

What We Heard Report

Emily Murphy Park Renewal

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Edmonton

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A. Project Overview

Emily Murphy Park is a popular place for recreation as part of the North Saskatchewan River Valley parks system.

Emily Murphy Park is a popular place for recreation as part of the North Saskatchewan River Valley parks system. It offers citizens access to the river valley for use of trails, the boat launch area, bookable picnic sites, playground and parking areas. Park amenities include:

- Building with washrooms;
- Parking;
- Sheltered and non-sheltered picnic sites;
- Playground;
- Hand/carry boat launch;
- Toboggan hill; and,
- Walking and cycling trails.

The City of Edmonton determined a need to enhance the quality of Emily Murphy Park and rehabilitate the park infrastructure. The aging park infrastructure has deteriorated over time due to heavy usage and weathering.

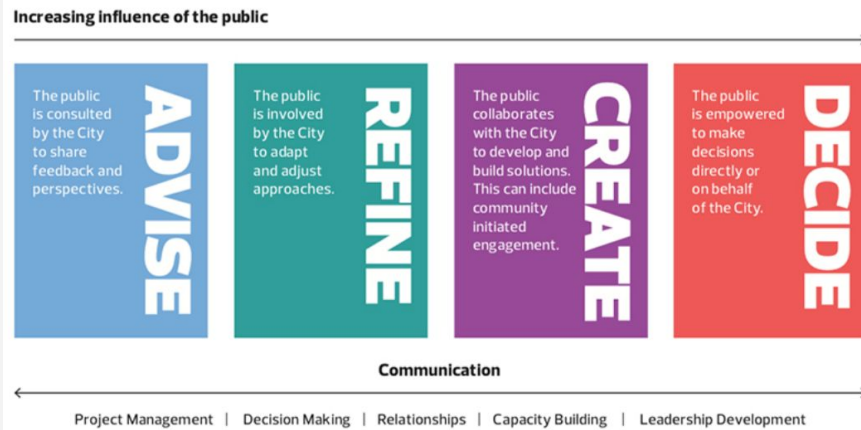
The purpose of this project is to renew the existing park roads, parking areas, and signage at Emily Murphy Park to revive a high-quality public space within the North Saskatchewan River Valley. The water fountains were evaluated for renewal, but, determined replacement as part of the future washroom facility renewal project was the most efficient option.

B. Public Engagement

Public and stakeholder engagement was guided by a Decision Map and Public Engagement Plan.

Following the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement process, a Decision Map was completed to determine if public engagement was required by outlining the project phases, decision makers, role of the public and if public and stakeholder input is required. The Decision Map concluded that public input would be at the Advise level of the Engagement Spectrum, where the public is consulted by the City to share their feedback and perspectives.

The City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum.



The COVID-19 Pandemic has suspended in-person public engagement until further notice. As a result, public engagement for this project was held online with no in-person event considered.

The Public Engagement Plan (PEP) was prepared and included the background and context of the project, identified the opportunity statement, role of the public, public input needed for decision making, the participants and audiences and outlined the public engagement activities.

We proposed one public engagement event in the form of an online survey presenting the Preliminary Design plan. The Preliminary Design stage was selected to include public engagement to present the preferred plan to the public for feedback to assess public support and to identify a need for further refinement if required. Key stakeholder groups were included in the online public engagement.

The role of the public was to ADVISE, to share feedback and perspectives on the Emily Murphy Park Renewal.

C. How We Engaged

An online survey was prepared to gather feedback as part of the Preliminary Design phase of the project. The survey was live from November 30 to December 14, 2020. The survey was featured on the City's website and Mixed Topic Survey through the Insight Community. Postcards with the survey link were circulated to the neighbouring community of Windsor Park and posted on the park webpage. Road signs and yard signs also advertised the public engagement opportunity. The same survey link was shared directly to key stakeholder groups. The survey was also shared as part of the Mixed Topic Survey which is circulated to the Insight Community, a database

of residents actively involved in city building across the City of Edmonton.

Prior to the launch of the online public engagement survey, the project team consulted with City of Edmonton departments and the Accessibility Advisory Committee to consider opportunities to make the park trails universally accessible to users with mobility challenges (such as strollers, walkers, wheelchairs, etc.)

D. Who Was Engaged

The online survey was open to the public and engaged the following key stakeholders:

- Residents in the Windsor Park neighbourhood
- Residents in nearby communities
- The general public who drove by the roadside signs (residents of the City of Edmonton, people employed in the area, etc.)
- City of Edmonton residents registered in the Insight Community

The online survey gathered 2,675 responses in 2 weeks

E. What We Asked

The online survey included questions on the following topics:

- How often survey respondents visit the park
- What amenities they use when visiting the park
- Support for the two proposed trail connections
- Support for overall park renewal plan
- If the plan missed anything
- What future amenities they would like to see in the park

F. What We Heard

A total of 2,675 people participated in the survey:

- 64 from the open link survey and
- 2,611 from the Insight Community Mixed Topic survey.

