects to improve public access to, and connectivity within, the regional river valley park system.

Of the total amount, \$72.9 million has been allocated by the RVA for projects within Edmonton. The River Valley Alliance provided \$48.6 million in funding, sourced from the Government of Canada (\$24.3 million) and the Government of Alberta (\$24.3 million). The Government of Alberta provided an additional \$22.6 million and the City of Edmonton contributed \$1.7 million to the projects.

Edmonton projects

Funding has been allocated towards a number of projects in Edmonton, which are grouped into five initiatives. The five initiatives are:

Terwillegar Park Footbridge: A 262-metre long footbridge will link Terwillegar Park in the southwest to River Valley Oleskiw on the north side of the river.

West End Trails: This initiative will add approximately five kilometres of primary (paved) and secondary (gravel) trails in Terwillegar Park and River Valley Oleskiw.

East End Trails: This initiative will develop approximately 16 kilometers of trails in east Edmonton.

Boat Launches and Docks: Three boat launches and seven docks will be added along the North Saskatchewan River.

Mechanized River Valley Access and Touch the Water: These two initiatives will help increase access to the river valley from the downtown core and will enhance connections to the trail system and the North Saskatchewan River.

Touch the Water Promenade Overview

The Touch the Water promenade will enhance current and future development on the north bank of the North Saskatchewan River near the new Walterdale Bridge.

The waterfront promenade will look to create places for citizens to gather and enjoy the riverfront and may include amenities such as plazas, walkways and docks.

The total budget for the Touch the Water promenade and the Mechanized River Valley Access project is \$34.4 million.

Public engagement: Online survey

In December 2015, the City of Edmonton began the public and stakeholder engagement process for the design of the Touch the Water promenade. Through the public engagement process, interested citizens and stakeholders have two opportunities to provide input that will help inform the look and feel of this future public amenity.

The first stage of engagement was conducted through an online survey that ran from December 8 to 22, 2015. The survey asked citizens to provide high-level direction on themes and desired user activities to inform two draft conceptual promenade designs (Appendix 1). The survey was also included as part of the Edmonton Insight Community online survey which ran from December 8 to 15, 2015.

The online survey was advertised through a public service announcement, online ads, print media, and through the City of Edmonton's social media accounts and website. One thousand three hundred and eight (1,308) responses were received from the two surveys.

What We Heard

Themes

A number of themes for the Touch the Water promenade and surrounding areas have been identified in existing City of Edmonton documents. Respondents were asked to select the

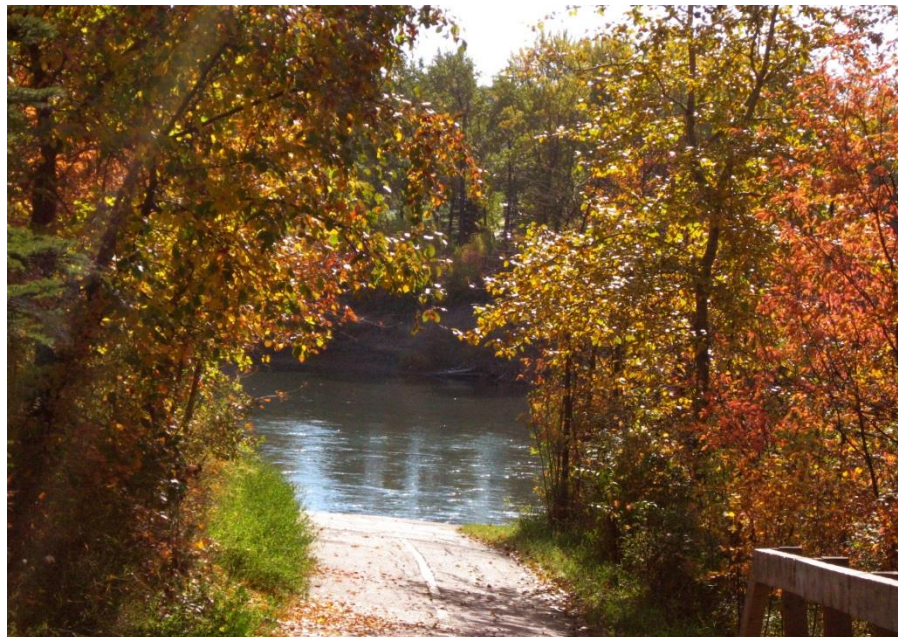
themes they believe are the most important to establishing a vision for the Touch the Water promenade. Participants were able to select multiple themes.

