

A park that embraces healing and reconciliation



Recommendations

1. Reconciliation and relationship building
2. Consider partnerships in land management
3. Create opportunities for cultural practices and intergenerational learning

In considering the future of Northeast River Valley Park as a sustainable, accessible and generous public resource, relationships with Indigenous communities and Memorandum of Understanding partners must be strengthened and protected. As stewards of the public realm and the historic North Saskatchewan River Valley corridor, the City of Edmonton has the responsibility of ensuring that opportunities for Indigenous communities are made available to them on these traditional lands, through continued collaboration and dialogue to foster productive partnerships for generations to come.

Northeast River Valley Park presents a rare and unique opportunity for the City of Edmonton to approach a new way of thinking about urban parks, and explore new ways of working with Indigenous partners. Given the site's location within the river valley and its potential for implementing ecologically resilient solutions to increased development and rising neighbourhood populations, a close working relationship between municipal team members and Indigenous partners has the potential to yield meaningful innovations that reflect shared values and help shape a new standard for inclusive and ecologically responsive urban park development in Edmonton.

It also presents an opportunity for the City of Edmonton to meaningfully respond to Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action #43 and #57, and develop a new standard for collaboration between municipal and Indigenous partners to yield mutually beneficial outcomes.

Article 25 - United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

“Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.”

These two calls, aimed at federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, call upon public servants to undertake learning and education initiatives to ensure that their work is in alignment with and in service to the Indigenous communities which they represent. As representatives of the City of Edmonton, the histories, rights, laws and relations pertaining to local Indigenous communities are of critical importance to building lasting and productive relationships, in the development of public space and otherwise. As stewards of public spaces like Northeast River Valley Park, the City of Edmonton bears the responsibility for holding space for Indigenous partners to practice ceremony, intergenerational teachings and harvesting on these lands. To do so, the development of a process to support these activities within the park is recommended.

TRC Call to Action #43

“We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.”

TRC Call to Action #57

“We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.”

1. Reconciliation and relationship building

The Northeast River Valley Park should serve as a meaningful site of reconciliation and relationship building, fostering connections between Indigenous communities and the broader public. The City of Edmonton possesses an opportunity to strengthen its existing relationships with Indigenous community partners and establish new or improved relationships with urban Indigenous communities with interest in using the park for land-based learning, teaching and ceremony. By showing a willingness to adapt municipal processes and protocol to increase access and opportunity for all community members, a productive working relationship built on trust and good faith can be established.

Small steps can be taken immediately to demonstrate this to Indigenous partners who have provided their time and input regarding the future of the park. The removal of the existing park gates at the northwest entrance would mitigate confusion regarding the site's public access, while distancing the park from the site's previous history as a private camp. The existing park gates (reminiscent of national park gates) carry with them connotations of restricted access, prescribed uses and unintended exclusivity. Similarly, eliminating vehicle access to the southern portion of the site will reduce the impression of the park as a heavily programmed space. This will allow the river valley ecosystem to thrive with relief from park maintenance traffic and vehicular circulation. Removal of the ropes course remnants and fencing

lining the existing river trail will remove traces of the park's previous history and allow for a new identity to take shape. The site will welcome pedestrians from the river trail and allow people, plants and animals to move unencumbered between the river and the park.

At the heart of the recommendations within this report is the emphasis on relationship-building and the critical nature of open, transparent dialogue among partners to create shared goals for the future of Northeast River Valley Park. Through engagement with Indigenous partners and, critically, the implementation of their recommendations and integration of their insights, the City of Edmonton can lay the groundwork for a reconciliatory path towards a Northeast River Valley Park where every community member will feel welcomed and valued.

2. Consider partnerships in land management

The second strategy to move towards healing and reconciliation at Northeast River Valley Park is to prioritize collaborative partnerships with Indigenous communities to guide land management, ecological restoration and long-term stewardship. Several entities across Canada have begun to explore shared management models in the stewardship of public lands, including national parks, to varying degrees of success. Learning from both the successes and failures of the past is critical to finding a way forward that is productive, progressive and sustainable for all people.

National parks, for example, are often synonymous with colonization and the protection of ‘untouched’ landscapes - an assumption which incorrectly and dangerously justified the removal of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands. To address this colonial history, Parks Canada has developed an Indigenous Stewardship Policy to develop collaborative stewardship models for national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas. This necessitates the building of balanced and equitable relationships between land management entities and Indigenous peoples, and acknowledging and educating about the past and present relationship between Indigenous peoples and these lands.

This approach often produces mixed outcomes, sometimes not acknowledging intergenerational impacts of forced removals, penalties for carrying out traditional land-based practices, or

the failure to prioritize the rights of Indigenous peoples in decisions relating to development and management of national parks. These disappointing outcomes reveal the deep ties between conservation and colonization, and how they have historically been used to suppress Indigenous sovereignty.

With the integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge a more equitable and just model for sustainable land management is possible. By prioritizing relationship-building and open dialogue, the City of Edmonton can explore these possibilities at Northeast River Valley Park to reimagine what a public park can provide.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

“Is a cumulative body of knowledge, practices, and beliefs about the relationship between living beings and their environment. Passed down through generations via oral traditions, TEK is deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual practices of Indigenous communities.”

Indigenous Climate Hub

3. Create opportunities for cultural practices and intergenerational learning

Northeast River Valley Park should provide opportunities for cultural practices, education and reconciliation by fostering inclusivity and honouring Indigenous traditions and the importance of performing them on traditional territory, particularly given the park's location within the cherished North Saskatchewan River Valley system.

The Indigenous engagement process revealed that Indigenous communities are interested in using both the interior and exterior facilities for gathering, ceremony and inter-generational learning opportunities. Where possible, the City of Edmonton should explore opportunities to reduce financial barriers to build a more diverse user group of the park, and help facilitate a relationship with the land and water at this location.

Operational considerations and modifications to current City of Edmonton facilities management could have significant impacts on Indigenous communities and their ability to access and use the site. These considerations and modifications become a measurable, tangible display of goodwill towards communities who routinely provide feedback to the municipality and its public space initiatives.

