



Natural Connections

Edmonton's Integrated Natural Areas Conservation Plan

Public Engagement Process Report 7

Conservation Focus Groups

Final Report

City of Edmonton, Office of Natural Areas
December 2006



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Highlights

The focus group findings suggest that the public still has a difficult time with the abstract concept of “the environment” generally and natural areas conservation in particular.

When asked about the most important issues presently facing Edmonton, most participants gave answers related to growth pressures, such as housing, infrastructure, and city planning. Other common issues included violence, crime and policing. A few participants mentioned urban sprawl and pollution as concerns. However, conservation of natural areas did not receive specific mention as a top-of-mind concern.

Two focus group participants in professions that would ordinarily be identified within the environment sector were no better than others at identifying municipal environmental issues. In fact, one even said that “the environment” begins at the City’s municipal boundaries – meaning he felt the City had little or no jurisdiction for environmental issues, including conservation.

Participants repeatedly demonstrated an affinity for the City’s parkland, and perceived a clear connection between the abundance of green space in Edmonton and the overall quality of life that its citizens enjoy. However, for the most part, participants also equate green spaces with the City’s manicured parks and maintained trails as opposed to natural areas. Although the conservation of natural areas was not a top-of-mind concern for participants, they did agree there is value in preserving natural areas because natural areas improve the quality of the environment and add to the City’s natural beauty. Participants had little knowledge of past or current conservation and were equally ignorant as to how Edmonton compares with other jurisdictions in this regard.

Once the term “functional ecological network” was explained, participants were not surprised to discover that Edmonton’s river valley, ravine system and tablelands qualify satisfy the requirements to comprise a functioning ecological network. They tended to view this more as a result of natural circumstance – *i.e.*, a deep and wide river valley unsuited to development – than a result of foresight or planning. However, even if they were not willing to credit the City with ensuring the preservation of natural areas in the river valley and ravine systems, participants were clear that they believe the City has a critical role in preserving that attribute.

Participants were not familiar with the term “tablelands” and were not aware of the importance of the tablelands in preserving the integrity of the river valley system. As the City develops and implements its integrated natural areas conservation plan, special attention should be paid to ensuring that Edmontonians understand the essential interconnectedness of its constituent parts in preserving the functionality of the ecological network.

Of all the information presented during the focus group sessions, participants were most struck by the statistic that 23% of natural areas in the tablelands have been lost since 1993, and that 56% remain unprotected. The trend toward loss of natural areas in the face of rapid urban development was easily perceived. More than any other fact shared during the focus groups, participants responded to this information with an assertion of the importance of taking immediate action to conserve Edmonton’s remaining natural areas.

When asked to suggest action the City should take to support the conservation of natural areas, participants provided the following answers.

- Make efforts to better educate the public on the importance of preserving natural areas and the role of the Office of Natural Areas.
- Survey landowners to determine their intentions.
- Further classify natural areas to determine which are critical for maintaining the environmental integrity of an area and which are not.
- Focus on issuing development permits in areas that do not threaten existing natural areas.

Background and methodology

As part of its public engagement process, the Office of Natural Areas agreed to the value of conducting focus groups to probe in greater depth than would be possible through an on-line survey the opinions of Edmontonians regarding natural areas conservation. Teleologic Strategic Communications commissioned Janet Brown Consulting out of Calgary to conduct the focus groups with Edmonton residents.

The focus group sessions had the following objectives.

