



# breathe

EDMONTON'S GREEN NETWORK STRATEGY

What We Heard Report  
Phase 3: Objectives + Priorities  
December 2016

**Project Website**

[www.edmonton.ca/breathe](http://www.edmonton.ca/breathe)



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# PROJECT OVERVIEW



## What is Breathe?

### Edmonton's Green Network Strategy

Parks and open spaces are vital to a community's health. These open spaces provide places for people to play, gather, grow food, learn about nature and celebrate.

Because Edmonton Metro is projected to nearly double in population from 1.2 million people to 2.1 million people by 2050, the City has embarked on a process to plan the city's green network to meet the needs of growing communities.

### A Multi-Functional Green Network

Edmonton's Green Network Strategy will examine how open space in the City of Edmonton functions as an integrated network of public spaces that provide real, measurable value to Edmontonians. Open spaces contribute to human health and wellness, improve the urban environment, and provide places for people to come together. These contributions are the central themes of the Green Network Strategy, and provide the organizing framework for assessing open space.

## ECOLOGY

Supports and enhances the environment by sustaining healthy and resilient ecosystems.



## CELEBRATION

Connects people to each other and builds a sense of place by providing places for communities to thrive, gather and celebrate.



## WELLNESS

Promotes healthy living and fosters well-being through diverse kinds of recreation, mobility and environments.



## What is the goal of the project?

BREATHE is a transformative strategy to make sure that each neighbourhood in Edmonton will be supported by an accessible network of open space as the city grows.

The Green Network Strategy builds on the Urban Parks Management Plan and the Natural Connections Strategic Plan, and aligns with the goals identified in the City's strategic planning documents ("The Ways").

The Green Network Strategy will support the City of Edmonton commitment to:

- » Transform Edmonton's urban form
- » Enhance the use of public transit and active modes of transportation
- » Improve Edmonton's liveability
- » Preserve and sustain Edmonton's environment
- » Ensure Edmonton's financial sustainability
- » Diversify Edmonton's economy

## What is included in the green network?

In Edmonton, the green network is all of the city's outdoor land and water that is publicly owned or publicly accessible.

Some examples include:

- » Parks and plazas, like Coronation Park and Churchill Square
- » Main streets, like Jasper Avenue
- » Natural areas, like the North Saskatchewan River Valley and Ravine System
- » Corridors and linkages, like Mill Creek Ravine
- » Green infrastructure, like the bioswale at Ellerslie Fire Station, green roofs, and the rainwater gardens at Government House Park









# ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The BREATHE public engagement process acknowledges the importance of incorporating local knowledge and community values in the planning of our green network. This section outlines how the project team has engaged and communicated to help inform the Green Network Strategy.

