

What We Heard Report: Naturalization and Tree Planting Public Engagement - Phase 1

December 2022
edmonton.ca

| SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Public Engagement Summary and Results	3
Project Overview	3
Public Engagement Approach	3
What We Asked	4
How We Engaged and Who Participated	4
What We Heard	5
What Happens Next?	8

Public Engagement Summary and Results

Project Overview

The City of Edmonton is expanding the urban forest to achieve the goal of planting two million new trees by 2050 and 20% canopy coverage by 2071. We are developing a plan, focused on both naturalization as well as boulevard and open space tree planting, to align with The City Plan's Big City Move Greener As We Grow. Our next steps are to:

- Create a new Naturalization, Reclamation and Restoration Plan (NRRP) that will provide processes and best practices to bring maintained turf and depleted land areas back to a more natural state of vegetation and ecological function.
- Continue to expand the urban tree canopy by identifying locations for park, boulevard and other open space opportunities to plant new trees and implement naturalization.

Public Engagement Approach

The City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum defines the public's level of influence in engagement processes. **The role of the public during this phase of engagement was at the ADVISE level on the spectrum** and we invited the public to share their feedback and perspectives on naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting.



Public engagement for this project is being carried out in two phases. Phase 1 engagement was completed in May 2022 and was designed to understand peoples' perceptions and support of naturalization and tree planting, identify opportunities for education and awareness and understand, at a high level, how people use parks or spaces where naturalization/tree planting would occur.

Planning for phase 2 is currently underway and will build upon information collected from phase 1, as well as seek input that has the potential to impact future site selection. Opportunities for participation in the second phase of engagement will be shared with the public in late spring 2023.

What We Asked

Phase 1 consisted of a city-wide, high-level online survey which gathered feedback on the following general themes:

- Current use of green spaces.
- Citizen understanding and support for increased naturalization.
- Citizen understanding of the urban forest and support for boulevard and open space tree planting.

The online survey included photos of different types of naturalized areas as well as examples of boulevard and open space trees, to accompany the questions on these topics.

How We Engaged and Who Participated

The online survey, made available through the Edmonton Insight Community and on [edmonton.ca](https://www.edmonton.ca) as an open link survey, from May 2-16, 2022 received over 4,600 responses.

The survey asked optional demographic questions to better understand who participated and help us determine if we are hearing from a variety of perspectives.

- The largest number of responses came from the 35-54 age category (37%) while the lowest number of responses came from the 18-34 age category (14%).
- 61% of respondents have people aged 13-64 in the household while 27% have people 65+ in the household.
- 17% of respondents have children under 13 in the household.
- Single detached home dwelling type received the largest number of responses (69%) while townhouse, duplex, or fourplex received the least (12%).

- 51% of respondents identify as women, 39% identify as men, and 4% identify as “other”.
- 7% of respondents identify as a racialized/visible minority and 7% as persons with disabilities. The majority of respondents (69%) did not identify with any diversity group.
- Most respondents are English-speaking (91%).
- The largest number of respondents have completed a university undergraduate degree (33%), while the lowest number of respondents (6%) hold a professional degree (e.g. medicine, law).
- More respondents preferred not to indicate household income (25%). The largest number of respondents indicating household income was 22% for \$150,000+, and the lowest was 4% of respondents for under \$30,000.
- Respondents were able to indicate their neighborhood of residence, which rolled up to the following:
 - Planning district - Largest response (14%) Jasper Place, lowest response (1%) Ellerslie
 - Ward - Largest response (14%) Anirniq, lowest response (3%) O-day/min

What We Heard

The key findings from phase 1 public engagement are summarized below.

Current use of green spaces (naturalized and maintained turf spaces, *excluding* sports fields)

- At least half of respondents have used naturalized areas and maintained green spaces in the city for the walking and biking trails, for relaxation/enjoying nature and for recreation/exercise.
 - More residents visit naturalized areas for trails (81%) and relaxation (70%) and maintained green spaces are visited primarily for trails (70%) and recreation (60%).
 - Respondents identifying as women – and specifically those under 65 and those with higher income – are more likely to visit these areas. Conversely, those 65+, who are low-income earners, and persons with disabilities are less likely to visit these areas.
- Respondents equally use their community parks and the river valley parks, with around two thirds saying so.
 - Younger residents (18-34) are more likely to visit river valley parks, while a broader age group (18-54) with children (under 13) living in the home are more likely to visit community parks.