Theme	Online survey (Dec 8- 22, 2015)		Edmonton Insight Community Survey (Dec 8-15, 2015)	
	Number of times chosen	%	Number of times chosen	%
Honour the past and recognize the area's history	265	49%	354	46%
Showcase arts and culture	170	31%	161	21%
Integrate nature	340	63%	519	68%
Celebrate the river	342	63%	428	56%
Enhance the area as a gateway to Downtown	234	43%	260	34%
Design for all seasons	402	74%	566	74%
Environmental sustainability	302	56%	451	59%
Other	71	13%	80	10%
	Top three: Design for all seasons Integrate nature Celebrate the river		Top three: Design for all seasons Integrate nature Environmental sustainability	



From all of the themes selected, participants were then asked to prioritize one theme as the most important.

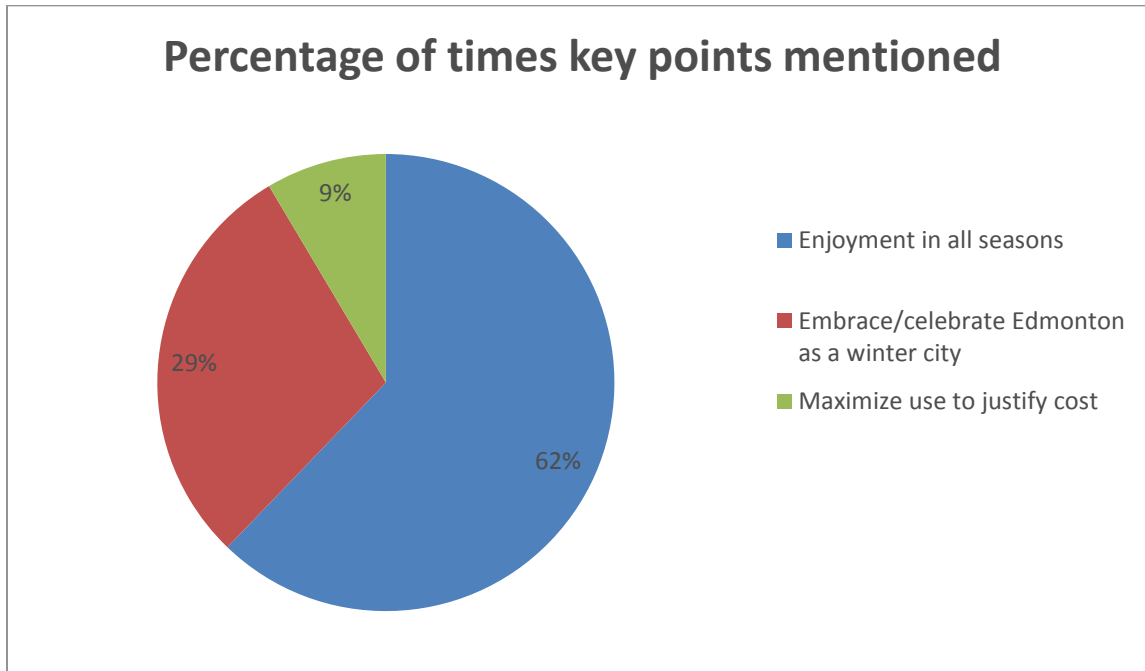
Theme	Online survey (Dec 8- 22, 2015)		Edmonton Insight Community Survey (Dec 8-15, 2015)	
	Number of times chosen	%	Number of times chosen	%
Honour the past and recognize the area's history	84	15%	80	10%
Showcase arts and culture	15	3%	13	2%
Integrate nature	68	13%	114	15%
Celebrate the river	86	16%	109	14%
Enhance the area as a gateway to Downtown	65	12%	51	7%
Design for all seasons	132	24%	226	30%
Environmental sustainability	63	12%	121	16%
Other	29	5%	52	7%
	Top three: Design for all seasons Celebrate the river Honour the past and recognize the area's history		Top three: Design for all seasons Environmental sustainability Integrate nature	