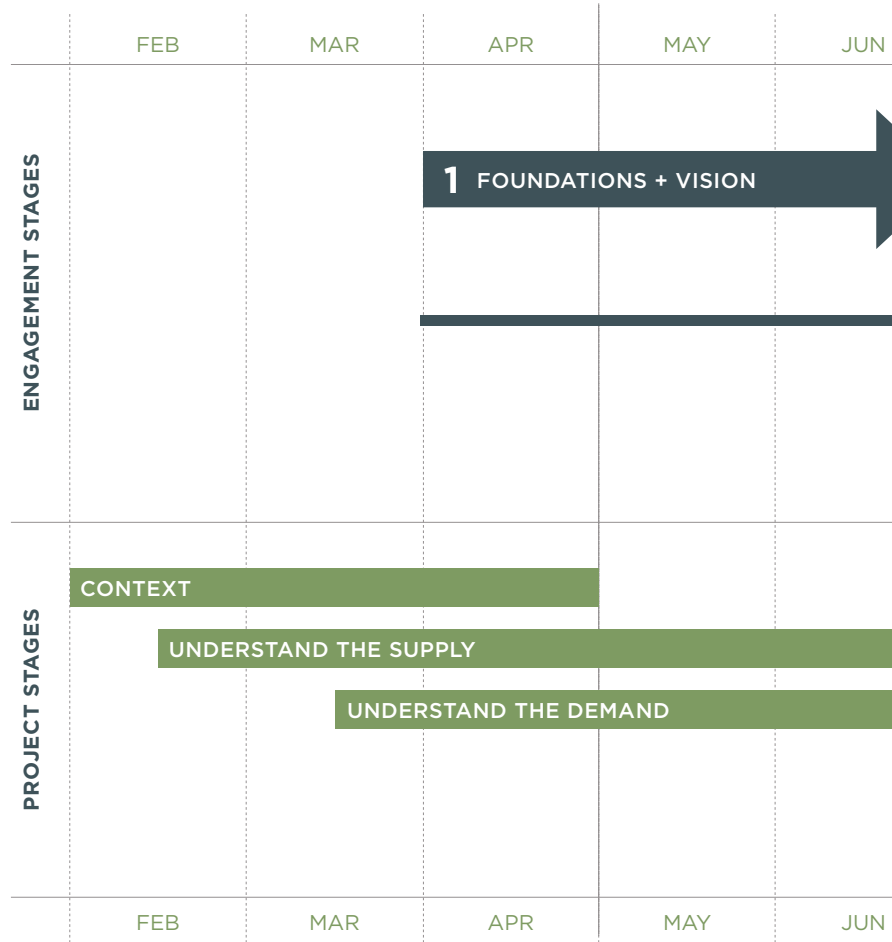
# Phases of Engagement

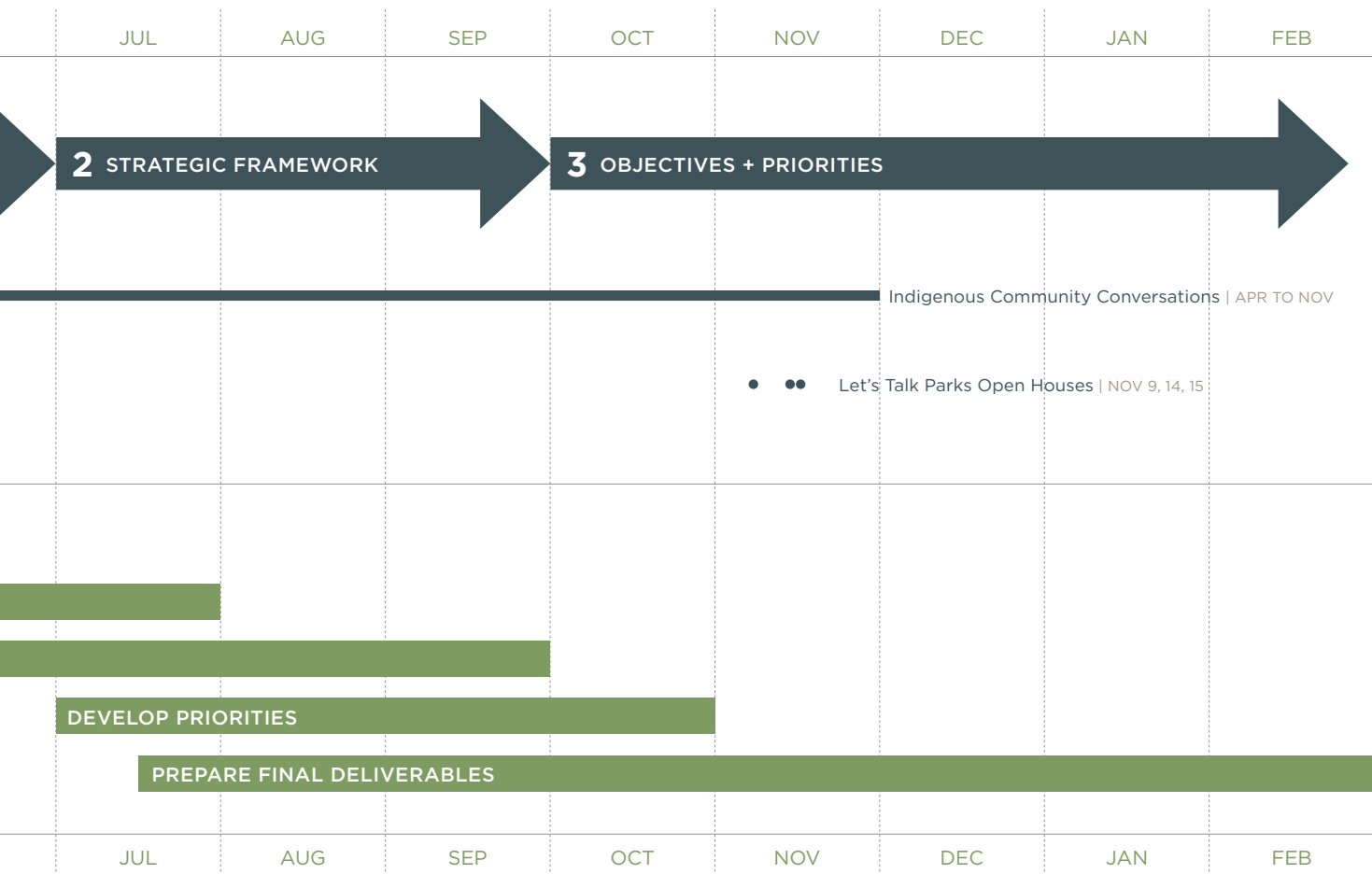
The engagement process is structured in three phases, which each inform project development in different ways:

**PHASE 1: FOUNDATIONS + VISION** is designed to identify demands, opportunities and barriers to use. Input will provide the foundation for developing strategic objectives and priorities.

**PHASE 2: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK** is designed to validate the results of the supply analysis (Project Stage 2). Major components of the Green Network Strategy will be developed based on feedback gathered during this phase.

**PHASE 3: OBJECTIVES + PRIORITIES** is designed to present the proposed objectives and priorities for Breathe. Public input will inform the development of a draft Strategy, which will be presented for final feedback from stakeholders and citizens.





## Communications

A thorough and varied program of communication supported and promoted the various engagement activities. Specific engagement tactics including the following:

- » Project information and engagement opportunities shared at [edmonton.ca/breathe](http://edmonton.ca/breathe)
- » Facebook and Twitter
- » E-newsletters (sent to 3,876 people)
- » Print material: posters to all City libraries, recreation centres, and City of Edmonton offices
- » Road signs (8 throughout Edmonton)
- » Media: public service announcements, media advisory, newspaper advertisements
- » City of Edmonton Public Events Calendar and Public Engagement Calendar
- » Direct email and communiques to internal and external project stakeholders; all City staff received information through Great City News, On Course and The Beat
- » Radio advertisements through a number of stations (CKRAFM, CISNFM, CKNOFM, CHED 1 and CFCW)
- » Letter of invitation sent to Mayor and Councillors

## About this Report

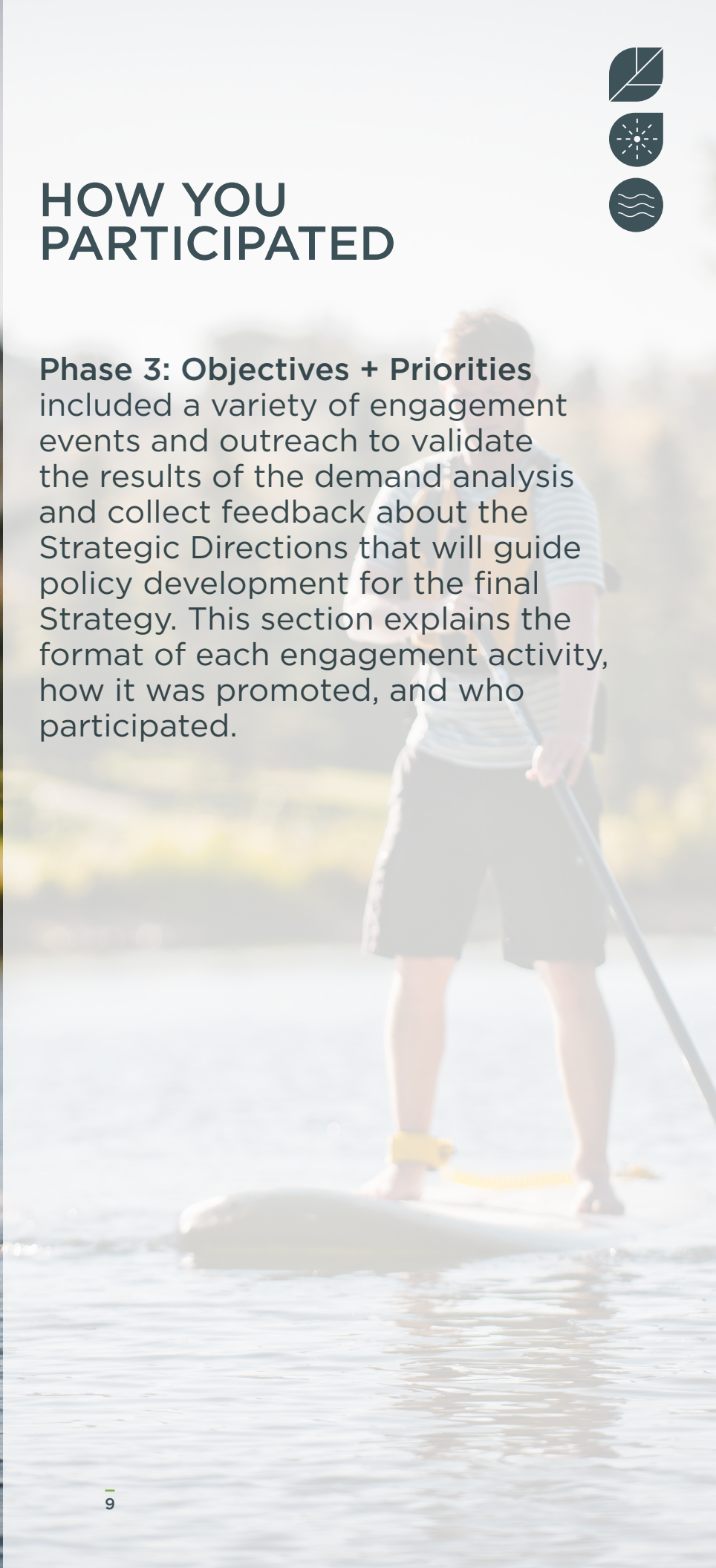
During the third phase of engagement, the BREATHE team presented the results of Project Stage 3 (Demand Analysis) and the draft Strategic Directions that were developed to help guide policy development and recommendations for the final Strategy.