- Modes of access impact availability and/or use of a maintained greenspace for recreational use. How an area is used may influence future tree planting or naturalization opportunities. The ability to access a park by walking is the single greatest factor (9 in 10) that residents consider when visiting maintained green spaces. Accessibility by parking and biking are also important for residents when visiting these areas.
 - Walking access is most important to younger residents (18-34) or where there are people 18-64 in the household, while parking access is more likely important for older residents (55-64).
 - Transit access is more likely to be important for younger individuals (18-34), persons with disabilities, visible minorities and low-income earners, while biking access is more likely important for people aged 35-54 with families, men and for higher-income earners (\$150,000+ households).
 - The availability of amenities for children (23%) and accessibility for people with disabilities (19%) were also very important factors for people when accessing maintained green spaces.
 - Other response options focused on different types of amenities, safety, cleanliness, seating, nature, landscaping, location, size, whether a site was dog friendly, as well as other factors.

Understanding and support for increased naturalization

- The majority of respondents are aware of the term “naturalization” (82%), with most (55%) defining it as using native plant species to make an area more natural.
 - Awareness of the term “naturalization” is more prevalent among families with young children, those with higher educational attainment and higher-income earners. It is not nearly as familiar to racialized / visible minorities and recent immigrants.
- Providing habitat for wildlife, ecological connectivity and habitat for pollinators is what respondents considered to be the most important benefit of naturalization (80%).
 - In general, women and younger residents are more likely to find the environmental and ecological benefits important. Meanwhile, cost-related benefits tend to be more important for men and families with children.
- There is a high level of support from residents for increased naturalization in their communities (79%) and in the city (83%).
 - Respondents support increased naturalization and native vegetation primarily in stormwater management facilities (88%) and in the river valley parks and ravines (87%).

- Respondents also supported increased naturalization in various sizes of parks (63-67%), along roadways/boulevards (78%) and in utility corridors (80%).
- The greatest concerns that respondents identified about naturalization are that it will attract more litter (47%), weeds (39%) and insects (33%) in the area.
 - Attracting wildlife (e.g. rodents, coyotes) was a lesser concern (19%).
 - Some respondents indicated *no* concerns with naturalization (19%).
 - Other concerns were low (1-6%), such as cost, visibility, fire hazard, crime/safety, etc.

Understanding of the urban forest and support for urban tree planting

- Most respondents are aware the City has an inventory of all City-owned trees (72%); however, most are unaware of the City's goal to plant two million new trees (71%).
- 81% of respondents identified the most important benefits of urban trees are climate regulation, flood mitigation and providing shade, and 80% identified beautification as the most important benefit.
- The vast majority of respondents (over 88%) think the City should plant more trees, protect older trees, remove sick trees and maintain the current trees to protect and enhance the city's urban forests.
 - Respondents would most like trees to be planted along boulevards (88%), in existing parks (87%) and around stormwater management facilities (84%).
- The greatest concern that respondents identified when planting more trees in the city is obstructing sight lines (38%).
 - Many respondents indicated *no* concerns with planting more trees (45%).
 - Most listed concerns were extremely low (less than 3%), other than damage from falling trees (17%), seasonal tree litter (15%) and seasonal allergies (12%).

The May 2022 survey presented an opportunity to obtain high-level feedback from Edmontonians. The engagement opportunity was open to anyone who might be interested or affected by naturalization or boulevard and open space tree planting in the city. The survey is therefore not a representative sample of geographical areas or communities. However, phase 1 survey data does provide the opportunity to identify gaps that can then be more specifically addressed through targeted approaches in the second phase of engagement.

What Happens Next?

Public engagement opportunities for 2023 are currently in the early planning stages and will be announced in spring 2023, with analysis and reporting anticipated for summer 2023.

Determining specific engagement methods and timelines are included in this planning work.

Future public engagement opportunities will continue to be at the [district planning](#) level, and with specific stakeholder groups, for the scope of this project. Although phase 2 will not include discussion of site-level plans, this engagement work will gather broad and diverse feedback to help inform future neighbourhood and site-specific engagement needs.

Due to the more targeted nature for the second phase, the City is considering a number of different methods during planning to help ensure that, as much as possible, any gaps from the May 2022 survey are addressed and that stakeholders are provided with opportunities to share feedback. Phase 2 public engagement opportunities will be supported by robust communications activities to ensure Edmontonians are aware of the opportunities to participate and of the project's progress.

An [Engaged Edmonton page](#) has been created to provide a space for citizens to leave general comments on naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting prior to phase 2 of public engagement.