

# BOAT DOCKS AND LAUNCHES

## Public Engagement Report

July 2015



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# BACKGROUND

The North Saskatchewan River Valley is North America's largest urban park, with a total area of more than 7,200 hectares (approximately 18,000 acres). With more than 160 kilometres of maintained pathways and 20 major parks, the river valley offers citizens unparalleled opportunities to connect to nature, get outside and play.

The City of Edmonton has partnered with the River Valley Alliance (RVA) on River Valley Connections, which is a significant step in creating a world-class, connected river valley park. Once complete, the project will increase access to and connectivity throughout the river valley.

## **River Valley Alliance**

The River Valley Alliance (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.

A 16-member board of directors governs the RVA with representatives from each member municipality. Its three primary goals are:

- To coordinate river valley planning and development within the seven member municipalities.
- Ensure plans respond to and balance the social, recreational, environmental, and economic needs of Capital Region residents; and
- Raise funds to bring these plans to reality.

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.

## **Funding breakdown**

The River Valley Alliance (RVA) provides \$48.6 million in funding to the City of Edmonton

for River Valley Capital Projects. The RVA funds are 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. <sup>1</sup>

### River Valley Connections

The \$72.9 million in funding has been allocated towards a number of projects, which are grouped into five initiatives.

1. **Terwillegar Park Footbridge:** This 262-metre long footbridge links Terwillegar Park in the southwest to River Valley Oleskiw on the north side of the river.
2. **West End Trails:** This initiative will add approximately five kilometres of primary (paved) and secondary (gravel) trails in Terwillegar Park and in River Valley Oleskiw.
3. **East End Trails:** This initiative will develop approximately 16 kilometres of trails in east Edmonton.
4. **Boat Launches and Docks:** Three boat launches and seven docks will be added throughout the river valley for public use.
5. **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.

### Boat Docks and Launches

The Boat Docks and Launches initiative includes building new or enhanced boat docks and launches along the North Saskatchewan River. This initiative will allow greater public access to the river and will reinforce the natural connection between municipalities by increasing options for water access, allowing travel along the river and supporting the regional park concept. Below is a list of the proposed project sites and the amenities under consideration.

#### Definitions:

**Dock** – A structure extending alongshore or out from the shore into a body of water to which boats may be moored and where the public can enjoy the river's edge.

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<sup>1</sup> Revised document August 2015- clarified information on funding.

**Launch** – A location or structure on a body of water that is designated for the purpose of launching a boat.

### **Whitemud Park**

- Dock with granular trail access
- Winter storage area for dock
- Improved signage
- Viewpoint
- Benches, waste receptacles
- Portable toilet

### **Laurier/Buena Vista Park**

- Dock with temporary trail access until Master Plan implemented
- Winter storage area for dock
- Improved signage
- For safety, boulders to restrict vehicle access to the beach

### **William Hawrelak Park**

- Dock with granular trail access
- Winter storage area for dock
- Improved signage
- Waste receptacles

### **Emily Murphy Park**

- Dock with granular trail access
- Re-grade slope down to water
- Winter storage area for dock
- Improved signage
- For safety measures, posts to restrict water access

- Waste receptacles
- Dedicated parking for launch and reconfigured drop off and pick up area

### **Rossdale**

- Dock
- Seating area
- Connections to trail system

### **Dawson Park**

- Dock with gravel trail access
- Winter storage area for dock
- Improved signage
- For safety, bollards/gates installed to restrict vehicle access to beach

### **Capilano Park/50th Street**

- Separate hand launch
- Dock
- Winter storage area for dock
- Reconfiguration of parking and vehicle circulation
- Improved signage

## **STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION**

A stakeholder consultation meeting for identified river users was held on January 13, 2015. The consultation meeting was attended by 22 individuals representing private river-based businesses, academic institutions, recreational boating clubs and environmental groups. The issues and themes identified during this consultation have been summarized in a separate report.

A public open house was held at City Hall on April 9, 2015. City of Edmonton staff and

project contractors were available to answer questions from members of the public and stakeholders. The open house was attended by approximately 200 people. Display boards and comment forms remained available in City Hall until April 10, 2015.

An online survey was also conducted to obtain feedback. The survey was available from April 7 to April 26, 2015. Both the open house and the online survey were advertised through a public service announcement, online ads, print publications, and through the City of Edmonton’s social media accounts and website. Between the open house responses and online survey, the public engagement team received 357 responses to the survey.

