

# Grandview Heights River Valley Stairs Rehabilitation What We Heard November 2019

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# River Valley Stairs Rehabilitation: Grandview Heights Stairs Design Plan

## Project/Initiative Background

The River Valley Stairs Project involves the rehabilitation/construction of stairs at:

- **Emily Murphy Park** (116 Street and Saskatchewan Drive)
- **Highlands** (Ada Boulevard and 52 Street)
- **Grandview Heights** (131 Street and Grandview Drive)
- **Jackson Heights/Minchau** (42 Avenue and 46 Street)
- **Walterdale-High Level-Kinsmen Stairs** (109 Street and 90 Avenue)

These locations are a component of a larger effort to rehabilitate river valley stairs and embankment paths at various locations throughout the City of Edmonton. In order to rehabilitate existing stairs or build stairs where only paths exist in a manner that reflects the needs and desires of Edmontonians, the City is conducting public engagement and communication activities that inform Edmontonians, and, where appropriate, gather input and feedback about the intended projects.

<p><b>Name</b> <b>Date</b> <b>Location</b> <b>Attendance</b></p>	<p><b>River Valley Stairs Rehabilitation: Grandview Heights Stairs</b> November 14, 2019 Grandview Heights Community Centre (in collaboration with a Building Great Neighbourhoods event). More than <b>125 people</b> attended the overall Building Great Neighbourhoods event. Not all attendees participated in feedback on the river valley stairs.</p> <p><b>More than 90 people</b> formally provided feedback on the river valley stairs, with the vast majority of the participants being residents of the Grandview Heights neighbourhood.</p> <p><b>Survey results from those participants that responded to an intercept survey:</b></p> <p>In the last 12 months, how often have you used these stairs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Almost daily: 6</li> <li>● Once a week: 11</li> <li>● 1-3 times per month: 10</li> <li>● Less than once per month: 21</li> <li>● Never: 5</li> </ul> <p>What do you typically use the stairs for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fitness/Exercise: 16</li> <li>● Casual/Leisure Use: 21</li> </ul> <p>Do you support the reconstruction of these stairs?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Yes: 42</li> <li>● No: 4</li> </ul>
<p><b>Contact information</b></p>	<p><b>Carlos Lopez</b>, Program Manager Building Great Neighbourhoods and Open Spaces Infrastructure Delivery, Integrated Infrastructure Services, City of Edmonton <a href="mailto:carlos.lopez@edmonton.ca">carlos.lopez@edmonton.ca</a></p>

<b>Level of public engagement</b>	
<b>Description</b>	<p>A public engagement in-person event was held to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● gain feedback on two concept designs for the reconstruction of the stairs and,</li> <li>● inform participants about the closure of the stairs during the 2020 construction season.</li> </ul>
<b>1. Executive Summary</b>	
<p>The established stairs between Whitemud Park and Grandview Heights have exceeded their lifecycle and do not meet the current City of Edmonton standards. The stairs are heavily used with a total of 254 stairs from top to bottom. This set of stairs is a very popular place for stair climbers and others who use them to access the River Valley Trail system and the Alfred H. Savage Centre. The new stair design will need to accommodate this type of usage and accommodate the existing set of side stairs leading to the east, towards the toboggan hill.</p> <p>Design and construction objectives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Replace stairs to meet current City of Edmonton standards.</li> <li>● Improve safety for users.</li> <li>● Design stairs with the recommended maximum number of steps between landings, with no more than two flights without a change of direction.</li> <li>● Achieve a stair alignment that considers water runoff and erosion within the proximity of the stairs as well as beneath the stairs.</li> <li>● Keeping a similar stair alignment.</li> <li>● Tie in to the existing granular trail at the top and bottom of the stairs.</li> <li>● Provide a defined granular pathway to connect the bottom of the staircase to the parking lot.</li> </ul> <p>What Has Already Been Decided (location, style, pitch/slope, width, tread/run and rise) and two concept designs with a different number of landings in each design were discussed at the public event. Participants were asked to provide feedback on the two concept designs that were on display.</p> <p><b>Audiences</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Grandview Heights neighbourhood citizens.</li> <li>2. Stairs, parks and river valley users.</li> <li>3. Exercise enthusiasts that regularly use the stairs.</li> <li>4. Other Edmontonians who may use the stairs now or at some future point.</li> </ol> <p><b>Key findings</b></p> <p>The vast majority of participants were pleased to see that the existing stairs will be replaced, be wider, have a larger/consistent rise between stairs at 7", and have consistent treads/runs throughout. There are two divergent views on the preferred design, based on the number of landings and whether the participant uses the stairs for exercise and fitness or casual and leisure use. This engagement event led to overall feedback in the majority that a concept design with fewer landings, rather than more, is preferred.</p>	

## 2. Engagement Techniques

The public engagement event involved a public in-person engagement which communicated What Has Already Been Decided and asked for feedback on What Has Yet To Be Decided. Two concept designs were presented for participants to learn about and consider. City of Edmonton project leaders, design consultant representatives, and the public engagement consultant team were on hand to take feedback verbally, answer questions, receive written feedback, and ask people to place a dot on their preferred design.

## 3. What Was Said?

### Design preference

- 46 participants placed a dot on Concept Design B (fewer landings) as their preference, while 35 participants placed a dot on Concept Design A (more landings). Approximately 10 participants stated they were neutral and did not place a dot.

