

RIVER VALLEY PLANNING MODERNIZATION



Ribbon of Green & River Valley ARP

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated: January 2022

River Valley Planning Modernization FAQ

Ribbon of Green Completion and River Valley ARP Modernization

Updated January 2022

Table of Contents

PROJECT INFORMATION	2
What is the River Valley Planning Modernization Project?	2
What is the Ribbon of Green Plan?	2
What is the River Valley ARP?	2
Why is the City doing this project?	2
Why are the two streams of work being completed together?	3
Didn't the City already start the Ribbon of Green project?	4
What is the status of the Ribbon of Green SW+NE Plan?	4
Will this project replace the Ribbon of Green plans created in the 1990s?	4
What is the study area for this project?	4
What is the timeline for this work?	5
What technical studies are included in this work?	5
How does the Ribbon of Green currently direct planning in the River Valley?	6
ENGAGEMENT	6
How will Indigenous Nations and Communities be engaged?	6
What are the engagement opportunities?	7
How is engagement occurring during COVID-19?	7
How will decisions be made?	7
PHASE 2 PROJECT INFORMATION	8
What is the purpose of Land Management Classifications (LMCs)?	8
What process informed the mapping of the LMCs?	8
Which trails are shown on the LMC maps?	9
How (and why) are private lands shown in the LMC?	9
Why does the Preservation LMC not include cycling as a compatible use?	10
RELATED PROJECTS/INITIATIVES	10
National Urban Park Initiative	10
The City Plan	11
Zoning Bylaw Renewal	11
Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy	11
Natural Connections Strategic Plan	11
Downtown Public Places Plan implementation	12
Touch the Water/North Shore Promenade	12
River Crossing	12
Climate Resilient Edmonton: Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan	12

Gallagher Park Concept Plan	13
Big Island Provincial Park	13
Valley Line LRT construction	13
River Access Strategy	14
Prairie Sky Gondola	14
EL Smith Solar Farm Proposal	14
Mill Creek Daylighting	14

PROJECT INFORMATION

What is the River Valley Planning Modernization Project?

- This project will create an integrated planning and regulatory framework for the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System (the “River Valley”) to ensure that it remains a vibrant and ecologically resilient green network as the city grows. There are two streams of work within this project:
 - Completing the Ribbon of Green Plan
 - Modernizing the [North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan, Bylaw 7188](#) (“River Valley ARP”)

What is the Ribbon of Green Plan?

- The Ribbon of Green is our highest-level strategic plan for the River Valley.
- It was initially developed in the early 1990s to guide appropriate public use and enjoyment of the River Valley and to protect ecologically sensitive areas.

What is the River Valley ARP?

- The [River Valley ARP](#) was adopted in 1985 and is the City’s main tool for regulating development within the River Valley. It guides the City in evaluating proposed River Valley projects.
- The main goal of the River Valley ARP is to ensure the protection of the river valley and ravine system over the long term.

Why is the City doing this project?

- Currently, planning guidance for the River Valley is spread across multiple documents, some dating to the 1970s.

- The planning context has evolved considerably in the last 50 years, which means that our River Valley plans don't reflect the current state of the system, or help us navigate today's challenges and opportunities.
- The River Valley ARP has not been substantially updated since it was adopted in 1985. Since that time, the City has grown, our approach to planning and environmental protection has evolved, and new challenges, such as climate change, have emerged. As part of this work, the River Valley ARP will be updated, or "modernized," to reflect today's planning context.
- Existing River Valley planning tools are not well-aligned, which means that it can be difficult to make decisions that support our vision for the future.
- With the recent completion of The City Plan, we have a clear sense of the planning priorities for our city, and how the River Valley fits into that future.
- This project will help improve the function of open space in the River Valley, while prioritizing the protection or restoration of important ecological areas and corridors.

Why are the two streams of work being completed together?

- Ideally, these two planning tools work together to provide guidance on River Valley protection, management and use:
 - The Ribbon of Green provides the **strategic direction**: our overall vision for the future of the River Valley and how it is connected to the broader open space network, and to other networks; our high-level plans for the connected open spaces within it; and the policy that guides our decisions about what happens in that space.
 - The River Valley ARP provides the **regulatory framework**: the standards and rules that guide our evaluation of individual project proposals, and cumulative impacts, in the River Valley.
- Currently, these tools are not well-aligned with other City policies and strategic goals. This has led to a lack of clear guidance, as well as to inconsistency, in how decision makers evaluate and prioritize land use proposals - especially when it comes to understanding tradeoffs, competing priorities and the cumulative impacts of River Valley development projects.
- Our intent in updating these tools together is to bring them into alignment to support better decisions for the future of the River Valley.

