

RIVER VALLEY PLANNING MODERNIZATION

Ribbon of Green & River Valley ARP

Phase 3 What We Heard Report
October 2023



Edmonton





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Project Background

Edmonton's North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System ("River Valley") is a vital and highly valued ecological, recreational, and active transportation corridor; a place of incredible cultural significance; and, a draw for visitors throughout the region. As the population of Edmonton grows, as Edmontonians increasingly seek out opportunities for natural recreation, and as a range of River Valley development projects are proposed, planned, and implemented, pressure on the River Valley is increasing. With demands on the area becoming increasingly complex, there is a need for clear policy, sound planning guidance, and a strong regulatory framework.

The River Valley Planning Modernization (RVPM) project will create an integrated planning and regulatory framework for Edmonton's River Valley to ensure that it remains a protected, vibrant, open space network as the city grows.

FRAMEWORK

This project includes two streams of work that are being developed together.

RIBBON OF GREEN – COMPLETION

The Ribbon of Green provides the strategic direction: our overall vision for the future of the River Valley, our high-level plans for the connected open spaces within it, and the policy that guides our decisions about what happens in that space.

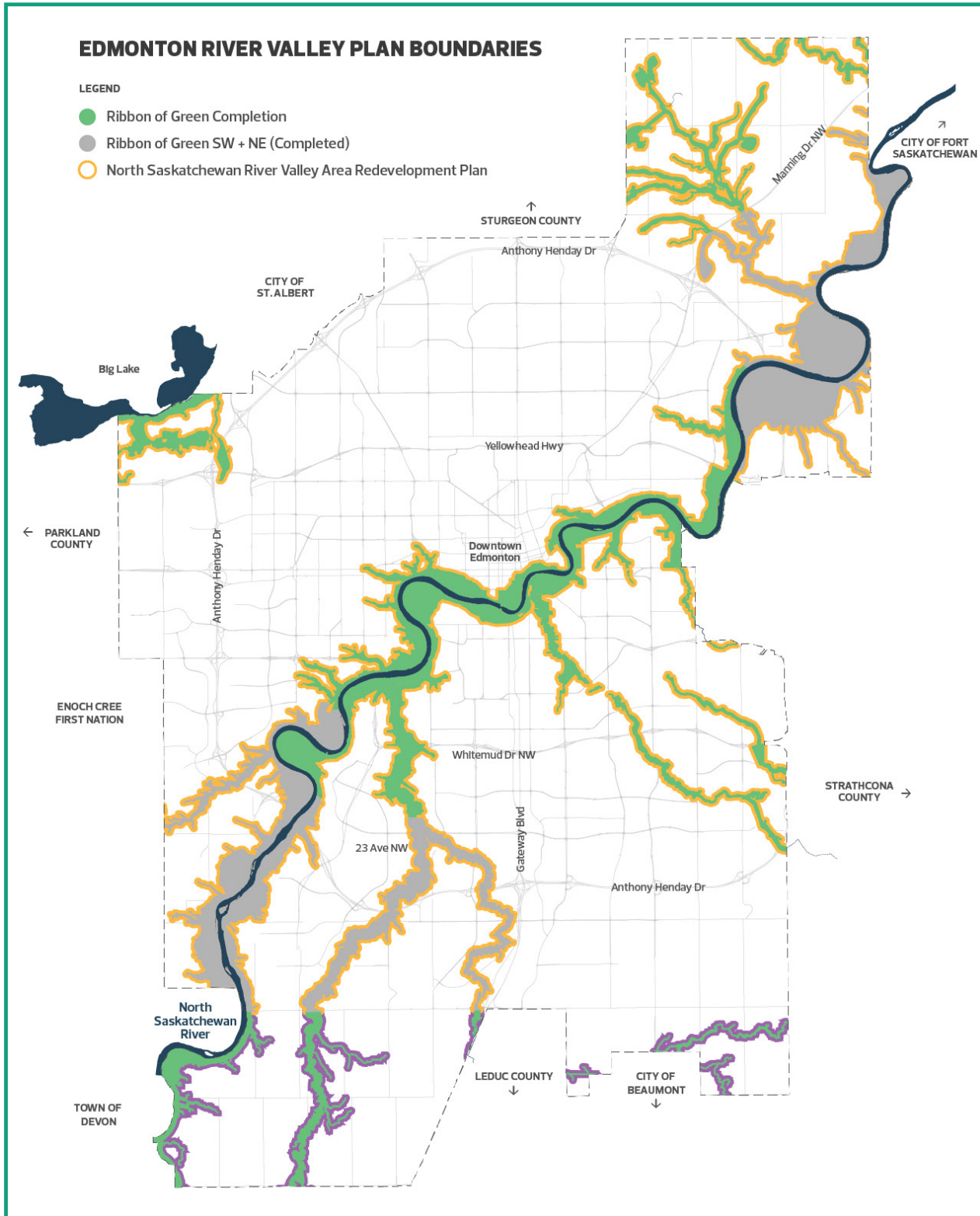
NORTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER VALLEY ARP – MODERNIZATION

The North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan (Bylaw 7188) provides the regulatory framework: the standards and rules that guide our evaluation of individual projects and developments proposed for the River Valley.



STUDY AREA

The study area follows the boundary of the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System. Planning of the northeast and southwest areas of the River Valley was completed through previous engagement processes. This phase of RVMP work is focused on planning the remaining areas of the system and providing overarching guidance across the entire River Valley and Ravine system.



PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

This public engagement process was developed in alignment with the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Framework.

ENGAGEMENT GOALS

While each project, and each phase, will have its own specific aims, there are several overarching goals that all public engagement processes will aim to achieve:

- + Provide opportunities throughout the project for participants to provide meaningful, appropriate, and actionable input that will be used to complete the Ribbon of Green plan and update the River Valley regulatory framework
- + Implement an engagement process that is open, transparent and respectful
- + Provide opportunities for involvement that are convenient and accessible
- + Creatively engage and communicate with the general public, stakeholders, and communities, including adjacent municipalities
- + Provide opportunities to engage vulnerable populations and equity-deserving groups
- + Clearly communicate the project goals, what the engagement process can and cannot influence, and how public input was used to help shape the plan

This phase of engagement falls within the REFINE level of the City's Public Engagement Spectrum. Input from Phase 3 will help the City to adapt and adjust approaches to planning for the River Valley.



In this phase, we sought input to help:

- + Finalize the vision and guiding principles for the River Valley
- + Refine the Land Management Classifications to clarify appropriate use in various parts of the River Valley
- + Refine draft planning guidance for the study area, including opportunities for ecological protection and restoration, access, gathering and enjoyment in the River Valley
- + Refine draft directions for River Valley decision-making, and public involvement in those decisions







Phase 3 built on the previous two phases of engagement where we asked the public about challenges and opportunities within the River Valley, developed a vision and guiding principles, and confirmed preliminary visions and directions for each of the 12 reaches within the River Valley.











How We Engaged

Phase 3 Public Engagement was open for feedback during June and July 2023. To reach a wide range of Edmontonians and River Valley users, a variety of engagement methods and tools were used, ensuring there were multiple avenues to choose from to participate, both virtually and in-person.

Overall, the engagement opportunities demonstrated our commitment to engaging with a diverse range of stakeholders in order to understand their unique perspectives and experiences. Each activity was designed to meet GBA+ goals by targeting specific stakeholder communities that may be underserved and/or underrepresented in traditional planning processes.

RESOURCES	DESCRIPTION	STATS	AUDIENCE	FORMAT
How We Communicated				
 Project Webpage	The online hub for all project information. edmonton.ca/ribbonofgreen	9.4K clicks to the website	Public	Online
 Signage & Billboards	Signage was posted at high-traffic locations to inform users about the project and promote engagement.	16.2 million impressions (estimated)	Public	Print/Onsite
 Road Signage	Signs placed along major roadways.	7 signs Estimated 6.3 million impressions	Public	Print/Onsite
 Social Media	Posts on Facebook and Instagram.	Over 1 million impressions 433K unique users 2.9K clicks to the website	Public	Online
 Direct Emails	Direct emails stakeholder organizations representing diverse communities and interests.	Over 200 emails	Public	Online
 Broadcast Radio & Online Audio	Spots aired on local radio stations and online radio, and included spots in English, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, Filipino, Ukrainian, Hindi and Punjabi	1.452 million impressions (estimated)	Public	Online/Radio

Signage, billboards and road signage impressions are measured by traffic counts. Social media impressions are the number of times a Facebook or Instagram post was seen. This number may include repeat or unique users. Broadcast radio and online audio impressions are the estimated reach of the audio ad.

