



**Natural Connections**  
Edmonton's Integrated Natural  
Areas Conservation Plan

Public Engagement Process Report 4

# Open House Consultation Results Final Report

---

City of Edmonton, Office of Natural Areas  
December 2006



**Table of contents**

Highlights.....3  
Background and methodology .....4  
Public commentary .....4  
Key recommendations .....7  
Appendix One: Open house attendee written comments ..... 8

## Highlights

Over 100 Edmontonians attended four workshops hosted in each of the City's four quadrants: northwest, northeast, southwest and southeast.

Opinion registered through conversation and written submissions was remarkably similar to that collected through the online survey and public and ENGO workshop. Attendees were strongly in favour of enhancing efforts to protect the City's remaining natural areas and to preserve the functionality of the ecological network.

Key issues raised by open house attendees included the following.

Securing the natural areas network was the single most important issue to open house attendees, who indicated that they wish the City to act quickly to prioritize unprotected sites for acquisition and to make the budget allocations required to do so.

Attendees challenged the City to protect natural areas prior to receiving development plans, effectively making conservation a requirement rather than a voluntary obligation entered into by the developer. Related to this was the observation that the City needed more effective legislative tools to support conservation and, when necessary, compel landowners to preserve existing natural areas.

Several open house attendees lamented the City's anthropocentric approach to 'parks' management and emphasized that natural areas are not intended only for human benefit but for the benefit of all living things.

A large number of open house attendees across Edmonton wished the City to maintain the zoning of agricultural land within municipal borders rather than see that land rezoned for residential or industrial development. Key areas cited were the Horsehills region, the agricultural lands to the west of the City and, especially, wetlands in agricultural areas in the southeast.

Attendees also spoke about the importance of communication, public engagement, education and public involvement.

Ninety-five open house attendees left contact information and indicated that they would like to be involved in future public engagement efforts to support the development of *Natural Connections*. It should also be noted that a significant number thanked the City for the opportunity to provide input, either in written submissions or in conversation.

## Background and methodology

The Office of Natural Areas launched a significant media campaign to raise awareness of the opportunity to be involved in its public engagement campaign (see Report 1: State of Natural Areas Report Release). Follow-up recruitment efforts included sending a letter, e-mail invitation and e-mail follow-up to identified stakeholder groups (see Report 4: Public and ENGO Workshop for stakeholder correspondence). Open house attendees tended to have learned about the open houses from print media and radio coverage of the release of the *State of Natural Areas Report*. Stakeholder groups sent representatives to the Public and ENGO Workshop.

The Office hosted four workshops, one in each of the City's four quadrants, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. as specified.

November 20	Northwest	Day's Inn	15 names left
November 21	Southwest	Riverbend Community Hall	39 names left
November 23	Northeast	Delwood Community Hall	20 names left
November 29	Southeast	Woodvale Community Hall	<u>20 names left</u>
			94 names total

The open houses were attended by well over 100 Edmontonians, of which 94 left contact information and asked to be involved in future public engagement efforts related to natural areas conservation; 40 percent of those attended the southwest open house, which was attended by the largest number of people.

The Office of Natural Areas mounted all the *State of Natural Areas Report* maps for viewing by attendees; Office staff was available to answer questions. Flip chart paper was mounted to the wall to encourage response to specific questions.

For all but the first open house, worksheets were also prepared to encourage attendees to provide written comments on conservation issues. See Appendix One for the questions and written comments.

## Public commentary

Open house attendees made written comments on a broad spectrum of conservation issues. Open house attendees seemed to appreciate the challenge of balancing conservation with rapid population growth but argued strongly in favour of enhanced conservation efforts. In particular, sentiment was high that the time for the City to act was now: it seemed to be consensus that acquisition, though more expensive than five years ago, would never be less expensive than it is now. Attendees challenged City Council and the Administration to demonstrate through action – the creation of supporting policy and budget allocations – that they are committed to preserving Edmonton's functional ecological network.

Specific issues raised by attendees have been grouped on thematic lines as shown on the following page in Figure 1. Response rates can nominally be considered a percentage of total attendees – that is, 24 of 94 attendees, or 25 percent, identified acquisition as the single most important issue. In most cases, couples completed a single worksheet together, so frequency/percentage rates should be considered provisional.

