

NORTHEAST RIVER VALLEY PARK



Strategic Plan 2025

Prepared for

The logo for the City of Edmonton, featuring the word "Edmonton" in a white, sans-serif font with a stylized "E" that has a circular element, set against a solid blue square background.

City of Edmonton

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The project team acknowledges that the traditional land on which Northeast River Valley Park is located is in Treaty Six Territory and within the Métis homelands and Métis Nation of Alberta. We would like to express gratitude to the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' inhabited this territory for generations, such as Nêhiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux) and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) peoples. We strive to help make Edmonton a welcoming place for diverse communities to call home, and we commit to working in a spirit of generosity, openness and collaboration to help build an authentic and resilient gathering place for future generations.

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Executive Summary

The Northeast River Valley Park Strategic Plan sets the direction for the future use, potential future development, and stewardship of a 77-hectare river valley park in northeast Edmonton. Previously known as the Our Lady Queen of Peace Ranch, the City of Edmonton officially acquired the park in 2023. Inherited infrastructure includes: an event centre, a lakefront facility, a lake, barn bridges, trails and forested areas. A coordinated strategic plan is needed to guide the transformation into a vibrant, inclusive and ecologically sensitive destination for Edmontonians.

The strategic plan has been developed in response to a growing need to manage competing interests around park use, programming, partnerships, environmental restoration and public access. It lays out a shared vision for the future of the park and provides a practical decision-making framework for City Administration. Clear recommendations and actions are grouped into three categories: relationship building, operational improvements and capital investments. This structured approach will assist the City in making informed decisions - whether related to operations, budget planning or long-term investment - by providing a clear rationale for each recommendation.

The plan aligns with City of Edmonton policies and plans, incorporates input from Indigenous and public engagement and reflects technical analysis and ecological considerations.

The vision for Northeast River Valley Park is rooted in three strategic plan principles:

1. A park that encourages connection and environmental stewardship

Ecological restoration of riparian forests, lake shorelines and grasslands is prioritized alongside nature-based recreation and accessible public use.

2. A park that embraces healing and reconciliation

Relationships with Indigenous communities and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) partners must be strengthened and protected. The park offers opportunities to explore new models of collaboration in land development and stewardship that reflect shared values and set a new standard for inclusive and ecologically responsive urban park development in Edmonton.

3. An animated park that inspires and engages year-round

Through dynamic, seasonal programming and inclusive design, the park will become a vibrant destination that supports recreation, cultural expression and community gathering across all seasons.

Each strategic plan principle is supported by recommendations that define broad objectives to achieve the long-term vision for the park. Key recommendations include:

- Consolidating infrastructure and parking in the northern portion of the site to reduce environmental impact near the river valley
- Enhancing ecological connectivity and biodiversity through targeted restoration strategies
- Improving accessibility through barrier-free pathways, low-impact transit infrastructure, and improved wayfinding and signage
- Enabling Indigenous stewardship and cultural use through partnerships, ceremonial spaces and inclusive policy shifts that remove barriers to access
- Supporting relationship building with a wide range of partners, including Indigenous communities, local residents, adjacent landowners and recreation and stewardship organizations
- Phasing capital investments in trails, facilities, washrooms and programming infrastructure to support long-term growth

This strategic plan is designed as a flexible, working document that will guide the City's investment, maintenance, programming and partnership decisions over time. It provides a structure for both near-term operational improvements and long-term transformation, ensuring Northeast River Valley Park becomes a celebrated public space rooted in ecological health, cultural respect and community connection.



Executive Summary
Long-term strategic vision plan

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Northeast River Valley Park

The City of Edmonton took ownership of Northeast River Valley Park in Spring 2023 and officially opened to the public on September 24, 2023, after purchasing the land from a private seller. This large riverfront property features many unique existing amenities, including a 1,000-person Event Centre, a programmable lake, barn bridges, a playground, a lakefront facility, an administration building, large open grasslands and a riparian forest along the river's edge. The City inherited the park in its current state and has not yet added any new amenities or landscaping.

The City commissioned a strategic plan be completed for Northeast River Valley Park to provide a structure upon which future planning decisions for the park will be made. With many competing interests already emerging related to park uses, a strategic plan is a critical element to support City Administration's decision-making around topics such as use, programming, partnerships, recreation and areas to set aside for naturalization/restoration activities, lease/license opportunities, as well as security and access.