RESOURCES	DESCRIPTION	STATS	AUDIENCE	FORMAT
How We Engaged				
 Pre-engagement meetings with stakeholder organizations that serve interest groups	Stakeholder meetings with conservation and recreational use advocacy groups were held to refine our targeted stakeholder engagement approach. This allowed the project team to reflect and address outstanding concerns and questions of highly invested stakeholders.	3 meetings with 3 organizations	Stakeholder Groups	Online & In-person
 Pre-engagement meetings with stakeholder agencies that serve equity-seeking organizations	Meetings with agencies who serve underrepresented groups were held to refine our Phase 3 engagement process to reflect the unique engagement and communication needs of previously underrepresented groups.	2 meetings with 2 stakeholder organizations		Online & In-person
 Survey	The survey was available from June 21 to July 4. It was designed to provide members of the public an opportunity to share feedback on program and ecological guidance, and public involvement in future project decisions. While the survey was made available on the City of Edmonton website and distributed through Edmonton Insight Community, hardcopies were also made available to those who required an offline version.	3215 respondents	Public	Online/ Print
 Stakeholder Workshops	Three workshops were held to collect qualitative feedback on specific topic areas. The workshops included interactive activities and offered virtual and in-person options to meet the needs of participants. See Appendix A for a list of stakeholders who were invited.	46 attendees	Stakeholder Groups	Online & In-person
 Public Workshops	Two workshops were held to hear from members of the public. Activities included presentations and discussions. Feedback was collected using a workbook.	45 attendees	Public	Online & In-person
 Pop-ups	Four pop-up events were held in popular areas of the River Valley, meeting members of the public where they were.	175 attendees	Public	In-person
 Interactive Portal & Online Map	This website included detailed information about the project and an interactive map to collect feedback on specific reaches.	130 map pins	Public	Online
 Project Email	Emails sent to the project team. ribbonofgreen@edmonton.ca	11 emails received	Public	Online

Who We Engaged

The City is committed to involving the people affected by the decisions it makes and seeks diverse opinions, experiences, and information so that a wide spectrum of perspectives are represented in the process. The insights presented in this What We Heard Report represent the viewpoints of people and organizations who voluntarily selected to participate in public engagement for this phase. Results are not necessarily representative of the perspectives of all Edmontonians.

General public: Engagement opportunities were open to all Edmontonians who live, work, and play in and around the River Valley.

Stakeholder organizations: Groups representing a variety of existing and potential River Valley users and uses were included. See Appendix A for a list of stakeholder groups who were invited to participate.

What We Asked

While each engagement tactic varied slightly due to format or audience, the questions remained consistent. Below is a summary of the types of questions asked throughout Phase 3.






Meetings 

Public Survey 

Interactive Portal Online Map 

Public & Stakeholder Workshops 

Pop-ups 

WHAT WE ASKED	WHY WE ASKED THIS QUESTION	WHERE IT WAS ASKED
RIBBON OF GREEN		
<p>VISION & PRINCIPLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Please rate the extent to which you agree with the revised Vision and Guiding Principles for future projects in the River Valley. 	<p>To confirm and refine the Vision and Guiding Principles</p>	
<p>LAND MANAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Please rate the extent to which you agree with the proposed addition of the Ecosystem Protection and Preservation: Trail-based recreation sub-classifications to the Land Management Classification Framework. + Is there anything else the City should consider in finalizing the Land Management Classifications? 	<p>To gather feedback on the new proposed LMC sub-classifications and to refine the overall LMC framework</p>	
<p>ECOLOGICAL GUIDANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Is there anything you would change or add to the plans to support ecological protection in the River Valley? <p><i>Participants were invited to share their feedback by adding one or more pins to an interactive map of the River Valley and adding a comment about ecological guidance.</i></p>	<p>To refine the plans to support the protection and restoration of the River Valley.</p>	
<p>PROGRAM GUIDANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Is there anything you would change or add to the plans to support access, gathering and enjoyment in the River Valley? <p><i>Participants were invited to share their feedback by adding one or more pins to an interactive map of the River Valley and adding a comment about program guidance.</i></p>	<p>To refine plans to support access, gathering and enjoyment in the River Valley</p>	
RIVER VALLEY ARP		
<p>PROJECT DECISION MAKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + What types of impacts and benefits are you interested in receiving information about? + What types of impacts and benefits are you interested in providing feedback on? + Thinking about the projects you're most interested in being informed about, what methods would work best for you to receive the information? + Thinking about the projects you're most interested in providing feedback on, what methods would work best for you to provide feedback? + Please rate the extent to which you agree with this model of public engagement. + Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about how you'd like to be informed and involved about future River Valley Projects? 	<p>To gather feedback on the process for decision making that will guide the River Valley planning process.</p>	

INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

Indigenous Engagement

The City of Edmonton is committed to keeping Indigenous Nations and Communities informed and engaged when projects intersect with Indigenous interests and concerns. The project team will look for opportunities to collaborate and understand how issues and concerns can be addressed, and seek to incorporate input into a clear set of goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations.

As part of Phase 3 engagement, the City met both in person and virtually with Indigenous Nations and Communities in October, November and December 2022. The focus of these conversations was on governance and decision-making in the River Valley, as well as draft planning guidance, including the Land Management Classifications. The following themes were identified based on the input gathered. Communities have been invited to review these topics for feedback and identify if additional topics should be considered.

THEME	STATEMENTS
GOVERNANCE & DECISION-MAKING	
Treaty Rights & Sovereignty	Acknowledge the complex intersections of community connection to the River Valley and the importance of including broad perspectives from the diverse Indigenous Nations and Communities with connections to this place. Give space for the sacred practices of ceremony and protocol in processes. Respect Treaty rights and the sovereignty of Nations and Communities.
Advisory Boards & Committees	While acknowledged as a challenge, decision-making processes that are started in ceremony and led by an advisory group had broad support.
Engagement Process for RV Development Proposals	Ensure engagement begins early in the process, and that input is meaningfully considered in decisions. Ensure materials and information are accessible to all, including those without internet access and those not fluent in technology. Attend and connect with Indigenous Communities at existing gatherings.
LAND MANAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS	
Indigenous Knowledge and Practices	Prioritize Indigenous knowledge and practices in planning and decision-making. Provide opportunities for storytelling, medicine walks and harvesting of traditional foods.
River Valley Protection	Natural/undeveloped parts of the River Valley present opportunities in which Indigenous Nations and Communities see specific access to their culture through opportunities for ceremony and medicine.
Places for Ceremony and Gathering	Create and protect places for ceremony and cultural activities, and for Indigenous Nations and Communities to reconnect with RV lands. Connect youth to the River Valley to support conservation efforts and provide access to culture camps for urban members.
OTHER INPUT & FEEDBACK	
Housing & Homelessness	Acknowledge the River Valley as a shelter or home for people experiencing homelessness. Consider how planning efforts and programs might support them, including stewardship and outreach programs with cultural components.
Economic Reconciliation	Find opportunities for formal collaboration with Indigenous Nations and Communities to develop programming, and create employed roles as a form of economic reconciliation.
Naming	Indigenous naming was a priority for some, including replacing existing names, and increased use of signage to share Indigenous knowledge or names.

PUBLIC & STAKEHOLDER SUMMARY

Summary

Nearly 3,300 members of the public shared their thoughts on the Ribbon of Green and River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan during workshops, pop-ups, and via the survey. The following section is a summary of findings from this phase of public and stakeholder engagement. The overarching themes include:

- + The majority of engagement participants agree with the revised vision and guiding principles for Ribbon of Green. Participants appreciated the thought put into revising the Vision and Guiding Principles, and feel that they reflect the importance of both ecological protection and access for enjoyment of the River Valley.
- + Many also commented on the need for greater emphasis on accessibility and connectivity of trails. Some participants identified a need for clarity around terms such as low-impact amenities and accessibility.
- + Participants expressed the need for greater priority on ecological integrity if we are to protect the River Valley for future generations.
- + Concerns were shared that overemphasizing ecological protection could lead to loss of access for activities that people enjoy
- + Participants expressed overall agreement with the updated Land Management Classifications, including that the new P reservation sub-classifications are beneficial, and that the LMC framework has improved from Phase 2. Engagement respondents expressed tensions between mountain bikers, hikers and those using motorized micromobilities such as e-bicycles and e-scooters. Another frequently mentioned theme was the support for mountain bike trails, with some calling for greater maintenance and development. On the other hand, we heard that mountain biking trails work against ecological protection. Many commenters want to see ecological enhancement prioritized instead of recreational activities.
- + When considering ecological and program guidance for the River Valley, many engagement participants shared overall general support for activities such as mountain biking within the area. However, some survey respondents also expressed that mountain biking is incompatible with ecological protection and would like to see restoration efforts incorporated throughout the River Valley. Most of the comments we received related to program guidance were related to trail planning, design, management and use.
- + Participants in this engagement shared a strong interest in being involved in future planning decisions regarding the River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan. They generally agreed with the overall proposed timing of public engagement for future River Valley projects.
- + Participants specifically shared that they would like to be involved in decisions with higher impacts and benefits. Most shared that digital communication tools are the best way to reach them and that online surveys are the most preferred tool for engagement.