Below is a summary of common themes from comments in support, and opposed to the proposed park renewal plan.

Between the two survey platforms, there was strong support for the overall park renewal concept, 88% survey and 77% (Insight Community Mixed Topic survey)

Support for the park renewal plan

- Renew aging infrastructure.
- The two trail connections improve safety by keeping people off the road.
- The renewal improves accessibility within the park and to other parks in the river valley.
- The renewal maintains the natural state of the river valley.

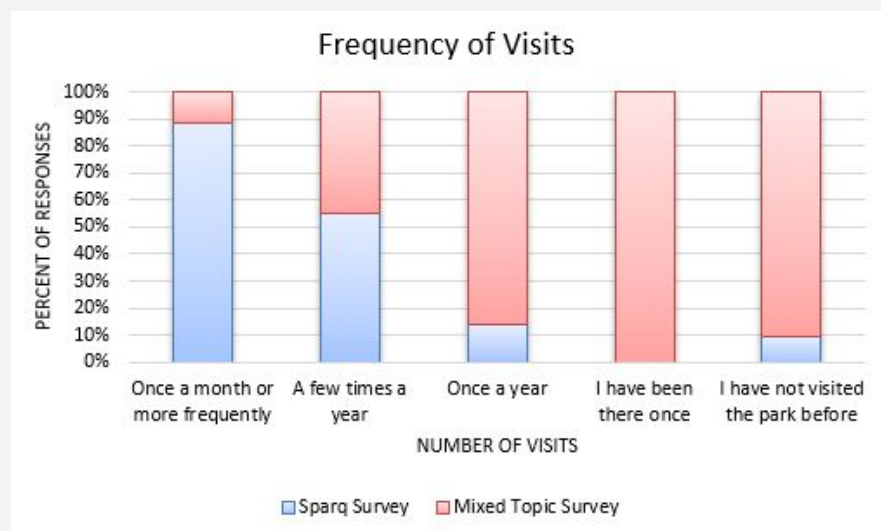
Opposition for the park renewal plan

- Prefer the washrooms and water fountain renewal before the road renewal.
- Gravel surfaces on the proposed trail connections are not accessible for those with mobility challenges (for example: wheelchair, stroller, and walker.)
- Project cost
- Over development in the park.
- Length of time for water fountain replacement.

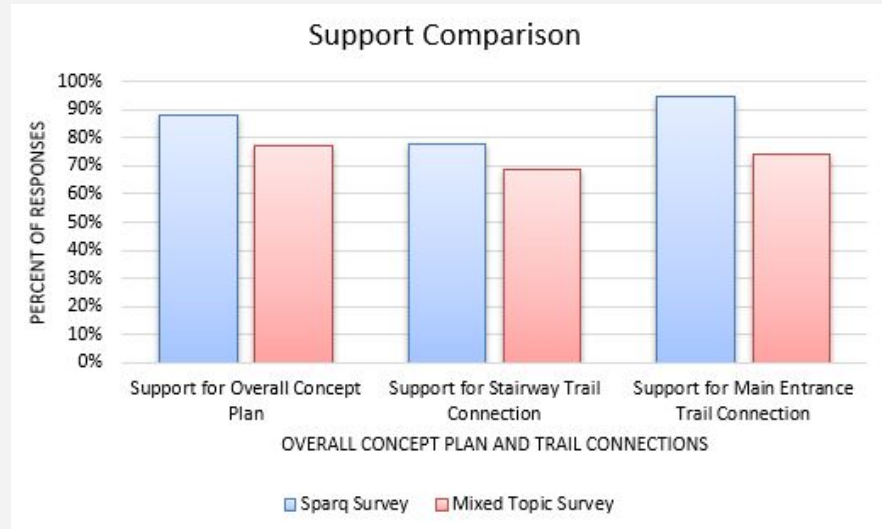
Between the two survey platforms, there was strong support for the overall park renewal concept, 88% (survey) and 77% (Insight Community Mixed Topic survey).

The key difference between responses in the open link and Insight Community Mixed Topic surveys is that the open link survey respondents demonstrated they are more familiar with Emily Murphy Park, with 56% of respondents visiting the park once a month or more frequently.

The majority of respondents to the Mixed Topic survey were not as familiar with the park with the majority of respondents (32%) visiting the park a few times a year. This feedback is illustrated in the **Frequency of Visits** graph below.