This report presents the findings from the Phase 3: Objectives and Priorities engagement activities. It includes a description of the consultation activities including when they occurred, who participated, and the findings from each. The report concludes with a summary of the findings from all engagement activities discussed herein.



## HOW YOU PARTICIPATED

**Phase 3: Objectives + Priorities** included a variety of engagement events and outreach to validate the results of the demand analysis and collect feedback about the Strategic Directions that will guide policy development for the final Strategy. This section explains the format of each engagement activity, how it was promoted, and who participated.



3

SESSIONS

94

PARTICIPANTS

## Let's Talk Parks Open Houses

Three open houses were convened at diverse locations across Edmonton. Attendees were able to review project goals, the definition of the green network, and open space functions. They could also review the results of the supply analysis that illustrated how well areas of Edmonton are serviced by the different types of open spaces. Preliminary findings from the demand assessment were presented that identified how Edmontonians use open space. Finally ten Strategic Directions were presented upon which priorities and recommendations will be based. Attendees shared their thoughts by providing comments on “sticky notes” and affixing them to the panels.

## Indigenous Communities

Meetings were convened with Indigenous communities with connections to Edmonton. The City has reached out to First Nations communities in Treaty 6; the Métis Nation of Alberta; communities from Treaty 7 and 8 with traditional territories in the Edmonton region; and urban Indigenous peoples. Meetings were held to share project information, gather input, and continue to engage in an open dialogue with the Indigenous communities. Input from Métis and First Nations communities is important to identifying key uses, needs, goals and strategies for open spaces, and specifically to develop a greater understanding of how Indigenous needs and interests can be incorporated and served in the future.



## WHAT YOU SAID

From the BREATHE engagement activities completed to date, it is clear that many people care about the Edmonton Green Network: hundreds of individuals have participated in meetings, workshops, open houses and pop-up engagement events, and thousands more provided feedback online.

This section explains the findings from the Phase 3 open houses, and from the Indigenous Community Conversations held throughout the project.

## Phase 3 Feedback

Feedback from the Let's Talk Parks open houses and from conversations with Indigenous communities is presented according to the ten Strategic Directions. Comments provided about other aspects of the study are noted as well.

### VIBRANT SPACES

***Make open spaces vibrant, sustainable and functional to support community identity and needs.***

- » Jasper Avenue presents an opportunity. The River Valley is another opportunity - commercial development would encourage more people to visit.
- » Spaces should reflect local uniqueness and heritage - they provide a sense of place.
- » Temporary installations can help make spaces vibrant.
- » Open spaces should reflect Indigenous heritage. This could be done by sharing the history of First Nations, Métis, fur trade, and treaties; naming parks and other spaces; installing art; and acknowledging traditional uses and cultural activities.
- » Many park spaces are very empty and unused. More active programming needs to take place which would help increase the feeling of safety as well. Even fire pits in park spaces would encourage use.
- » Sustainability should not simply be to address potential problems but should include maintaining assets in their natural state.