**Figure 1: Frequency of natural areas conservation issues raised by open house attendees, by theme**

Prioritize acquisition/allocate budget/borrow funds 24 (25%)	Work more aggressively with developers to conserve natural areas 15 (16%)	Shift conservation focus away from human use to acknowledge other species 14 (15%)	Make environmental sustainability a Council focus 12 (13%)
Improve public education and public involvement 9 (10%)	Protect creeks and ravines* 9 (10%)	Protect agricultural lands from development 8 (9%)	Use residential densification to reduce development pressure 7 (8%)
Protect wetlands, recharging areas, saline springs, etc.* 7 (8%)	Promote conservation donations – i.e., land trust and ECAP* 7 (8%)	Make conservation a planning priority, not afterthought 6 (7%)	Protect all existing natural areas* 5 (6%)
Provide/protect natural areas W of 142 St, N of river* 5 (6%)	Construct wetlands to manage stormwater 5 (6%)	Protect habitat* 5 (6%)	Balance recreation and protection 5 (6%)
Protect Horsehills region* 4 (5%)	Lobby provincial government to enhance legislative tools† 4 (5%)	Protect large core areas* 4 (5%)	Pursue restoration/naturalization 4 (5%)
Work closely with NGOs to manage natural areas 4 (5%)	Improve use of MRs/ERs† 3 (4%)	Use native vegetation whenever possible 3 (4%)	Adopt Earth Charter or its principles in sustainability 2 (3%)

\* All issues marked with an asterisk may be considered subsets of a prioritized acquisition strategy; that is, they are in some way related to the number one issue and are more specific recommendations for action within that theme.

† These might be considered variant expressions of the same idea – change municipal authority to support conservation.

As indicated above, securing the natural areas network was the single most important issue to open house attendees. No less than one person in four indicated that s/he wished the City to act quickly to prioritize unprotected sites for acquisition and to make the budget allocations required to do so. Related issues included attendees' wish that creeks, ravines, wetlands, core areas and areas west of 142 Street be protected. Some felt that development too much development close to, or even in, the river valley was being permitted.

Attendees challenged the City to protect natural areas prior to receiving development plans, effectively making conservation a requirement rather than a voluntary obligation entered into by the developer. A related observation was the need to enhance municipal authority to protect natural areas, whether that is through acquisition strategies, expansion of the municipal reserve allotment and environmental reserve designation, land exchange programs, greater zoning stringency, expropriation or other measures that might arise out of amending the *Municipal Government Act*. Some attendees said in conversation that the City needs not only an integrated *conservation* plan but an integrated *development* plan that reconciles economic, environmental and social concerns.

Several open house attendees lamented the City’s anthropocentric approach to ‘parks’ management and emphasized that natural areas are not intended only for human benefit but for the benefit of all living things. They stated strongly that the City has a responsibility to preserve the biodiversity and requisite habitat that exists now for future generations. In conversation, this was, again, linked to the City’s acquisition strategy, in that attendees felt certain natural areas with habitat implications for other species must be identified as priority areas.

A large number of open house attendees wished the City to maintain the zoning of agricultural land within municipal borders rather than see that land rezoned for residential or industrial development. This was raised particularly in the northeast workshop (see below) but was also raised in each of the other open houses. In side conversations, attendees frequently cited the value of Edmonton region market gardens, particularly with the increase costs of shipping food to Edmonton from other regions, and said they felt compromising those areas for industrial development was short-sighted since food would never not be in demand but oil and gas resources would ultimately be depleted and their economic value null. In the northwest, attendees were concerned about the disappearance of prime agricultural lands west of Edmonton. In the southeast, attendees noted the importance of protecting the remaining wetlands from residential development.

Attendees also spoke about the importance of communication, public engagement, education and public involvement.

Due to the geographic catchment of the four open houses, attendees at each also identified issues specific to the area that corresponded to the City’s approximate cardinal quadrants – northwest, northeast, southwest and southeast. These ‘site-specific’ issues are identified in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Geographic conservation issues raised by open house attendees, by quadrant**

Northwest	Northeast	Southwest	Southeast
Attendees were concerned about the lack of parks and natural areas west of Laurier Park and advocated protection of the river valley and tributary ravines.	Attendees indicated strong support for the preservation of agricultural land in the Horsehills area.	Attendees indicated support for restoration efforts and ‘naturalized’ stormwater ponds.	Attendees particularly cited the need to protect wetlands in the City’s agricultural zones in the southeast.

Attendees from the City’s largest quadrant, delineated by being north of the North Saskatchewan River and west of 97 Street, were disappointed by their relative lack of access to the river valley or other natural areas. Accordingly, they voiced great concern that areas such as the McKinnon Ravine continue to be protected and that efforts be made to provide a natural areas experience in closer proximity than the river valley and tributary ravine system.

In the northeast, as discussed in detail above, attendees indicated strong support for the preservation of agricultural lands in the Horsehills area.

In the southwest, the quadrant with the best access to natural areas both in the North Saskatchewan River Valley and the Whitemud Creek area, attendees indicated strong support for restoration efforts, including measures to re-introduce native vegetation and remove invading weeds. Attendees also supported the efforts of the Drainage Branch to build constructed wetlands for stormwater management.

Lastly, as above, attendees in the southeast singled out existing wetlands in agricultural lands for protection.

It should also be noted that at least half of open house attendees indicated gratitude either in their written responses, on the sign-up sheet or in conversation that the City had made it possible for them to express their opinion on conservation issues. There was a tremendous amount of goodwill generated among attendees that should be respected as *Natural Connections* is developed.

All written submissions have been attached as Appendix One.

## **Key recommendations**

Open house attendees, for the most part, were interested in the same conservation issues and proposed similar solutions as did workshop participants.