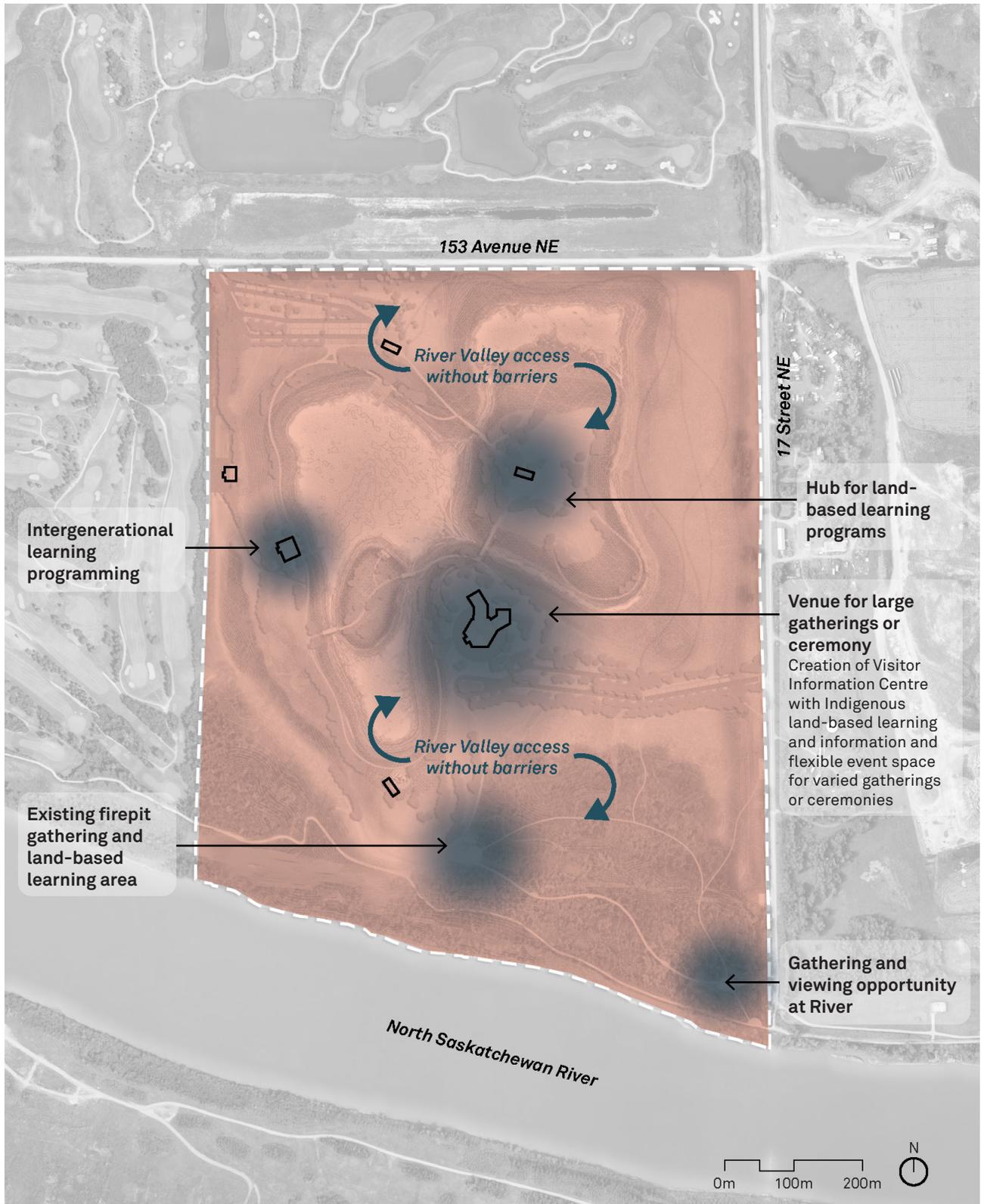


Figure 25
 Formal infrastructure that holds space for ceremony and gathering

A park that embraces healing and reconciliation

1. Relationship building actions

- Sustain engagement and open communication with Indigenous community partners to strengthen ongoing relationships and ensure collaborative efforts
- Explore the creation of an Indigenous Advisory Working Group to provide guidance for future park management and development
- Explore employment and mentorship opportunities for Indigenous communities to steward the site and influence its future healing and growth
- Collaborate with the community to co-develop programming that incorporates Indigenous cultural teachings and supports traditional knowledge sharing
- Build partnerships with community organizations to hold space and provide access to support urban Indigenous peoples

2. Operational and programming actions

All operational and programming actions to be considered and implemented in collaboration with Indigenous knowledge keepers, Indigenous community partners and the City of Edmonton's Indigenous Relations Office.

- Acknowledge the knowledge gap regarding the site's pre-industrial history and acknowledge the long-term relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the river valley corridor
- Undertake a renaming process of the park to reflect and honour the river valley's Indigenous heritage
- Consider interpretive signage that has integrated Indigenous languages and encourages respect and understanding of ceremonial remnants and their purposes
- Where possible, explore opportunities to reduce financial barriers to build a more diverse user group of the park
- Continue to support ceremonial uses, including temporary sweat lodges or gathering circles
- Consider collaborations through community programming to support early years and youth leadership, to foster engagement and connection to the park

3. Capital investment actions

All capital investment actions to be considered and implemented in collaboration with Indigenous knowledge keepers, Indigenous community partners and the City of Edmonton's Indigenous Relations Office.

- Limiting or removing vehicular access to the North Saskatchewan River on 17 Street NE to preserve natural systems and create a peaceful space to observe the river
- Consider integration of Indigenous languages and Traditional Ecological Knowledge into interpretive and educational signage and park programming
- Develop an Indigenous Stewardship Policy for managing the park, ensuring Indigenous knowledge informs ongoing land management and environmental strategies

An animated park that inspires and engages year-round



Recommendations

1. Animate site and grow visitor experiences
2. Develop facilities to support recreational and social programming that amplifies the park's unique assets
3. Invest in infrastructure that is inclusive and accessible

1. Animate site and grow visitor experiences

Enhancing Northeast River Valley Park as a vibrant, year-round destination involves implementing imaginative programming, seasonal activations and adaptable spaces. Strengthening community connections and supporting diverse experiences will ensure the park remains dynamic, welcoming and reflective of local culture.

Activation of the park through dynamic, seasonal events and experiences will create a vibrant and engaging atmosphere for all visitors. A thoughtfully curated calendar of activities can appeal to diverse interests and age groups, transforming the park into a space of continuous discovery and connection that visitors return to regularly.

Programming should appeal to both the voices of the surrounding Horse Hill community and to the City at large, ensuring the park's activation reflects local sub-cultures, needs and aspirations. Seasonal offerings might include hands-on educational camps for children, interactive workshops led by local artists, community dance, music events and seasonal pop-up restaurants—fostering creativity, learning and social bonds with the land and existing facilities.