1.2 Purpose of the strategic plan

The Northeast River Valley Park Strategic Plan establishes a clear vision for the park's future. This vision is informed by site analysis, technical requirements, priorities and alignment with Edmonton's broader planning frameworks. The plan integrates City policies and programs, input from Indigenous partners and public engagement to ensure the park serves both current and future generations.

The plan is structured to provide both strategic direction and adaptability. Strategic plan principles set the foundation, then detailed recommendations translate the principles into action. While firmly rooted in strategic intent, the plan is designed to be flexible—allowing it to evolve as new opportunities and priorities emerge.

This strategic plan report will serve as the blueprint for implementation, outlining phased, potential future development, cost considerations and long-term expansion. More than a document, this plan is a practical road map, ensuring that Northeast River Valley Park is developed thoughtfully, responsibly and with a clear long-term vision.

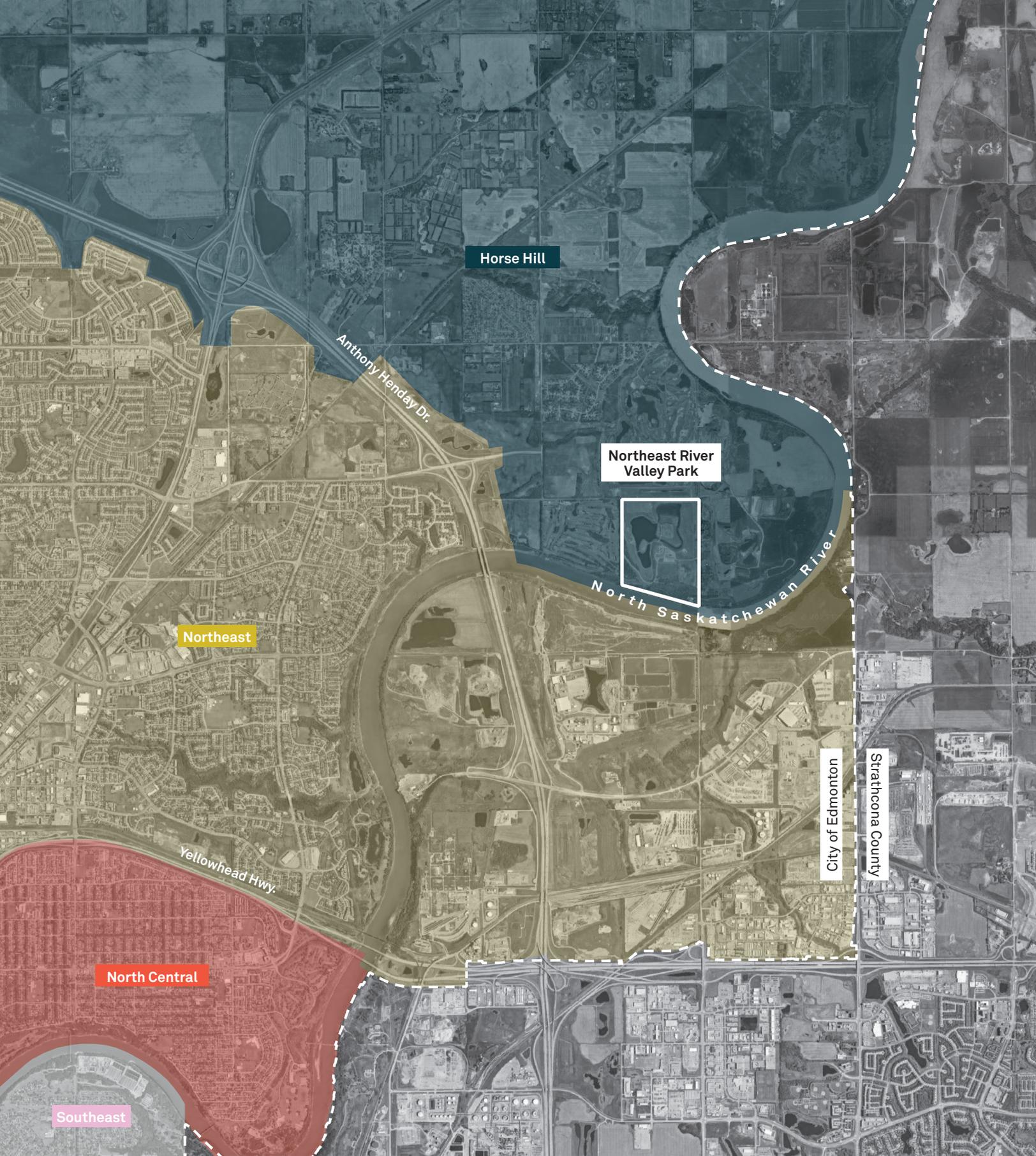
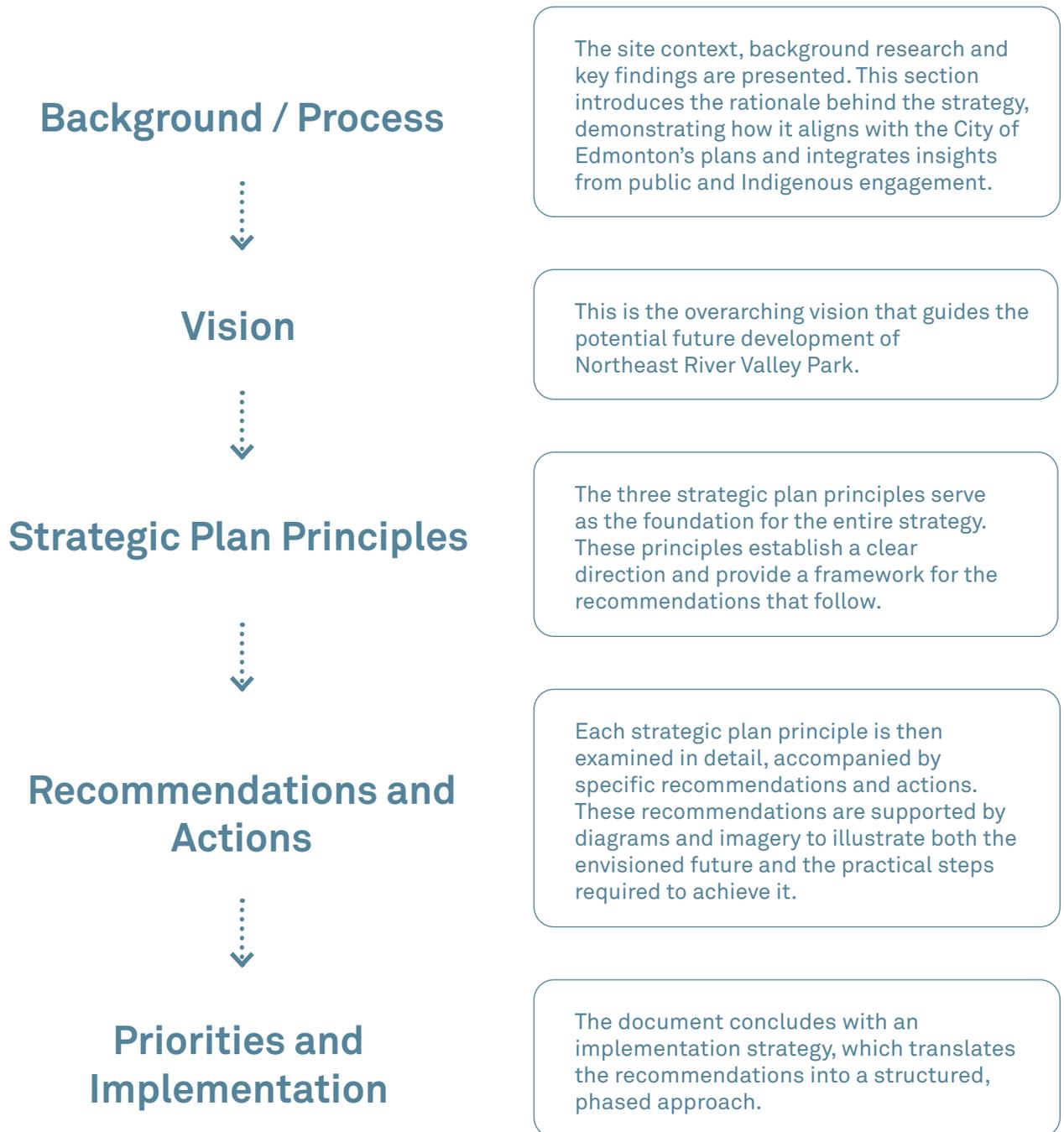


Figure 01
 Northeast River Valley Park district context map

1.3 How to read this strategic plan

This document is structured to provide clarity, purpose and impact. It follows a logical sequence, ensuring that both the overarching vision and the supporting details are easily understood.