- Assess overall perceptions of the City of Edmonton, including the following contextual questions.
 - What are the most important issues of concern to citizens?
 - What factors influence residents' overall quality of life?
 - What do residents feel are the most important things that the City of Edmonton can do to maintain and enhance the overall quality of life of citizens?
- Understand the relevance of natural areas conservation within the City of Edmonton *vis-à-vis* other key issues of concern.
 - Is it mentioned as a top-of-mind concern?
 - How does it relate to other issues of concern?
 - How does it relate to the overall quality of life in Edmonton?
- Assess public awareness of efforts made to conserve natural areas within the City.
 - Of what efforts, if any, are citizens aware?
 - Do they believe efforts have been adequate?
 - What more should the City of Edmonton be doing in this regard?
 - How does Edmonton compare to other jurisdictions in North America?
- Assess public awareness of the concept of “functional ecological networks.”
 - Have they heard of this concept?
 - Do they think Edmonton has a “functional ecological network”?
 - Do they see value in having a “functional ecological network”?
 - Do they believe Edmonton’s “functional ecological network” is threatened?
- Gauge public reaction to several key facts about the conservation of natural areas within the City of Edmonton, including:
 - the history of conservation efforts in the river valley;
 - the history of conservation in the tablelands;
 - this size of natural areas within city boundaries; and
 - the loss of tablelands natural areas since 1993.
- Determine how the public would like the City of Edmonton to proceed with development that threatens natural areas.
- Assess the degree to which various information sources are received positively, including:
 - the City of Edmonton;
 - the provincial and federal governments;
 - landowners;
 - environmental groups, and
 - the media.

Two focus groups were held the evening of Monday, December 11 in facilities provided by Trend Research. A total of 20 people participated – ten in each session – who were recruited according to the following specifications.

- All were aged 18 years or older with a good mix of ages in each group.
- Approximately half were male and half were female.

- Each session included a mix of people from urban and suburban neighbourhoods.
- A variety of family compositions were represented – no kids, young kids, older kids, seniors, single, married, etc.
- A variety of socio-economic backgrounds – including education, income, and occupation – was represented.
- No more than one student, homemaker or unemployed person per group.
- All read the newspaper or watched television news at least five times per week.

The recruitment screener is attached as Appendix One. The actual discussion agenda is attached as Appendix Two.

Perceptions of Edmonton

At the beginning of each focus group session, participants were asked to think about the most important issues facing the City of Edmonton and to write down up to five issues.

The most common responses given relate to the growth pressures the City currently faces, such as housing, infrastructure, and city planning. More specifically, participants mentioned the following issues.

Housing

- Rising cost of housing.
- Difficulty for first time buyers to get into the housing market.
- Lack of affordable housing for lower income earners.
- Increased homelessness.

Infrastructure

- Increased volume of traffic on City streets.
- Disrepair of some roads.
- Slow pace of construction of new roads and interchanges.
- Need for further expansion of the LRT.
- Need to encourage greater use of public transit through lower fares and better schedules.

City Planning

- Improving process to predict future needs of the City, *i.e.*, roads and other services.
- Revitalizing older neighbourhoods.
- Minimizing urban sprawl.

Participants also raised concerns related to crime, safety and policing.

- Violence among teens and young adults – *i.e.*, murder of teen in Mill Woods, lawlessness on Whyte Avenue.
- Sentences for offenders.
- Funding for police services.
- The insufficient number of police officers.
- Drug trafficking and drug use.
- Recent controversies within the Edmonton Police Service.
- Personal safety when walking at night.

Given that focus groups took place within a few days of a major snowfall, it is not surprising that a number of participants mentioned snow removal and winter road maintenance as a concern, including the following specific observations.

- Inadequate number of snowplows owned by the City of Edmonton.
- Inadequate City budget for snow removal.
- Concern about how long it takes to clear major roads.
- The lack of snow removal on side streets.*
- The time it takes City to clear sidewalks for which it is responsible.

* Two days after the focus groups, on December 13, the City of Edmonton announced it would grade all City streets – including residential streets – to the pavement.

Other issues raised by participants included the following:

- property tax increases;
- raises for City Council;
- management of City finances;
- funding for education, health care and emergency services;
- auto insurance rates;
- pollution;
- photo radar; and
- services for the poor.

It should be noted that urban sprawl and pollution were the only issues mentioned that relate to natural areas conservation, in the sense that municipal development threatens conservation efforts.

