EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building Great Neighbourhoods is a new branch of the City of Edmonton committed to making the most out of your neighbourhood by investing taxpayer and utility rate dollars in reconstructing neighbourhoods to enhance their livability and longevity. This work is intended to last for the next 50-60 years and to keep our mature neighbourhoods at their best.

The upgrades could include:

– Connections that help you walk, bike and move around your neighbourhood;
– Improvements to green spaces and parks;
– Measures to reduce speeding and shortcutting;
– Other infrastructure needs identified by the community to improve livability.

The City of Edmonton’s Building Great Neighbourhoods (BGN) branch is planning Neighbourhood Renewal construction for Highlands beginning in 2019 and ending in 2021. Before construction begins, an Urban Design Analysis is completed, which informs the preliminary and detailed designs. The analysis and designs are a reflection of City policies, technical requirements and public input.

Overview

Highlands began its development as a residential area in 1908 in north–east Edmonton. Since then, Highlands has experienced various stages of development. Many historic buildings help to preserve the unique historical or architectural character in the neighbourhood. Magrath Mansion, Holgate residence and Marshall McLuhan residence are a few prominent properties that maintain ties to the early development. The community is composed primarily of single–family houses, with many long term residents, indicating a general satisfaction with Highlands living.

Ada Boulevard is a prominent roadway on the south edge of the neighbourhood, which plays multiple roles as a roadway for people who drive, bike, and walk with connections to the North Saskatchewan River Valley, along with multiple park spaces along the road. Highlands has four named parks internal to the neighbourhood including: Highlands Park, Gaby Haas Park, Buttercup Farm Park and Henry Martell Park. There are a few additional open spaces with opportunity for enhancement including the former trolley turnaround at the southeast portion of the intersection of 112 Avenue and 61 Street, the five–way intersection of 111 Avenue and 57/60 Street and open spaces along Ada Boulevard.
Typical residential streets in the neighbourhood have 1.5m concrete sidewalks. Several existing sidewalks in the community are covered with asphalt overlay. Resident feedback and City policy supports replacing 1.5m sidewalks with wider walks where possible. Most of the roads are lined with mature trees and without curb ramps at intersections. As part of the Neighbourhood Renewal, curb ramps will be added to improve accessibility.

There are several missing sidewalk connections in the neighbourhood that are planned to be added along with raised crosswalks and curb extensions, as shown on the Active Connections and Walkway Improvements Plan.

The City of Edmonton has conducted a comprehensive series of public engagement events since January 2018, which included a community meeting focused on Ada Boulevard, a stakeholder workshop, two in-person public workshops at Highlands School and Mount Royal School, an online and hard copy survey, and two drop-in workshops at Henry Martell Park. The input received through all public engagement activities is used in conjunction with City policies and technical considerations to inform the concepts for this Neighbourhood Renewal project.

As presented in the associated “What We Heard” report, a Vision statement and Important Elements were identified and refined by residents and stakeholders to help guide the renewal efforts for their neighbourhood streets and public open spaces. The workshops also helped to identify “What Is Working Well” and “What Needs Attention” for Highlands. The Vision defines what the City is working to achieve through Neighbourhood Renewal and the set of Important Elements are objectives that contribute to achieving that Vision.

**Vision**

“Highlands is a safe, friendly, and highly-connected neighbourhood. It is an active and accessible destination, where people enjoy modern infrastructure and beautiful gathering spaces surrounded by local history.”

**Important elements of the vision:**

- Highlands features its natural beauty, including mature trees and connections to the river valley.
- Highlands is an active and accessible neighbourhood, where streets and sidewalks are designed to favour pedestrians and other active modes of transportation.
- Highlands is a safe neighbourhood, where traffic management and lighting help people feel secure moving throughout the community.
- Highlands is a friendly neighbourhood, where there are beautiful, functional and accessible outdoor areas for people to gather.
- Highlands honours and reflects its history, recognizing local points of interest and telling stories about the diverse groups of people who lived on these lands.
- Highlands is a connected neighbourhood, where the streets and sidewalks support a natural flow of people who move both north and south of 112 Avenue.