## PARTICIPANT PROFILE

In addition to collecting feedback on the initiative, the survey asked participants to indicate their current uses of the river valley and their frequency of use. Respondents could select more than one option to indicate their current use.

### Most common uses of the river valley:

Recreation: Running/walking the trail	306
Recreation: Enjoying the views	294
Recreation: Biking the trail system	231
Recreation: Boating	95
Other recreation	38
Recreation: Fishing	34
Educational purposes	31
Recreation: As a member of a club or	30
Do not use the river valley	22
Commercial purposes	4

### How often participants visit the river valley

Daily or weekly	191
One or two times a month, mostly during the	60
One of two times a month, throughout the	46
A few times a year	43
Rarely or never	13

# RESPONSE THEMES

Participants of the open house and the online survey were asked two open-ended questions about the overall initiative, and one open-ended question about each specific project site:

- In the Boat Docks and Launches initiatives, do you see a way for you to access and enjoy the North Saskatchewan River and river valley? Why or why not?
- Will what is being proposed allow for the enjoyable use of each site? Why or why not?
- Do you have anything else to share about the overall project?

A question was also asked to provide additional information for the Environmental Impact Assessment that will be completed for each site location.

- An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will be conducted as part of the Boat Docks and Launches project to identify potential impacts that could result from the proposed project. The EIA begins in the planning stages so that potential impacts are addressed early in the project. The EIA will be conducted in accordance with the City of Edmonton’s Bylaw 7188 (North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan).

Do you have any information regarding the environment at the proposed project locations that the City should be aware of?

## Overarching Themes and Identified Issues:

Although the responses were diverse, several key themes emerged from the completed surveys.

### Support for the initiative

The comments received about the overall initiative were largely positive. Respondents



were happy to see more opportunities for citizens to be able to use the river, and most individuals viewed all of the locations as welcome additions to the river and river valley.

Approximately one-third of the overall comments received identified potential issues and areas of concern about the initiative. Some of these respondents believe that too few users will benefit from the docks and launches for them to be worth the cost. Others feel that paddlers already have sufficient access to the river, and that this initiative will mostly increase accessibility for powerboats to the river (which many individuals indicated was undesirable and potentially damaging to the environment).

### **Desire for additional amenities**

Many individuals felt the proposed sites do not include enough development and asked the City to consider constructing additional amenities as part of the initiative. Washrooms were among the most requested item followed by additional parking and garbage receptacles.

A number of commenters suggested the City should examine creating one or two destination points along the river, akin to a “mini-marina” that could include a dock as well as small-scale commercial development like a café or restaurant.

Several other commenters suggested the City should encourage the development of a “water taxi” service that could take river valley users between the dock sites allowing for more people to experience the river.

A few respondents asked the City to consider developing amenities in the river itself. Specifically, they suggested the City consider the construction of whitewater features for paddlers and other users to enjoy.

### **User conflict**

A recurrent theme across all the proposed project sites was the potential for user conflict, particularly between powerboats and paddlers. Many non-motorized users of the river asked for the City to limit the use of motorized boats, while motorized boaters

generally saw increased access for powerboats as beneficial. Concerns about powerboats included their impact on the environment (noise, wake erosion) and safety for other river users. As the majority of survey respondents were non-motorized users, their comments reflected a preference for restrictions or prohibitions on powerboats.

It is important to note that these concerns were not raised as a point of opposition; rather commenters were asking the City to proactively manage this issue.

### **Safety concerns**

Respondents asked the City to take steps to address the potential safety issues that could arise from increased recreational use of the river, including providing additional bylaw officers on the river to enforce boating regulations and ensuring adequate fire and rescue resources are available to respond to emergencies on the river.

Other commenters suggested the City undertake a river safety campaign to ensure that users are educated about the dangers present when near and on the water, particularly during periods of large runoff.

### **Environmental concerns**

A number of individuals expressed concern about the potential for environmental impact due to increased numbers of users on the water. The most commonly cited concern was about erosion of the riverbank from wakes generated by powerboats; however, several respondents also expressed concern about the impact of increased boating on fish habitat. Some commenters also expressed concern over the amount of tree clearing that could be needed to construct the planned docks and launches and asked that the environmental impact of the project be mitigated as much as possible.

## Location specific feedback

All of the proposed boat dock and launch locations were generally well received and were supported by a majority of the respondents. The qualitative feedback received from the survey was coded as positive, neutral ideas and advice, or as an issue or concern. Based on this analysis, approximately 60% of the comments received were positive, 30% identified potential issues or concerns with the proposals, and 10% included neutral ideas or advice.