Investment in supportive infrastructure both in the landscape and facilities along with a dedicated staff is essential to enhancing the overall experience. Adaptable event spaces can accommodate wellness activities like yoga sessions or guided nature walks, promoting both personal well-being and community engagement. Additionally, temporary social infrastructure - such as pop-up installations, modular seating and mobile programming - can provide cost-effective, high-impact opportunities to activate the park with fresh and unique experiences.

To keep Northeast River Valley Park dynamic and relevant throughout the year, it is recommended to evolve programming and embrace flexible infrastructure. The City of Edmonton can enhance site animation by fostering relationships with community groups and interested parties, supporting stewardship initiatives and raising awareness of the park's potential for diverse uses and activities. These efforts will strengthen the connection between people and place, reinforcing parks as vital community hubs.

2. Develop facilities to support recreational and social programming that amplifies the park's unique assets

Investment over time in infrastructure such as trails, water access and rentable interior spaces will allow for the Park to grow and be activated with strategic passive activities that support Northeast River Valley Park's unique assets.

Northeast River Valley Park has the potential to become a vibrant, year-round destination that harmonizes the site's natural ecology with social, recreational, and educational experiences. The development of a trail network (figure 26) will provide all-season access, guiding visitors through diverse ecological zones—grassland, lake, and riparian forest—while conserving sensitive ecosystems and showcasing the site's dynamic natural features. The trail network will emphasize ecological engagement through educational programs, interpretive signage, and small nature play areas. Visitors to the trails can learn about ecosystem functions while also gaining insight into traditional medicinal plants, native species restoration efforts and conservation initiatives.

Strengthening functions and relevance of the supporting buildings (figure 29), including the Event Centre, lakefront facilities and washrooms, will enhance the visitor experience and accommodate a range of programming. These spaces will serve as hubs for community gatherings, cultural events and educational workshops, offering public access while also providing opportunities to book for private events. Complementary infrastructure including day-use docks, nature play areas, terrain play features, fire pits and outdoor gathering spaces, will offer visitors diverse ways to engage with the park and its natural surroundings.

The development of a year-round trail network will immerse park visitors in the site's diverse ecological zones, offering opportunities to explore and engage with the natural environment. This interconnected system of trails will not only strengthen the site's legibility by providing clear pathways and wayfinding, it will also establish meaningful connections to key features, such as bridges, park facilities and nearby regional trail networks.

By integrating these elements, the trail system will enhance both the user experience and the park's overall accessibility, ensuring a cohesive and seamless transition between natural and built environments.

Wetland loop

Develop a trail on the Big Island that combines standard surfaces with selectively designed boardwalks to create a varied and engaging visitor experience. Boardwalks will be introduced to allow access to sensitive shoreline areas while minimizing ecological impact.

The trail loop will include a small rest and gathering area, play spots and interpretive content that is both informative and engaging. Along the way, visitors can enjoy activities such as dip-netting, birdwatching and wildlife observation, making the trail a destination for nature-based education and recreation.

Forest loop

Develop an all-season forest trail network that guides public access while protecting regeneration areas and habitat restoration. Integrate rest areas, interpretive signage and cultural storytelling, supporting ceremonies, reflection and traditional plant harvesting. Designed to evolve with forest succession, the trails offer a dynamic sensory experience, connecting visitors to the changing landscape.

Grassland loop

Develop trails, or seasonally mowed pathways, through the restored grasslands to provide unique opportunities for observing the restoration process and viewing diverse native grasses and pollinators, which attract a variety of birds, insects, and other wildlife. Interpretive signage could educate visitors about the processes of restoring and managing grasslands, including the process of prescribed burns, seed harvesting, and management of invasive species.

Paddling loop

Lake paddling provides both opportunities for paddling on the open lake as well as navigating through the restored shoreline and wetland style planting to catch glimpses of various waterfowl, insects and amphibians as well as diverse shoreline plants. Visitors can learn about how the plants filter nutrients and improve water quality as part of a complex ecosystem being recreated through revegetation and management efforts.

Winter trail

Develop a network of groomed winter trail loops of varying lengths to support low-impact winter recreation including cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Develop partnerships with adjacent land use owners to expand seasonal trail offerings and provide more winter recreation opportunities.