This road map provides a path for execution over time, ensuring the strategy is actionable and achievable.



2.0 Background / Process

The Northeast River Valley Park Strategic Plan is grounded in research, analysis and meaningful engagement to guide the future development and stewardship of this important river valley park. The following section outlines the site’s history, existing conditions and the high-level process undertaken to develop the strategic plan.

2.1 Site

Northeast River Valley Park, located at the intersection of 17 Street NE and 153 Avenue NE in Edmonton, represents a significant expansion within the city’s extensive River Valley Park system. Covering 77 hectares, this site, formerly known as Our Lady Queen of Peace Ranch, became an official part of Edmonton’s public green network in 2023. The park is uniquely positioned within the

“Quarry Node,” as identified in the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan (November 2024). Defined by an oxbow river formation, the Quarry Node provides a sense of seclusion from the surrounding northeast neighbourhoods, while remaining well-connected to the broader urban landscape.

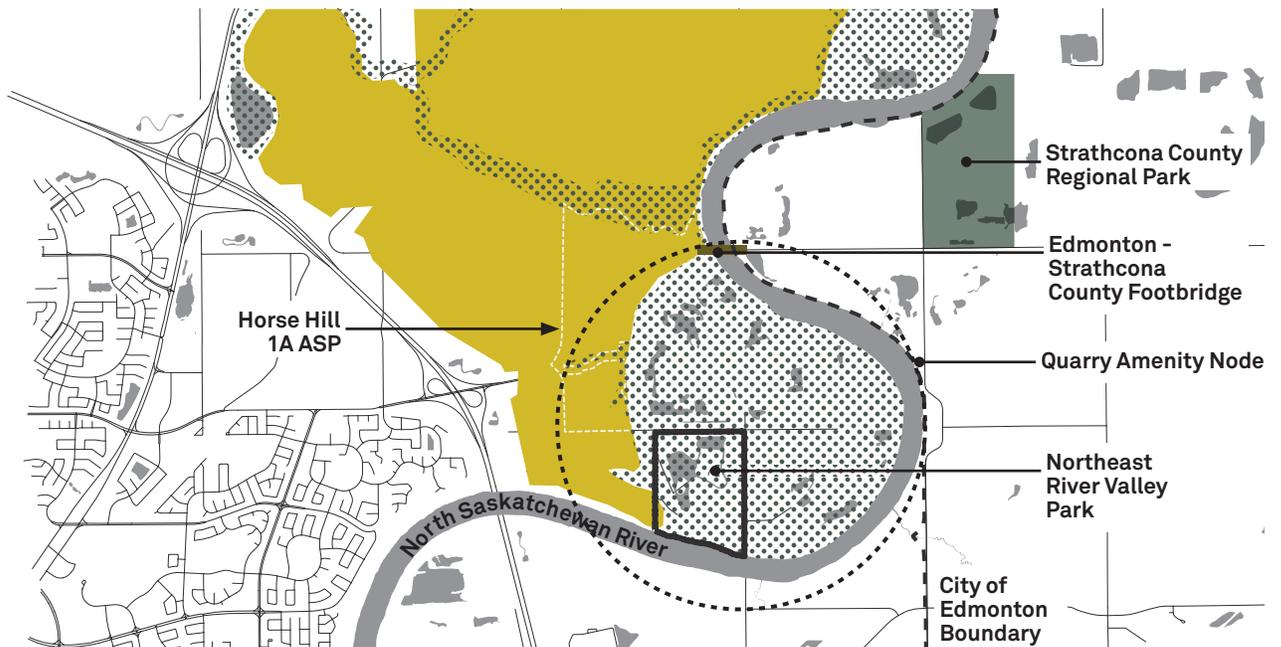


Figure 02
Northeast River Valley Park planning context

History of the site

The site's topography was originally shaped by ancient glacial lakes and rivers, which carved and deposited sediment over time. This process created three distinct river terraces: an upper or high terrace, mid terrace, and a lower terrace along the riverbank. Each offering a glimpse into the ancient forces that define the park's unique landscape.

Indigenous people have used the River Valley and Ravine System for food, medicine, shelter, transportation, gathering, and celebrating for thousands of years.