Top themes

Design for all seasons

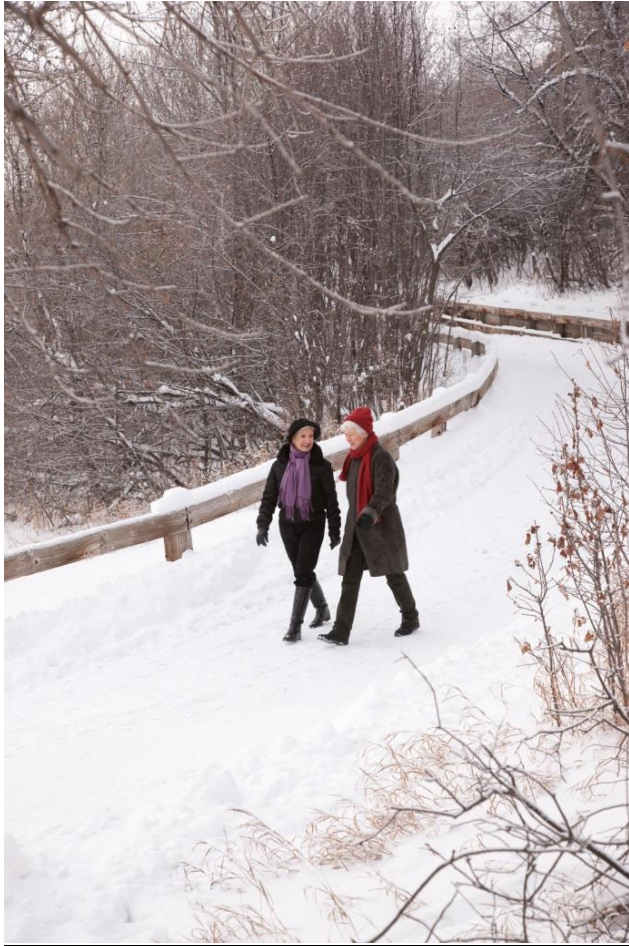
Respondents who selected 'design for all seasons' as the top theme specified a desire to ensure the public can enjoy the space in all seasons, to embrace and celebrate Edmonton as a winter city, and to maximize the use of the space to justify the project cost.



"I believe that if Edmonton is going to promote itself as a Wintercity, then going forward all new projects should be based on year round access."

"As an individual who has lived in other cities in Canada and across the world, all-season access to natural amenities is a huge necessity in the dark days of winter. At present, there is little done by the City to promote the River Valley and to make it accessible for residents in the winter."

"The city needs to become more creative in their accessibility to the outdoors in all seasons, not just summer or winter. We do have four very distinct seasons which need to be addressed in the development of any outdoor space."



"Since we are a winter city we should be looking at ways to improve winter activities and one of those ways is to encourage people to enjoy the river front in winter."

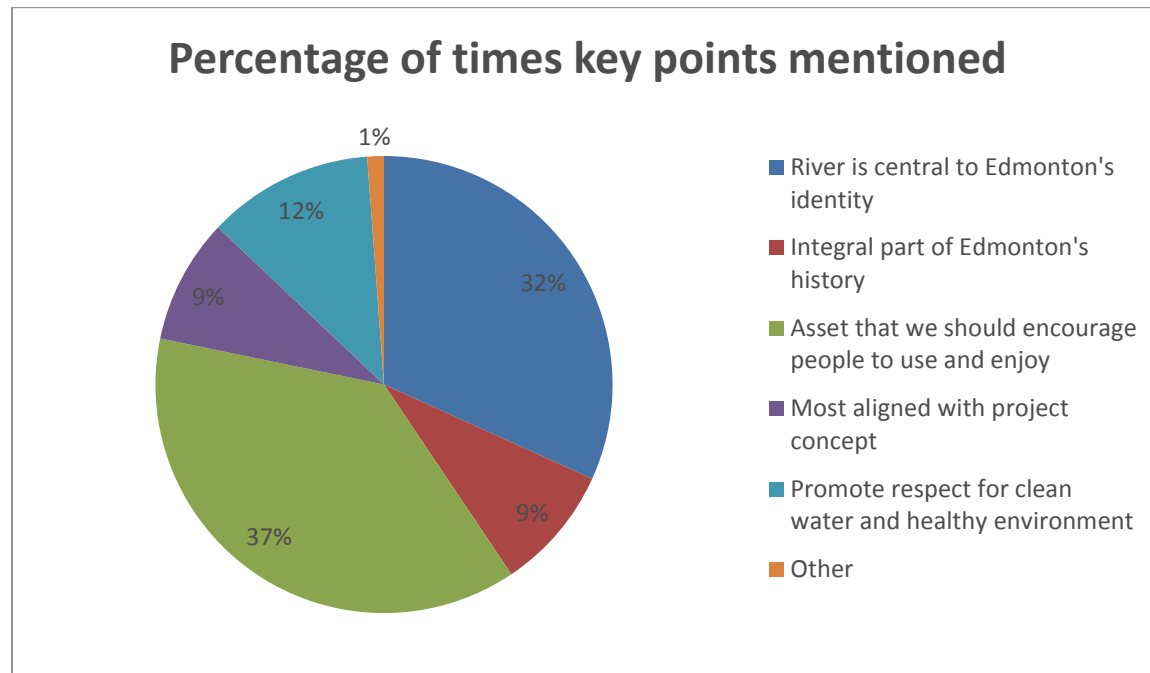
"It's a sad waste of investment if a facility can only be used in our 4-5 months of sunny and mild weather!"