Following the discussion about issues of concern, participants were asked to comment on what they value most about the quality of life in Edmonton. Their responses centered around three main themes: the economic strength of the City; the recreation and entertainment options available; and City parks.

Economic strength

- The ease of finding a job.
- The availability of high paying jobs.
- The growing number of shops, restaurants and services operating in Edmonton.

Recreation and entertainment

- The vibrant arts community, including theatre, music and visual arts.
- The many festivals, including the Fringe and Folk festivals.
- The number of community sports and recreational facilities.

City parks

- The natural beauty of the North Saskatchewan River Valley.
- The large amount of green space within the City.
- The number of local parks.
- The extensive river valley and ravine trail system.

The quality of life discussion clearly revealed the importance of parks and green spaces to City residents. However, for the most part, participants focused on manicured parks and paths as opposed to genuine natural areas within the city.

Conservation of natural areas

As mentioned above, conservation issues were not a top-of-mind concern among participants. Although they indicated that they see a strong connection between the abundance of parks in the City and quality of life, participants focused more on their use of and appreciation for manicured parks and paths, rather than natural areas.

Since the topic of conservation did not arise spontaneously, the focus group moderator introduced it, and defined conservation as “efforts made to preserve the natural areas within the City of Edmonton.”

Participants agreed that there is value in preserving natural areas because this helps improve the quality of the environment overall and adds to the natural beauty of the city. They did not, however, indicate specific awareness of the City's conservation efforts. This lack of awareness must be considered against the fact that the release of the City's *State of Natural Areas* report had achieved front-page coverage in the *Edmonton Journal* only one month before.

When asked how they think Edmonton compares to other jurisdictions in North America with respect to natural areas conservation, participants tentatively guessed that Edmonton was probably better than average. Their reasoning was that the topography of the North Saskatchewan River Valley discourages development and, as a result, most development has occurred above the river valley, leaving a wide swath of green space running through the City. Edmonton was contrasted to Calgary, whose river valley is not as deep, where comparatively less green space remains in the city's core. In other words, participants implied Edmonton's record of natural area conservation is better than most other cities by accidental virtue of its topography rather than any thoughtful planning or design on the part of the City of Edmonton.

Participants were surprised when told that Edmonton is among the best Canadian municipal jurisdictions when it comes to natural areas conservation. They said this is a fact that more Edmontonians should be aware of, and that it should be a point of pride for the City. And, although they didn't necessarily believe the City earned this distinction due to past foresight, they did want to see the City of Edmonton play a key role to maintain this distinction.

Functional ‘ecological network’

After an initial discussion about Edmonton's natural areas, participants were asked if they had ever heard of the term “functional ecological network.” None of the participants had and they could only offer vague guesses as to it term means.

To support a fuller discussion of this concept, participants were given the following explanation.

In *Land Mosaics*, Harvard ecologist Richard Forman identified four essential elements to comprise a functional ecological network.

- A few large patches of natural vegetation, *i.e.*, *core* areas.
- Wide vegetation corridors along major water courses.
- Connectivity through corridors and stepping stones.
- Heterogeneous natural areas within developed areas.

Based on this description, participants were asked if they thought Edmonton has a “functional ecological network”; most were still unsure whether this definition would apply to Edmonton.

When advised that, in fact, the river valley, ravine system and tablelands natural areas enable Edmonton to be one of the very few major municipalities in the world that can claim to have a functioning ecological network, participants were mildly surprised. They agreed Edmonton's ecological network, as defined, was probably extensive enough to qualify; however, they were not aware this was a point of distinction for Edmonton.

After reflecting on the information that Edmonton has a “functioning ecological network,” participants again suggested that this was more a factor of natural circumstances than foresight or planning. They also expressed the view that, due to growth pressures, Edmonton would not be able to maintain this network without careful municipal planning in the future.