RIBBON OF GREEN:

Vision and Guiding Principles

The revised Ribbon of Green Vision and Guiding Principles (included below) were developed and refined through previous phases of public input, including engagement that took place in the winter of 2022. These foundational statements will guide all steps in the River Valley planning process. In this phase, participants were asked to provide input to finalize the Vision and Guiding Principles, and whether or not there is anything to add or change.

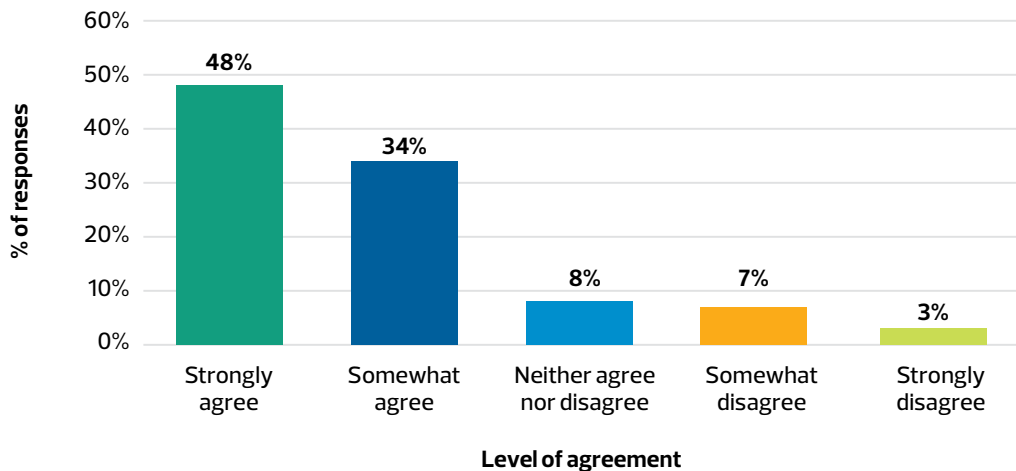
VISION:

The North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System is a protected, connected, ecologically resilient landscape that honours our collective history and promotes healthy living through diverse opportunities for recreation, active travel, learning, and gathering in the tranquility of nature.

PRINCIPLES:

- + **Ecological integrity:** Ecosystems will be protected, connected, restored, and managed to preserve ecological integrity and resiliency, minimize the impacts of human use and respond to changing conditions.
- + **Low-impact amenities:** Any new or expanded amenities will support opportunities for people to gather and recreate in nature or provide essential urban services, and will be located and designed to minimize environmental impact and promote ecosystem function.
- + **Connected trails:** A continuous trail system and access points will connect neighbourhoods, the city, and the region to the River Valley and Ravine System, and provide safe and accessible opportunities for recreation and active travel.
- + **Collaboration:** Through education, engagement, and partnerships, meaningful opportunities will be provided to contribute to the planning, design, and stewardship of the River Valley and Ravine System.
- + **Heritage:** The natural and cultural heritage of the River Valley and Ravine System will shape the places, experiences, and connections within it. Natural and historical sites, features, and landscapes will be protected and, where appropriate, interpreted.
- + **Indigenous perspectives:** Indigenous cultural values will be recognized and supported throughout the River Valley and Ravine System, and Indigenous Communities will be meaningfully engaged as active participants in the planning, stewardship and use of the River Valley.

**Please rate the extent to which you agree with the revised Vision and Guiding Principles
(Total number of responses: 3215)**



Overall, there was general agreement with the revised Vision and Guiding Principles. When asked about any additions or changes to help finalize the project vision and guiding principles:

- + Some respondents appreciated that the vision and guiding principles incorporated the ability for nature to thrive in the River Valley with a balance of activities and uses.
- + Some participants expressed interest in receiving more information about what future enforcement efforts will be in place.
- + Some respondents shared concerns that several activities, including mountain biking, could jeopardize the sensitive ecology of the River Valley, while other respondents were concerned about too many limitations on access and activities.
- + Survey respondents shared that the Vision and Guiding Principles could include more emphasis on accessibility and connection for all who use the River Valley, specifically for those who live with disabilities. Others expressed possibilities for better access by public transit.

Others shared:

- + That there are opportunities to further prioritize Indigenous perspectives to enhance reconciliation efforts.
- + Desire to see more commercial opportunities to support open space use (e.g. equipment rentals, small cafes or restaurants) and promote tourism.
- + Facilitate sharing of space by different users through education and collaboration.
- + More support needed for those who live or seek shelter in the River Valley.
- + Concerns about safety with increase in people seeking shelter in the River Valley.
- + Desire for greater focus on the river itself.
- + Missing reference to climate resilience and adaptation.

GBA+ ANALYSIS

Respondents who were more likely to strongly agree with the vision and guiding principles included those who identify as women (59%), as LGBTQ+ (63%) and as persons with disabilities (57%).

“Accessibility- making sure that the river valley is accessible to the entire city through public transit and other sustainable transportation options.” – Survey Participant

“These principles should absolutely speak to access, usage and vibrant urban spaces. We need to do far more to make the river valley a vibrant gathering space.” – Survey Participant

RIBBON OF GREEN:

Land Management Classifications

Land Management Classifications (LMCs) outline the level of protection or compatible development and use within portions of the River Valley and Ravine System. In the future, they will guide design and programming decisions to create park amenities and operations standards appropriate to their location and surrounding context. There are three LMCs: Preservation, Conservation and Active/Working Landscapes.

NEW PRESERVATION SUB-CLASSIFICATIONS

In the previous engagement phase (Phase 2), the project team shared the LMCs and showed how they have been applied to the River Valley and ravines. Among the extensive feedback received in Phase 2, three key themes stood out:

- + Strong value placed on trail experiences in Preservation areas, for biking as well as foot-based travel.
- + Concerns about the impact that continued unmanaged use of unimproved/informal trails may be having, especially in the most ecologically sensitive areas.
- + Considerations that a well-planned network of trails could provide access to Preservation areas while containing recreational use to the most appropriate (least sensitive) areas.

Based on this feedback, in Phase 3, the project team shared a proposed change to the Preservation LMC to create two sub-classifications, as follows and as shown in the image below:

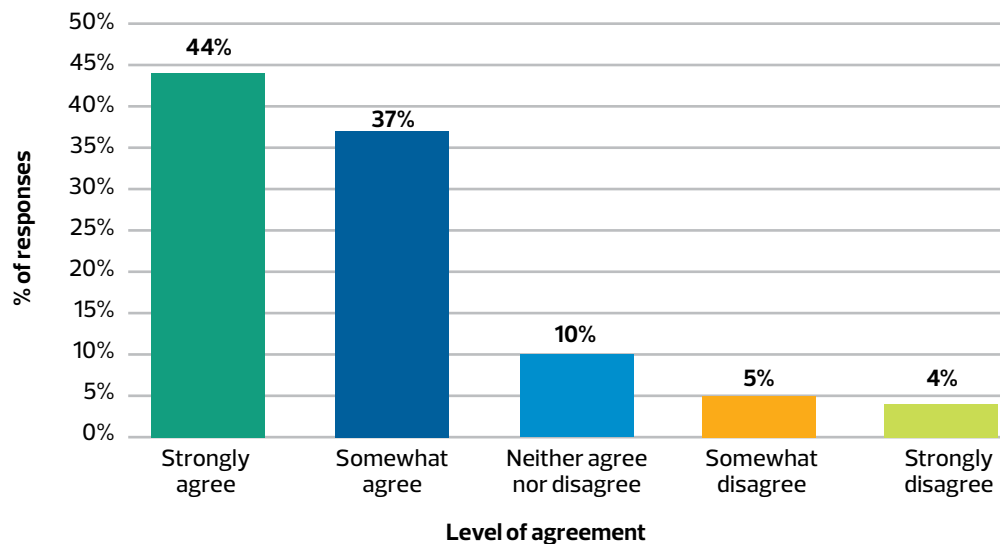
- + Ecosystem Protection
- + Preservation: Trail-based Recreation

PRESERVATION		CONSERVATION		ACTIVE/WORKING LANDSCAPES		
Protect the integrity of the natural environment and restore natural functioning with limited access and recreational opportunities.		Connect people to nature by allowing people to enjoy and appreciate the System while minimizing environmental impact and restoring ecological functioning, when possible.		Facilitate gathering and recreation within the System, recognize existing uses and encourage restoration.		
NEW Ecosystem Protection	NEW PRESERVATION Trail-based Recreation	CONSERVATION Trail-based Recreation	Natural Recreation	Intensive Recreation	Agriculture + Horticulture	Urban Services + City-wide Attractions
Protect the highest-value and most sensitive ecosystems and features, ensuring that these systems continue to thrive as the city's population grows. Compatible uses include conservation and stewardship activities.	Provide a network of trails in Preservation areas to support low-impact trail recreation opportunities while minimizing ecological impacts. <i>Trail type: non-paved narrow width trails.</i> Compatible uses include a variety of low-impact trail uses. Foot-based travel and biking are considered compatible unless explicitly prohibited (e.g. through signage).	Facilitate access to and regional connectivity through the System in harmony with the natural environment. <i>Trail types: non-paved variable width OR paved variable width.</i> Compatible uses include all types of trail use.	Provide opportunities to rest, linger and enjoy nature. Compatible uses include all types of trail use, plus picnicking, unstructured play and river access.	Provide a wide range of recreational opportunities tailored to the River Valley setting. Compatible uses include events and festivals, fitness courses and boat launches.	Recognize existing agricultural and horticultural uses. Compatible uses include farms and supporting uses.	Support city-wide attractions while acknowledging the importance of urban services to accommodate a growing city. Compatible uses include existing development, golf courses and city-wide attractions.