"Edmonton is being branded as a "winter city" and I think it is part of what makes us special. Having an area that would be great in the winter is very important to me, because it encourages people to get outside and enjoy nature at a time when many are cooped up in their homes."

"Edmonton is a winter city so we need to encourage Edmontonians to get outside and celebrate nature all year long."

Celebrate the river

Respondents who selected 'celebrate the river' as the top theme chose this theme because they felt the river is central to Edmonton's identity, that it is an integral part of the city's history, and because it is an asset that we should be encouraging people to enjoy and appreciate. Respondents also noted this theme is most aligned with the "Touch the Water" concept (the promenade will be next to the river), and that by celebrating the river we can promote respect for clean water and a healthy environment.



"The river is the centerpiece of Edmonton. It is my favourite part of the city, and it is for many other people too."

"I think the river is Edmonton's most undervalued (and underutilized and miscast) asset. The river is one of the cities greatest treasures. It's so pretty... and underutilized!"

"While Edmonton's river valley is beautiful, Edmonton seems terrified of actually interacting with, or developing near, the water. I would love to see a small part of the valley emulate Riverfront Park in Spokane. We're a river city and we should not be afraid to develop part of the river valley. The more people can "touch the water" in their day-to-day lives, the more opportunities to learn about the history of the area, the importance of the river ecology, and the importance of treading lightly in our environment."

"The river is the reason Edmonton exists... it's time to make it accessible to people. While I feel that much of the river valley should remain "wild" with VERY restricted development, this is an area that is already an exception and we can use it to bring a wider variety of people and uses to the valley and river."

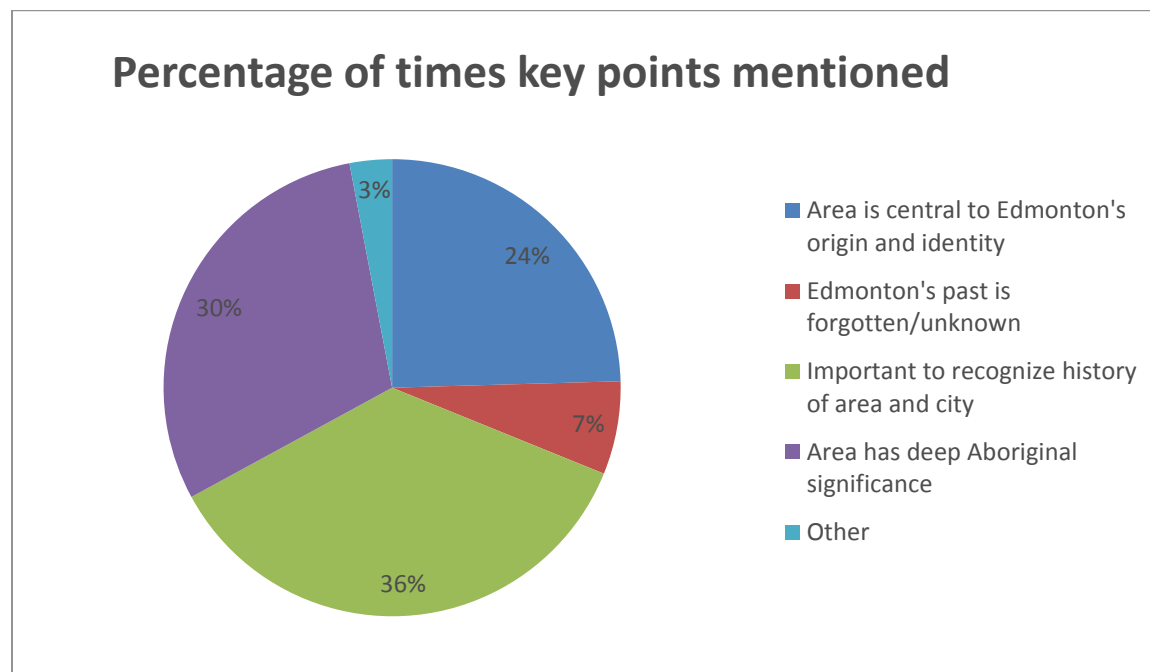
"The river is why this city is here, the low table lands afforded easy access to all for getting their important mode of transportation access to the water. You cannot get a canoe or boat out of the water where there are steep banks. Not only fur traders, but everyone used it!"