Didn't the City already start the Ribbon of Green project?

- Yes - the first part of the renewal of the Ribbon of Green plan took place from 2017-2020 and was called the [Ribbon of Green SW+NE](#).
- That project:
 - updated the vision, guiding principles and policy framework for the River Valley as a whole, and
 - developed direction for activity nodes, ecological protection and trail development for the [southwest and northeast parts of the system](#).
- At that time, we didn't have the resources available to complete planning for the whole system, so we focused on the unplanned parts of the River Valley (SW and NE) and committed to come back to finish the rest as soon as we could.

What is the status of the Ribbon of Green SW+NE Plan?

- Due to the restrictions on Council meetings in place due to the COVID pandemic, there was not an opportunity to present the plan at Urban Planning Committee. As a result, the Ribbon of Green SW+NE was advanced to Council by memo in July 2020, and now forms part of the City Administration's guiding policies for the River Valley.
- The Ribbon of Green SW+NE represents an interim step, and will ultimately be incorporated into the final Ribbon of Green Plan once the next phase of renewal is complete.

Will this project replace the Ribbon of Green plans created in the 1990s?

- Yes. At the end of this project the original Ribbon of Green Master and Concept Plans will be retired, and the new Ribbon of Green Plan will come into effect.

What is the study area for this project?

[Project Study Area Map](#)

- The **Ribbon of Green** study area includes all of the lands within the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System with the exception of those lands addressed through the Ribbon of Green SW+NE (Phase I). It includes the central River Valley, Mill Creek Ravine, Fulton Ravine, north Whitemud Ravine, the Big Lake area, Horsehills Creek, as well as River Valley lands south of 41 Avenue SW that were annexed to the City of Edmonton in 2019.

- The **Central River Valley**, which includes the River Valley lands between Hawrelak Park and Dawson Park, and the parks themselves, has been identified as an area of focus. Because of its higher level of development and use compared to other portions of the River Valley, the current and anticipated demands on this area are higher and the ecological pressures and impacts of existing use are more significant. As a result, a more detailed level of analysis and planning will be undertaken for this area.
- The area of application of the **NSRV ARP** includes the entire River Valley as mapped in Schedule A of the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan (Bylaw 7188). In addition, the plan area is being updated to include lands south of 41 Avenue SW, annexed from Leduc County and the Town of Beaumont in 2019. Delineation of these areas is underway and a bylaw amendment to include these areas will be brought forward to City Council in 2021.

What is the timeline for this work?

- The project started in late 2020 and is planned for completion by the end of 2022.
- Work to be undertaken in 2020 includes preliminary mapping and assessment of the study area, best practice review, current state assessment, and planning for Indigenous and public engagement.
- The first phase of Indigenous and public engagement will take place in the spring of 2021.

What technical studies are included in this work?

- This project includes a wide range of technical studies, including ecological, environmental, cultural/archaeological, wellness, celebration and geotechnical assessments. For the most part, these studies will be done at a desktop level.
- For the Central Reach, the project will recommend additional studies that should be completed at more detailed stages of planning, including field studies.
- Current-state mapping, environmental/jurisdictional scans and policy alignment backgrounders will also be completed at the outset of the project.
- The results of the technical studies, together with City policy direction and engagement input, will form the basis for decision-making for the project.

How does the Ribbon of Green currently direct planning in the River Valley?

The Ribbon of Green provides guidance in a number of ways:

- The **Vision** defines the ideal state of the River Valley and Ravine System and the **guiding principles** describe the elements and actions required to achieve the vision.
- **System-wide policies** guide decision making and direct the planning, design, and management of the River Valley.
- **Land Management Classifications** guide design and programming decisions to create park amenities and operations standards appropriate to their location within the River Valley and Ravine System.
- **Ecological and program guidance** provides initial spatial direction to function as a starting point for future site-specific planning - including restoration areas, the high-level trail network, trailheads and amenity nodes (key destinations).
- **Implementation items** direct the acquisition, management, programming, and development of publicly owned land within the River Valley.

ENGAGEMENT

- It is important that the public, Indigenous Nations and Communities and stakeholders be involved in shaping the planning of Edmonton's river valley to create a stronger, more relevant and effective framework and approach.

How will Indigenous Nations and Communities be engaged?