The 95 people who left contact information asked to be kept informed about progress on *Natural Connections*, and indicated an interest in becoming involved in management strategies. Those names have been added to the stakeholder list of the Office of Natural Areas and will be notified of future developments and opportunities to provide additional input.

## Appendix One: Open house attendee written comments

The Office of Natural Areas provided a handout with the following questions to prompt written responses from attendees.

- How do Edmonton's natural areas contribute to your quality of life?
- How would you suggest the City prioritize lands for protection?
- What is the City doing well with respect to natural areas conservation?
- What could it do better?

### Northwest

1. Development should be directed away from areas of good agricultural land. Enhancement of the natural environment should be given higher priority. Urbanization is strategically hazardous because failure of energy supply would cause endless dislocation of necessities of life.

The City is right to have a team to monitor what is happening to our local environment. It provides expert advice for formulation of policy. Urban living is not sustainable. We must learn to live a sustainable lifestyle or perish. Understanding and enhancing natural habitat is essential to this end.

2. Excellent maps. I look forward to more discussion about the forces that have shaped the landscape to date and into the future, perhaps in the workshop/focus group? I really support the idea of putting the report in the library for access by all. You have made a fantastic start. I hope this is the basis for strengthened continued natural areas protection in Edmonton and surrounding area.
3. The biggest problem as I see it is affordability. Land has tripled in price in recent years and won't get any more affordable. I would suggest that working with the development industry to try and come up with solutions may help solve the problem. For example, the 10% MR requirements could be worked on and made easier to deal with if it was broadened in scope to enable land swaps or MR swaps with significant areas. This would make these areas as valuable as developable land. If so-called land swaps weren't restricted to plan areas, the bigger land dealers could see it won't [illegible] the purchased lands and deal with the city on them. The trade off would be higher densities, parks in plan areas, etc. there seems to be a bigger requirement for school sites than demand.

### *Flip chart comments*

How do natural areas contribute to your quality of life?

- Natural areas are what human beings are at home in. they are where we come from. We share this world with other forms of life and depend on them.

How would you suggest the City prioritize lands for protection?

- Please leave us space for parks and trail systems east of 142 Street.
- West of Laurier Park, there are no parks for families to enjoy a picnic or family events.
- We need some jogging trails in the river valley west of Parkview!
- Prioritize based on affordability and sustainability. I.e. Look at lands that will withstand development.
- Preserve the best agricultural land; keep areas that might be linkable.
- Keep Laurier Park and Terwillegar Park as they are forever! i.e., natural, unpaved, undeveloped dog off-leash parks.
- The more people we have in the city, the more green spaces we need – not manicured parks but real natural areas.
- Stop building west of the city on agricultural land – start expanding east of the city.

- Natural areas with public access to the river valley west of Laurier Park and on the north side of the river.
- Preserve the creeks and ravines from development. Keep natural, preserve from more homes; ravines shouldn't be exclusive real estate.
- Keep large natural areas, not just small parks, eg., Nose Hill Park in Calgary. Large natural areas give identity to the city.
- Edmonton without the river valley would merely be an industry stink-hole. Keep more large natural areas.

### Southwest

4. Natural areas are essential to my quality of life in Edmonton. Saving natural areas should be considered in every facet of business and development. Put money aside so action can be taken. The City is not doing well; there having been far too many opportunities lost. Waterways filled in and woodlots lost. Some of the cattail-storm-water ponds are encouraging but there must be rules and legislation to encourage developers to save those places that will indeed enhance that development.
5. Natural areas contribute a lot to the quality of life. It breaks up the mundane look of communities with just buildings. The City should have the ability to legislate to developers a percentage of natural areas, tree groves to be left alone. Try to preserve areas of trees, which offer shelter from winds. Save money from planting new trees which usually end up dying anyway.

First of all, [the City needs to] implement this study. It needs to follow the advice of this study.

I am concerned that developers and city tear down natural areas and groves of trees to accommodate their developments. They end up planting trees that do not fit with the areas. The City should have a policy to legislate protection of areas and natural areas, even if it is private land for community development.

6. Natural areas give me peace and tranquility. It gives me the ability to hike in nature. Do not just prioritize, but protect!

Parkland is acquired in a moderately good way for active use. This needs connections through to natural areas.

It would be good to see/review/have input into the policy framework that will protect natural areas. Staff spoke of process and potential new zones. I am not interested in money dedicated to parkland in the guise of natural areas...these are complimentary but their primary function differs. We need to protect habitat, natural functions such as water filtration, groundwater, recharge areas, groundwater discharge areas.

7. I think the maps are a bit over optimistic. To call Whitemud Freeway a green corridor is a bit of a stretch. I think the city has to take incredibly bold steps. Borrow to buy up land/property which will become green areas. The trust fund is a great way to go.

Limit building permits for urban sprawl. The downtown east initiative is great. Central-north west is in need of green areas (Westmount, *etc.*)

8. Natural areas are the source of my quality of life in Edmonton. While urban amenities are appreciated, natural areas are the source of inspiration and relaxation in my city life.