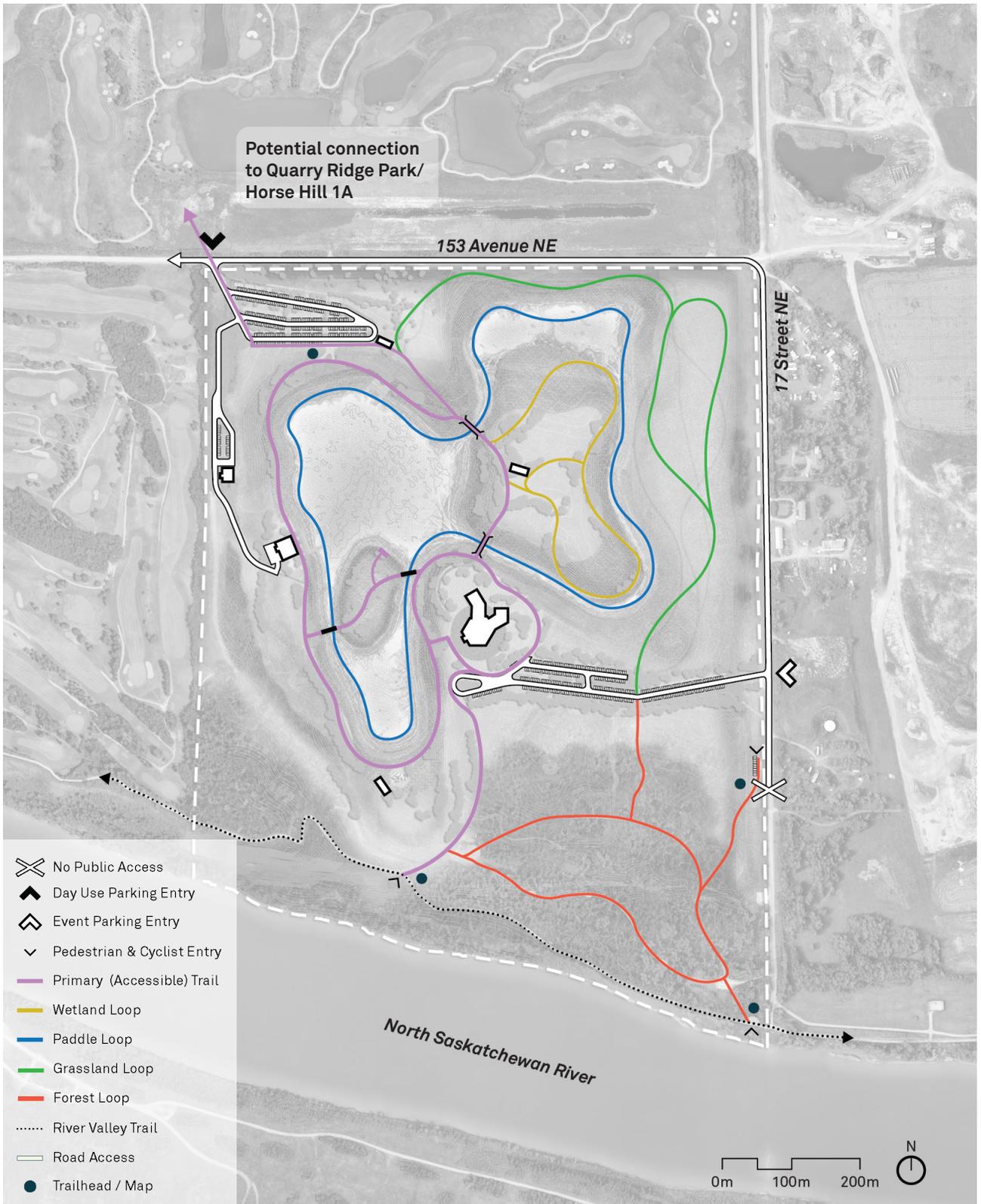


Figure 26
Recommended recreational trail loops

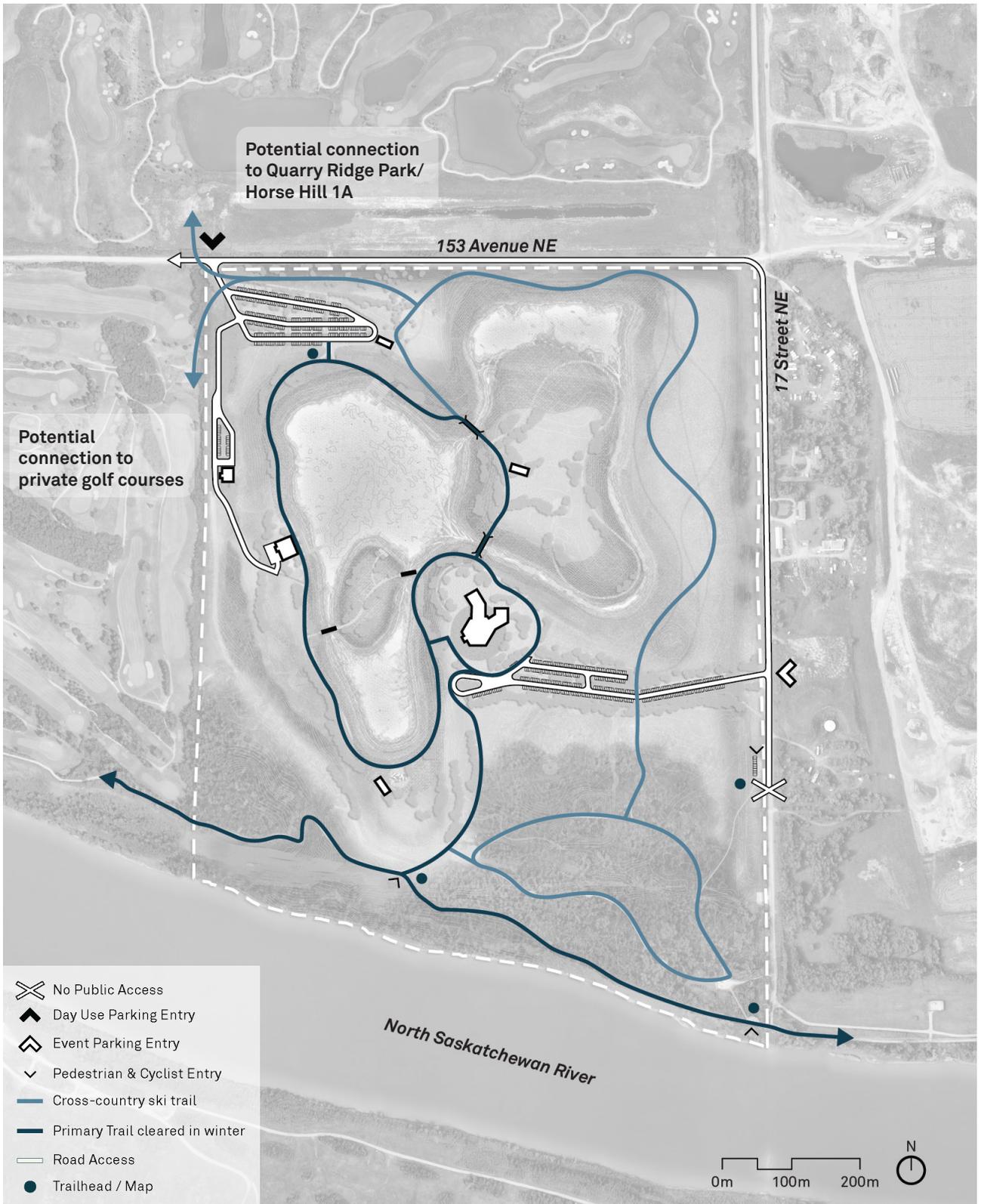


Figure 27
Recommended winter recreation trails

To fully realize the Northeast River Valley Park's vision as an animated, vibrant, inclusive and nature-based destination, it is essential to invest in high-quality supportive facilities and infrastructure. These amenities will enhance the user experience, support diverse programming and recreation and enable both large and small community events. By strategically developing key infrastructure—from educational hubs, accessible washrooms and docks to play areas and supporting indoor spaces—the park can accommodate a wide range of activities that bring it to life, ensuring it remains a welcoming place to return to time and time again. In addition, the lakefront should serve as a recreation hub, offering programming for activities like paddling, cross-country skiing and other outdoor recreation. It is recommended to develop a fully accessible dock and paddling sports launch to encourage water-based recreation on the lakes. To further support the community, consider rental programs and long-term storage options for local recreation groups and program partners, strengthening the Lodge's role as a dynamic and inclusive recreation destination.

The City's River Valley parks often host events of different sizes. A variety of events are likely to be proposed for Northeast River Valley Park and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Events will be evaluated for compatibility with other park uses, available infrastructure, and landscape restoration of the park as site conditions and amenities change and evolve over time.

Supporting Facilities

1. Administration building and site maintenance facility

Consolidate maintenance facilities and storage with the administration building on the west side of the site. The new outdoor maintenance area should be similar in size to the existing facility and screened from park views. This relocation will streamline maintenance and operations, improve efficiency and minimize disruption to park users and natural habitats—supporting more sustainable and effective land use.