- The City is committed to keeping First Nations and Métis communities informed and engaged on projects in the North Saskatchewan River Valley that may be of traditional cultural, historical and environmental interest.
- We know that this land is important to many Indigenous Nations and Communities, historically and culturally, and it is important that these Nations and Communities are part of conversations about the past, present and future of Edmonton's River Valley.
- The City will invite 31 regional Indigenous Nations and Communities with historical, cultural and environmental interests to engage in this project.
- Additionally, Indigenous peoples living within Edmonton are invited to participate through stakeholder and public engagement activities.

What are the engagement opportunities?

- Four phases of public and stakeholder engagement are planned for this project. In each phase, there will be a variety of opportunities for the public and stakeholders to provide input.



- The project will strive to engage a diverse public, as well as relevant stakeholder organizations, partners and landowners. The [River Valley Planning Modernization Public Engagement and Communications Plan](#) outlines our approach to engaging the public and stakeholders, and gathering their insight and feedback to inform the Ribbon of Green and North Saskatchewan River Valley ARP projects.

How is engagement occurring during COVID-19?

- With in-person public events postponed and physical distancing a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are committed to delivering project information and meaningful public engagement opportunities efficiently and safely.
- Phase 1 engagement opportunities will be provided primarily through remote and online platforms using tools such as online surveys and interactive maps, virtual sessions and the project webpage.

How will decisions be made?

- The City of Edmonton values Indigenous and public engagement processes and activities that contribute to project decisions by providing City Council and Administration with the best possible information to support decision making.
- Engagement is one factor in the decision making process. Other important factors that inform project-level recommendations include:
 - Findings and recommendations from technical studies
 - Direction from existing City policies and plans
 - Budget considerations
 - Council direction

PHASE 2 PROJECT INFORMATION

What is the purpose of Land Management Classifications (LMCs)?

LMCs help us to identify our desired future for the River Valley. While they are driven to some extent by the existing condition of the land (is it of high ecological sensitivity? Is it currently developed?), they may also point us towards a different future use/state. The LMCs will be supported by Program and Ecological Guidance (to be developed in Phase 3), which provide additional detail on desired future state, and help the City and community partners to advance planning for preservation/restoration, renewal/development and programming.

What process informed the mapping of the LMCs?

The LMCs were initially delineated using a variety of spatial data criteria to identify areas that would be suitable candidates for each class. Following this initial assessment, manual refinement was conducted to resolve identified areas of conflict (which could be placed into a number of potential classes), as well as areas that conflicted with existing management plans (in parks where the master planning process had been completed in the past 10 years), or other existing zoning (such as the Whitemud Ravine). This refined classification forms the content included in the interactive portal.

Preservation criteria were defined, including:

- major landslide areas
- flood hazard areas
- 60 m buffer around the North Saskatchewan River as well as any major streams, wetlands and natural waterbodies
- ecology score polygons with a rating of “very high”
- “core” and “habitat” class polygons
- very or extremely high environmental sensitivity polygons

Active/Working Landscape criteria were defined, including:

- Footprint of existing developed areas (buildings, parking lots, etc.)
- Intensively-used areas such as Fort Edmonton Park, Valley Zoo, ski hills, golf courses, and event spaces
- Areas that are planned for more intensive uses in Council-approved plans
- Roads that fall outside of park boundaries

Conservation criteria were defined, including:

- The primary trail network:
 - Existing improved (paved/granular) trails

- Trail buffers: 15m for paved trails and 5m for granular trails (note: any trails within 30m of the river's edge had a special buffer applied to them to remove the conservation designation on the river side of the trail)
- Pedestrian bridges
- Areas for informal, unstructured recreation and gathering

Which trails are shown on the LMC maps?

- The Ribbon of Green maps currently being shared online show existing City-maintained trails - not the complete network of unimproved/recreational trails that currently exist in the River Valley.
- Where the trail is outlined in yellow (which represents a Conservation buffer), it has been classified as Conservation, and intended use includes cycling/mountain biking. If the trail is just a black line through a Preservation area, its intended use is in alignment with Preservation (foot-based travel only). A black line through a grey area indicates alignment with Active/Working Landscapes, which also permits cycling.
- The Ribbon of Green defines only a high-level trail network, including major access points and regional connections, and is not a comprehensive trail inventory. It functions as a starting point for further site-specific planning, where field assessments and public engagement will define the complete recreational trail network.

How (and why) are private lands shown in the LMC?