Just protect some [natural areas]! You could and have spent too much time worrying about what to protect, while development rolls along. Just protect something!! Protect natural areas, support nature festivals, promote recycling, *etc.* Need to expand natural areas and promote them as value-added lands to developers.

The maps at this open house portray a better situation than the reality. Areas that appear green but are not natural include the ring road, cemeteries, parks and native reserve. These areas should be white as is Namao which has natural parks but is not protected.

9. The City needs to create a policy to conserve as many natural areas as possible. It would be a shame to lose the small amount of land still available.
10. For me, nature is very healing and soothing. I couldn't survive without natural areas to visit. I love being surprised by the wildlife and the plants that I discover. This is a very selfish view. Wildlife and plants die when natural areas are destroyed. They need these areas far more than I do. To them, it is a matter of life and death.

Just about all of the unique areas have already been destroyed and there is only enough money to save some of the others. Therefore, the wildlife corridors would be my priority.

Most important thing. Find a way to make conditions so tough for developers that they willingly hand over land to the city. Refuse permission to build! Use the conservation methods that the city already has access to. Expropriation for example.

I am not part of the city staff so I am not sure what the city is doing well. What could it do better? Only people are given consideration right now. Natural areas are only looked at in the light of how people can use them and what they mean to people. Plant, animals and birds are rarely considered and yet they are far more important than us. If we ceased to exist as a race, nature would carry on quite happily without us. If all the plants and animals were wiped out we would die very quickly. I realize that the proposed wildlife corridors are an attempt to help wildlife but this is only a token gesture in the grand scheme of things.

11. Natural areas are necessary for the health of all including wildlife. Proactive approach to labeling sensitive areas and create an awareness of saving more natural spaces.

Lots of good maps, plans and research. Keep working at a higher profile regarding conservation plans. Keep at it and keep us informed of new initiatives and ways to support or donate to the cause. Go for it!

12. Close your eyes and imagine a world without green, in all its variations. No grass, no shrubs, no trees. No birds, no grasshoppers, no bees, no gophers, no coyotes, no rabbits. No life. No soul. Bring sci-fi movies to mind, doesn't it. Our natural areas allow me, assist me, transports me to another place. Do you know that in one stretch of trail that goes from 82 Ave to river valley, you can go through hot and dry, then damp and humid zones? That you can close your eyes, and not know that you are in the city. I don't have to leave home to take a trip in the country. I just have to hit the hiking trail!! Blessed be!

I know that it may not be \$\$ feasible but just buy it all. Damn the cost! After speaking with April this evening, it would appear that there are opportunities for land owners to gift land/to keep title and still receive some benefits for their generosity and far sightedness.

Financial opportunities would/could be the annual surplus that usually appears in the city budget to find more efficient ways to manage transit (not that it isn't managed efficiently). Ie. Are the small buses less costly to operate than the large ones?

Finding ways to create or change legislation provincially to create or enhance programs that would encourage the protection of our forest, grassland/prairie areas.

I would like to add here the education regarding the importance of looking after our earth/our mother. I would be thrilled to see the city of Edmonton become part of the Earth Charter movement (this is bigger than just the environmental (earth) but looks at our community in earth as a living system.

As I see our natural areas dug up, rich farmland turned into condo developments or (shudder) golf courses and shopping centers, I wonder how far off some of our sci-fi flicks really are. If we all work together we can turn those green spaces on the maps into red and pink spaces.

13. Quality of life; I might survive without natural areas, but never contentedly. Just being in a natural place is relaxing and cheering. Important to me, being a bird watcher, butterfly lover, scenery buff, and plant studier (I participate in the Plant watch program, a local, national and international recording of where certain plants bloom – important for monitoring changes such as global warming, etc.). Also, in Europe, for generations, gardeners and farmers have let wild plant blooming guide planting times, *etc.*

Priorities for protection: strive to save the habitat that migratory and nesting birds like and need, and the areas where plants thrive. Pay attention to unusual habitats and species if possible. Two goals I have is to have a natural areas close to every Edmontonian (there are areas without now). Keep and restore those linkages. Important things: advertise and nurture the land trust when (not if) it gets going.

City is maintaining the river valley through there is some questionable construction near the riverbank edge and too near the ravines.

City could resist the temptation to concentrate more on fattening its tax base and expanding its population and remember that though natural areas may not pay taxes, they help life over the living for those who do. Also that the City should be responsible to future generations of animals, plants and humans.

14. Natural areas extremely important to quality of life. River valley contributes to Edmonton international recognition, but should be left natural as much as possible (*i.e.*: minimal paved trails, wood chips much friendlier than hard gravel.

All creek/water bodies should be given as much protection as possible, with riparian areas left unmanicured to give maximum waterfowl protection, etc.

But grasslands/benchlands/woodlands are under protected away from the river. Should try and connect the dots. Can city not have some control over developers? They have to approve developer plans, council should take more restrictions on them.