The goal of the following concepts is to deliver a plan to renew the neighbourhood public spaces based on the direction provided through the Neighbourhood Renewal program. The project takes into account the physical condition, historical context, safety, functionality and recreation requirements identified through the public engagement process.
Residential Road Renewal

Potential improvements to residential roads to improve walking, cycling, and accessibility to slow traffic and discourage short-cutting include:

- curb extensions at several intersections;
- raised crosswalks at intersections to replace speed bumps along Ada Boulevard;
- the addition of a roundabout at 60 Street and 111 Avenue;
- adding curb ramps at intersections and new street lights along the streets;
- widening of existing sidewalks to 1.8m where feasible; and
- adding missing sidewalk links as site conditions allow.

Proposed Bike Routes

There are two additional north/south bike routes proposed between Ada Boulevard and 118 Avenue and an additional east/west bike route on 113 Avenue. The west bike route would connect the existing bike route on Ada Boulevard at Henry Martell Park at 65 Street up to the retail stores on 112 Avenue. There is a signalized pedestrian crossing on the east side of the intersection at 112 Avenue that could be used by bikes to cross the busy roadway. The bike route would continue north to 113 Avenue where it intersects with the east/west bike route and wayfinding signage would direct people on bikes east to 64 Street. The 64 Street bike route would continue north to an existing pedestrian crossing on 118 Avenue. There is an existing bike route that continues north of 118 Avenue on 64 Street.

An additional bike route is proposed at 55 Street. This would direct bikes between Ada Boulevard and 118 Avenue and past the existing Mount Royal School and Gaby Haas Park.

A bike route on 113 Avenue would provide an alternate route to avoid busy vehicle traffic and intersections on 112 Avenue. This route also provides access to the community league, Highlands Park, Buttercup Farm Park, and would connect to the Mount Royal School site. A connection further east could continue with a shared use path through the school, but will depend on the ultimate development plans for the site.

Bicycle Facility Road Renewal

Throughout the renewal project we have heard that active modes of transportation and movement between areas north and south of 112 Street are important. The streets within Highlands are generally narrow at 8m width with mature trees lining the roads, making the addition of bike facilities a challenge without considering changes to the current operation of the roadway. There are two types of facilities proposed for priority bike routes.

An on-street bike boulevard would continue to allow bikes and cars to share the roadway, increasing the awareness of bikes to motor vehicle drivers. Traffic calming will be considered to limit vehicles to 30 km/hr. The on-street painting helps direct people to community destinations and other neighbourhoods. The benefits include the following:

- Low maintenance.
- No change to street width or sidewalks.
- Creates awareness of bikes on the road.
- Provides direction to people who walk and bike.

A shared use path moves people who walk and bike off of the street and provides a wide place for them to share. The path would be widened towards the private property lines within the road right–of–way to avoid disruptions to mature trees. The shared use path concept includes the following benefits:

- On road parallel parking is maintained.
- During winter, the shared use path will be cleaned and maintained by the City.
- Creates a separate space from cars for people who walk and bike.
Highlands Overall Urban Design Concept
Ada Boulevard

Ada Boulevard is a prominent roadway in the City with views of the North Saskatchewan River Valley and it currently functions as a shared space for people who drive, walk and bike without sidewalks. Two design concepts are proposed based on existing constraints, City policies and resident feedback. The two proposed concepts are as follows:

1. **A shared-road (Woonerf),** with one-way vehicle traffic. The concept is proposed along a segment of Ada Boulevard within Highlands between Henry Martell Park and 62 Street. Woonerf is a Dutch planning concept, which gives the pedestrian priority on the street with vehicles acting as a secondary mode of transportation. The design focuses on complete street design with enhanced public amenities and slows traffic movement to allow for safe shared use. Raised planter boxes and seating areas can direct vehicle traffic and define on-street parking opportunities. The traffic flow is in one direction to allow extra width for the activity areas, which could include benches, waste receptacles, landscaping and interpretive signage. In addition to the shared slow speed roadway, a shared use path would be continuous on the south side of Ada Boulevard and defined by a different colour to allow for the two-way bike route. The Woonerf would be limited to a portion of Ada Boulevard due to the disruption to vehicle traffic and extra material cost to street improvements.