### Design feedback and requests

#### General comments and design options

- Happy with new construction, wider width; doesn't have a preference.
- Want everyone to use it (accessibility); the City should not make a design that excludes people.
- Thank you for doing this.
- Stairs too busy with exercisers.
- Especially (need) the width.
- Keep the stairs as they are (repairs only).
- Leave (stairs) as they are.
- Tree roots at top of stairs could be a trip hazard.
- Are the boards nailed or screwed in place? (currently nailed, prefer screwed)
- We (husband and I) are in favour of increasing the width of the stairs to improve safety. Currently, the volume and pace of people using the stairs as a fitness training facility creates real challenges for those walking at a more leisurely pace – and especially for those helping small children up and down the stairs. My husband and I are Grandview residents who use the stairs regularly to access the river valley, although when they are too busy with fitness types, we take the trail down instead due to safety concerns. We have small grandchildren who accompany us on the stairs at times. On several occasions we have experienced issues with overly zealous fitness users, oblivious to the safety of others – I assume due to the focus such intense exercise requires.
- We (husband and I) assume any increase in the depth of each individual stair will be based on increased pedestrian safety, so support that.
- Anything you can do to make the stairs more safe and accessible for Edmontonians of all ages and fitness levels is much appreciated.

#### Landings

- More people can access the stairs if more landings; fitness people can use those as well.
- Consider greater accessibility for an aging population.
- More view(point) opportunities.
- Maybe go back to 7 landings for a redesign, maybe even 5.
- Either design okay.
- Make sure to provide at least one rest area/seat on stair.
- If you make it difficult, I would never use the stairs ... more landings would be better. (senior participant)

#### Rise

- Several participants stated they agreed with the rise at 7" and the consistency.
- My husband and I are also in favour of increasing the step rise to 7 inches, which is consistent with stairs found in most residential and commercial buildings. Currently, the lower step rise presents mobility challenges to some

people who have balance or gait issues, as it is inconsistent with what they are familiar with in everyday life. This shorter step rise can cause vertigo in people like me, who struggle with making the mental adjustment required to negotiate the stairs safely – especially on the way down.

- Higher rise will give younger people joint/knee issues later in life.
- Appreciates consistent rise and tread.
- Use 6" riser; this is consistent with home stairs.
- Lower rise better for people doing physiotherapy.
- Should keep at 6" (x7).
- Keep the rise and run the way it is; taller hurts my knees.
- Prefer 5-6" rise, not 7" (higher is tougher on knees, achilles, tendons, etc.)
- Keep rise at 6" for health and safety and no injuries.
- More concerned about neighbours and friends (lower rise better).

#### Lighting

- Please provide a light at the top. (x3)
- Follow-up with lights on stairs.
- Lights at top and bottom.
- Wondered if lighting can still be considered/what became of it?
- Could a light be placed halfway up and at the top of the stairs?
- Light at bottom of stairs is out of order (advised to follow up with 311).

#### Fitness users

- Please consider that the steps are used mostly for sports; it'd be nice to keep the steps numbered; maybe use some sort of tally method/tool to show/mark number of climbs; right now people use pebbles to mark/count from 1 to 12, people would love little details that show understanding.
- People leave water and clothes at the top; they lean on railings to recover and stretch.
- U of A varsity teams use the stairs.
- Fitness users use the lookout and lookout seat as part of their fitness routine.

#### Bikes/bike ramps

- Wants bike ramp to connect the river valley paths.
- Can we have bike ramp/racks?
- Understood why no bike ramp but does not necessarily agree.

#### Other

- Cross-country ski track, groom in neighbourhood.
- Toboggan hill should stay.
- Maintenance and cleanliness of stairs requested.
- No asphalt; natural terrain. Good the way it is.

## 4. What did we hear?

### A. New stairs re-construction

The vast majority of participants stated they support reconstruction of the stairs. The vast majority of participants shared their appreciation and/or passion for having the stairs available for them to use.

### B. Exercise and Fitness Use vs. Casual and Leisure Use: Opposing Views

The participants provided specific comments mainly relating to whether they used the stairs for exercise and fitness, or whether they used the stairs for casual and leisure use. The views are distinctly divergent as the two distinct groups have differing viewpoints on how the stairs should be designed, based on the way they use the stairs. The exercise and fitness users prefer a set of stairs with a higher "degree of difficulty", fewer landings and steps, longer flights, and a specific rise between steps to accommodate the best possible workout. The casual and leisure users prefer a set of stairs that is easier to

get up and down, more landings and stops, shorter flights, and a rise that is easy to move up or down on. (This is the same feedback as received at the October 24, 2019 public engagement event.)

**C. Design**

- **Width:** All citizens commenting supported wider stairs.
- **Rise:** All citizens agreed with a consistent rise. There are divergent views on the specific depth of the rise as several fitness participants opposed the rise being at 7", preferring 6".
- **Tread:** All citizens agreed with a consistent tread.
- **Landings:** Most participants in this engagement agree with less landings.

**5. How did citizen input affect the project/initiative with this engagement?**

Participant input confirmed that a compromise in a design that meets the needs of both the exercise/fitness user and the casual/leisure user must be accomplished to create a satisfactory result for both groups. This engagement also provided an opportunity to educate participants on What Has Already Been Decided, on City design standards for River Valley stairs and inform participants about an upcoming stair closure.

**6. What's next?**

This was the last of four in-person engagement sessions on this set of stairs. The input from this session will be combined with the data from the other three sessions, plus the online survey, to inform the final design. The final design will be shared online and presented at a final in-person communication event before construction starts in 2020.