Anyway to maintain a green corridor along with the major utilities/road ring road? Eg: line of trees/berms to separate traffic from the edge? (UK roadways are natural areas for plants, etc.)

Most important! Produce proper re-vegetation guidelines when rehabilitating disturbed ground. Eg: native plant species. Discourage awful weed invasions (*i.e.*: in Fort Edmonton cycle path and Keillor Road. Minimize width of paths – 9 ft is plenty, you don't need another 3 ft either side scraped bare.

City is doing a good job trying to maintain trails but please discourage mountain bikes from making side unofficial trails.

15. Edmonton natural areas are extremely important to the quality of life. We are fortunate to live on a ravine that is a tributary of the Whitemud Creed. Many years ago, I was equally fortunate to meet Edgar T. Jones and was able to watch him band and identify birds. It was something that has led to being an avid bird watcher and participant of the Edmonton Nature Club. I look forward to the many organized field trips in the city, in areas near by the city and more distant areas. Since I retired a couple of years ago, I have had more time to enjoy my walks in the ravine, mountain bike, cross country ski and photograph these areas. We see deer in our backyard daily, frequently see coyotes, skunks, porcupines. We have numerous feeding stations for birds which we do year round but particularly in the winter. Preserving the trees and water is important to my self, my wife, and our family who have grown up to enjoy nature and the out of doors. Of we don't preserve these green areas they will be gone forever. Think the city is doing a good job of preserving the river valleys and I am particularly impressed with how the river has been preserved with the building of the new Anthony Henday Bridge. The areas around St. Alberta Beaver Hills Lake, Hermitage Park, Hawrelak Park, Whitemud ravine are areas I particularly enjoy. Many of these areas are there because our ancestors had insight. Thanks for keeping us informed and let us know what we can do for future generations.
16. I walk in natural areas frequently. They are soothing. I even enjoy them so much that as a Partner in Parks, I care for areas by weeding and enriching with native flowers and grasses.

Priority – by the variety of ecology, both within the areas and whether it is different from other natural areas within the city. The city should do its best to connect natural areas. Everybody should be able to reach a natural area without using a car.

There is growing evidence that homes near natural areas are more valued. They are taxed more after they are bought. Developers should be encouraged to protect natural areas. Part of the 10% of land that the city can require should be in natural native form. If there is none then the develop should pay to buy some close by/

The city should advertise these meetings better. All clubs involved with nature should have been notified. Even the Alberta Native Plant Council should have been asked to send emails out to its list.

Some of the park areas seem well protected but parks such as mill creek are overused. An area that is a network of trails is no longer natural.

I am glad that the city is cooperating with NGOs to set a conservation organization similar to Nature Conservancy of Canada.

17. The city needs a map of natural areas that includes species lists. You need to talk to the naturalists who know these areas to get information. The map needs to be available to all city departments involved in natural areas.

The city needs to consult with naturalists before attempting changes to natural areas. For example, if a saline wetland is turned into a constructed wetland, the composition of the water will change – the ecosystem will change and the unique plant species will die.

18. Quality of life: essentially to my enjoying retirement in the city.

Priorities: any natural areas should be kept from development. Probably the closer they are to high density populations should get highest priority.

Defining river valley areas for no development. Urban sprawl must be controlled, but it seems to be politically impossible. Thanks for having this material on the net.

Shoot coyotes.

### **Northeast**

19. Must keep all parkland full 10%. Also stop natural areas from being changed now as the landowner do now what the city wish with the land. Is anything going to be done or is it just like what the mayor and council are doing to surplus school sites now? It's a sad city when the mayor is only interested in money. And to hell with people and the community. We need to protect all parkland, surplus school sits and natural areas. Now money is not everything. Mayor and council: do what the people wish. Not what you wish. You were elected by the resident to represent them, not the people that want money.

20. The natural areas are critical to my sense of well-being, physical, emotional and spiritual health and my enjoyment of this city. Without these areas, I would seriously question living in this city. The entire NE agricultural areas and adjacent natural areas should be protected. This is a great asset to the city in terms of security and is a great model of the co-existence of agriculture and natural areas in an urban environment.

We should look for diverse eco-systems, larger tracts and areas that are rare or particularly sensitive.

This process is great but could have used wider and earlier notice. The city should look for additional leverage with those developers who refuse to consider preserving valuable lands. (stronger zoning bylaws).

21. It gives you peace of mind, where you can spend time without cars, traffic, noise. View the available natural sites that are available and set them aside or plan now for non-development. Everything seems to be how much money is it worth. We should put industrial farther out of Edmonton and keep the available natural areas for our citizens to enjoy. We bend over backwards to please big land developers and destroy the natural areas that should be preserved for our citizens and our children – future citizens.