More specifically, participants would like to see the City of Edmonton pursue the following actions:

- identify those natural areas that are critically necessary for the preservation of the network; and
- take action to prevent development in these areas and to limit development in the surrounding areas.

When asked to discuss the value of a “functioning ecological network” within the City, participants mentioned the following.

- Maintaining the habitat of the many animal species that live in the City.
- Having more trees to absorb CO₂ and improve overall air quality.
- Preserving the natural beauty of the City for future generations.
- Maintaining the recreational opportunities offered by these natural areas.
- Causing the City of Edmonton to focus on increasing density in urban areas rather than allowing further urban sprawl.

Historical perspective and key facts

Because participants had very little knowledge of conservation efforts in Edmonton, the focus group moderator introduced some background information to facilitate further discussion. Participants were briefed about:

- the history of conservation in Edmonton;
- relevant municipal policies;
- the size and distribution of natural areas; and
- the proportion of natural areas that are and are not currently protected.

The specific information shared in the focus group discussions can be found in Appendix Two.

Virtually all the information presented was new to participants. The most noteworthy observations arising out of the discussion about this information are summarized below.

Participants were not familiar with the term “tablelands” and were not aware of the importance of the tablelands in preserving the integrity of the river valley system. As the City develops and implements its integrated natural areas conservation plan, special attention should be paid to ensuring that Edmontonians understand the essential interconnectedness of its constituent parts in preserving the functionality of the ecological network.

Participants were surprised to discover that deliberate efforts to preserve the river valley date back to the early 1900s with the creation of Victoria Park. Many assumed the lack of development in the river valley was strictly a function of the threat of flooding and the difficulty of constructing buildings and industry in the valley and on the banks of the ravine.

There was no awareness of the Office of Natural Areas but there was agreement that Edmontonians should be made more aware of this Office and the importance of the work it is doing.

Participants are more familiar with the City’s manicured parks than they are with its natural areas. The focus group discussion caused participants to become more conscious of the connection between all of Edmonton’s open spaces, including parks, rivers, creeks, forested areas, grasslands, wetlands and lakes.

Participants had no knowledge of the size and distribution of Edmonton’s natural areas or the proportion of this area that is and is not currently protected. All agreed this is important information and suggested more should be done to improve awareness.

Participants were startled to discover that 23% of the natural areas in the tablelands that existed in 1993 have been lost and that 56% remains unprotected. More than any other fact shared during the focus groups, this one convinced participants of the importance of taking immediate action to conserve Edmonton's remaining natural areas.

When told that the natural areas in the tablelands have a raw land value of approximately \$150 million dollars, but could be worth as much as \$450 million if “real” land value is factored in, participants were not moved. For the most part, they found these large numbers difficult to comprehend and were not comfortable discussing the importance of these lands in terms of a ‘dollar value.’

At the conclusion of the discussion devoted to Edmonton’s conservation history, participants were asked to suggest how they would like to see the City proceed on conservation initiatives in the future. The following comments were made.

- The City needs to survey landowners to determine what they ultimately intend to do with their property.
 - If a landowner wants the land to remain in a natural state, the City could:
 - help the landowner with estate planning to ensure their wishes are maintained;
 - formally designate the land as a protected area; and
 - possibly provide reasonable compensation to the landowner.
- The City needs to further classify natural areas to identify which areas are critical for maintaining the environmental integrity of an area and which are not.
 - The City could then focus its efforts on these critical areas and work with those landowners in the following ways.
 - Organize land swaps – *i.e.*, trade “critical” land for land on which the City is prepared to allow development.
 - Provide specific instructions to landowners on how they are allowed to develop their property – *i.e.*, only grant development rights on the condition that critical lands are preserved.
 - Purchase the most “critical” natural areas.
- The City should focus on issuing development permits for land that does not threaten natural areas.
 - Future development should focus on under-utilized land rather than undeveloped land in its natural state.
 - Development in existing residential and commercial areas should be intensified.
- The City should make efforts to better educate the public about this issue, including providing information on:
 - the importance of natural areas to quality of life;
 - the challenge of balancing rapid growth and development with conservation; and
 - the role of the Office of Natural Areas in managing conservation.