The fluvial deposits of sand and aggregate, while alluding to the area's geological past, are also fundamental to its recent history. The site served as agricultural land in the mid-1900's until the start of quarry operations in the 1960s. These operations continued into the early 2000s and left behind a series of pits in the landscape. These voids, remnants of the industrial extraction, were later reshaped into the recreational lake that defines the Park's landscape today.



Figure 03
Archive photography, 1948

The former quarry site was then purchased and converted into a private camp called Our Lady Queen of Peach Ranch. The Camp featured an event centre, lakefront facility, administrative building, sports fields, lake for non-motorized water sports and swimming, picnic areas, playground, ropes course, washroom buildings and sleeping facilities, as well as a dugout pool, and two iconic barn bridges.

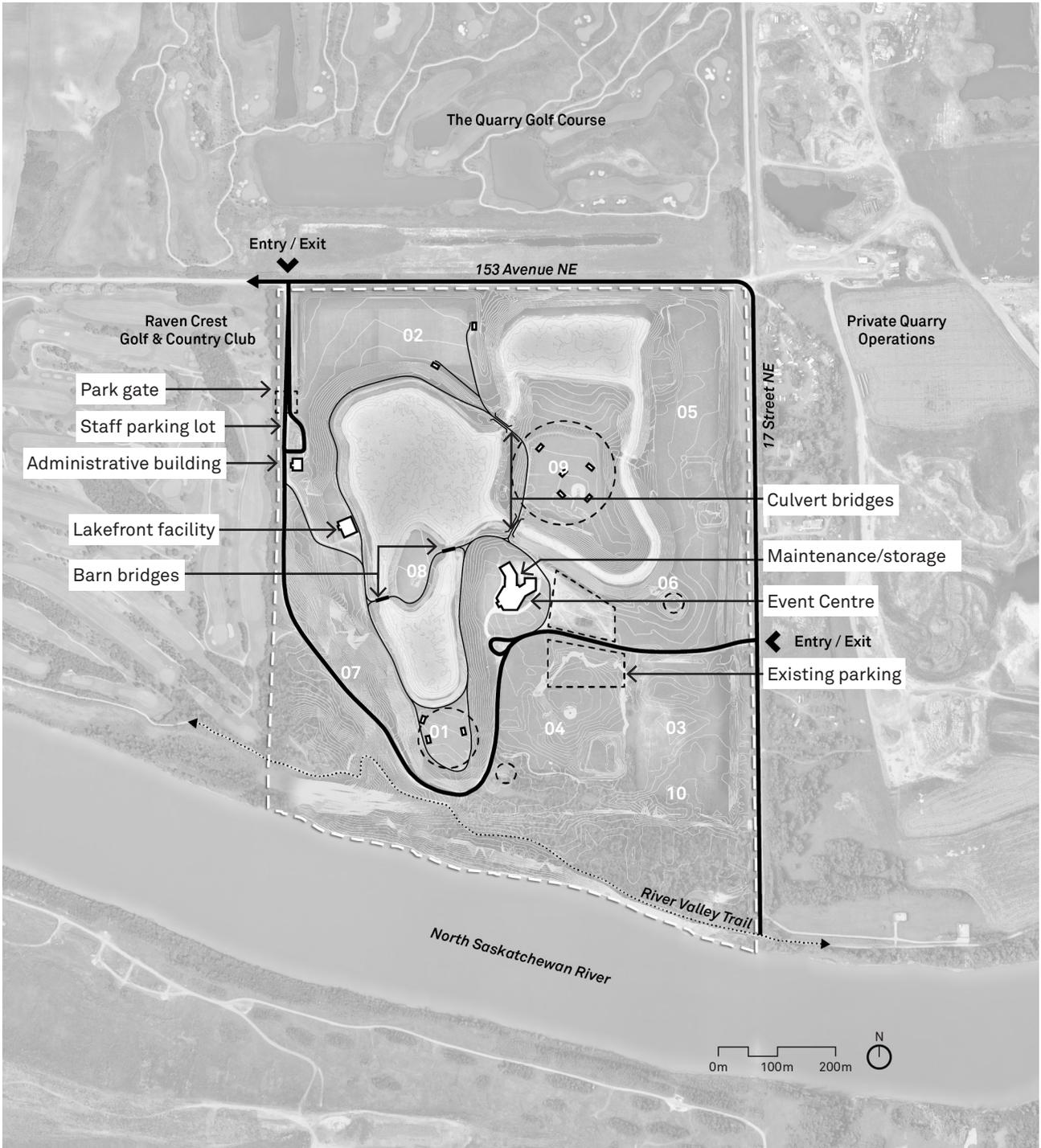
Current state of the site

Northeast River Valley Park operates today with a layout and amenities similar to those of its previous use as Our Lady Queen of Peace Ranch. The park features a spacious Event Centre, which is regularly booked throughout the year for large gatherings and events. The Lakefront facility remains unused as it awaits necessary upgrades to meet building code requirements. Once renovated, the lodge will serve as a key facility for future programming.