2. Lakefront facility

Develop the lakefront facility as both a hub for learning and recreation. As an education centre, the lodge should include dedicated meeting

rooms and flexible spaces for school and youth programming. By hosting groups such as day camps and school tours, a home base for hands-on learning experiences is created. To further support the community, explore opportunities to license a portion of the facility for public rentals of boats and equipment. This should include space for rental inventory storage for activities such as paddling, nature walks and cross-country skiing.

3. Day-use docks

Develop a day-use dock at the lakefront facility and new parking lot to improve lake access. Include mobility transfer facilities to ensure universal access to the lake for paddling activities.

4. Barn bridges

Maintain the iconic barn bridges for use in small gatherings and events. These structures also support critical habitat for barn swallows.

5. Hill recreation zone

Take advantage of the site's natural topography to support informal, all-season sliding and hill-based recreational activities.

6. Signature nature playground

Create a signature, accessible, nature-inspired play area—including a traditional structure—in the lower bowl. Designed to spark curiosity, exploration and meaningful interactions, the playground should offer a balance of imaginative, physical, and manipulative play opportunities. Active play equipment, hands-on experiences like sand and water play and movable features to encourage creativity and discovery should be incorporated. Quiet areas should provide space for reflection, while cooperative play features will foster social connections. Celebrating the changing seasons, the playground will be designed for year-round use. Thoughtfully integrating natural materials and colorful elements, it will serve as a destination where children of all abilities can engage with the environment, challenge themselves and develop a strong connection to nature.

Within this area, consolidate the existing washroom facilities in the lower bowl into a single, upgraded, all-season facility, paired with a shaded picnic shelter. The shelter should accommodate smaller outdoor events, ceremonies, or educational programming, enhancing year-round usability.

7. Little Island

Revegetate Little Island to create a natural rest and viewing area, offering a quiet space to observe lake activities, wildlife and insects.

8. Event Centre

Expand the offerings at the Event Centre by incorporating a staffed Visitor Information Centre within the relocated maintenance wing. This centre should serve as a vibrant, multi-use hub that provides park information alongside Indigenous-curated cultural exhibits, supporting reconciliation and cultural learning. Complement the centre with amenities such as a café, destination restaurant, or nature shop, and include an outdoor patio overlooking the lake. Additionally, consider interior upgrades to create flexible rental spaces suitable for a variety of event types and scales, ensuring the venue meets diverse community needs.

9. Washroom parking lot

Maintain and improve the washroom facilities at the new parking lot, paired with an associated shaded shelter or meeting place. Upgrade the washroom for all-season use to enhance year-round accessibility.

10. Big Island nature education hub

Develop Big Island as a flexible gathering space for nature-based programming, educational camps, Indigenous youth/Elder learning, and ceremonies. The hub should accommodate both intimate and larger-scale events. Consolidate existing washroom buildings into a single, fully accessible facility, paired with a shaded picnic shelter or winter

warming hut. The shelter should be designed for flexible use, with the potential to be rented out for small outdoor events, ceremonies, or educational tours—adding versatility to Big Island. Upgrade the washroom for all-season use to ensure year-round functionality.

11. Fire Pit Gathering

Maintain a designated fire pit area to support smaller public gatherings, storytelling and ceremonies.

12. Forest gathering space

Collaborate with Indigenous partners to identify and develop a sacred space for cultural ceremonies, including sweat lodges, fire pits and areas for harvesting medicinal plants.

13. Gateway

Develop a secondary park entry point from the River Valley Trail. This gateway should include branded signage and clear wayfinding elements to welcome and guide visitors paired with an associated shaded picnic shelter. The shelter should be designed with the potential to be rented out for smaller outdoor events, ceremony, or education tours, adding versatility to the site.

14. Nature play locations

Throughout the park, develop small natural play areas that encourage hands-on exploration using logs, boulders, sand and other tactile materials. These unstructured play spots will nurture curiosity, creativity and a sense of environmental stewardship.



Figure 28

Vision image - Event Centre patio overlooking lake



- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 01 Administrative building and maintenance facility | 06 Signature nature playground | 11 Fire pit gathering |
| 02 Lakefront facility | 07 Little Island | 12 Forest gathering space |
| 03 Day-use docks | 08 Event Centre | 13 Gateway |
| 04 Barn bridges | 09 Washroom parking lot | 14 Nature play locations |
| 05 Hill recreation zone | 10 Big Island nature education hub | 15 Trailhead parking road closure |

Figure 29
Annotated vision plan

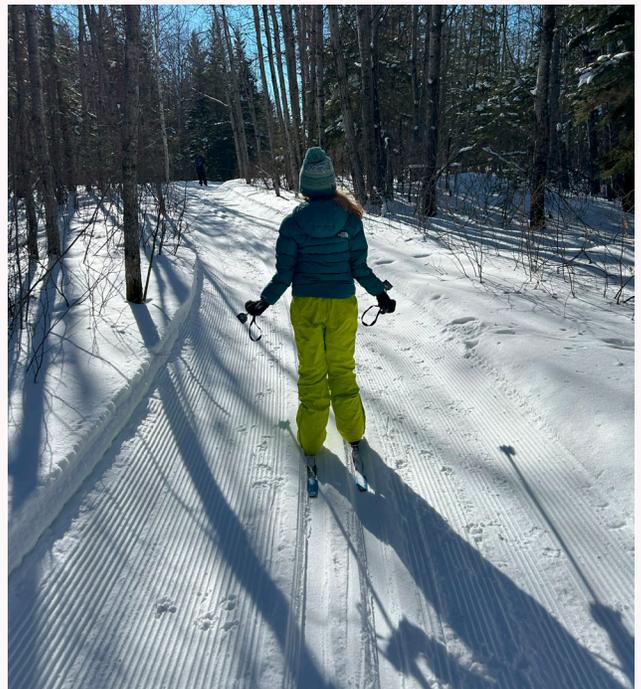


Figure 30
Precedent images

3. Invest in infrastructure that is inclusive and accessible

Creating inclusive, accessible spaces for all, enhancing connectivity, comfort and safety in Northeast River Valley Park

The Northeast River Valley Park should serve and be accessible to all peoples by providing facilities that accommodate diverse abilities and socio-economic backgrounds, while creating safe, welcoming spaces that foster a sense of belonging. Enhancing access to the site is a priority, with improved public transit connections and clear, legible links to the planned Horse Hill community.