- The Ribbon of Green is a long-term, strategic plan that provides direction for all lands within the River Valley and ravines. As such, a Land Management Classification has also been applied to private parcels, while acknowledging that any proposed future uses identified for lands that are currently privately-held are dependent on those lands coming into City ownership, should that take place at any point.
- The Ribbon of Green does not change the existing development rights of private landowners set out in the Zoning Bylaw and any applicable statutory plans for the area.
- Private lands are identified in the Land Management Classification mapping with a unique colour-scheme (darkened, with dashed-white border) to acknowledge that they are not currently within City ownership.

Why does the Preservation LMC not include cycling as a compatible use?

- Areas designated Preservation prioritize ecological protection, and therefore limit recreation to foot-based travel. The River Valley is the city's main biodiversity core area and wildlife corridor, providing critical wildlife habitat and ecological function. These areas are fairly unique in our city in being relatively intact natural systems, which makes them extremely valuable from an ecological perspective. Much of the rest of the system is more developed, and more heavily used.
- While we understand that there is a desire to accommodate a range of recreational experiences, including a variety of mountain biking styles, in the River Valley, we do not feel that changing the Preservation LMC to include additional recreational activities is the appropriate solution.
- Resolving the current challenges with the recreational trail network - in particular reconciling the existing single-track trail network - requires a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of demand, opportunities, potential impacts and management/mitigation strategies than the ROG is able to address.
- A detailed trail strategy has been identified as the appropriate tool to achieve those objectives, and Administration is working to obtain funding for that work.
- Acknowledging that that work will take time, the City is committed to working directly with partners in the interim to address the most pressing management issues and, if possible, to provide targeted ways to meet demand without compromising ecological integrity.

RELATED PROJECTS/INITIATIVES

National Urban Park Initiative

- The City of Edmonton and Parks Canada are in the early stages of planning this work, and are anticipated to begin broader discussions with potential partners, stakeholders, and the general public in the coming months. Further information about the initiative, and our proposed approach to this work, was provided to Urban Planning Committee on November 15, 2021 (see item [6.1 in the meeting agenda](#)). We anticipate collaborating closely with Parks Canada as we evaluate potential benefits, challenges, and general implications of the initiative for City of Edmonton programs and policies, including the RVPM project.

The City Plan

- The [City Plan](#), Edmonton's renewed municipal development plan and transportation master plan, sets strategic direction for the way Edmonton grows - its land use, mobility systems, open spaces, employment and social networks. The plan identifies the "Green and Blue Network," Edmonton's system of open spaces, of which the River Valley forms the backbone.
- The City Plan provides important, current guidance for the Ribbon of Green, in the form of policy intentions, guiding values, city-building outcomes and "Big City Moves".

Zoning Bylaw Renewal

- The City's Zoning Bylaw sets out the rules for the location and size of buildings constructed on all property in Edmonton. It also provides rules for the types of activities that are allowed to take place on those properties. The City is conducting a [complete review](#) of Edmonton's Zoning Bylaw, including analyzing current land use zones used in Edmonton.
- The timing of this work presents an important opportunity to align our city-building tools to ensure clear, consistent, and integrated guidance - from strategy to land use regulation - for the River Valley.

Breathe: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy

- [Breathe](#) is Edmonton's city-wide plan for open space. It provides strategic guidance to ensure that each neighbourhood is supported by an accessible, connected network of parks and open spaces as the city grows.
- The Ribbon of Green takes its direction from Breathe, applying the open space functions of Ecology, Celebration and Wellness and planning for the appropriate quantity, quality, distribution and connectivity of River Valley open space.

Natural Connections Strategic Plan

- [Natural Connections](#) is Edmonton's plan for the protection, management and restoration of local natural areas and biodiversity, and the engagement of the community in that effort.
- The Ribbon of Green will support the outcomes of Natural Connections, applying an ecological network approach to planning in the River Valley.

Downtown Public Places Plan implementation

- The [Downtown Public Places Plan](#) provides a 20-year vision and direction for the entire Downtown public places network, including strategies for improving the provision, connectivity, and functionality of Downtown public places.
- The plan identifies key recreation, active transportation and visual connections from downtown to the River Valley, which will help to guide the Ribbon of Green.

Touch the Water/North Shore Promenade

- The [Touch the Water](#) project is intended to improve access to and within the river valley, creating enhanced opportunities for recreation, celebration, heritage interpretation and social gathering.
- The project includes two distinct but connected areas: the **Rossdale area** is proposed to extend from 94 Avenue NW to the Walterdale Bridge, and the **North Shore Area** will extend along the northern bank of the North Saskatchewan River from the western edge of the Walterdale Bridge to Government House Park, alongside River Valley Road.
- As this project progresses, we will seek opportunities to align Ribbon of Green direction with the planning and design outcomes of the Touch the Water project.

