What We Heard Report

Naturalization and Tree Planting Project (Phase 2)

August 2023

ADVISE

SHARE YOUR VOICE
SHAPE OUR CITY

Edmonton

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Executive Summary

Project Overview

The City Plan's Big City Moves of Greener As We Grow outlines a commitment to protection and conservation of our urban forest, while driving climate resilience by planting two million new trees as the population grows. The City will reach the goal of planting two million new trees through naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting. To guide this work, the City is developing two tools; the Naturalization, Restoration and Reclamation Plan (NRRP) and the Green Infrastructure Expansion Mapping (GIEM) model. In May 2023, the City conducted the naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting phase 2 city-wide public and stakeholder engagement to inform the NRRP and GIEM model. This work built upon the first phase of engagement that was carried out in May 2022.

Engagement Approach

During the second phase of engagement the public had the opportunity to provide feedback through an online meeting, interactive mapping tool on Engaged Edmonton, online and intercept survey, and at 12 in person pop-up events. The online interactive mapping tool allowed participants to indicate locations within their neighbourhoods where they are comfortable with naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting.

Stakeholder opportunities to give feedback included an online survey and two meetings (online and in person). The online survey was distributed to 364 stakeholders.

Public Engagement Results

The majority of participants who shared their feedback using the interactive mapping tool shared that they were very comfortable with naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting in the locations that they pinned. Forty four pins were placed on the map by 22 participants.

The City received 431 responses from the online and intercept survey and the majority of the respondents were within the 35-44 years age range.

- Most respondents indicated that they mainly use public/open spaces for dog walking, sledding, community gardening, sporting and other recreational activities.
- When asked what activities may be impacted by naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting in neighbourhoods, most respondents indicated that activities will be positively impacted while others cited concerns that it would reduce play space for children and for sports.
- Posters in high traffic areas, emails and text messages from homeowners

associations via Councillors' offices and community league boards were among the most preferred methods by respondents to receive progress updates of naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting in their neighbourhoods.

- When naturalizing and boulevard and open space tree planting the public wants the City to consider the aesthetics of neighbourhoods, safety and security, accessibility to public spaces, pest management, tree protection and maintenance, diversity of native trees and plants and also an integrated approach to naturalization and tree planting.

Stakeholder Engagement Results

The City received 15 survey responses from community leagues, homeowners associations, developers, community and recreation, researchers/academics, business and active transportation groups. Eight per cent of respondents to the stakeholder survey indicated that naturalization and tree planting would conflict with community priorities, interest and activities while twenty per cent responded "unsure." Mitigation measures to minimize impacts were suggested to include proactive consultation with community and key stakeholders and limiting naturalization to unused areas.

The two stakeholder meetings were attended by representatives from the following groups in Edmonton; Environmental Observatory Lab, Edmonton Mountain Bike Alliance, researcher with a focus on environmental justice for minority groups such as refugees and newcomers, Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition (ERVCC), Edmonton Native Plant Group, Woodhaven-Edgemont HOA, Academic/Researcher, Partner in Parks volunteer. City staff were also invited to the following four stakeholder initiated events to gather feedback on naturalization and tree planting: Greater Windermere Community League board meeting, Terwillegar Homeowners Association pop-up event, Joint Use Agreement - Land Management committee meeting (school boards) and the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Advisory group meeting.

- When asked about how spaces are currently being used in neighbourhoods and where there are opportunities to naturalize or plant trees, stakeholders highlighted that spaces are utilized for recreational and sporting activities like soccer, tobogganing, children playing, seniors who enjoy viewing and sitting by the water at stormwater management facilities.
- Stakeholders encouraged the City to continue local level engagement to understand neighbourhood priorities and use of land and consider population vulnerabilities that have low equity on green spaces.
- Other themes that emerged include consideration by the City for future schools

expansion plans, tree replacement and maintenance, safety risks, weed control and partnership explorations.

- Stakeholders are interested in collaborating and partnering with the City's urban forestry team and work with the City to plant trees.