The intent in creating these two new Preservation sub-categories is to acknowledge the demand for diverse uses on these non-paved narrow trails and commit to working towards a network that meets this demand without compromising the ecologically sensitive areas that the Preservation LMC is intended to protect.

As seen in the chart below, 81 percent of survey respondents agreed with the proposed addition of the two new Preservation sub-classifications – Ecosystem Protection and Preservation: Trail-based Recreation.

Please rate the extent to which you agree with the proposed addition of the Ecosystem Protection and Preservation: Trail-based Recreation sub-classifications to the Land Management Classification framework (Total number of responses: 3215)



Participants throughout all engagement activities were invited to share their input to help finalize the Land Management Classifications. Specifically, participants were asked, “Is there anything else the City should consider in finalizing the Land Management Classifications?”

PRESERVATION

We heard overall agreement that the new Preservation subcategories are beneficial and that the LMC framework has improved from Phase 2.

ADDRESSING USER CONFLICT

Many comments were related to the conflict between mountain bikers, hikers, and fast-moving e-bikes and e-scooters. This led to comments around enforcement, safety and noise levels from bikers impacting the desire for quiet enjoyment.

MOUNTAIN BIKING A VALUED ACTIVITY

Another frequent theme raised by participants was general support for mountain bike trails. Some suggested that biking trails be maintained and further developed wherever hiking is permitted.

TRAIL TYPE AND MAINTENANCE

Trail maintenance was also a common theme. Some expressed concerns about some trails falling into “no man’s land,” which could result in trail damage or poor maintenance.

ECOLOGICAL PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

On the other hand, some commenters shared that mountain biking trails are incompatible with ecological protection. These survey respondents want further ecosystem enhancement. This group of commenters would like to see ecological restoration, stewardship, native plants, wildlife corridors and an overall plan for ecosystem protection. However, a handful of participants expressed the tension that ecological preservation in a large city Edmonton is unrealistic.

SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Other comments included requests for additional infrastructure such as seating throughout the River Valley. Further, many would like to see signage and location markers to help protect ecologically important areas while reinforcing appropriate trail use.

ACCESS FOR ALL AGES AND ABILITIES

Another frequently mentioned theme was the desire for more accessibility. This included many calls for paved trails for people of all ages and abilities to use. There were specific mentions of how existing narrow trails create unsafe conditions for people with mobility challenges or hearing impairments who are unable to hear fast moving bicycles.

ACTIVE/WORKING LANDSCAPES

The majority of comments related to this LMC was about the opposition to any new golf course developments in the River Valley or large commercial operations.

COMMERCIAL USES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Some commenters wanted to see small rental businesses for non-motorized water sport equipment and other low-impact food options such as food trucks and other temporary pop-up retail options.

ENCAMPMENTS IN THE RIVER VALLEY

Several commenters expressed concerns about people experiencing homelessness in the River Valley. Some expressed a perspective that housing in the River Valley is not aligned with ecological preservation and called for the removal of the encampments. Others supported encampments staying in place until better and more permanent solutions become available in Edmonton.

Other general feedback from participants throughout engagement activities is highlighted below.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- + Desire for clear communication, collaboration, and focus on stewardship to strike a balance between recreation and ecological protection in the River Valley.
- + Questions about the distinction of preservation areas, and whether these areas would be remapped or if the existing mapping would be carried forward
- + Desire to better understand and define the difference between the terms "ecosystem protection" and "preservation" and their practical implications, particularly concerning the trail construction in preservation areas and allowable uses (e.g., hiking, cycling)
- + Desire for further engagement about the ecological impacts of trail usage
- + Desire for more information, including mapping of sub-classifications, before providing an assessment of the framework

"Need more details on how biking will be protected in preservation areas." – Survey Participant

"You need to consider people with disabilities and having adequate access for them." – Survey Participant

"This is all people-focused. Please develop a parallel plan for nature- and wildlife-focused concerns." – Survey Participant

RIBBON OF GREEN:

Ecological Guidance

Ecological guidance gives direction for ecological protection within each reach of the River Valley, including:

- + Protecting wildlife habitat and corridors
- + Restoration and naturalization
- + Managing unique and sensitive features
- + Low impact development

Participants were asked to help refine plans to support the protection and restoration of the River Valley, specifically anything they would change or add to the plans to support ecological protection.

Online engagement participants were invited to share their feedback by adding one or more pins with comments to an interactive map of the River Valley about ecological guidance, whereas those who attended a facilitated session were asked to share their comments via workbooks. Key themes are highlighted below.

- + Desire for ecological preservation and restoration efforts such as daylighting creeks, restoring natural areas, stream buffers, and naturalizing/restoring grassy areas
- + Suggestions for more education and signage to help users learn about ecologically important areas
- + Desire for classifications to be more clear to allow for explicit rules (e.g., what activities are restricted in a given area)

- + Some want the City to address the Rossdale Water Treatment Plant by relocating the facility or preventing its future expansion, whereas others were supportive of the idea to redevelop or renaturalize the area
- + Desire for a single track plan
- + Concern about erosion/slope degradation due to unsanctioned mountain biking trails
- + Concern about the off-leash dog areas near trails and the potential for dogs to disrupt birds and wildlife

“Daylighting Mill Creek should be prioritized. While it would be a large undertaking, the benefits, as listed, would be enormous. It would be amazing to correct a massive mistake that the City made in the past.” – Survey Participant

“In the past there was lots of mountain biking on paths and natural areas eroding and destroying habitat. How to educate and prevent this?” – Survey Participant

Program Guidance

Program guidance gives direction to support access, gathering, and enjoyment, including:

- + Pathways and connections (e.g., opportunities to walk, run, ski, and roll in the River Valley)
- + Facilities (pedestrian bridges, washrooms, boat docks, and launches)
- + Gathering and activity areas (e.g., off-leash dog areas, picnic areas, event spaces)

Participants of the engagement were asked for input on anything they would change or add to the plans to support access, gathering, and enjoyment.

Online engagement participants were invited to share their feedback by adding one or more pins to an interactive map of the River Valley and adding a comment about program guidance. During stakeholder and public workshops, participants were invited to share their thoughts about program guidance during discussions and in the engagement booklet provided. The key themes are highlighted below.

TRAIL PLANNING, DESIGN, MANAGEMENT AND USE

The greatest number of comments were related to trail design, management, concerns, and appreciation. Key themes included:

- + Appreciation for existing trail uses, including cross-country skiing, trail running, and cycling
- + Desire for a trail network that supports both active transportation and recreational trail opportunities within the River Valley, including mountain biking
- + Suggestions for trail improvements, including linkages between sections of the trail network and better maintenance
- + Preference for minimal impacts on the ecology of the River Valley, including by discouraging alternate trail building

- + Desire for development of a master single-track trail plan or trail strategy to provide clear guidelines around access to trails for recreational use. Some acknowledged this type of strategy would help to preserve the ecological integrity of the River Valley

“Rogue trails have been added in the last 2 years that are on steep sloped hillsides and an urgent evaluation needs to be conducted here.”
– Survey Participant

“Love mountain biking here. Nice variety from gravel to paved to multiple single-track loops.”
– Survey Participant

“Poor sight distance as you follow the bike/walking path and electric bikes and others come at very high speeds. Scary and potentially dangerous for walkers and bikers.”
– Survey Participant

- + Concerns about how activities coexist with each other on multi-use trails
- + Desire to add more gravel multi-purpose trails
- + Desire to ensure clear sightlines
- + Preference for unpaved trails (due to concerns about flooding)
- + Focus on preserving existing trails rather than creating new ones
- + Desire for signage and educational elements along trails, with a focus on recognizing and considering areas of special significance for Indigenous Nations and Communities
- + Interest in planning for both current and future active transportation modes, which includes consideration for e-bikes

- + Concerns around increased demand for trail use leading to the clearing of natural areas, unauthorized trail building, and users violating trail access rules
- + Suggestions for the City to foster respectful relationships among different user groups, for example through initiatives to facilitate mutual learning and understanding
- + Desire for development of more fulsome trail strategy, including continuation of engagement efforts with all trail users in the development of trail plans, coordination between a future trail plan/strategy and Ribbon of Green plan implementation, and funding
- + Desire for a more structured, regulated, and coordinated approach between the Edmonton Mountain Biking Association and the City for trail building and maintenance

