

Reporting Back

River Valley Stairs Rehabilitation: Highlands Stairs

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.

Name: Date: Location: Attendance:	River Valley Stairs Rehabilitation: Highlands Stairs April 6, 2019. Pop-up table at top of the stairs at 52 Street and Ada Boulevard A total of 97 people stopped by the table. 81% (79 people) were Highlands community residents.
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	A pop-up public engagement event was held to advise and educate local residents and stairs users about the pending construction of stairs to replace embankment trails from 110 Avenue to the river valley and eliminate a 'goat trail' from Ada Boulevard to 110 Avenue by adding vegetation.

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. This project is at the construction phase. A pop-up event was held April 6, 2019 to inform audiences of the stairs design and construction plan.

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

The vast majority of participants (94%) were supportive of the Highland Stairs project. However, many people wanted to see accommodation for people on bicycles, by either providing a ramp or incorporating a bicycle trail into rehabilitation planning. Those who were opposed felt the trail should be left in place to accommodate bicycles, strollers, wheelchairs, etc.

2. Engagement Techniques

A pop-up table was set up at the top of the stairs at 52 Street and Ada Boulevard from 10 am to 4 pm. Those who stopped at the table were briefed on the work to be done using a display board as a visual aid. Questions or comments were noted and their level of support for the project was assessed.

3. What Was Said?

In addition to an indication of their support for the project, a total of 53 people provided a comment regarding the design plan. Verbatim input included:

- There should be access for baby strollers and bicycles at the junctions of the stairs and the existing trail.
- Ensure there is access during construction for the residents at the end of the 110 Avenue driveway to allow for septic tank and maintenance trucks.
- I like the idea but what will be done about path erosion at the bottom end of the stairs?
- What about goat trailers? Where will we go?
- What disruptions will there be?
- Will there still be access to roadway under stairs and down to river valley for cyclists, baby carriages, and stairs? (10 people)
- Will trail be upgraded?
- Will erosion at the bottom by the path by the river be dealt with?
- Build stairs at the top of the goat path.
- The road needs to be upgraded.
- More garbage cans should be added along the trails.
- A ramp for bikes is required (10 people) ... need to be wide enough.
- Wheelchair access preferred so the path should stay.
- Excellent ... especially the lower section as it is dangerous in spring/winter conditions.
- Stairs are needed especially in the lower section.
- Exercise bike riders should also have to use the stairs.
- Love it! Great idea!
- Very supportive.
- Single use plastic bottles at these events are a no. You should have vegan snacks.
- Need stairs that are good for strollers, wheelchairs, double strollers.
- The path should be paved for switchbacks ... not in support of steep stairs.
- The more of the trail you keep at the bottom, the better. People use it a lot.

- The goat trail from the top that you are covering over is a waste of time. People will still use it and run it over. "I have been using this trail for 55+ years ... since I was a kid."
- Experienced riders don't want to get off their bike.
- You should be collaborating with the EMBA ... mountain bike association ... because it is a sustainable cycling group. Hopefully the COE includes them in consultations.
- I completely disagree with sidewalks going in on the north side of Ada Boulevard. Please share with the people in charge. Why not on the south side? We understand it is a park but it is a much better location.
- What is the disruption going to be during construction? (8 people)
- Prefer the normal stairs for running. Not the wide and irregular steps at Concordia.
- I certainly think accessibility for people on wheels and parents with strollers should be taken into consideration when planning projects like these. We are mindful of wheelchair access in buildings and it would be good practice to extend that to outdoor spaces. I know it is done with curbs and public parks and the river valley is essentially a big public park.

In order to be true to 'How We Green', I would insist that the City completely ban the use of single use plastic water bottles, starting with City events, and if they need to supply water for an event, only use the large refillable bottles with a pump and educate the public that they need to bring reusable containers. It will only take people forgetting their containers once or twice for it to become a habit.

Also, cookies and snacks that are planet based and not in plastic packaging. A little more work perhaps but the right thing to do. The City has to start leading by example. Animal agriculture is one of the leading causes of climate and environmental destruction. Please watch the documentary 'Cowspiracy' on Netflix and/or read the IPCC report released last year. At two community engagement event in the Highlands the city has hired Fat Franks to supply food and not only are meat hot dogs carcinogenic (Class 1 carcinogen according to the World Health Organization) they are also bad environmentally.

4. What did we hear?

A. Accommodation of bicycles, strollers and other wheeled devices

There was considerable support for the project to build in accommodation for bicycles, strollers and other wheeled devices like wheelchairs. It was noted by many people that the existing trail was used heavily by such users and the stairs should not eliminate this type of access to and from the river valley along this route. At a minimum, supporters of this view wanted the stairs to have a bicycle ramp built in.

B. Construction details and need

There were several questions about when the project would start and end, and how river valley access along the route would be affected during construction. A resident at the bottom of 110 Avenue from Ada Boulevard wanted assurances that important vehicle access (maintenance trucks for the three homes located there) would be allowed during construction.

C. Elimination of the goat trail at the top of the embankment

While those who participated in the pop-up supported eliminating the goat trail at Ada Boulevard leading into the river valley, many were doubtful that adding vegetation would deter people from doing so. It was suggested by some that construction of stairs that would block trail access for wheeled devices would lead bicyclists to create a new goat trail bypassing the new stairs.

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

Input helped determine that the Highland Stairs construction plan was supported by the vast majority of people but that accommodation of wheeled devices particularly bicycles remains a concern. It also emphasized the need to provide more information to residents and users prior to construction about how access to the river valley along this route will be impacted

during construction.

6. What's next?

There will be no further engagement regarding this project. However, communications about construction timing and impacts will continue on an as needed basis until completion.