"I chose celebrate the river because I also think it can include honouring the past and recognize the history of the area/river."

"The river could be considered our greatest natural asset. In this proximity to the city core, there is the best opportunity to bring people to the river in order to understand and experience its significance."

Honour the past and recognize the area's history

Respondents who selected 'honour the past and recognize the area's history' chose this theme because this area is central to Edmonton's origins and identity, because they felt Edmonton's past is too often forgotten or unknown to Edmontonians, and because it is important for us to recognize, showcase and honour the history of this area and of the city. Respondents also indicated that because this area has a deep Aboriginal history and is of significance to Aboriginal people, it is important to respect and celebrate these connections.



"We need to hold on to more of our cities past, too often are buildings demolished and times forgotten."

"The opportunity to recognize the historical significance of the area is tremendous and for a fast growing city we need to make sure that we are cognizant of the past."



"Because Rossdale was an important First Nations site for millennia before settlers ever showed up. It is time for Edmonton to recognize First Nations history and this is the place to do it."

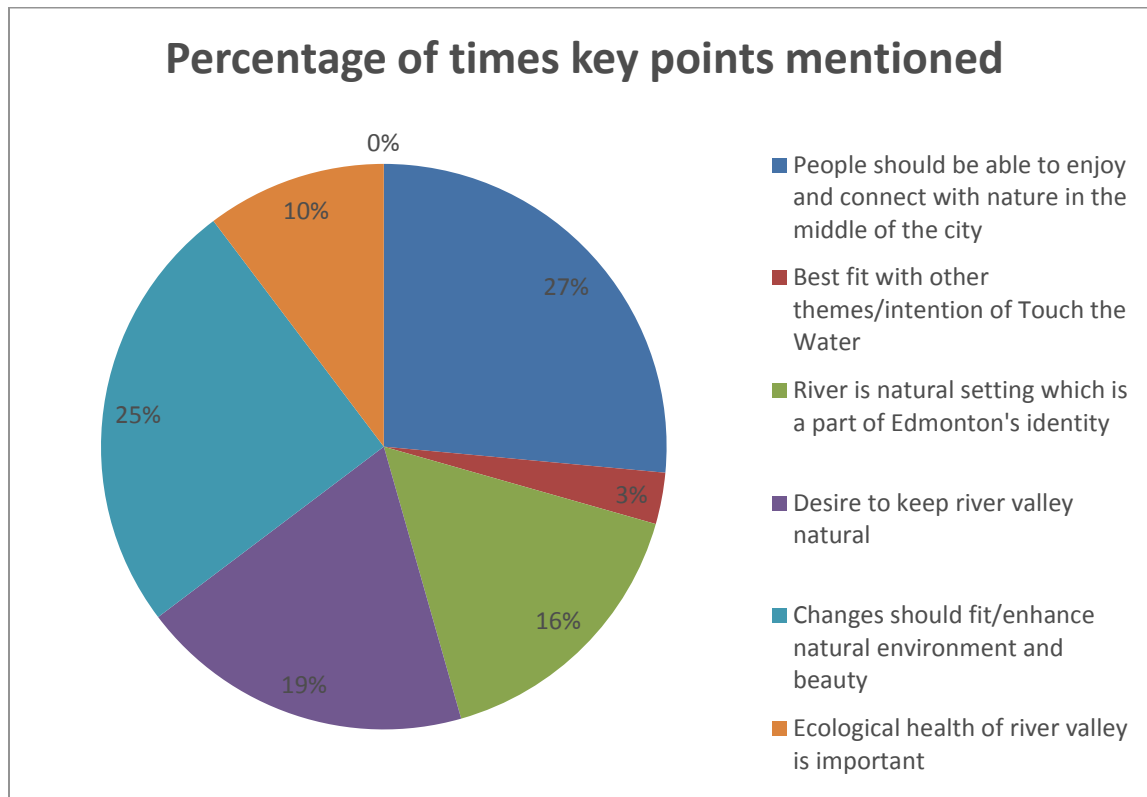
"Integrating the history of the First Nations who originally lived here is vital to establishing a sense of place along the river."

"The Rossdale flats is a very important site in terms of Aboriginal history, contact history, and the early history of Edmonton. It's the perfect place to address some of the issues between Aboriginal people, Euro-Canadians and more recent immigrants."

"Edmonton cannot have a strong future without honouring the past, especially on this site which is one of the most historically significant in the city."