To ensure year-round accessibility, the park will feature fully accessible public washrooms and a primary trail that is maintained throughout the winter, providing a direct and cleared connection from the parking lot to key park amenities (figure 32). All trails and public spaces will adhere to the City of Edmonton’s accessibility standards, with appropriate materials, compliant slopes and handrails where necessary. Additionally, the primary trail will be illuminated for safety and include seating areas to enhance comfort and usability for all visitors.



Figure 31
Accessible hand boat launch

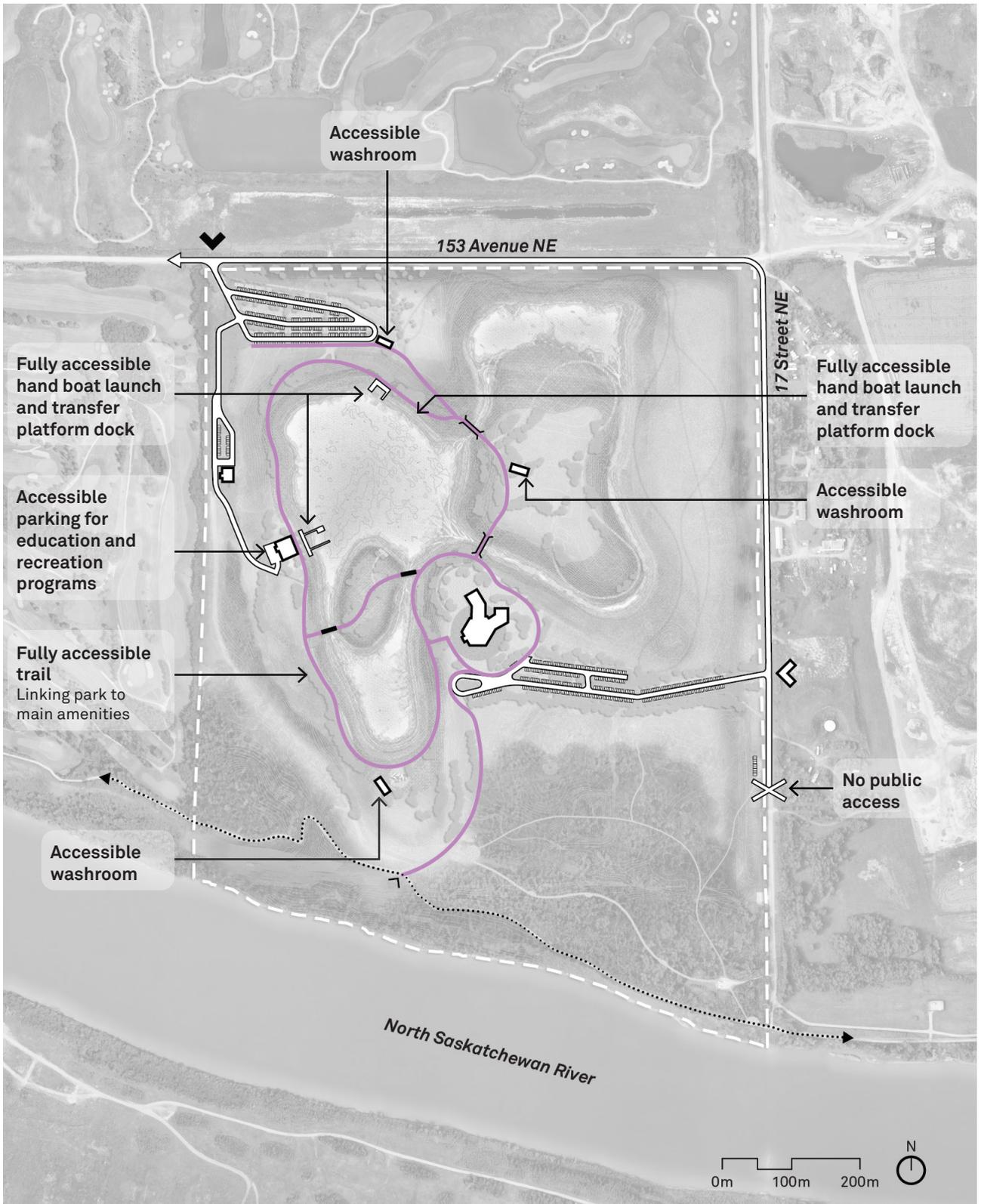


Figure 32
Proposed accessible accommodations and amenities

An animated park that inspires and engages year-round

1. Relationship building actions

- Encourage partnerships to create engaging park experiences and events that require minimal investment but have a strong impact in attracting visitors
- Develop partnerships to facilitate year-round recreation activities that align with the park's strategic priorities, such as ski clubs, learn-to-paddle programs, equipment rentals and guided walks

2. Operational and programming actions

- Attract and host unique events featuring local artisans, with activities designed to engage a diverse range of ages and demographics, ensuring repeat visitor appeal
- Invest in dedicated staff to enhance the park visitor experience, ensuring they are on-site and readily available to engage with guests
- Develop educational programs aligned with school curriculum, in partnership with Indigenous communities, to foster learning and connection to the park
- Facilitate all-season recreation activities, such as ski clubs, learn-to-paddle, equipment rentals, and guided walks, to align with the park's strategic priorities
- Prioritize smaller rentals across the park and other facilities such as by renovating and upgrading the Lakefront Lodge to support lower-cost options for visitors to utilize
- Develop small nature play spots throughout the park to encourage interaction with nature and enhance the visitor experience
- Develop interpretive signage and temporary educational displays
- Introduce temporary or pilot programs focused on ecological education
- Expand cross country ski trail network as usage increases
- Enhance existing trails by adding seating and improving accessibility with upgraded surfacing

3. Capital investment actions

- Design and build secondary trails, boardwalks and observation decks for sensitive habitats and wetlands
- Replace the maintenance wing of the Event Centre with a staffed Visitor Information Centre, incorporating a café/restaurant and outdoor patio to enhance visitor services
- Relocate and replace the existing playground with a signature destination nature playground in a new location to create a focal point for play and exploration
- Develop the lakefront facility as a dedicated space for education and youth programming, as well as a hub for day-use water recreation activities
- Develop a hand-launch and day-use dock to enhance water access for recreational activities
- Construct shade structures and consolidated washroom buildings to create sheltered gathering hubs that also serve as learning spaces for visitors
- Encourage the development of transit service to the park to increase accessibility for visitors without vehicles
- Develop an accessible paddling sports dock to ensure equitable access to water-based recreation

06 Priorities and Implementation

6.1 Introduction

The implementation of recommendations and actions at Northeast River Valley Park will begin with a strong focus on the land itself.