22. We love to go for walks in the treed areas in various parks. It is wonderful to see wildlife and experience a world without development. The food that is raised in the NE area of the city and often sold at farmers markets or to local stores is a necessity to our food supply. The seed potatoes that are raised in the NE area are great all over the US and Canada – another important food source. Paving over the green areas that are left would be a disaster for our city. We all need trees to get rid of the Co2. all natural areas that are left in the city boundaries should be left as it is. protect all farm production lands that are left. Do more in-fill housing. Urban sprawl should be stopped. I'm not aware of what the city is doing expect for the beginning of the land trust.
23. The river valley provides us with a walk at least each autumn. Our church has picnics once a year. Many of our church members are or have been farmers in the Edmonton area. For history, it is important to have an area which would still be for agriculture. The city should prioritize the river valley as the city grows.

I very much appreciate the conservation plan for Edmonton. Having developments change various plans is not very good since long range plans would change negatively. Having walking paths and bike paths through natural areas may help to have Edmontonians appreciate natural areas.

The NE area is especially important with so many rivers in the area.

24. [How do Edmonton's natural areas contribute to your quality of life?]  
Desirable walking areas, enhanced if there are birds and wildlife

[How would you suggest the City prioritize lands for protection?]  
Treed areas preserved first, before they can be destroyed. Then unique areas (little mountain).  
Bordering creeks for walkways.

[What is the City doing well with respect to natural areas conservation?]  
Conservation director appointment, albeit late in the game. And now there is a lot of catching up to do with what is left.

[What could it do better?]  
Setting aside a constant amount of money each year to accomplish the above goals and promoting the conservation fund to the public and companies to speed up the process. As we have already discovered it is too late in many areas.

25. [How do Edmonton's natural areas contribute to your quality of life?]  
Peaceful space that is not human centered like a playing field. Wildlife protection and corridors.  
Habitat for creatures and birds.

[How would you suggest the City prioritize lands for protection?]  
Protecting the remaining natural areas from impinging human development. Purchase, donate, expropriation. Keeping the river valley free from intrusive development. Insisting on semi or constructed wetlands in developments (birds and aquatic wildlife).

[What could it do better?]  
Could do much better by identifying natural areas ahead of subdivision planning permissions and building into the planning the protection (and enhancement) of same.

Any special attention to the horse hills areas?

26. The natural areas keep providing a place where wildlife birds and people can mingle. I love to go walking in several areas with or without my family.

Natural areas have to be prioritized long before development reaches the city outskirts. Once a natural area is lost, it is gone for good. stay ahead of development.

The most important thing is to stabilize the percentage of natural areas we now have. Losing natural areas to development over the last 20 years has dramatically lowered the percentage of natural area within city limits.

Purchase more privately owned natural areas as they become available. I realize that there is significant costs associated with this but I believe its worth it in the long haul.

27. Natural areas are very dear to me. I enjoy walking my dogs in natural wooded areas, do bird watching, see deer, coyotes, squirrels, *etc.* a tremendous stress reliever. I'm so glad the city of Edmonton had the foresight to protect the river valley from private development. Our river valley park system is the envy of many other centers. The trail system and off leash areas are tremendous. I often meet people who express their gratitude to have such areas to walk and fish and explore without having to leave the city. Well done!

28. I use the river valley areas for walking, cross country skiing and bird watching. I am in it 3-4 times a week. We are very lucky to have it and should protect more. As our population grows, we need these areas which are as natural as possible for protection of our sanity. We should proceed as quickly as possible to obtain these natural areas as once any development happens they are gone. Some of the river areas within the city are lands the river valley alliance is discussing and hopefully you'll be working together on these. Eco tour companies are being set up regularly and offer trips to varied locations. We can make Edmonton one of those locations if we preserve and promote instead of rampant development (especially wetlands/streams/creeks).

29. [How do Edmonton's natural areas contribute to your quality of life?]  
They are very important as a balance to a whole day spent in an office, for my sanity and health; going for walks, hearing and seeing wildlife. It is important for me to know that our city has pockets of natural areas that serve as a seed bank for nature plants and a home for beneficial insects and wildlife.

[How would you suggest the City prioritize lands for protection?]

Areas that are relatively close to each other and that are larger should be prioritized, also areas that have special features.

[What is the City doing well with respect to natural areas conservation?]

I like the fact that the city is talking about conservation plan and doing the online short survey. We need more examples of natural areas that are treasures and valued by the citizens. Highlight their value and importance. I would like to see an interpretative sign of the waterfowl we have observed on Klanathan Lake/Poplar Lake – educational purpose.

[What could it do better?]

Buy land before it is too late, negotiate with landowners and make it attractive and easy for land to be donated and/or protected. Educate the public about what is happening at this pace of development. Support higher density, but not at the expense of natural areas and parkland.

30. The natural areas within Edmonton are directly tied to higher quality of life. Whether it be tobogganing or skiing in the winter or biking, playing sports or just enjoying a family picnic in the summer time, my quality of life is greatly improved by access to these natural areas. My most fondest childhood memories all take place in the natural areas on the outskirts of the urban core and in the river valley.

