

Reporting Back

River Valley Stairs Rehabilitation: Highlands Stairs Design Plan

Project/Initiative Background

The River Valley Stairs Project involves the rehabilitation/construction of stairs at:

- **Emily Murphy Park** (116th Street and Saskatchewan Drive),
- **Highlands** (Ada Boulevard and 52nd Street),
- **Grandview Heights** (131st Street and Grandview Drive),
- **Jackson Heights/Minchau** (42nd Avenue and 46th Street) and,
- **Walterdale/Kinsmen Park/High Level Diner** (109th Street and 90th Avenue).

These locations are a component of a larger effort to rehabilitate river valley stairs and embankment paths at various locations throughout the City of Edmonton. In order to rehabilitate existing stairs, or build stairs where only paths exist in a manner that reflects the needs and desires of Edmontonians, the City is conducting public engagement and communication activities that inform Edmontonians, and, where appropriate, gather input and feedback about the intended projects.

The Highlands embankment path leading to the river valley is adjacent to Ada Boulevard near 52 Street, on the north side of the North Saskatchewan River near the Capilano Bridge.

Name	River Valley Stairs Rehabilitation: Highland Stairs
Date	September 27, 2018.
Location	Highlands School.
Contact information	Carlos Lopez , Program Manager Building Great Neighbourhoods and Open Spaces Infrastructure Delivery, Integrated Infrastructure Services, City of Edmonton Carlos.lopez@edmonton.ca
Level of public engagement	
Description	The public engagement was held to advise on replacing an embankment path leading from the Highlands community to the river valley with a set of stairs.

1. Executive Summary

The Highlands embankment path leading to and from the river valley is steep. Users of the trail have difficulty traversing it due to the grade and lack of handrails. Several informal paths have also developed in this area as users have sought alternative ways to reach the lower trails. A design plan to replace the path with stairs was developed and discussed at a public engagement event. This was held in conjunction with a broader information session hosted by the City on neighbourhood renewal in Highlands.

Audiences

1. Stairs, parks and river valley users.
2. Highland community residents and neighbourhood businesses such as the Highlands Golf Club.
3. Other Edmontonians who may use the stairs now or at some future point.

Key findings

Most of the participants were pleased to see that the existing path will be replaced with stairs. However, several people wanted to see accommodation for people on bicycles, by either providing a ramp or incorporated a bicycle trail into rehabilitation planning. There were only a few suggestions for specific design improvements.

2. Engagement Techniques

The public engagement event involved manned display boards showing design schematics and pictures of the existing path's condition. City and design consultants invited comment and input. Those attending the open house provided either verbal comment or posted written comments directly on the display boards.

3. What Was Said?

A total of 48 people provided a comment regarding the design plan. Verbatim input included:

- Stairs with a line of sight to the bridge is safer.
- Yes, great idea, love it, thumbs up, do it, looks good, fantastic, excellent, makes sense to me, awesome (30).
- Need lights (2).
- Include a multi-use path between the upper and lower stairs.
- Rehab the natural trail between Ada Boulevard and 110 Avenue.
- Tie in the multi-use path with the river bank granular trail.
- Don't change access to the bridge.
- Start the stairs on the trail where it starts getting steeper.
- Footing much improved.
- Do it with bike ramps.
- Fence line needs to be made much stronger so it can't be knocked out.
- How about a funicular?
- Need to accommodate a gravel cycling trail similar to the existing trail to preclude 'rogue' trail construction.
- How will you stop people from short-cutting?
- The area is unattractive. You will need a complete overhaul to get people to use it. I used to use area but stopped because it was in bad state.
- How are the dogs doing the stairs?
- Excellent to have stairs instead of an eroded trail.
- Engage the mountain biking community and trail associations to re-establish a mountain biking trail after the stairs.
- Need to get rid of poison ivy.
- Great for runners.
- First idea I have agreed with.
- Consider a food forest for the local community. There are many native varieties if that is a concern.
- Make it user friendlier than the breakneck trail we have now.

- Excellent idea to improve the trails and the multi-use stairs.
- Any enhancements for international single track mountain biking trails?
- Great idea. Now I can run/bike up on this side of the trail along the river.
- Maybe line-up stairs 1 and 2?

4. What did we hear?

A. Accommodate bicycles

Mountain bikers and other bicyclists wanted access to and from the river valley at the same access point. They suggested this be done either by incorporating a ramp into the stairs design or by rehabilitating a trail area adjacent to the stairs for bicycle traffic.

B. Path connections to the stairs

The City was encouraged to build, tie in and/or rehabilitate multi-use paths between the stairs and existing trails in the river valley, and a natural trail between Ada Boulevard and 110 Avenue.

C. Bridge sight lines and access

A couple of people wanted to ensure that the design did not interfere with line of sight or access to the Capilano Bridge.

D. Lights

Two people suggested that lights be added to the stairs design.

E. Landscaping

Two people suggested landscaping adjacent to the stairs use native food varieties and address controlling noxious weeds.

F. Other suggestions (one person only per suggestion)

- Start the stairs at a steeper point on the embankment.
- Consider building a funicular.
- Make the fence stronger.
- Accommodate dogs.
- Align stairs 1 and 2.

5. How did citizen input affect the project/initiative with this engagement?

Citizen input helped confirm that the design met most expectations and had strong support. It also provided an opportunity to educate participants about City design standards for river valley stairs.

6. What's next?

The next step is to inform stakeholders about the construction plan. Further engagement will provide an opportunity to determine if there are any major concerns regarding safety, access, construction impacts, etc.