The Park's amenities include scenic trails for walking, running, cycling and cross-country skiing, weaving through open meadows, forested areas, and along the lake's shoreline.



Figure 04
Archive photography. Quarry operations on site, 1988



- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 01 Lower Lawn | 05 Northeast Corner | 08 Playground Island |
| 02 Upper Lawn | 06 Dugout Area | 09 The Big Island |
| 03 East Open Space | 07 High Road | 10 Forest Edge |
| 04 West Open Space | | |

Figure 05
Existing Northeast River Valley Park plan



Paddleboarding on the lake, barn bridge beyond



Trail wraps around lake



Birdseye view of the playground island connected by the barn bridges, the Event Centre can be seen in the back



Emergent forest in the southeast corner



The lake view looking north



Lake shoreline looking south

Figure 06
Existing conditions

2.2 Background research

Throughout 2024, the project team completed a comprehensive site inventory and analysis using a multi-scaled approach to understand the park in its current state. This research began with a review of previous public engagement input, relevant City of Edmonton planning and development initiatives, policies, environmental data and historical land uses. Meetings with City of Edmonton departments were held to better understand current conditions, identify park needs and explore preliminary opportunities for the project.

A technical site assessment was completed which included both on-site analysis and a desktop review of accessibility, lake conditions, site servicing, utilities and geotechnical factors. This was complemented by an evaluation of the park's physical characteristics, such as topography, wildlife and sensitive vegetation. Refer to *Appendix B – Site Inventory And Analysis* for additional information. Following the inventory and analysis phase, a broad public engagement process was facilitated, along with Indigenous engagement sessions held on site with Indigenous community partners.

The findings from all phases of background research directly shaped the development of the strategic plan's guiding principles and vision.

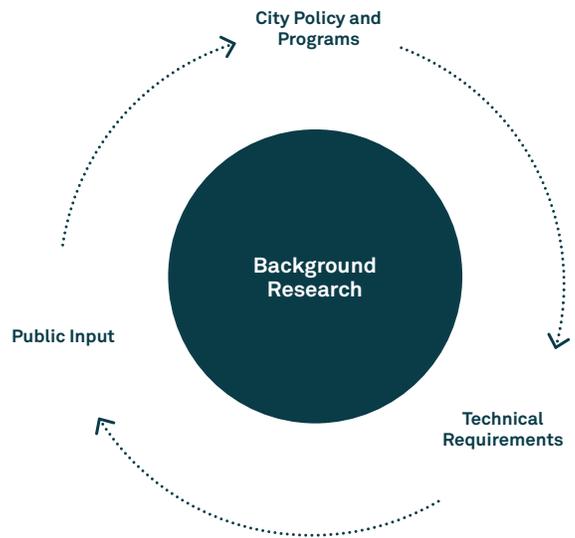


Figure 07
Field work - site inventory analysis tour

3.0 Vision

The Northeast River Valley Park is a place where Edmonton’s natural environment, Indigenous cultural heritage and community spirit come together to decolonize our relationship with the land, inspire connection and create a distinctive park experience.

3.1 Vision

The Northeast River Valley Park Strategic Plan envisions a vibrant and inclusive space where Edmonton’s natural environment, Indigenous cultural heritage and community spirit converge to foster a decolonized relationship with the land. Guided by Indigenous leadership and perspectives, the park will offer a distinctive experience that blends nature recreation, education and reconciliation.

The park will provide year-round opportunities for passive recreation, connection and discovery through activities like hiking, cross-country skiing, birdwatching, paddle sports and hands-on outdoor learning. Restored ecosystems, interactive trails and gathering spaces will encourage exploration and engagement with nature.

Indigenous teachings and traditions will be woven throughout the park’s identity. Storytelling, opportunities for ceremony and community-led programming will honour the land’s history and support Indigenous communities in revitalizing cultural practices, language and knowledge. These elements will ensure the park fosters reconnection with the land and celebrates its profound cultural significance within the River Valley.