Next Steps

Feedback collected from phase 2 public engagement is currently being reviewed and considered by the City Project Team for potential revisions to the NRRP and GIEM model. Phase 1 and 2 public engagement feedback will also be considered to help improve the City's regular communications and education work around naturalization and tree planting.

Introduction

Naturalization and Boulevard and Open Space Tree Planting

Greener As We Grow - one of The City Plan's Big City Moves - outlines a commitment to protection and conservation of our urban forest, while driving climate resilience by planting two million new trees as the population grows. This target is linked to the goal outlined in the Urban Forest Asset Management Plan to reach 20 per cent forest canopy coverage in Edmonton by 2071.

The City will reach the goal of planting two million new trees through naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting.

To guide this work, the City is developing two tools:

1. The Naturalization, Restoration and Reclamation Plan (NRRP)
2. The Green Infrastructure Expansion Mapping (GIEM) model

The NRRP will update the City's approach to urban naturalization, restoration and reclamation, replacing the previous 1994 Naturalization Master Plan. The new plan will:

- Determine naturalization best practices that will best help meet urban forest canopy and tree planting goals for the next eight years
- Update process and criteria for site selection, planning, budgeting and implementation, including species suited to Edmonton's climate, geography, soils and ecology
- Update processes and best practices for ongoing monitoring and maintenance
- Enhance community involvement and stewardship

The GIEM model is a geographic information system (GIS) map the City is developing to identify potential new sites for naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting. Sites will be identified based on a variety of key social, ecological and technical factors including:

- Population vulnerability
- Existing tree canopy and vegetation inventory
- Heat islands
- Design and construction standards
- Existing and future infrastructure or projects
- Ecological connectivity
- Flood risk zones

What will inform the NRRP and Mapping tool?

The NRRP and GIEM model take into consideration a variety of inputs including:

- City policies, procedures and existing Open City Data
- Technical design criteria and best practices for site assessments and classifications, site preparation, planting and/or seeding and pest management
- Feedback gathered through communications and public engagement activities to help sequence naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting activities, and inform public engagement and education at the operational level

Public Engagement Overview

Phase 1 Public Engagement - May 2022

In May 2022, Phase 1 public engagement was undertaken and included a city-wide survey to help the City of Edmonton better understand how green spaces are used, as well the level of support for boulevard and open space tree planting. A What We Heard report summarizing the first phase of engagement is available on Engaged Edmonton.

Online Comment Box - October 2022 to May 2023

An Engaged Edmonton page was launched in October 2022 as a way for Edmontonians to provide ongoing feedback on naturalization experiences. An online comment box was available to share general thoughts and perspectives on the City's naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting activities. The comment box received 28 responses and was closed on May 5, 2023, when the second phase of engagement opened. Key themes from the online comment box are outlined below.

Key themes

Over half of the respondents were supportive of naturalization and tree planting. A number of comments suggested planting a variety of tree species to produce fruit and to help prevent disease. Others raised concerns about tree removal and replacement as well as needing guidelines for tree planting on infill and new build sites. Some respondents were also interested in participating in future planting and public education opportunities.

Public Engagement

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 second phase of engagement was at the ADVISE level on the City of Edmonton's Public Engagement Spectrum** and the public was invited to share feedback and perspectives on naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting. Visit edmonton.ca/PublicEngagement for more information on the City's public engagement process.

GBA+ Considerations

The City of Edmonton has adopted a Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) process to consider more equitable access to programs and services.

The needs and preferences of different genders and populations were considered and the learnings from Phase 1 were also used to inform this second phase of engagement. For example, Phase 1 feedback results showed, "*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,*" and so one of the Phase 2 public engagement events was carried out at the Mustard Seed Mosaic Centre whose programs target recent newcomers and those living in more vulnerable circumstances. This was an opportunity to raise awareness and get feedback on the City's plans for naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting.

Intercept survey participant sharing their feedback with City Staff

In planning for Phase 2 public engagement, representatives of stakeholder groups (including Indigenous, youth, women, people living with disabilities and seniors groups) received a pre-engagement email detailing information about the project and asking how their group would like to participate in the upcoming public engagement. The responses from this pre-engagement phase helped inform the public engagement and communications plan including the number and location of pop-up events, in person and online public and stakeholder meetings and materials to include in the information package. At the launch of Phase 2 public engagement, the information package, with links to public engagement opportunities, was shared with the stakeholder group representatives for dissemination.