Who do citizens trust?

Participants were asked to think about all of the stakeholders affected by the issue of natural areas conservation – including landowners, environmental groups, the media, the City of Edmonton, the provincial government, and the federal government – and the degree to which they trusted the information received from each. For the most part, participants don't believe any of these groups are completely trustworthy and assume that each has its own interests that it protects in addition whenever addressing any specific topic.

With regard to landowners, participants said that the stereotype of the greedy landowner who has no regard for the environment is the exception, rather than the rule. They believe most landowners are reasonable, and would be willing to work with the City to find adequate solutions to protect the environment and the natural areas located on land they own. They also believe that most landowners realize that they could enhance the value of any future development if they are sensitive to preserving natural areas – *i.e.*, houses in a subdivision close to a natural area will fetch a higher price than those that are not close to a natural area.

Environmental groups and the media are generally seen as reliable sources of information but participants are conscious that information coming from these sources may be presented to preference a particular point-of-view.

All levels of government are considered essentially trustworthy. However, participants are more used to hearing environmental and conservation messages from the federal and provincial governments than they are from the City of Edmonton. Participants want the City of Edmonton to play a bigger role in educating citizens about natural areas conservation, and its plan to achieve its conservation goals.

Appendix One: Recruitment Screener

My name is _____ and I'm calling from _____. A client of ours is hoping that you might be interested in participating in a focus group discussion on **December 11** at 5:30pm. / 7:30pm. The purpose of this group is to gain your opinions and thoughts concerning current issues affecting Edmontonians. This is a focus group only, it is not used for selling purposes or the possible generation of sales. Each participant will receive an incentive of \$50.00 for their time and assistance and refreshments will be served. **THIS DISCUSSION WILL LAST APPROXIMATELY 2 HOURS.**

Before I give you the details, I must ask a few questions.

1. What is your occupation please?_____
2. What is your spouse's occupation please?_____

TERMINATE IF OCCUPATION IS IN RESEARCH, ADVERTISING, MEDIA, OR WITH CITY OF EDMONTON

WATCH QUOTAS: MAX. 1 UNEMPLOYED/1 STUDENT

3. And have you, or anyone in your household or member of your immediate family ever worked in any of the following fields:

Market Research

Advertising

Media

Public Relations

With the City of Edmonton

TERMINATE IF YES TO ANY

4. We need to recruit people from across the city.

- a) Do you live in the City of Edmonton

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Thank and Terminate

- b) What neighbourhood do you live in?

WATCH TO ENSURE A GOOD MIX FROM ACROSS THE CITY (BOTH URBAN AND SUBURBAN)

5. And in which of the following age ranges may I place you?

Under 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	THANK AND TERMINATE
18 to 24	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recruit 1
25 to 34	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recruit 2
35 to 44	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recruit 2
45 to 54	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recruit 2
55 to 64	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recruit 2
65+	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recruit 1

6. What is your current marital status?

Single	x	
Married/Common Law	x	
Divorced	x	GET A GOOD MIX
Separated	x	
Widowed	x	

7. Do you currently have any children living at home?

Yes x **RECRUIT A MIX OF PEOPLE WITH KIDS AT HOME,
AND NO KIDS AT HOME**

8. What is the highest level of education you have reached?

Partial high school	x	THANK AND TERMINATE
Completed high school	x	
Partial college/technical	x	
Completed college/technical	x	
Partial University	x	
Completed university	x	
Post graduate	x	