### SAFE + INCLUSIVE

***Ensure that the Green Network is safe, accessible and inclusive for all Edmontonians.***

- » Different spaces have different lighting requirements. Multi-use corridors need to have appropriate lighting for safety and year round use.
- » In some instances however the absence of light is good so people can enjoy the night sky.
- » Spaces should be identified where people can engage in healing, mentally and spiritually. Providing areas where reconciliation can take place is needed.



## EDUCATION + AWARENESS

### *Improve awareness of open space opportunities and appropriate use.*

- » Through signage and mapping, areas of ecological, cultural and historical interest and value should be identified. Information could include species, age, interpretation, etc.
- » Education and promotion needs to be multi-modal including hard copy maps, signs, as well as online, electronic, and smart phone apps.
- » The city is becoming more diverse. This puts a premium on the ability to communicate to people of different cultures and languages.
- » Wayfinding signage is needed that illustrates not only how to get around but different destinations and distances.
- » “Rules for use” signs to identify proper trail and park etiquette would help minimize conflicts and improper behaviours. Where possible, emphasize what *can* be done rather than what is not permitted.

## DISTRIBUTION + SUPPLY

### *Ensure an adequate supply, quality, diversity and distribution of open space throughout Edmonton.*

- » Higher density neighbourhoods need more open space - these areas are not only downtown.
- » Consideration needs to be given to providing open space equitably across the entire city. Including smaller park spaces rather than huge district park spaces in all instances could help ensure open space is distributed across Edmonton.
- » Facilities / buildings that are in park spaces (including recreation facilities) take up too much room.
- » There are some plans in place for different parks across the city. These should be implemented.
- » Engaging with the leaders in the neighbourhoods / communities would be beneficial to ensure local needs are being met. These people understand their communities.

## ACCESS + CONNECTIVITY

### *Improve open space connectivity for humans and environment.*

- » The River Valley is a significant asset in the city and region. Connections and access to the River Valley from downtown need to be improved.
- » When considering connectivity it is important to recognize public transportation and the transit stops. Look at this network and even consider the amenities there (e.g. benches). People should be able to take transit to the major open space components including golf courses. Shuttle service to accommodate major events (like the Heritage Festival) should be part of this plan.
- » Ensure the Green Network Strategy aligns and integrates with existing City plans such as the Transit Strategy and the multi-use trail corridor plan.
- » Connections need to be made among open spaces, neighbourhoods, services and destinations through all parts of the city and region. These connections need to have support amenities such as benches, wayfinding signage, and washrooms.
- » The grade of hills and the trails on them can act as a barrier. It is not enough to include multi-use trails – considerations need to be given to their design as transportation corridors. Of course the river acts as a barrier to movement as well, particularly non-motorized movement.
- » In all the discussion about corridors, there must be consideration for ecological corridors for plants and animals.
- » Develop utility corridors into integrated connectivity corridors that serve

multiple functions, including active transportation, seating areas and wildlife movement. Support with appropriate amenities - signs, benches, tables, good lighting, wayfinding signage, etc.

- » Recognizing this as a network strategy is the right approach.

## ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRITY

### *Preserve and enhance the environmental integrity of the Green Network.*

- » Policies and approaches about the management of weeds, pests and invasive species need to be developed. The City should make greater use of native species. Concerns about the use of pesticides and herbicides was expressed as well.
- » Strategies should be developed that outline reclamation of areas to their natural state as a means to restore important habitat and ecological connections. Protecting areas so that they won't need to be reclaimed should be an approach, including wetlands and riparian areas, and traditional use sites (e.g. berry or medicinal plant gathering sites).
- » The protection of the River Valley is very important. Strong statements need to be made to the public and development community that this resource will be maintained and not nibbled away. The same applies to other significant natural areas, e.g. Mill Creek Ravine.
- » Edmontonians need to be able to access natural areas. It is a balance to be able to maintain the natural areas but allow people access. The preservation and protection of the city's open spaces for nature's sake is good.
- » Urban agriculture should be included in the use of open space. Some corridors could accommodate this function.
- » Incentives could be used to encourage green roofs on commercial buildings.
- » Trail development through natural areas need not always be paved. Natural surfaces can be okay - there should be a mix in types of surfaces.
- » Protection and stewardship of the North Saskatchewan River and its waters are very important. The river brings life and vitality to the city and region.
- » Identify natural area preservation opportunities early on, before development plans are in place. Recognize that community is not yet in place to advocate for preservation in new neighbourhoods.
- » Strengthen enforcement of bylaws, including dumping/encroachment.
- » Support implementation of Low Impact Development.

## RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT

### *Adaptively manage changing trends in growth, demographics and preferences.*

- » The use of surface parking is poor use of space – different solutions should be explored. There are needs for parking however near large outdoor amenities. Parking does not need to all be paved.
- » The City should keep park land, school sites, and natural areas. Once it is gone it is very difficult to replace.
- » The value of neighbourhood parks needs to be recognized and appreciated to ensure these sites are maintained to appropriate levels as seen on the regional park sites.
- » Organizations sometimes fundraise for park amenities and improvements. Proceeding with these improvements necessitates that not all spaces can be completely flexible. Some certainty around spaces is needed as well.
- » A component of the management of open space is to look elsewhere. Often there are good examples of approaches to open space in other cities. The High Line in New York is a good example of how park space can be designed.
- » Trying to be responsive is challenging when there are many demands and voices that will call for their rights and needs to be met. A process to ensure a level of fairness in managing the space is needed – it should be understood as well. Flexibility in the planning and use of space can be of help when managing responsively.

## COORDINATED PLANNING

### *Improve coordination of open space planning with other City departments and initiatives.*

- » The relationship between parks planning and transportation needs to be strong.
- » Planning and design should be done in a manner that ensures maintenance and operations can support it. Involving operations during the planning and design decisions would help ensure that planning is appropriately and sustainably implemented.
- » Good planning necessitates good data and information. This information would include the financial commitments from both a development and operational point of view and sources of financing.
- » Coordinated planning means coordinating with the impacted communities in which these spaces will exist.

## SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

*Develop a sustainable funding model that responds to operational requirements, community capacity and local needs.*

- » Ensure that there is funding (or a plan in place to secure funding) to support the planning, development and operation of amenities before initiating a project.
- » For public parks, the City should not look to the community to pay for them. Amenities are public assets so individual communities should not have to fund them. Secondly, not all communities are in a position to fund infrastructure and operations.
- » To help with funding, partnerships can be developed.
- » Public education is needed regarding funding sources. It is not always clear that the public understands where the money comes from to pay for the development and maintenance of City amenities.

## OTHER COMMENTS

Attendees at the open house provided some other comments. A summary of those is noted below.

- » Surplus school sites need to be considered in the plan for open space.
- » The mapping showed the supply of open space as a measure per 1000 people. It was unclear what an appropriate benchmark is and what the City's standard is.
- » Greater promotion of the available open space is needed to get people (residents and visitors) to make better use of it.
- » The ravines in the city provide natural connectivity. Work is needed to provide the same levels of connectivity across Edmonton where these natural corridors do not exist.
- » Some support amenities can encourage greater use of open space, particularly amongst newcomers. These include benches, clean bathrooms, water supply, shade, campfire stoves, picnic tables, etc.
- » Public transit needs to be examined in terms of its ability to deliver people to the different park spaces in Edmonton.
- » Minimizing manicuring in open spaces would be attractive and less costly. Drainage ponds could include greater treed areas, lawn areas along roadways could be replaced by natural plantings, and weeds could be treated organically.
- » Consideration should be given to urban orchards and edible plant species.
- » The goals and vision for open space need to be accepted and adopted by elected officials.
- » In light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the City of Edmonton needs to build and maintain relations with Indigenous communities and take an active part in reconciliation.
- » Trails need to connect to a diversity of destinations, e.g. stores, LRT, coffee shops, schools, parks.
- » Without a coherent growth plan that prioritizes downtown and mature neighbourhoods, we will be spending money to develop low value open space in the suburbs without the budget to maintain and improve existing open space.
- » Look at opportunities to make connections to open spaces from major transportation corridors, including LRT and major bus routes.
- » Need a balance of large sports facilities with multiple sportsfields for tournaments and smaller, easily-accessed community fields.
- » Look at additional daylighting opportunities (e.g. Fulton Creek) and wetland/riparian restoration opportunities in ravines.
- » Continue to involve community leagues in urban planning.
- » Protect high-quality agricultural lands (e.g. Northeast).
- » Noise associated with large events (e.g. Sonic Boom) at parks can have a significant impact on the residents of surrounding neighbourhoods; need careful planning to ensure this impact not concentrated in a few areas exclusively.
- » Obtain area priorities and objectives and then pull together a planned network of open spaces, linkages and trails that promote year round active, healthy lifestyles.