While traveling around the world, even in incredible green countries such as New Zealand, the one thing I missed most and talked about with other travelers was the natural environment within the city limits. This should be a number 1 priority for the city, not only for the health of its residents but for the integrity of the city and to create a world-wide reputation as a unique beautiful city.

The city is doing well at addressing this issue at an economically good time for the city, which should make preserving the land easier and have no excuses not to do anything.

#### ***Flip chart comments***

How do Edmonton's natural areas contribute to your quality of life?

- Sometimes I have to visit one to remind me about how much I love Edmonton. The river valley has been one of my joys since childhood. The little upland woodlots are important too.
- I'm a birder and I talk often in the river valley, ravines and parks. I can pretend I'm back on the farm. I try to walk at least once a week so it's also part of exercise program.

What is the most important thing for the City to be doing in the way of conservation?

- Preserve the few remaining natural areas. Reconstructed wetlands don't take the place of the real thing.
- I agree, wetlands contribute to the health of the environment. Down the road we're going to need these bodies of water.
- Very important to preserve existing wetlands.
- Actively assist interested people to organize and learn community political process. Lots of organizations out there however many don't know how to carry their suggestions and concerns forward.

#### **Southeast**

31. I think that it is imperative that the city do what it can to preserve the natural areas within the city and its outskirts. As humans, our physical, emotional and spiritual health and well-being are intricately bound to nature. We need clean air to breathe; plants and animals contribute to this. Animals, birds, plants and trees contribute to our quality of life. Natural areas provide plans for people to get away from the stresses of every day life and opportunities to expose and teach future generations about nature. I enjoy having birds sing, seeing the beauty of nature in all its glory, variety, beauty every season of the year, and smelling the perfuming of flowers and grasses. Nature is a feast for all senses. I believe that this makes me more fully alive and human. We need to be responsible for our environment so that future generations will also be able to benefit from these resources. We need to be particularly sensitive and responsible about preserving habitat for endangered species – plant and animal. Urban sprawl, if done without consideration for the bigger picture, can intentionally or unintentionally put species at risk.

I appreciate everything Edmonton has done to protect the river valley and ravines. For some people, these are the only places that they are exposed to. Working with senior citizens who now live in continuing care facilities, I know how much they look forward to outings that go through natural areas either en route or as a destination.

I hope that even if development occurs around natural areas, that provisions for public access is part of the plan. I think that it is important to preserve wild life corridors. I'm disappointed to see how some corridors are already blocked and about how many natural areas have been lost since 1993.

I think that the most important thing that the city should do is, on the advice of naturalists/ environmentalists, protect the most sensitive areas, habitats, etc. for endangered plants and animals. Then, protect wild life corridors. And of course, continue to protect our river valley and ravines.

32. I think Edmonton would be a very lonely place without wildlife because places in Edmonton look better with a lot of trees and if there were no animals, I wouldn't want to live here when I'm an adult. The people in Edmonton should make areas without houses or roads into wildlife areas and then into protected areas. (Age 8)
33. We need to keep natural areas for our children (all children) to see and experience nature. The city needs to look at ways to re-build older inner areas, like Griesbach and the new Heritage Mall area, rather than moving further out. This would help not only to preserve natural areas but would help to repopulate the older schools.
34. Better communications.
35. Natural areas improve the quality of life for all city people since it provides a place to enjoy trees, water and wildlife. It teaches young people to appreciate natural areas and it is an investment in the future. Once gone, it cannot be reclaimed. Protection of natural areas should be a high priority not only for Edmontonians to enjoy, but also an area for wildlife to co-exist. Natural areas should not be sold to developers and newly developed areas should contain conservation areas as part of the planning. Many people exercise, plan family time and de-stress in natural areas, so it is of value to many people. I use the trails of Millcreek ravine and see many people cycling, walking, pushing strollers, etc. along the trails. It would be a great loss to many Edmontonians if the natural areas were developed.

The City of Edmonton had amazing planning in the past to preserve the river valley and ravines as parkland for all to enjoy. If it was residential like in Calgary, there would be nothing to use as recreational and conservation for the Edmonton area.

Please keep up the good work in preserving our natural areas for us and future generations to enjoy and appreciate. Green belts and natural areas are an important part of city planning.

36. Natural areas significantly improve quality of life in our city. They provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, wildlife sightings, the appreciation for flora and fauna, and contribute to our overall health and well-being. The city should make conservation of its existing natural areas a high priority. Partnership with land owners to further this goal remains a difficult thing, and must be done with careful consideration of the public and current stakeholders.

The city needs to create a network of green corridors throughout its land to enhance active commuting by bike and other modalities, and to encourage citizens to enjoy the outdoors to an even greater extent. Limit sprawl to save our natural areas!