GET A GOOD MIX IN EACH GROUP

9. And which of the following best reflects your total household income, before taxes, in 2005?

Less than \$20K	x
\$20 to \$40K	x
\$40 to \$60K	x
\$60 to \$80K	x
\$80+	x

GET A GOOD MIX IN EACH GROUP

10. In a typical week, how many days per week do you watch a television news broadcast?

|____|____| times

11. In a typical week, how many days per week do you read a daily newspaper?

|____|____| times

NOTE: NUMBERS IN Q.10 AND 11 MUST ADD UP TO AT LEAST 5

12. Have you ever attended a focus group before?

Yes x
No x **SKIP TO CONCLUSION**

13. How long ago did you last attend? _____
(MUST BE AT LEAST 6 MONTHS OR LONGER, OTHERWISE TERMINATE)

14. What subjects have you discussed? _____

(MUST NOT HAVE BEEN RELATED TO CITY ISSUES OR CITY POLITICS, ETC.)

IF YOU REQUIRE EYEGLASSES FOR READING, PLEASE BRING THEM ALONG.

Thank you. The group is on:

December 11	x	5:30 p.m.
	x	8:00 p.m.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

Appendix Two: Discussion Agenda

Goal of Focus Group: Provide input to help articulate a vision and guiding principles for the City of Edmonton's efforts to preserve the integrity of the region's natural areas.

Introduction

We're going to have a round table discussion. Don't hesitate to give your honest opinions. Speak whenever you have anything to add. Please do not interrupt others.

The conversation is being recorded, and you are being viewed.

I want everyone to introduce him or herself. Please tell me your name, what you do for a living, whether you have a family and how long you have lived in Edmonton.

General perceptions of Edmonton

Before we begin the discussion, I want everyone to jot down what you think are the 3 to 5 most important issues facing Edmonton today. **DISTRIBUTE HANDOUT**

Let's discuss what you wrote down. **RECORD ON FLIP CHART**. What issues did you write down? Why did you say that?

COLLECT RESPONSES FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS.

Let's make another list ... what would you say is the best thing about living in Edmonton? **RECORD ON FLIP CHART**

What are the most important things that the City of Edmonton and the residents of Edmonton should be doing now to maintain or enhance our quality of life? **RECORD ON FLIP CHART**

Conservation

Let's talk about conservation ... and by this I mean efforts made to preserve the natural areas within the City of Edmonton.

Where does conservation fit into what we've been talking about? Is it an important issue? How does the preservation and conservation of our natural areas enhance our quality of life?

Are we doing enough in the area of conservation of natural lands? What are we doing well at? What do we need to improve?

How do you think Edmonton compares to other jurisdictions in North America when it comes to conservation of our natural areas? Are we better or worse? Why do you think that?

Functional ecological network

Have you ever heard anyone talk about a "functional ecological network"? What do you think this term means? If you don't know, can you guess what it means?

In *Land Mosaics*, Harvard ecologist Richard Forman identified four essential elements to any ecological network.

- A few large patches of natural vegetation, *i.e.*, core areas.
- Wide vegetation corridors along major water courses.
- Connectivity with corridors and stepping stones.
- Heterogeneous nature within human developed areas.

Based on this description, which cities in North America do you think might be able to claim to have a “functional ecological network” within their boundaries? Do you think the natural areas in Edmonton make up a “functional ecological network”?

In fact, Edmonton *is* considered to have a functioning ecological network, which is rare among urban municipalities anywhere in the world. Edmonton’s network includes core areas in the river valley and tablelands, river valley and ravine system, connectivity using parks and utility corridors, and smaller natural areas in the tablelands.

Does this surprise you?

What’s the value of having a functioning ecological network within the City?

Do you think this network is threatened? What, if anything, should we be doing to preserve this network?

Timeline

I’m going to give you some information about conservation efforts in Edmonton. As I go along, please let me know if this is new information, and your reaction to the information.