GATHERING AND ACTIVITY AREAS:

- + Support for additional recreational uses and infrastructure, such as places to gather (picnic facilities, etc.), water access, playground/children's areas, off-leash dog areas and a pump track (for wheeled sports, including biking, skateboarding, and scooters)

FACILITIES:

- + Desire for more accessible washrooms
- + Desire for commercial spaces including pop-up stores
- + Desire for educational and cultural spaces
- + Requests to include accessibility standards in plans

FEEDBACK FOR CENTRAL, EAST, AND FAR SOUTH REACHES

During the stakeholder and public facilitated engagement sessions, participants had an opportunity to share their thoughts about the various reaches within the study area. We received feedback for three reaches – the central reach, east reach and far south reach. The following is a list of themes for each respective area:

NORTH SASKATCHEWAN CENTRAL REACH

- + Desire for a unified single trail network
- + Questions about how the City determines preservation areas (e.g., via site-specific assessments)
- + Concerns about the potential impact on native species resulting from the proposed plans
- + Desire to establish a better working relationship between Edmonton Mountain Bike Alliance and the City to identify an appropriate trail network
- + Considerations to look at golf courses as potential space to host educational campaigns (e.g., trail etiquette) with trail users
- + Opportunities for educational campaigns (e.g., trail etiquette) with trail user groups

NORTH SASKATCHEWAN EAST REACH

Regarding ecological guidance:

- + Concerns around the management of erosion as well as understanding wildlife impacts of highly maintained areas like the golf course
- + Appreciation for the idea of daylighting creeks in this reach
- + Questions about the feasibility of ecological protection while maintaining trail uses

Regarding program guidance:

- + Appreciation for the plan to upgrade washrooms and desire to know more about the proposed locations
- + Questions around whether the preservation or repurposing of existing infrastructure was being considered as part of the planning process
- + Concerns about the dog off-leash areas in Hermitage Park
- + Preference for single-track natural surface trails and structural elements along the banks to prevent further erosion

FAR SOUTH REACH

Regarding ecological guidance:

- + Excitement about improved connections from the river to Windermere in the Rabbit Hill area

Regarding program guidance:

- + Concerns about hikers widening footpaths and impacting sensitive areas, prompting suggestions to either make some of the area accessible to mountain bikers or consider restricting access for all users
- + Questions about guidelines for different modes of transportation, such as scooters and mopeds, to mitigate concerns about safety and enforcement
- + Regarding water recreation, safety concerns for kayakers due to motorized watercraft traffic
- + Appreciation for having publicly protected areas so that no future golf courses will be developed in the area
- + Desire for continued access to the river

It was noted that the Irvine Creek area would benefit from more amenities. As in the East Reach, we heard suggestions for trail improvements to prevent further erosion and slope failure. Given that this area has a well-used and highly valued mountain biking trail system, integrating the economic and cultural value of these trails was also raised as an important part of future plans.

RIBBON OF GREEN:

Other Comments and Concerns

In addition to comments directly related to the Ribbon of Green's land management classifications, program guidance, and ecological guidance, we also heard from survey participants concerns related to:

- + People experiencing homelessness in the River Valley area and the need for the City to address the situation
- + Personal safety in and around the River Valley
- + Opposition to a new plan as some participants want to keep things as they are
- + Concerns about the presence of a solar farm as it conflicts with the vision for a healthy ecological area

River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan

The River Valley ARP, Edmonton's statutory plan for the River Valley, is one of the tools the City uses to regulate development in the River Valley and guide decision-making. The ARP is one of the tools that will be used to implement the Ribbon of Green.

As part of the renewal of the River Valley ARP, the City is reviewing decision-making processes for development in the River Valley.

The City currently has a process by which potential River Valley projects are evaluated for impacts and, in some cases, forwarded to City Council for consideration and approval. This includes the completion of an environmental review report that is evaluated by subject matter experts in City administration.

An impact refers to the negative effect a project may have on the current or future conditions of the river valley. The level of impact can be high, moderate or low. A benefit refers to the positive effect a project may have on the current or future conditions of the River Valley.

The updated statutory plan will outline how stakeholders and the public will be informed of projects in the River Valley, and their potential impacts to the environment and historical resources.



Projects that may result in high impacts, based on technical assessments and evaluation by subject matter experts

(e.g. new large-scale facilities and infrastructure such as recreation centres and bridges; significant changes to existing facilities/ infrastructure; projects occurring in areas of high environmental sensitivity)



Projects that may result in moderate impacts, based on technical assessments and evaluation by subject matter experts

(e.g. new smaller-scale facilities and infrastructure such as washrooms, boat docks and launches, etc. Projects occurring in areas of moderate environmental sensitivity)



Projects that may result in low impacts, based on technical assessments and evaluation by subject matter experts

(e.g., like-for-like replacement of smaller-scale infrastructure and amenities; projects occurring in areas of low environmental sensitivity)



Projects that may result in benefits, based on technical assessments and evaluation by subject matter experts

(e.g., tree planting and other types of habitat restoration work; naturalization projects; etc.)

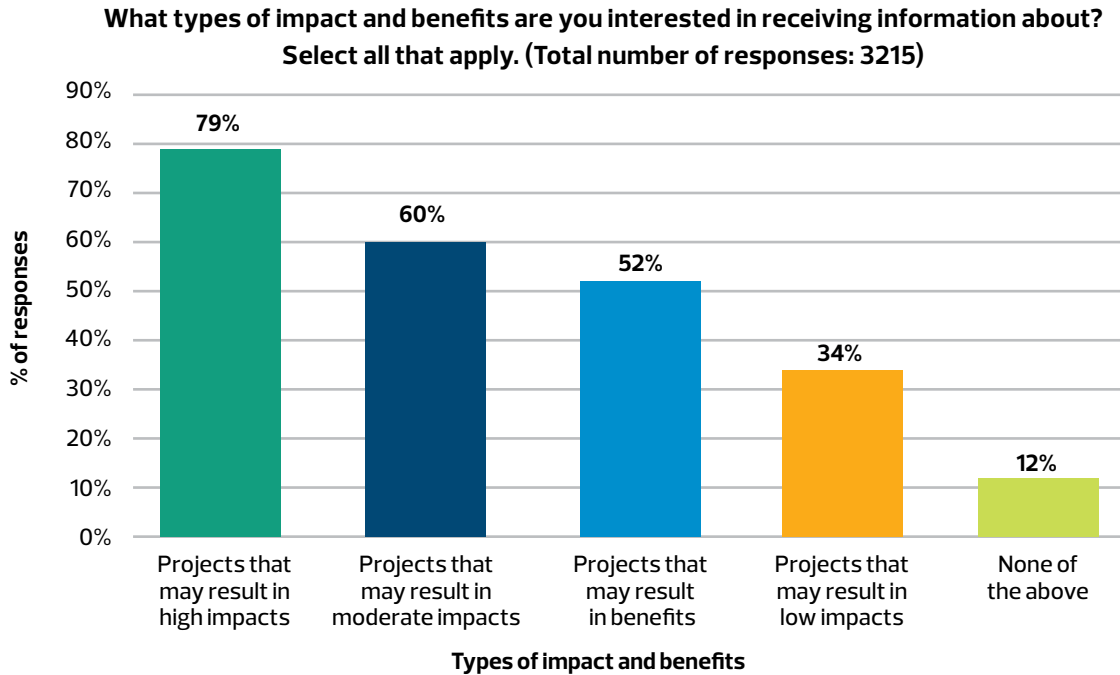
The current River Valley ARP does not outline a process for how we ask for input from the public and stakeholders about the potential environmental impacts of proposed development in the River Valley. Through this project, we have an opportunity to include more specific directions and requirements around the City's engagement approaches for River Valley projects.

Current engagement activities vary depending on the type of project and its potential level of impact. The City must consider the resources required to deliver engagement and prepare project information to share with the public.