Integrate nature

Respondents who selected 'integrate nature' selected the theme because they felt people should be able to enjoy and connect with nature in the middle of the city, because it is the best fit with the other themes and with the overall intention of 'Touch the Water', and because the river valley is a natural setting which is part of Edmonton's identity. There was also a strong desire to see the river valley remain natural and to ensure that any changes made enhance the natural environment and beauty of the river valley. Consideration should also be given to ensure the ecological health of the river valley is considered.



"I think it is important to enhance the natural beauty of the river valley rather than slapping a slab of concrete on the riverbank and calling it done. While I enjoy walking along the promenade in Louise McKinney Park, I think it's rather sterile and doesn't really match the area."

"As the city grows, more and more people are living in an "urban" environment often disconnected to nature. By highlighting nature as an integral part of "Touch the Waters" people can be informed about, connect with, and enjoy the "natural world" around them which research has shown is a healthy and healing activity."

"It's critical that we do not lose the natural beauty of the river valley."

"It is the river valley. It should not be made to be a concrete jungle."

"People of all ages benefit from experiences in nature, and there should be more opportunities for this in the city."

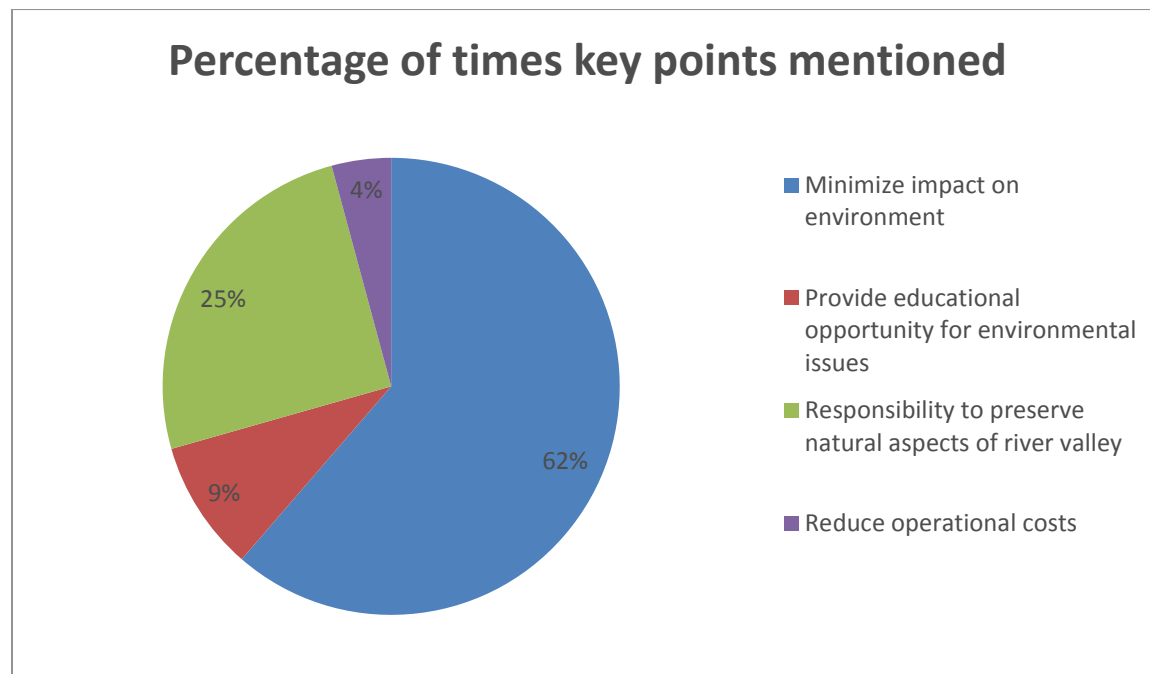
"I prefer a natural river valley with no new development."

"The project should be compatible with the river and help bring us closer to what happens in the river. It should help us see our impacts on the river and that should help us keep the river cleaner and more sustainable. I want to be able to get close to the river, but still have it feel like a river."

"Whatever we do by the river should accentuate the river itself, and the natural environment the river is part of."

Environmental sustainability

Respondents who selected 'environmental sustainability' as the top theme specified a desire to have the project minimize its impact on the environment, to provide an educational opportunity for people to learn about environmental issues, and to support the belief that it is our responsibility to preserve the natural aspect of the river valley. Respondents also indicated that by prioritizing environmental sustainability, the long-term operational costs of the project will be reduced.



"Whatever is done, it should be done to minimize impact on environment, and provide an educational opportunity to foster awareness of how nature supports the people that live off it."