37. Any area away from traffic/development is a chance to escape this busy city and relax. The city should start with the most at risk and act now. The city should buy land quickly as prices constantly rise, to ensure conservation. And stop top of valley development – nothing should touch the edge of the valley/ravine areas. This issue may not involve your mandate.
38. I think Edmonton would be a very boring and lonely place without many trees or many animals. Edmonton would look very ugly without any wildlife areas, so it would be hard for people who like to hike close to home to hike where they like to. When I'm an adult, I'd have to live in Edmonton.
39. There needs to be a major shift in our overall value system. I suppose this is somewhat like a vision/mission statement against which we measure our decisions in all areas of municipal (and hopefully regional) decision-making. For example, this initiative regarding conservation planning comes up with some proposals which undoubtedly will appear to conflict with what the transportation department sees as important. Is there a larger picture in which these different priorities can find a chance to dialogue? For me, it is important that this larger picture involve a concept of "quality of life" that goes beyond increase in money and what it can purchase. Some areas that fit into my quality of life are:
- a health, natural environment that includes water, air, soil, space and quiet
  - a caring community, especially for the protection for the vulnerable
  - equal opportunities for growth including education, creativity and finances.

[What could the City do better with respect to natural areas conservation?]

Looking into Edmonton's future within the context of shifts beyond our borders such as climate change, food security and population shifts.

40. Southeast Edmonton lacks the natural habitats of Whitemud and Blackmud Creeks for any long distance walking. It would be good to inter-connect and develop the wetlands in the far southeast to also help the natural movement of small wildlife as well.

Our wetlands need boardwalks and blinds with signboards to educate people as to what they can see both in vegetation and wildlife – species of birds, *etc.* Before all of the southeast is developed, more space around and wetland needs to be protected as wildlife and birds consider the edges or feature as a dead zone and will not habituate the space until they feel protected further in a tree stand.

41. Edmonton is a beautiful city and the river valley is one of its greatest attractions. I love the fact that the natural areas in the core of our city are so easily accessible (*e.g.*, Mill Creek Ravine). Love the bike trails and how protected they are from the noise and commotion of the big city. The priority of maintaining and protecting these areas should not be a question. They are essential to the quality of life of many Edmonton residents.

Natural areas are well-maintained and biking/walking paths are easy to find and well kept. I would like to see more bike paths and designated bike lanes along major roads to encourage environmentally-friendly alternatives to driving. I would like to see improved transit and public transportation systems to decrease traffic and reduce the need for bigger, wider roads. I think people would consider bussing or biking if there were provisions for this.

I would like to see conservation/ecology programs mandated in schools so that children develop an awareness and appreciation of Edmonton's natural areas and grow to become advocates for the environment.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide input!

42. There is a great deal of research indicating that personal and social well-being is enhanced by nature and natural spaces. It is not even experiences in nature, but its presence – visual, aesthetic, emotional. And it seems to improve cognition, reduce anti-social behaviour more. This is research in environmental psychology, sociology and other disciplines.

Everyone should have access to nearby nature – that there be natural spaces close to where people live (not just in river valleys, ravines, which by the way don't generally have bus access, which means many people have limited access). I'd even call conservation a social justice issue.

Ironically, at the same time as this Natural Spaces consultation, we hear that the school boards and city have a deal to develop school reserve lands. Why not let these spaces return to natural spaces? Here in Millwoods, we have large tracts of green space, mowed lawns, partly organized as sports fields. But much of this space could be naturalized, saving maintenance costs and allowing more "nearby nature". While most would not be large enough for great biodiversity, they would be moments of nature, and may help reintroduce something as simple as birds into our neighbourhood. We've tried birdfeeders and some shrubs to no avail but for sparrows and occasional chickadees.

Looking at the maps, my kids (8 & 9) asked, what's that ribbon of nature near us? – it's the tiny little ribbon of Millcreek south of Jackie Parker (?). Silliness – hardly a space for much play or biodiversity.

Final note – in October, I was a rep to a workshop on land planning. The facilitators had no good idea that "green spaces" were not necessarily "natural spaces."

43. Natural areas improve my quality of life by providing areas in the core (river valley) of the city by providing space to walk, bike, relax in that is natural. The natural areas need to be large and continuous, not just little patches. Larger and continuous natural areas can both serve wildlife and public spaces when managed effectively and constructed large enough.

Edmonton should prioritize based on the needs of plant/animal species needs first and then build public spaces around these areas. The city should enforce a greenbelt around the city that contains farmland, public natural areas and a large greenbelt that focuses on conservation.

The city is currently not doing well at advertising that there is a forum for community feedback. The city is doing even worse at managing the river valley development. The city needs to protect the Saskatchewan river for natural areas and public natural areas in and outside of the city. Making a deep and long green areas along the river will/can increase the prestige and international recognition the city has as being green and desirable to live in.

***Flip chart comments:***

Where should the City be focusing its efforts with respect to natural areas?

- Coordination of focus on natural areas, transportation department, city planning regarding residential and businesses.
- Reasonable access to natural areas.
- Beyond the \$ bottom line, the tax revenue, the warehouse mentality.

How do natural areas in Edmonton contribute to your quality of life?

- A refuge.
- A connection beyond to nature. *eg.* Highest participation in Christmas bird count in world.
- Help me be whole.