- ‘Conservation’ began in the early 1900s with the creation of Victoria Park.
- Early focus was on the river valley.
- First official policies included the:
 - North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan (1985); and
 - Ribbon of Green (1992)
- Value of natural areas in the areas beyond the river valley, the so-called tablelands, began to be noted in mid ‘80s.
- Edmonton first inventoried natural areas in the tablelands in 1986 and again in 1993.
- In 1995, Council approved policy C-467, *Conservation of Natural Sites in Edmonton’s Tablelands*.
- Office of Natural Areas was created in 2002. The Office has a stewardship function to ensure that natural areas – from forest and grassland to wetlands, lakes and riparian areas – are conserved and restored, and integrated into new development in a way that enables them to remain healthy and sustainable.
- Natural areas are defined as “An area of land and/or water especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means. This includes forest and grassland, wetlands, lakes and riparian (river and creek shorelines) areas.
- Groomed parks and recreation areas are not included. The river valley is a blend of old neighbourhoods, groomed parks and natural areas.
- Current efforts are to integrate management of the river valley and ravine system natural areas with those in the tablelands.
- Related plans and initiatives include the following.
 - *Natural Connections*: the Integrated Natural Areas Conservation Plan (in development).
 - Edmonton Land Trust (approved two weeks ago; City partnered with five organizations to create trust).
 - Ecological Conservation Assistance Program (City covers cost of landowners to donate land – legal, survey, etc.).
 - Plan Edmonton, Environmental Strategic Plan, Policy C-467, Environmental Review in NSRVRS, new structure plans.
- *State of Natural Areas* report a snapshot of natural areas in Edmonton in 2005. Submitted to City in November 2006.
- Natural Areas in Edmonton as follows.

- City-wide: 424 natural areas, ~7220 hectares, nine percent of total land area in City;
 - NSRV and ravine system: 106 NAs, ~5,200 has, roughly 2/3 protected, 63% of NA land areas;
 - Tablelands: 318 NAs, ~2,000 has, roughly 1/2 protected, 3% of NA land areas;
 - Transportation and utility corridors comprise the rest.
- Core areas and heterogeneous nature in undeveloped suburbs are under development pressure.

Private ownership

- Since 1993, 23% of tablelands NAs have been lost; 21% are in some form of protection (largely in partnership with developers); 56% percent remains unprotected, mostly on privately owned land.
- City has little legislative authority to compel conservation so has, essentially, two options: purchase or persuasion of landowners to put lands into conservation easements.
- Current land values of \$100-150K/ha places value of \$150 million on all tableland NAs.
- “Raw land” costs; real costs may be higher due to servicing or zoning.
- Raw land cost roughly the same as interchange at 23 Avenue and Calgary Trail; real costs could approach \$450 million.
- Trend toward loss of connectivity (corridors and heterogeneous nature) in tablelands.

How would you like to see the City proceed? How do you strike a balance between preserving tablelands NAs and the rights of landowners?

Horsehills

We've talked about different parts of the city. Is anyone familiar with the area in the northeast called Horsehills? What do you know about this area?

In fact, it's largely agricultural lands, and natural areas that run along the Horsehills Ravine Watershed System. It also contains a microclimate making it ideal for agriculture.

The City has talked about building more industry in that area as a way of increasing the industrial tax base for the city.

How would you like to see the City proceed with development in this area? How can the City balance industrial and residential growth with conservation?

Who do you trust

Let's move on to a different topic. There are lots of people and groups that have something to say about conservation ... landowners, environmental groups, the media, the City of Edmonton, the provincial government, the federal government, etc. Who are you most inclined to believe and why?

Balancing concerns / Guiding Principles

Let's go back to some of the issues we discussed at the beginning of the group. Talk to me about how conservation of natural areas fits in. How would you prioritize it?

Which areas do you think are more pressing than conservation of natural areas? Which areas are less pressing?

If you only have a set amount of money, how do you decide which areas to focus your attention?

This is a complex issue, and it's not possible to come up with all the answers in just 2 hours. But I'd like to conclude by trying to develop a list of Guiding Principles that you would like to see the City of Edmonton follow when addressing conservation issues. **RECORD ON FLIP CHART.**