"If native trees, shrubs and plants and natural materials are used it should fulfill all my options and need less energy and expensive care to maintain."

I don't want to see our River valley turn into the concrete jungle of downtown. The separation - its starkness - is the best part of the downtown River valley area.

"One of the things I love about Edmonton is that we have preserved our river valley in much of its natural state and restricting development. I think we need to be cognizant about the implications of further development on and around our river."

"In order to be proper stewards of the land and natural spaces we need to design this with minimal impact to existing ecosystems, and to improve the biodiversity of the area."

"Considering that the river valley is such a valued and loved treasure, whatever changes we make to it must protect and preserve the river, otherwise we risk destroying the best part of Edmonton."

"Environmental sustainability should be top of mind when enhancing a dynamic natural environment such as a waterfront."

Promenade Activities

The promenade is intended to be a public space that can accommodate a variety of user interests including walking, running and cycling. Respondents were asked to indicate what other activities (up to three) they would be most likely to engage in on the promenade.

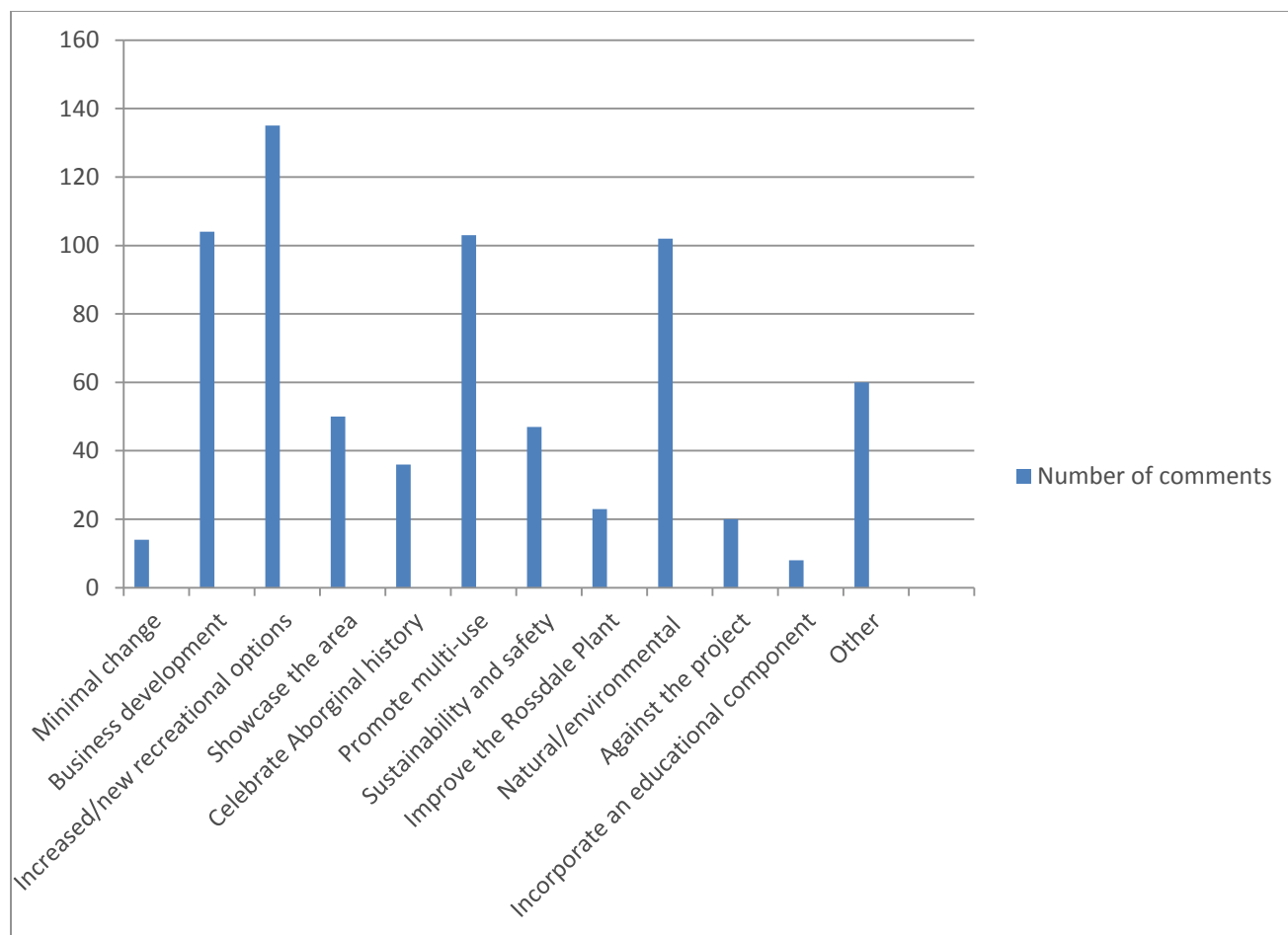
Theme	Online survey (Dec 8- 22, 2015)		Edmonton Insight Community Survey (Dec 8-15, 2015)	
	Number of times chosen	%	Number of times chosen	%
Picnicking and eating	192	35%	270	35%
Learning about the area through public art or interpretive elements	105	19%	124	16%
Exercise and play	160	30%	232	30%
Watching the river and river users pass by	218	40%	380	50%
Sitting and relaxing	245	45%	398	52%
Socializing	161	30%	167	22%
Attending events	159	29%	199	26%
Interacting with the river	207	38%	239	31%
Other	54	10%	38	5%
Wouldn't engage in any activities on promenade	13	2%	45	6%
	Top three activities: Sitting and relaxing Watching the river and river users pass by Interacting with the river		Top three activities: Sitting and relaxing Watching the river and river users pass by Picnicking and eating	