# Indigenous Communities

The City of Edmonton is committed to keeping First Nation and Métis (Indigenous) communities informed and engaged when projects intersect with Indigenous interests, and concerns. Respecting our relationships with Indigenous communities, the City has reached out to several Indigenous communities and organizations to engage them in developing BREATHE: Edmonton's Green Network Strategy.

Over the past 7 months, the City has reached out to Indigenous communities through telephone conversations, emails, and one-on-one and small group meetings to share project information, gather input and continue to engage in an open dialogue.

In the second What We Heard Report, we identified a series of topics important to Indigenous communities. Through these topics we learned about the issues and concerns, specific needs, ideas and concepts to incorporate into our planning and strategies for open spaces.

Through our analysis of these topics and the feedback we received, we identified an alignment between the four topics of Indigenous interest and the project's three open space themes (Wellness, Ecology, Celebration) and their 15 supporting functions, as illustrated in **Table 1.0 Alignment with Indigenous Topics**.

Table 1.0, Alignment with Indigenous Topics

	WELLNESS					ECOLOGY					CELEBRATION				
	RECREATION	ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION	MENTAL HEALTH + WELLBEING	LEARN + PLAY	WATER MANAGEMENT	CLIMATE REGULATION	BIODIVERSITY	RISK MITIGATION	WASTE MANAGEMENT	FOOD PRODUCTION	AESTHETIC VALUE	COMMUNITY BUILDING	PUBLIC SAFETY	HERITAGE	DESTINATION & TOURISM
<b>TRADITIONAL USES</b> Areas of the city have and could be used for traditional / harvesting activities such as berry picking, fishing, trapping, and collection of medicinal plants	●	●	●	●		●			●	●	●	●	●	●	
<b>CULTURE</b> Safe, designated cultural areas need to be accessible, shared, recognized, acknowledged, and celebrated	●		●	●							●		●	●	
<b>HISTORY</b> First Nation and Métis helped introduce fur trade and establish Edmonton; need for more appropriate, accurate and public interpretation of Indigenous culture and history	●	●	●	●							●		●	●	
<b>ENVIRONMENT</b> Greater environmental protection measures are required, especially around rivers and natural areas		●			●	●	●	●		●	●				

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

The feedback provided throughout the BREATHE engagement process is valuable and will be considered as the Strategy is developed further. While some of the comments received refer to a level of detail that may not be completely evident as the Strategy is developed, it is all considered in the grounding of the principles and can be further referenced as plan implementation occurs.

This section presents the messages that resonate the strongest from **Engagement Phase 3: Objectives + Priorities**.

- » The Strategic Directions, as presented herein, are fundamentally sound.
- » It is important to ensure other City policies and plans are considered, reflected, and harmonized as this Strategy is finalized.
- » The sustainability of space is a critical construct. As the city grows and demand increases, ensuring that the available open spaces are physically and financially sustainable is important.
- » Open spaces fulfill functions across several themes (Wellness, Celebration, Ecology). Considering the distribution and accessibility of these options across Edmonton is paramount.
- » Involving stakeholders (particularly the community) in the planning and development of open spaces is a necessary step. This includes internal stakeholders and partners in the City.
- » Connectivity and accessibility are elements of the open space network that require purposeful planning and are critical requirements to ensure appropriate use.



## NEXT STEPS



### **Develop Indicators**

Are we meeting our goals?  
What should our open space targets be?



### **Create Recommendations**

Which actions should we take to  
improve the Green Network?



### **Public Review**

Submit final feedback on the Draft  
Green Network Strategy

## BREATHE IS ONLINE



Visit [edmonton.ca/breathe](https://edmonton.ca/breathe)  
to keep up to date on the project  
and stay involved!

## HAVE QUESTIONS?



[breathe@edmonton.ca](mailto:breathe@edmonton.ca)



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