The first principle is ecological restoration—establishing and strengthening natural systems as the foundation for all future development. Restoring native grasslands, wetlands and riparian forests will ensure a resilient, healthy and sustainable landscape for generations to come. These efforts will prioritize biodiversity and ecological health, while also enhancing nature-based recreation. Immediate actions should focus on establishing this ecological base before advancing other initiatives.

The second principle is integrating Indigenous land-based knowledge into park management and decision making. By embedding Indigenous stewardship practices and ecological knowledge, the park will honor traditional relationships with the land, while promoting sustainability and environmental respect. This will be an ongoing process, with early efforts focused on relationship building and partnerships. Aligning these efforts with ecological restoration will create a seamless integration of cultural and environmental stewardship.

The third principle is activating the park through cultural, recreational and educational programming. This will bring the park to life with year-round activities, events and infrastructure that supports learning, outdoor recreation and community engagement. These experiences will be designed to reflect the park's natural and Indigenous heritage, while fostering a sense of belonging and connection. While amenities will be developed and expand over time, the initial emphasis will be on unique programming that attracts visitors and encourages ongoing engagement.

While these three principles establish the foundation for development, their implementation should remain adaptable—allowing for overlap and adjustments as circumstances evolve. Ongoing public and Indigenous engagement may also be needed to help inform and guide future decisions. The recommended strategic sequence is designed to align with the guiding principles established through the planning process, supporting the creation of a balanced, sustainable and culturally meaningful park for generations to come.



6.2 Priorities and strategic implementation sequence

The following priorities establish an overarching sequence to guide implementation decision-making. This sequence aligns with the strategic principles and associated recommended actions outlined earlier in the strategic plan. It provides a logical, phased approach to development—starting with foundational ecological elements and progressing toward more comprehensive infrastructure enhancements. It offers a practical, actionable framework to support City Administration in making informed, coordinated decisions over time and ensures that early actions lay the groundwork for future phases, fostering a cohesive and efficient realization of the overall vision.

Priority 1: Enhancing Ecology

Establish and sustain native grasslands, wetlands and riparian forests while improving nature-based recreation.

Intent:

- Restore and protect natural ecosystems
- Provide shade and wind protection with buffer plantings
- Strengthen biodiversity and long-term ecological health

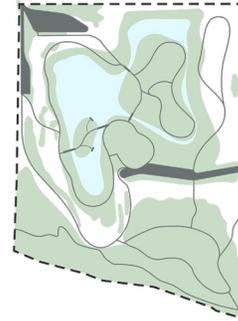


Priority 2: Improving Access

Upgrade park access, including roads, trails, parking and wayfinding.

Intent:

- Make the park easier to access and navigate
- Improve parking and clear signage for visitors

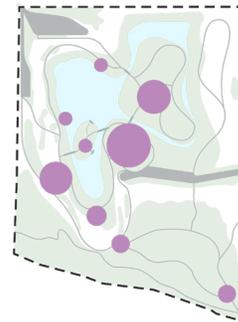


Priority 3: Activating the Site

Attract visitors with unique programs, markets, events and local business partnerships.

Intent:

- Create a destination for year-round activities
- Build a range of experience offerings not available elsewhere in the city

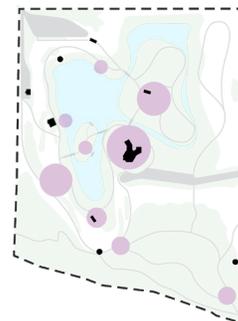


Principle 4: Infrastructure and Expansion

Upgrade and expand park facilities to improve visitor experience.

Intent:

- Invest in essential amenities to support recreation and events
- Ensure facilities are fully accessible and welcoming



6.3 Relationship Building

Building strong, respectful and lasting relationships is foundational to the success of the Northeast River Valley Park Strategic Plan. The City should proactively initiate relationship-building activities, as recommended, with a wide range of partners—including Indigenous partners, community residents, adjacent landowners, recreation and nature-based stewardship organizations and other key interested parties through intentional, inclusive and ongoing engagement.

This work should be guided by the strategic principles outlined herein, including shared ecological stewardship, reconciliation and the vision of an animated and welcoming park. Methods of relationship building may include listening sessions, workshops, community advisory groups, Indigenous advisory groups, targeted outreach and, where appropriate, the development of formal partnership agreements.

To ensure accountability, the City should track progress on each relationship building action, using metrics such as the number of participants engaged, frequency of interactions, collaborative projects initiated and the development of formalized partnerships.

By embedding relationship building as a strategic recommendation in the development of Northeast River Valley Park, the City will create meaningful outcomes, foster shared respect and support the process of developing a more inclusive, animated and resilient park.

6.4 Implementation timeframe

The following section outlines recommended timeframes for implementing actions based on strategic priorities. These timeframes serve as guidelines to establish a logical sequence of development.

- Short-term (1–5 years): Focus on relationship building, operational improvements and early ecological restoration. These foundational efforts will set the stage for future park development.
- Mid-term (5-10 years) Capital investments to improve access, visitor experience and expand recreation and programming.
- Longer-term (beyond 10 years): Larger capital investments, such as infrastructure upgrades, will follow as the park evolves.

This timeline is flexible, allowing for adjustments based on City operations, funding availability and evolving community needs. The park's development will remain adaptable to ensure it meets long-term goals while responding to a changing and growing city.

Implementation timeframe: A park that encourages environmental stewardship

	Timeframe			
	1-5 Years	5-10 Years	10-25 Years	25 Years +
A Park that Encourages Connection and Environmental Stewardship				
Relationship Building Actions				
Initiate discussions with non-profit groups and stewardship groups to expand nature-based recreation, such as guided walks, birdwatching, and plant harvesting workshops	●————→			
Explore partnership opportunities with adjacent golf courses to expand the winter cross-country ski trail loop	●————→			
Operational and Programming Actions				
Initiate rezoning to the appropriate River Valley Zone in alignment with the North Saskatchewan River Valley Area Redevelopment Plan and the Ribbon of Green Strategic Plan	●————→			
Focus active recreation and programming near existing infrastructure	●————→			
Initiate re-zoning of Park's Ribbon of Green Land Management Classifications	●————→			
Restrict the existing interior road to maintenance vehicles only	●————→			
Conduct ecosystem surveys to identify restoration priorities and monitor health	●————→			
Implement a weed management program and designate no-mow zones for natural regrowth	●————→			→
Launch native grassland planting initiatives and small-scale habitat improvements	●————→			→
Begin a tree planting program on Small and Big Island	●————→			
Remove fence along River Valley Trail	●————→			
Conduct prescribed burns	●————→			→
Capital Investment Actions				
Remove existing park gates	●————→			
Develop new park entry and a low-impact, environmentally responsible day-use parking lot	●————→			
Develop and install new Park entry and wayfinding signage	●————→			
Formalize the new park entrance and retrofit the existing parking lot with low-impact, environmentally responsible solutions at the Event Centre			●————→	
Establish a River Valley trailhead accessible from 17 Street NE		●————→		
Assess the potential decommissioning and removal of the interior road		●————→		
Enhance the primary, fully accessible trail linking main facilities	●————→			
Consolidate park maintenance services at the Administration Building		●————→		
Develop and implement a native re-vegetation strategy that includes monitoring protocols and measurable targets to assess progress, plant establishment and overall ecosystem health over time	●————→			→
Develop and implement a strategy to improve ecological functioning of the lake through wetland and shoreline restoration processes	●————→			→
Develop comprehensive land management and maintenance plans to achieve long-term biodiversity goals	●————→			→