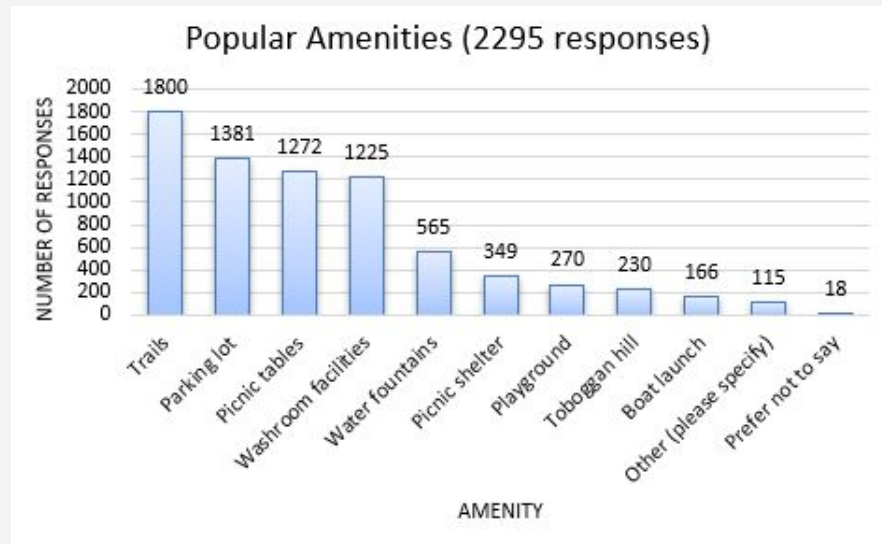


The open link survey, and therefore those more familiar with the park, had responses that were more supportive of not only the overall renewal concept (88%), but also the stairway trail (78%) and main entrance trail (95%) connections. The Mixed Topic responses were slightly less supportive of the overall renewal concept (77%), and of the stairway trail (69%), and main entrance trail (74%) connections. This comparison is shown in the **Support Comparison** graph below.



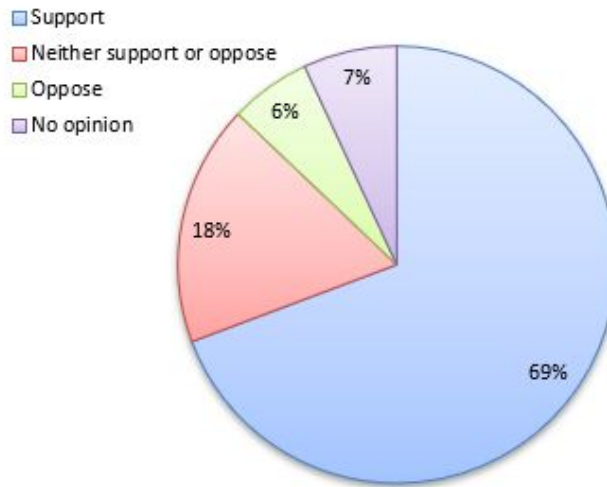
Combining both surveys, the public feedback outlines the following:

- Four amenities emerged as the most popular:
 - Trail
 - Parking lot
 - Picnic tables
 - Washroom facilities



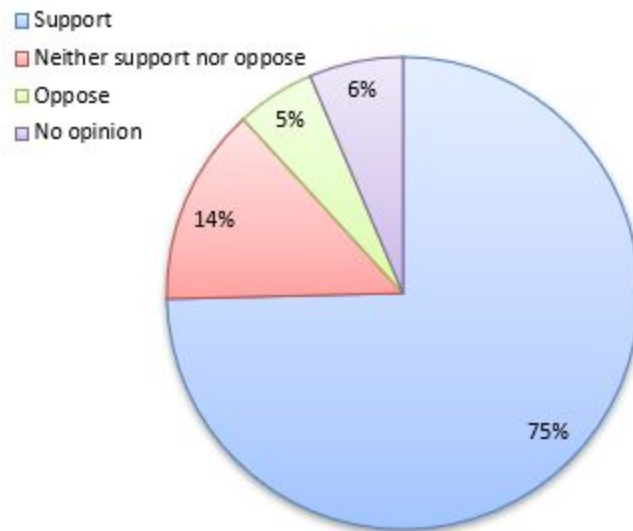
- Strong support for the proposed stairway trail connection at 69%

Support and Opposition for the Staircase Trail Connection (2675 responses)