Ultimately, Northeast River Valley Park will become a place for shared discovery, deepening respect for the land and its history, and create distinctive park experiences for all. It will embody the principles of connection, decolonization and reconciliation, fostering a meaningful relationship between people and place.



Figure 08
Long-term strategic vision plan

3.2 Re-framing strategy

The Northeast River Valley Park Strategic Plan marks a fundamental shift in how the landscape is structured and engaged with, prioritizing ecological restoration, cultural awareness and accessibility. The re-framing centralizes active areas near existing infrastructure, reducing colonial land-use patterns in favor of a more inclusive and respectful approach to land stewardship. Opportunities for restoring the River Valley's natural environment are maximized, ensuring a resilient and thriving ecosystem for future generations.

Strategic shifts

- Centralize active areas close to existing infrastructure, roads and public access
- Reduce colonial influence and attitudes to structuring the land
- Maximize opportunities for ecological restoration along River Valley

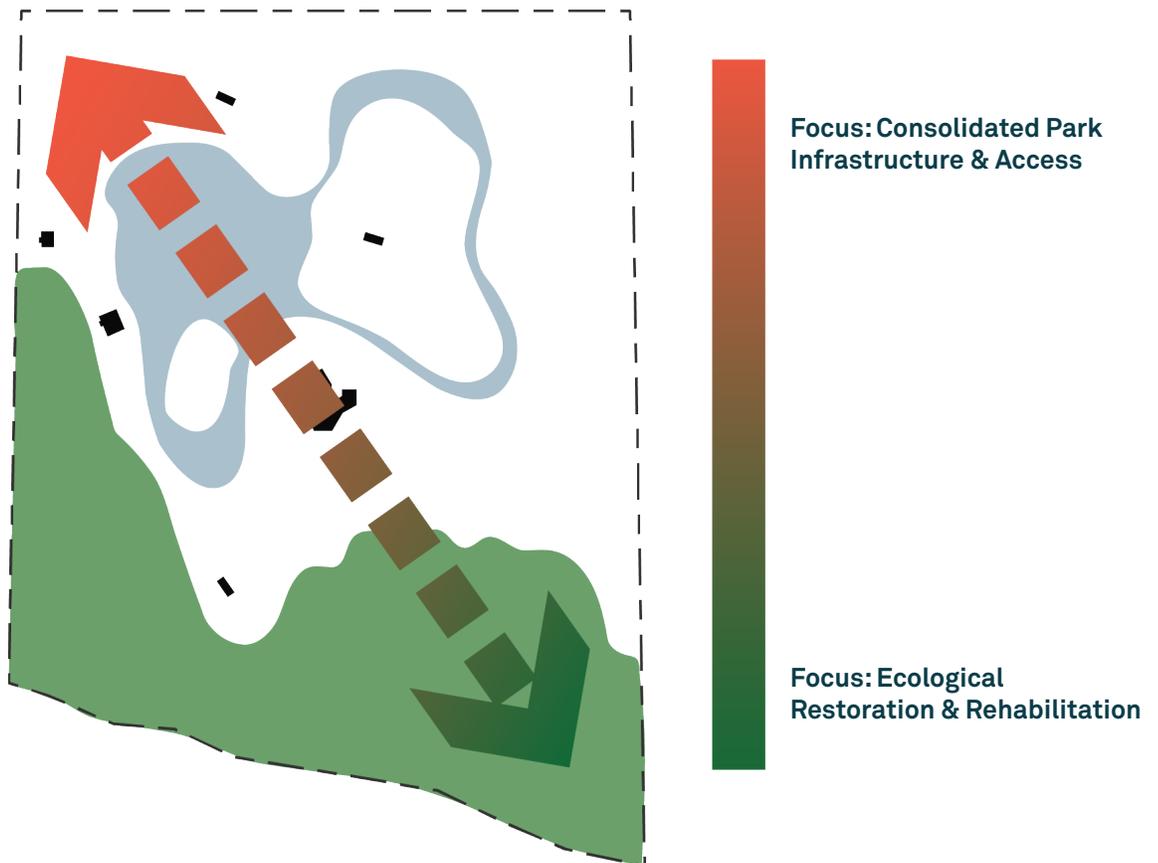


Figure 09
Northeast River Valley Park reframing strategy