2. **A shared-use path (SUP) with boardwalk** along the south side of Ada Boulevard is an alternative design concept. This concept moves bikes and pedestrians off of the street and provides a wide path for shared travel. The existing road width along Ada is between 8.5m to 9.5m and therefore may require additional width outside the road to create the path. The extra width could be created by shifting the road to the north or by projecting the path over the top-of-bank by building a boardwalk structure. Concrete accessible ramps from private homes or mountable curbs should be considered in the design to allow for accessibility across to the path on the south side of the street. Parallel parking is maintained on the north side of the Boulevard. During winter, the shared use path will be cleaned and maintained by the City.
City-Owned Outdoor Spaces

Along with the public streets, Highlands contains several parks and open spaces throughout the neighbourhood. The open space design concepts align with the City’s overarching policy documents, such as, “The Ways” documents and “Breathe” strategy document for open spaces. The common elements of the concept designs include increased accessibility, improved public amenities and placemaking.

The cost for the open space concept designs must fall within the renewal budget for the neighbourhood to be approved for construction. Some elements proposed may not receive funding, however efforts will be made to partner with other City programs, community partners, and initiatives to leverage additional funding opportunities.

Following is a brief description of the potential concept enhancements:

1. **Buttercup Farm Park** — A triangular-shaped park located between 58 Street and 60 Street and between 113 and 112 Avenue. The park name references the area’s history as a farm where yellow buttercup flowers grew naturally. The farmhouse was originally built in 1912 and still stands across the street. The proposed concept for the park would include closing 113 Avenue and replacing it with a wide shared-use path for the bike route and planting additional deciduous trees. The curb at the peninsula where 58 and 60 streets connect would be realigned to remove a reverse angle left turn and improve the pedestrian connections. A circular plaza could be built near the center of the park with a shape of a buttercup flower inset with coloured paving, sculptural public art reflecting historical elements as a park feature, and park benches and pathways connecting people to the amenities. The overall purpose of the park improvements is to reflect the history of the neighbourhood space, create placemaking and to provide a passive space for meeting and relaxing.

2. **Trolley Turnaround Open Space** — an open space formerly used as a turnaround for street trolleys is located on the southeast corner of the 61 Street and 112 Avenue intersections. This space is currently underutilized and could provide an additional open space for the neighbourhood or could be redeveloped into a City asset. The proposed concept for the space includes replacing the existing asphalt roadway with coloured asphalt or paving stone path distinguishing it as a gathering place and small pocket park. It could also be designed as an art park where local artists display their creations on a temporary basis for viewing or sale. The coloured paving could also be used to set up kiosks or by food trucks during organized events.
Henry Martell Park — The park space is proposed to be expanded by extending the curbs to narrow adjacent roadways, which would help slow down drivers. Walkways, a curb ramp, and a waste receptacle could be added at the northwest corner to connect to the existing park benches and to Ada Boulevard. A sidewalk is proposed along the east side of the park. The addition of hard surface walkways and curb ramps will provide universal accessibility to residents. A bike rack is proposed along the bike route and could be a form of functional art, reflecting neighbourhood history or Henry Martell’s legacy as an accomplished golfer. A shared street (Woonerf) concept works well at this location to provide an area for people to gather and socialize during events such as Highlandia. In general the concept maintains the natural open space.

Boulder Lookout Park — The park is located between 51 and 52 Street overlooking the river valley on the south side of Ada Boulevard. The design proposes to include a manufactured boulder play structure with approved surfacing for soft landings, such as, sand, rubber or wood chips at the base. This boulder would be a climbing amenity for people of different ages and would allow users to reach a height to look over the natural trees to the river valley below. This park is located at the entrance to a trail down to the pedestrian bridge across the river and would be a good stopping point for travelers along Ada Boulevard. Wayfinding signage identifying neighbourhood features and the trail access are proposed at the entrance to the trail. This signage could also include information about the historic buildings in the neighbourhood and a walking route to see the historic features and plaques.

111 Avenue/60 Street Intersection — There is an existing triangular shaped open space at the intersection of 57/60 Street and 111 Avenue. The proposed design concept for this space adds a landscaped roundabout to the intersection and closes the road access from 57 Street to 111 Avenue. The closure of the road allows for better operation of the roundabout intersection and driveway access from the adjacent house would be maintained with access north on 57 Street. The roundabout would help reduce speeding on 111 Avenue and also adds an attractive neighbourhood feature. The existing open space would be expanded, with low hanging branches trimmed back to allow more visibility into the space. There would also be potential for more seating and additional walkway connections to create a quiet space to visit and relax.