Implementation timeframe: A park that embraces healing and reconciliation

	Timeframe			
	1-5 Years	5-10 Years	10-25 Years	25 Years +
A Park that Embraces Healing and Reconciliation				
Relationship Building Actions				
Sustain engagement and open communication with Indigenous community partners to strengthen ongoing relationships and ensure collaborative efforts	● →			
Explore the creation of an Indigenous Advisory Working Group to provide guidance for future park management and development		● →		
Explore employment and mentorship opportunities for Indigenous communities to steward the site and influence its future healing and growth	● →			
Collaborate with the community to co-develop programming that incorporates Indigenous cultural teachings and supports traditional knowledge sharing	● →			
Build partnerships with community organizations to hold space and provide access to support urban Indigenous peoples				
Operational and Programming Actions				
Acknowledge the knowledge gap regarding the site's pre-industrial history and acknowledge the long-term relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the river valley corridor	● →			
Undertake a renaming process of the park to reflect and honour the river valley's Indigenous heritage	● →			
Consider interpretive signage that has integrated Indigenous languages and encourages respect and understanding of ceremonial remnants and their purposes	● →			
Where possible, explore opportunities to reduce financial barriers to build a more diverse user group of the park	● →			
Continue to support ceremonial uses, including temporary sweat lodges or gathering circles	● →			
Consider collaborations through community programming to support early years and youth leadership, to foster engagement and connection to the park	● →			
Capital Investment Actions				
Limiting or removing vehicular access to the North Saskatchewan River on 17 Street NE to preserve natural systems and create a peaceful space to observe the river		● →		
Consider integration of Indigenous languages and Traditional Ecological Knowledge into interpretive and educational signage and park programming		● →		
Develop an Indigenous Stewardship Policy for managing the park, ensuring Indigenous knowledge informs ongoing land management and environmental strategies		● →		

Implementation timeframe: An animated park that inspires and engages year-round

	Timeframe			
	1-5 Years	5-10 Years	10-25 Years	25 Years +
An Animated Park that Inspires and Engages Year-Round				
Relationship Building Actions				
Encourage partnerships to create engaging park experiences and events that require minimal investment but have a strong impact in attracting visitors	● →			
Develop partnerships to facilitate year-round recreation activities that align with the park's strategic priorities, such as ski clubs, learn-to-paddle programs, equipment rentals and guided walks	● →	→		
Operational and Programming Actions				
Attract and host unique events featuring local artisans, with activities designed to engage a diverse range of ages and demographics, ensuring repeat visitor appeal	● →	→	→	→
Invest in dedicated staff to enhance the park visitor experience, ensuring they are on-site and readily available to engage with guests	● →	→		
Develop educational programs aligned with school curriculum, in partnership with Indigenous communities, to foster learning and connection to the park	● →	→		
Facilitate all-season recreation activities, such as ski clubs, learn-to-paddle, equipment rentals, and guided walks, to align with the park's strategic priorities	● →	→		
Prioritize smaller rentals across the park and other facilities such as by renovating and upgrading the Lakefront Lodge to support lower-cost options for visitors to utilize	● →	→		
Develop small nature play spots throughout the park to encourage interaction with nature and enhance the visitor experience	● →	→		
Develop interpretive signage and temporary educational displays		● →	→	
Introduce temporary or pilot programs focused on ecological education		● →	→	
Expand cross country ski trail network as usage increases	● →	→		
Enhance existing trails by adding seating and improving accessibility with upgraded surfacing	● →	→		
Capital Investment Actions				
Design and build secondary trails, boardwalks and observation decks for sensitive habitats and wetlands	● →	→	→	
Replace the maintenance wing of the Event Centre with a staffed Visitor Information Centre, incorporating a café/restaurant and outdoor patio to enhance visitor services		● →	→	
Relocate and replace the existing playground with a signature destination nature playground in a new location to create a focal point for play and exploration		● →	→	
Develop the lakefront facility as a dedicated space for education and youth programming, as well as a hub for day-use water recreation activities		● →	→	
Develop a hand-launch and day-use dock to enhance water access for recreational activities	● →	→		
Construct shade structures and consolidated washroom buildings to create sheltered gathering hubs that also serve as learning spaces for visitors		● →	→	→
Encourage the development of transit service to the park to increase accessibility for visitors without vehicles		● →	→	→
Develop an accessible paddling sports dock to ensure equitable access to water-based recreation		● →	→	

07 Conclusion

The Northeast River Valley Park Strategic Plan sets a clear and thoughtful direction for the transformation of one of Edmonton’s newest public parks. By layering together ecological restoration, Indigenous land-based knowledge and cultural practices, and nature-based recreation and community programming, the strategic plan positions Northeast River Valley Park as a regional destination that reflects the City’s commitment to reconciliation, environmental sustainability and equitable access to public green space.

Grounded in site analysis, Indigenous and public engagement and technical review, the strategic plan provides a flexible, phased framework to guide future decision making, investment and stewardship. Recommendations are organized into three categories, relationship building, operational and programming actions and capital investment actions—ensuring the Park can evolve over time through both immediate improvements and long-term transformation.

Three interrelated strategic plan principles guide the vision for the Park:

- 1. A park that encourages connection and environmental stewardship**
- 2. A park that embraces healing and reconciliation**
- 3. An animated park that inspires and engages year-round**

Together, these principles inform recommendations that support the consolidation of infrastructure, restoration of ecological systems, creation of inclusive gathering spaces and activation of the park through vibrant and all-season programming.

The City of Edmonton continues to evolve and the implementation of this strategic plan will have Northeast River Valley Park serve as a model for ecologically grounded, culturally inclusive and community-responsive park development.