### Whitemud Park – 253 responses received

Participants were asked: “Will what is being proposed allow for the enjoyable use of this site? Why or why not?” The qualitative responses were then coded as positive (143 responses); identifying issues and concerns (71 responses); and providing ideas and advice (39 responses).

#### *The most frequently identified positive comments included:*

1. Better access to the river makes Edmonton a more livable city.
2. This will add much-needed amenities to the park and increase its use.
3. The added amenities will have a positive impact on other river valley parks and sites in the west end (Fort Edmonton, etc).

***“Absolutely will allow for enjoyable use. Easy access, great area, super idea.”***

#### *The most frequently identified issues and concerns included:*

1. The launch is not easily accessible – both because it is hard to access the site itself, and because the shallow depth is a challenge for most boats.
2. The potential for the project to impact the nearby fish habitat.
3. The impact of increased motorized boats using the river.

***“What will that do for the ecology? More boats can’t be good for the fish.”***

#### *Other ideas and advice received included:*

1. Potentially allowing commercial operations from the site, i.e. a canoe/kayak/raft rental business.
2. Increasing the number of picnic sites and fireboxes.
3. Positioning the washrooms between the launch and the parking lot.

***“A few more picnic tables and fireboxes would be nice. Currently can be a very busy park and this will make it busier. More parking is probably needed too.”***

## **Laurier/Buena Vista Park – 234 responses received**

Participants were asked: “Will what is being proposed allow for the enjoyable use of this site? Why or why not?” The qualitative responses were then coded as positive (133 responses); identifying issues and concerns (56 responses); and providing ideas and advice (45 responses).

### *The most frequently identified positive comments included:*

1. Access to our river should be encouraged.
2. This investment will improve the use of the current facilities in this park.
3. This is a great location due to its proximity to other river valley amenities (the zoo, picnic areas, etc)

***“Being near the zoo, families will enjoy this area.”***

### *The most frequently identified issues and concerns included:*

1. Concern about the impact of the dock on the number of motorized boats using the river.
2. Concerns about negative impacts on current access to the park.
3. A belief that future usage will not justify the level of investment.

***“My chief concern is room for sharing the space. It looks potentially crowded.”***

### *Other ideas and advice received included:*

1. Mitigate the odours from the nearby outfall.
2. Potential congestion in this area must be anticipated and managed.
3. Plans must ensure the impacts of the adjacent dog park are considered.

***“Odour issues might be problematic and defeat the purpose of this.”***

## **William Hawrelak Park – 238 responses received**

Participants were asked: “Will what is being proposed allow for the enjoyable use of this site? Why or why not?” The qualitative responses were then coded as positive (135 responses); identifying issues and concerns (68 responses); and providing ideas and advice (35 responses).

### *The most frequently identified positive comments included:*

1. The proposed development will provide greater access to and connection with the river from an already great park.
2. It will provide another location for non-motorized users to access the river.
3. It will increase the range of uses in Hawrelak Park.

***“Good central access to the south bank, ideally located between downtown and the western docks.”***

### *The most frequently identified issues and concerns included:*

1. Concerns about access to the dock.
2. The park is already busy and full, the proposed development will add to the existing congestion.
3. The dock is too far from the parking area to be useful to boaters.

***“I don’t think this dock will be used much as it will not be possible to leave one’s boats and go and have a picnic.”***

### *Other ideas and advice received included:*

1. The City should consider the addition of washrooms nearby.
2. The City should ensure the dock is wheelchair accessible.
3. The dock should be designed to accommodate the potentially large number of users.

***“I think it will be a busy site and will require a larger development in order to be accommodating.”***

## **Emily Murphy Park – 212 responses received**

Participants were asked: “Will what is being proposed allow for the enjoyable use of this site? Why or why not?” The qualitative responses were then coded as positive (145 responses); identifying issues and concerns (46 responses); and providing ideas and advice (21 responses).

### *The most frequently identified positive comments included:*

1. The proposed development will attract users to a currently underutilized park.
2. The development is a welcome and much-needed upgrade.
3. It will provide a central location for boaters to access the river.

***“Another good site for improving pedestrian appreciation of the river.”***

### *The most frequently identified issues and concerns included:*

1. Concerns about odours from the outfall near the launch.
2. A lack of available parking.
3. Concerns about increased motorized use of the river.