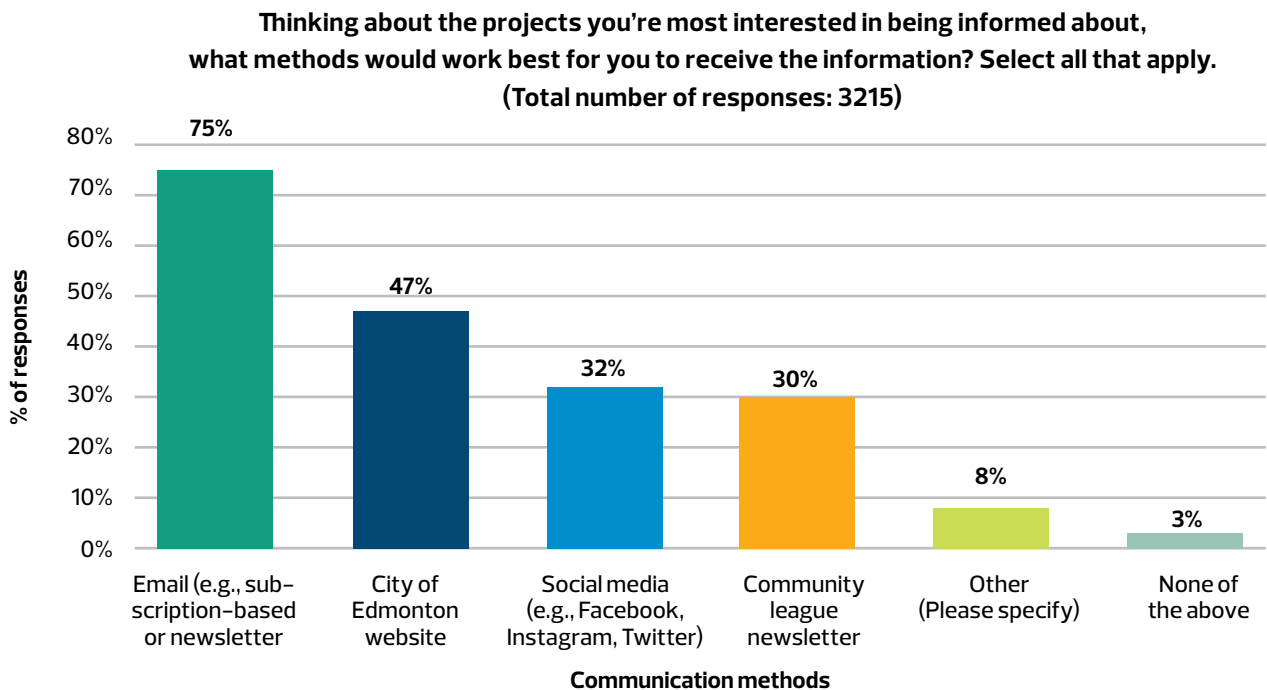
In this phase of engagement, we asked participants how and when they are most interested in being involved in future planning for the River Valley ARP.

Receiving Information About Project Impacts and Benefits

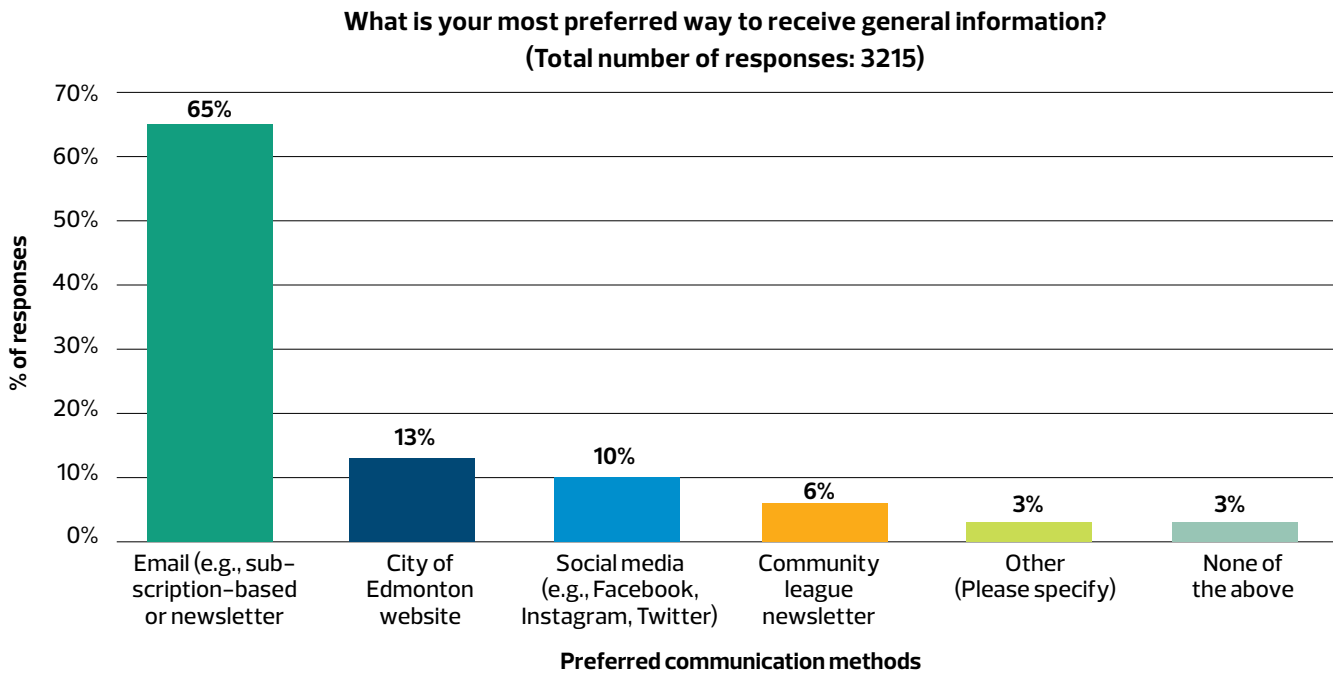
When asked about the **types of impacts and benefits that survey participants are most interested in receiving information about**, we heard that projects that may result in high impacts are of most interest (79%) to survey respondents. This is followed by projects that may result in moderate impacts (60%). Just over fifty percent of survey participants are interested in receiving information about projects that may result in benefits (e.g., restoration).



The survey also asked participants about their preferences for **how they would like to receive information** about projects in which they had the most interest. Most respondents (75%) want to be informed through email correspondence. This was followed by the preference for information to be posted on the City of Edmonton website (47%) and by social media (32%).



When asked about the **preferred method to receive information** generally, we heard that most respondents (65%) prefer to receive information via email.

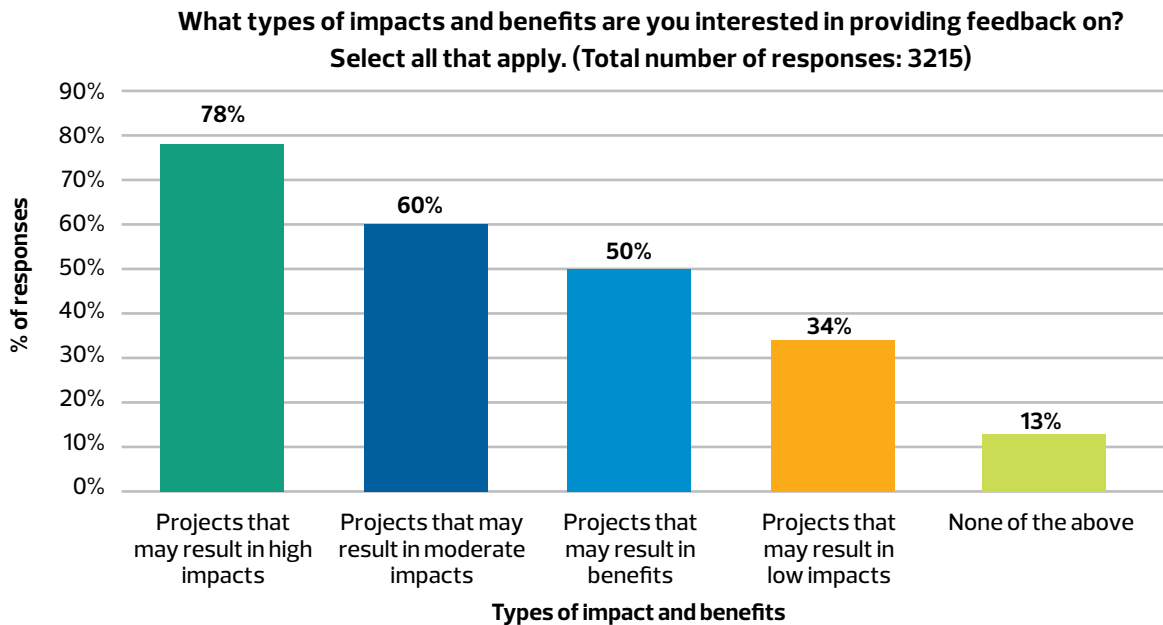


During facilitated sessions, we heard that regardless of a project's impact levels, transparent communication throughout all periods of construction is important. We also received specific suggestions about how stakeholders want to receive information:

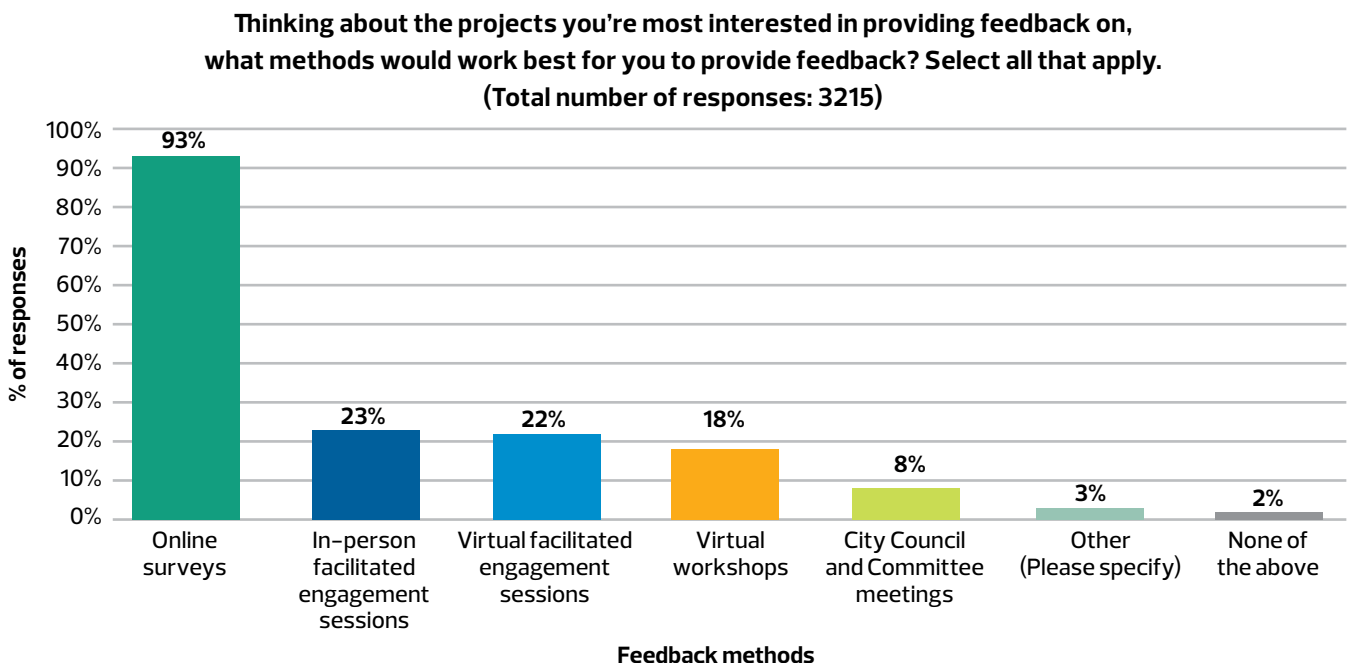
- + Desire to receive regular project updates on the topics most relevant to them
- + Emails: bi-weekly summary emails as well as a comprehensive summary of all projects and engagement that allows people to choose their level of involvement
- + Outreach: appreciation for localized neighbourhood promotions and materials to be available in other parts of Edmonton and acknowledging the connection and value that many trail users have to the River Valley. Suggestions for more paid advertisements in future engagements and more frequent newsletters.
- + Website: suggestions to consolidate all future River Valley projects into a single website featuring an interactive map for improved accessibility and information-sharing
- + Frequency and length: participants would like to receive more information consistently throughout a project's lifespan. Desire to extend engagement timelines to allow residents to better understand the project goals.

Providing Feedback on Project Impacts and Benefits

The online survey also asked respondents to share **what types of impacts and benefits they are interested in providing feedback on**. We heard that respondents are most interested (78%) in providing feedback on projects that may result in high impacts. This is followed by projects that may result in moderate impacts (60%) and those that may result in benefits (50%).

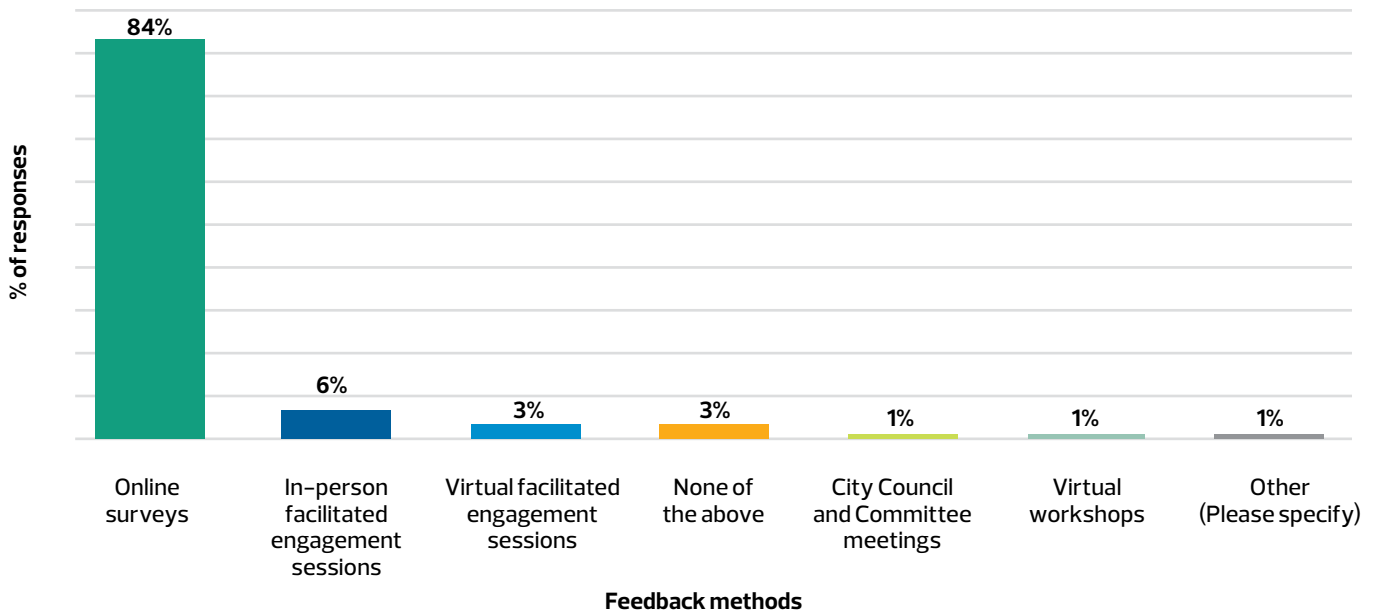


Survey participants were also asked **how they would like to provide feedback on projects of interest**. Nearly all respondents (93%) prefer to provide feedback through online surveys. This method of engagement was followed by about a quarter of respondents who prefer in-person facilitated sessions (23%) and virtual engagement sessions (22%).



When it comes to providing general feedback to the City, online surveys again stood out as the preferred method. All other options are generally not preferred by survey respondents. During workshops, we heard there is a preference for shorter surveys.

What is your most preferred method to provide feedback?
(Total number of responses: 3215)



Timing of Information-Sharing on Project Impacts and Benefits during Engagement

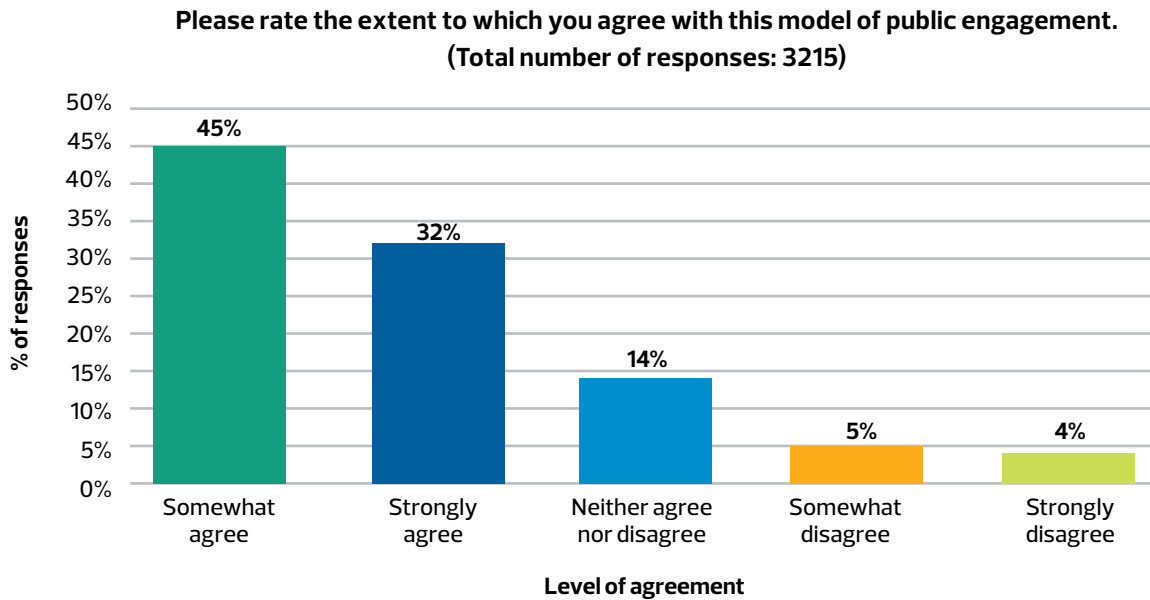
For many River Valley project proposals (e.g., new facilities and amenities), the City engages the public at multiple stages of the project, including high-level concept, preliminary design, detailed design and delivery (i.e., construction). There is an opportunity to develop formal guidelines for public involvement specific to the impacts and benefits of proposed projects and development in the River Valley. Through this project, the City is evaluating how best to balance the need to keep the public engaged and informed about potential project impacts and benefits while being able to deliver services in a timely and efficient way.