River Crossing

- River Crossing is a long-term city-building initiative focused on transforming the western area of the Rossdale neighbourhood into a vibrant community and a place that embraces and celebrates its rich history.
- The River Crossing Project includes a [Heritage Interpretive Plan](#), which guides how heritage and culture will be reflected and communicated throughout the area as it evolves over time and a [Business Plan](#), which lays out a framework for how the area can redevelop over the next twenty years.
- The plans for how this area, at the heart of the River Valley, will evolve over time will be an important catalyst for Ribbon of Green implementation.

Climate Resilient Edmonton: Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan

- [Climate Resilient Edmonton](#) focuses on understanding the climate impacts we are already experiencing and how they may shift in the future due to ongoing climate change, and how we can build resilience for those impacts.

- The River Valley provides many ecological services that, if protected, will help us to remain resilient to the effects of climate change - e.g. flood mitigation and carbon sequestration. The Ribbon of Green will identify opportunities to support Goal 10 of this plan: *"Edmonton's natural ecosystems continue to provide essential ecosystem goods and services such as clean air, clean water, and biodiversity."*

Gallagher Park Concept Plan

- The [Gallagher Park Concept Plan](#) establishes a 20-year vision for development and use of the park, which is home to the Muttart Conservatory, Edmonton Ski Club, Cloverdale Community League and the Edmonton Folk Festival. It includes an analysis of opportunities and constraints as well as public engagement on the vision, programming and uses of the park.
- Once complete, the Ribbon of Green will provide strategic guidance for more detailed levels of planning, including concept plans.
- In completing the Ribbon of Green for the central River Valley, the project team will take into account the priorities, opportunities and constraints identified in existing plans, including the Gallagher Park Concept Plan.

Big Island Provincial Park

- The Woodbend-Big Island area is one of the River Valley's most ecologically rich and dynamic natural areas, including an old growth forest, regionally significant wetlands and critical wildlife corridors. Program and ecological guidance for the area is included in the [Ribbon of Green SW+NE](#) plan.
- The City of Edmonton, in partnership with the Province of Alberta and Enoch Cree Nation, is exploring the feasibility of establishing a provincial park at Big Island. The Ribbon of Green will provide important strategic and policy guidance in this process, and the plan will be updated with the development of a park concept once complete.

Valley Line LRT construction

- Construction of the southeast part of the Valley Line LRT started in spring 2016, and the line is expected to open in 2021. It includes the new Tawatinâ Bridge across North Saskatchewan River and a stop northwest of the Muttart Conservatory, which will provide an accessible connection to the central River Valley.

River Access Strategy

- The River Access Strategy was initiated in 2013 to inform the development and location of infrastructure and amenities for river-based activities. Following public and stakeholder engagement, the [River Access Guiding Principles](#) (Policy C586) were presented to Council for approval in 2015.
- These principles, along with further work completed internally on site criteria, design guidelines, and a draft river use plan which identifies appropriate locations and intensity of use at each location, will inform the Ribbon of Green completion.

Prairie Sky Gondola

- In 2018, Prairie Sky Gondola approached the City of Edmonton with a proposal to build and operate an urban gondola, which would have five stops connecting Rossdale to Whyte Avenue.
- In January of 2020, a preliminary report by the proponent concluded that the project merited additional study.
- This is an ongoing project. Additional information will be provided as it becomes available.

EL Smith Solar Farm Proposal

- City Council has approved a planning application to rezone land at the E. L. Smith Water Treatment Plant site. Epcor will develop the site for a solar farm that will be used to power the E. L. Smith Water Treatment Plant.
- The project site is within the study area of the [Ribbon of Green SW+NE plan](#) (the first phase of Ribbon of Green renewal). The SW+NE plan currently provides guidance in alignment with existing and anticipated future water treatment land use needs only. The plan will be updated to reflect Council's new direction.

Mill Creek Daylighting

- In 2017, the City completed a preliminary study to assess the feasibility of restoring the natural connection and creek channel between Mill Creek and the North Saskatchewan River. "Daylighting" the creek in this way would restore fish and wildlife habitat, mitigate flooding issues in the area, improve water quality, and provide recreation and education opportunities.

- The study concluded that daylighting Mill Creek is technically feasible. It also provided initial cost estimates for three different restoration and development concepts that the City could explore.
- The project was not advanced for further design work due to resource constraints. At this time, a funding source for design and implementation has not been identified. The project is considered to be on hold until funding becomes available.