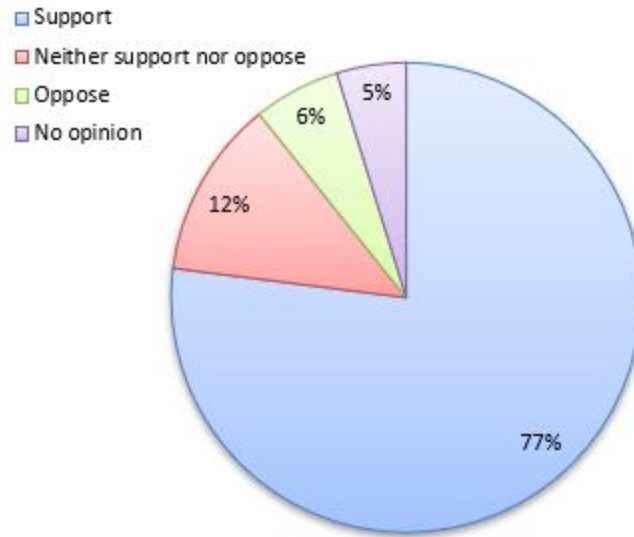
- Strong support for the proposed main entrance trail connection at 75%

Support and Opposition for the Main Trail Connection (2675 responses)



- Support for the park renewal plan at 77%

Support and Opposition for the Emily Park Renewal (2675 responses)



Comments

The survey included five open-ended questions that allowed respondents to leave comments. The main comment themes in support and opposition for each open-ended question are outlined below.

To what extent do you support or oppose the Staircase Connection Walkway?

Support (69% of comments)

- Happy to have more trail connections.
- Improves pedestrian safety by giving them a path to walk on, not the road.
- Formalizing a path that was created by use.
- Good connection point for people traveling across the river on Groat Road or coming down from the University of Alberta.

Opposition (6% of comments)

- Building more trails to maintain.
- Crosswalk and trail are not necessary.
- Gravel trail is not ideal for cyclists.
- The cost for the park renewal is not necessary considering the other financial challenges the City is facing now.
- Prefer less development in the park.

To what extent do you support or oppose the Main Entrance Walkway?

Support (75% of comments)

- Formalize a path that was created by use.
- Improves pedestrian safety by giving them a path to walk on, not the road.

- Integrates the park into other recreational areas.
- Convenient location.
- Trail connecting to the parking lot.

Opposition (5% of comments)

- Building more trails to maintain.
- Postpone this work until after 2021 due to City's financial challenges now.
- Trail addition is not necessary.
- Too many developed trails in City parks.
- Pave the pathway, gravel is not accessible for the mobility challenged (wheelchairs/strollers/walkers, etc.)

Have we missed anything important to your use of the park?

- Improve public transit access to the park.
- More lighting.
- More seating areas..
- Fire pits in the picnic area.
- More focus on ecology and sense of place.
- Consider bike accessibility such as:
 - Making the new the trail connections shared-use paths
 - Using pavement instead of gravel
 - Adding a ramp to the staircase to roll bikes down
 - Adding more bike racks

Is there anything else you would like to see in Emily Murphy Park in the future?

- Splash pad
- Viewing locations at the river
- Swimming pool or beach on the river
- Outdoor ice rink
- Amenity building or warming huts
- Bike racks
- Exercise programming
- More lighting
- Public art
- A tracked cross-country ski trail
- More picnic sites, picnic shelters
- Firepits

Out of Scope Comments

Some comments were not directly related to the project scope, they particularly involved commentary on the following topics:

- The improvements to Groat Road Bridge and the boat launch.
- Requests to change the name of the park or include a plaque identifying Emily Murphy's involvement in racist, anti-Semitic, and eugenics movements.

G. What Happens Next?

What We Did

The feedback was considered while finalizing the preliminary design plan alongside technical analysis and City policies. The high-level of support for the overall park renewal and proposed trail connections confirmed that no changes were necessary to the proposed park plan.

Due to budget constraints, the future amenities are not included in the scope of this project. The future amenities question was included in the public engagement to inform future park projects.

A common theme in the comments was that the gravel material chosen for the proposed trails is not ideal for those with mobility challenges (for example: people with strollers, walkers, wheelchairs.) The project team explored multiple options to accommodate barrier free accessibility, and concluded what was proposed in the park renewal plan balanced the needs of most park users, limiting development in the park, and cost effective materials for long term maintenance of the park. This included the following reasons:

1. Gravel was the selected material to be consistent with existing trails in the park.
2. Gravel is more cost effective to maintain.
3. A larger area was required for the proposed main entrance trail in order to accommodate the appropriate slope angle as part of barrier free requirements. This would require clearing the existing trees nearby. Therefore to minimize the impact to the existing park, it was decided not to make the pathway barrier free.
4. The project team consulted the Accessibility Advisory Committee on their challenges accommodating barrier free access. The Committee preferred making the trails accessible. Due to the above noted constraints, the Committee suggested providing appropriate signage at the top and bottom of the slope and to consider a hand railing if feasible. Based on this information, the proposed trails did not require further design intervention.

Next Steps

The What We Heard Report and project updates will be shared on the City of Edmonton webpage. There will be no further public engagement conducted for this project.

An Environmental Impact Assessment and Site Location Study will be developed and taken to City Council for approval. Construction is tentatively scheduled for summer 2021.