***“Let’s leave the park system as it is, which is wonderful.”***

### *Other ideas and advice received included:*

1. Adding commercial development, for example a café.
2. Ensuring the design is accessible for people using wheelchairs or other assistive devices.
3. Adding more washrooms.

***“This area already has a dock. I would add a restaurant or two.”***

## **Rossdale - 220 responses received**

Participants were asked: “Will what is being proposed allow for the enjoyable use of this site? Why or why not?” The qualitative responses were then coded as positive (122 responses); identifying issues and concerns (68 responses); and providing ideas and advice (30 responses).

### *The most frequently identified positive comments included:*

1. The central location will provide access to the river close to downtown.
2. The nearby area is already developed; therefore the dock will not have a large environmental impact.
3. It will add needed amenities to an underserved part of the river valley.

***“Ties in nicely with the funicular.”***

### *The most frequently identified issues and concerns included:*

1. The lack of available parking close to downtown.
2. Low accessibility of the launch from the existing parking at Kinsmen Leisure Centre.
3. The lack of other amenities in the area, including washrooms.

***“No parking or washrooms? No thanks.”***

### *Other ideas and advice received included:*

1. Coordinating the development of the dock with other plans for the Rossdale site.
2. Consider adding commercial development like a restaurant or bar.
3. Ensure the dock can be accommodated given the construction taking place on the Walterdale Bridge.

***“If further development is done at Rossdale plant then I think this would be a wonderful view or access point.”***

### **Dawson Park- 203 responses received**

Participants were asked: “Will what is being proposed allow for the enjoyable use of this site? Why or why not?” The qualitative responses were then coded as positive (103 responses); identifying issues and concerns (54 responses); and providing ideas and advice (46 responses).

#### *The most frequently identified positive comments included:*

1. The re-grading of the slope on the approach to the launch will improve its accessibility.
2. It will provide another point to access the river.
3. The development will improve and enhance the already existing amenities.

***“Grading the slope down to the river at Dawson will be a huge improvement and hugely appreciated.”***

#### *The most frequently identified issues and concerns included:*

1. The impact of increased use on nearby fish habitat.
2. Concerns about personal safety and vandalism of the proposed development.
3. The distance between the dock and the parking lot.

***“Too close to the fish habitat rehabilitation area.”***

#### *Other ideas and advice received included:*

1. Increasing the number of patrols by police and park rangers.
2. Understanding and mitigating the impact of high-water levels/flooding on the dock.
3. Mitigate the odours from the outfall near the dock.

***“We need park rangers throughout the river valley, but Dawson Park is in great need.”***



### **Capilano Park/50th Street – 204 responses received**

Participants were asked: “Will what is being proposed allow for the enjoyable use of this site? Why or why not?” The qualitative responses were then coded as positive (121 responses); identifying issues and concerns (59 responses); and providing ideas and advice (24 responses).

#### *The most frequently identified positive comments included:*

1. The development will provide a much-needed upgrade and expansion to the existing facilities.
2. The separate hand launch may help reduce conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users.
3. Reconfiguration of the parking area will alleviate some current access issues.

***“A great addition to what already exists.”***

#### *The most frequently identified issues and concerns include:*

1. Safety concerns regarding the interaction between motorboats and other users (non-motorized boats, fishing, dog walkers).
2. Concerns about noise pollution from motorized boats.
3. Lack of available parking.

***“Need a larger parking area for trucks and trailers.”***

#### *Other ideas and advice received included:*

1. Ensure the off-leash dog park is considered during the planning/construction of the dock launch.
2. Consider the addition of washrooms to the site.
3. Consider placing the dock upstream from the launches to minimize navigational hazards.

***“I use this location every week with my dog. I would prefer the hand launch to the east of the existing vehicle launch, so as to avoid causing problems for boaters.”***

## CONCLUSION

On the whole, citizens who participated in the public engagement opportunities are quite supportive of the Boat Docks and Launches initiative and many are excited about the prospect of increasing access to the river. Generally, they are happy with the proposed amenities, but have concerns about the availability of washrooms and parking. As well, many would like to see at least one of the sites receive a limited amount of commercial development (an independent coffee shop or restaurant) that would help to create a destination in the river valley.

The input received during this public engagement will assist the City to make decisions as plans for the Boat Docks and Launches initiative proceed. Additional public and stakeholder engagement activities may occur at later stages of the project. More information on the status of all the River Valley Connections initiatives can be found online at [Edmonton.ca/rivervalleyprojects](http://Edmonton.ca/rivervalleyprojects).