For River Valley projects that include a formal public engagement component, the City is evaluating opportunities to share information about potential project impacts twice during project engagement:

1. A general overview of potential environmental impacts early in the project, when fewer project details are known (e.g., at a high-level concept stage), but when there may be more opportunity to influence project direction.
2. A more detailed impact report at later project stages (e.g., preliminary/detailed design), when more project information is available, but when there may be fewer opportunities to influence project direction.

We asked participants to rate the extent to which they agreed with this model of public engagement.



There was strong agreement with the model of public engagement presented. Those who participated in facilitated sessions want to see a greater educational component throughout the engagement process, in particular around ecological preservation. Those who shared that they somewhat or strongly disagree expressed their concerns in the comments:

- + Lack of trust and equity in the engagement process: some participants feel that decisions have already been made or that certain interest groups have more say in the outcome of the program. Some participants hope to see engagement targets for hearing from diverse groups.
- + Following the final design, some participants want the opportunity to give their input to assess whether their concerns were addressed.

“I think all engagement needs to happen when changes to the final plan can be made. Otherwise the city is just saying “this isn’t going the way we wanted and you can say something but it won’t actually matter”. That would be a waste of tax dollars.” – Survey Participant

“Only works if the results of the public engagement are taken into account. Most projects that make it to a draft design have already been decided on and very few changes are made even if the public is not on board.” – Survey Participant

“Need to see final choices & give feedback before actual construction begins.” – Survey Participant

Other Comments and Concerns

We received additional comments about:

- + Desire to recognize and protect ancestral burial sites in the River Valley
- + Language: some respondents shared that the topic and language were too technical and they felt they could not contribute meaningfully to the survey
- + Engagement tools: interactive mapping tools are too complex, and preference for shorter surveys
- + Concerns about engagement fatigue and delays to much-needed changes in the River Valley
- + Some participants want to see fewer resources on these engagements because the River Valley currently functions well

What Happens Next?

Phase 4 engagement on the River Valley Planning Modernization project will take place in the spring of 2024. In this next phase, stakeholders and the public will have the opportunity to review the draft plans, informed by engagement and technical assessments completed to date, and provide further feedback for consideration.

Thank you for your participation!

Your input is essential to this process and will help guide the next stages of work in the development of the Ribbon of Green and River Valley ARP.

Please stay tuned for project next steps and ongoing opportunities to participate and stay involved.

To receive project updates, please sign up at

edmonton.ca/ribbonofgreen

To contact the project team, email

ribbonofgreen@edmonton.ca

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Stakeholder Workshop Invitation List

The following organizations received direct email communications about engagement opportunities.

This outreach was one component of a broader communications strategy that included updates to the project website, signage, billboards, road signs, social media, direct emails, broadcast radio and online audio.

The project team is open to input about organizations that should be added to this list in Phase 4. If you have suggestions, please reach out to ribbonofgreen@edmonton.ca.

ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION ORGANIZATIONS

AdaptAbilities
Canadian Hard of Hearing Society
Chrysalis Society
City of Edmonton Accessibility Advisory Committee
Edmonton Association of the Deaf
Inclusion Alberta
Paralympic Sports Association
Steadward Centre for Personal & Physical Achievement (U of A)
Voices of Albertans with Disabilities (VAD)

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ORGANIZATIONS

Bike Edmonton
Paths for People
Ski2LRT

CHILDREN, YOUTH & STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Boys and Girls Clubs of Edmonton
City of Edmonton – Youth Council
Crystal Kids Youth Centre
Edmonton Early Years Community Coalitions
Fyrefly Institute for Gender & Sexual Diversity (U of A)
iHuman
Old Strathcona Youth Society
Rainbow Alliance of Youth

of Edmonton
Student Unions of post-secondary institutions
Youth Empowerment & Support Services (YESS)
YOUCAN
YWCA
Youth Rise
Youth Unlimited Edmonton

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Explore Edmonton
Edmonton Chamber of Commerce
EEDC/Edmonton Tourism
IDEA (Infill Development in Edmonton Association)
Edmonton Riverboat
High Level Line Society
Prairie Sky Gondola
River Valley Adventure Co.

CONSERVATION, NATURALIST & ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS

Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute
Alberta Conservation Association
Alberta Invasive Species Council
Alberta Mycological Society
Alberta Native Plant Council
Alberta Plantwatch

Beaver Hills Initiative
Big Lake Environmental Support Society (BLESS)
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society – Northern Alberta Chapter
CFUW (Canadian Federation of University Women) Environment Group
Cows and Fish
Ducks Unlimited
Edmonton Native Plant Group
Edmonton Nature Club
Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition
Land Stewardship Centre
Nature Conservancy of Canada – Alberta
North Saskatchewan River Valley Conservation Society
North Saskatchewan River Watershed Alliance
Protect Edmonton's Parks
River Watch
Sierra Club
Wildlife Rehabilitation Society

FESTIVAL & EVENT ORGANIZATIONS

CariWest
Downtown Spark
Dreamspeakers Festival Society
Edmonton Craft Beer Festival
Edmonton Folk Festival
Edmonton Fringe Festival

Edmonton International Film Festival
Edmonton Jazz Festival
Edmonton Pride Festival
Edmonton Ukrainian Festival
Flying Canoe Festival
Heritage Festival
ITU World Triathlon
Silver Skate Festival

FOOD & AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATIONS

Agri-Environmental Partnership
Edmonton Food Council
Horsehills Berry Farm
Norbest Farms
Riverbend Gardens
Sunstar Nurseries
Sustainable Food Edmonton

GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

Edmonton Metropolitan Region Board
Epcor
Province of Alberta
River Valley Alliance

HERITAGE & ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

Edmonton Arts Council
Edmonton & District Historical Society
Edmonton Heritage Council
Edmonton Historical Board

ETHNOCULTURAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS & NEWCOMER SERVICES

Action for Healthy Communities
ASSIST Community Services Centre
CANDORA Society of Edmonton

Catholic Social Services
Edmonton China Town Multi-Cultural Centre
Edmonton Intercultural Centre
Edmonton Interfaith Centre
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
Edmonton Multicultural Coalition
Hellenic Canadian Community of Edmonton and Region
Jewish Family Services Edmonton
John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights
Kara Community Resource Centre
Metis Child and Family Services Society
Multicultural Health Brokers
Multicultural Women and Seniors Services Association
Norquest College (Centre for Intercultural Education)
Somali Canadian Cultural Society of Edmonton
The Family Centre
The Green Room
Ukrainian Canadian Social Services

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING OR AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS/ HOUSELESSNESS

Bissell Centre
Boyle Street Community Services
Boyle Street Outreach
CANDORA Society of Edmonton
E4C
Edmonton Social Planning Council
Homeward Trust

SPORT & RECREATION ORGANIZATIONS

Ceyana Canoe Club
Dogs Off Leash Ambassador Program
Edmonton Australian Rules Football Club
Edmonton Nordic Ski Club
Edmonton Dragon Boat Racing Club
Edmonton Mountain Bike Alliance
Edmonton Outdoor Club
Edmonton Rowing Club
Edmonton Ski Club
Edmonton Speed Skating Association
Edmonton Sport Council
Friends of Terwillegar Park
Hardcore Bikes
Mud Sweat and Gears
NE Zone Sports
Northwest Voyageurs Canoe and Kayak Club
Red Bike Cycling Club
River City Runners
TRAC (Terwillegar Riverbend Advisory Council)
Whitemud Equine Learning Centre Association
Wildcats Football Club
Women on Wheels YEG

SCHOOL BOARDS & POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord
Edmonton Catholic School Board
Edmonton Public School Board
Concordia University
King's University
MacEwan University
NAIT

SENIORS' ORGANIZATIONS

City of Edmonton –
Age Friendly Edmonton

Edmonton Seniors Centre

Edmonton Seniors
Coordinating Council

Mill Woods Seniors Association

Operation Friendship
Seniors Society

Seniors Association of Greater
Edmonton (SAGE)

Senior Citizen Opportunity
Neighbourhood Association
(SCONA)

Southwest Edmonton Seniors
Association

West End Seniors Activity Centre

Urban Indigenous Organizations*

Aboriginal Veterans Society
of Edmonton

Alberta Native Friendship
Centres Association

Canadian Native Friendship Centre

Creating Hope Society

Edmonton Native Healing Centre

Sacred Heart Church of the
First Peoples

** Note that in addition to outreach to these organizations, engagement with Indigenous Nations and Communities is also taking place as a parallel, integrated stream of RVPM engagement.*



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