General Suggestions and Comments

Respondents were asked to share any other suggestions for the vision of the Touch the Water promenade. Responses were categorized into 12 groups, including:

1. Minimal change: don't over develop/little to any change.
2. Business development: cafes, restaurants, food.
3. Increased and new recreation options: create a destination with walkways/canals/benches/swimming/ski.
4. Showcase the area: art/events and shows/lights/integrative architecture/aesthetics.
5. Celebrate Aboriginal: history of the area.
6. Promote multi-use: accessibility/washrooms/ all seasons/ parking/ accessibility for citizens with disabilities.
7. Sustainability and safety: limit littering/loitering/safety/ upkeep/ security.
8. Improve the Rosedale plant.
9. Natural/environmental: environmental improvement of location and river/ good integration/low impact design.
10. Against the project.
11. Incorporate an educational component.
12. Other comment: look to other cities/design comments.



"Well-lit at night, safe, accessible to all, a meeting place like European city neighbourhoods have - an area for kids to play, along with seating and tables for citizens to meet, have coffee and be part of the downtown neighbourhood."

"It could be a great place to share Aboriginal history."

"Make it as environmentally sound as possible. Help instill a love for our river in every Edmontonian through this project."

"Return it to its natural state. There is no need for this project."

"Really would like to see area going 12 months a year. Not summer specific."

I would love to see a nature filled area that blends with the river valley rather than fight against it. It should complement the area while being sustainable and appeal to a wide range of people."

"Have an area to tie up boats for access from the river to the promenade"

"Ensure it is a space that all ages and abilities can use."

Next Steps

The results of this survey will be used to inform two draft conceptual promenade designs. These conceptual designs will be presented during the second stage of engagement where individuals will have opportunities to provide feedback to inform the final design.

The second stage of engagement is anticipated to take place in spring 2016.

Appendix 1 – Survey

The City of Edmonton has received funding from the River Valley Alliance for projects designed to improve access in the river valley. One of these projects is the construction of a riverfront promenade called Touch the Water.

Located on the north bank of the North Saskatchewan River near the new Waltherdale Bridge, the promenade will create places for citizens to gather and enjoy the river valley.

Two conceptual designs for the Touch the Water promenade will be created and be made available for public review in early 2016. Your answers to the following four questions will help to inform these concepts.

Question 1.

A number of themes for the *Touch the Water promenade* and surrounding areas have been identified in existing City documents. Please select the themes you believe are the most important to establishing a vision for the *Touch the Water promenade*.

- Honour the past and recognize the area's history
- Showcase arts and culture
- Integrate nature
- Celebrate the river
- Enhance the area as a gateway to Downtown
- Design for all seasons
- Environmental sustainability
- Other

Question 2.

From the themes you selected, please identify which theme you think is the most important.

Why is this theme the most important to you? (optional)

Question 3.

The promenade is intended to be a public space that can accommodate a variety of user interests (including walking, running and cycling). Please tell us what other activities (up to three) you would most like to engage in on the promenade.

- Picnicking and eating
- Learning about the area through public art or interpretive elements
- Exercise and play
- Watching the river and river users pass by
- Sitting and relaxing
- Socializing
- Attending events
- Interacting with the river
- Other
- Wouldn't engage in any activities on promenade

Question 4.

Do you have any other suggestions for the vision of the Touch the Water promenade? If so, please tell us here.

Appendix 2- Map