The integrated data collection methods were designed to enhance participation. For example, the interactive mapping tool on Engaged Edmonton provided the public with an opportunity to pin a location in their neighbourhood (or any other place of interest), indicate their comfort levels with naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting and leave a comment. The public survey option gave the public an opportunity to expand on their feedback and provide any further details on what the City should consider when naturalizing or tree planting in their neighbourhoods.

Additionally, the intercept and online surveys were comprehensive but still concise enough to gather the necessary feedback, allowing participants to give their feedback without being fatigued by long and strenuous questions. The City staff went out to administer intercept surveys in public spaces such as libraries, parks and recreational centres. The intercept survey administration aimed to respect people's time and attention, including the fact that the public engagement period happened during the provincial election campaign and voting times.

Consideration was given to the times the public online meetings or pop-up events were carried out to ensure that Edmontonians had the opportunity to participate and give their feedback. One of the public meetings was carried out during lunch hour to accommodate those that work during the day and pop-up events at some of the public libraries were scheduled around after school hours in order to increase interactions, as that is when parents often accompany their children to the library.

Who We Engaged

From May 5-29, 2023 the City of Edmonton engaged with:

- The general public
- External stakeholders, such as community groups and organizations

Prior to the engagement launch on May 5, 364 external stakeholders received a pre-engagement email asking how they would like to be involved and engaged in the project.

The pre-engagement email was sent to organizations and groups representing:

- Seniors
- Active transportation
- Public health/active living
- Researchers/academics
- Indigenous community representatives
- Multicultural groups
- Accessibility groups
- Community leagues
- Homeowners associations
- Children/youth/student groups
- People experiencing or at risk of houselessness

Forty one responses were received from the following groups:

- 15 community leagues and Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues
- 7 utilities (EPCOR and ATCO) respondents
- 6 homeowners associations
- 6 environmental groups (Edmonton Native Plant Society, Alberta Native Plant Society, Partners in Parks resident volunteer, Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition, Urban Environment Observatory Lab, Edmonton and Area Land Trust)
- 3 academic respondents
- 1 Edmonton Public School Board respondent
- 1 Shaw respondent
- 1 resident

How We Engaged

A variety of tools and tactics were used to ensure participants had an opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives.

Public Opportunities

The public engagement process launched on May 5, 2023 with a "Parks Roadshow."

The City visited five Edmonton area parks to administer the intercept survey, give away wildflowers and postcards to park users.

- ➢ Hermitage Park
- ➢ Rundle Park
- ➢ Jackie Parker Park
- ➢ Government House Park
- ➢ Terwillegar Park

Postcards and wildflowers given to the public

Additional opportunities included:

Activity	Venue	Date
12 In-person pop-up events	Kinsmen Sports Centre	May 8
	EPL Whitemud Crossing	May 9
	EPL Millwoods	May 9
	Mosaic Centre	May 10
	EPL Stanley Milner	May 10
	EPL Clareview	May 15
	Clareview Community Recreation Centre	May 15
	EPL West Henday	May16
	Terwillegar Recreation Centre	May 18
	The Meadows Community Recreation Centre	May 19
	Central Lions Recreation Centre	May 25
	Terwillegar Gardens	May 27
One online general public meeting	Google Meet	May 24

Stakeholder Opportunities

- Three in-person pop-up events
    - Hazeldean Community Clean Up
    - Terwillegar Gardens Homeowners Association
    - Stillwater Homeowners Association
- One online community league meeting
    - Greater Windermere Community League
- One in-person multi-stakeholder meeting
- One online multi-stakeholder meeting

How We Communicated and Connected

120 **Postcards** left at recreation and library facilities

11 **Emails** received at naturalizationandtrees@edmonton.ca

Engaged Edmonton views **18,800**

18 **Posters** displayed at recreation facilities

364 **Emails** to stakeholders

Social Media

3 **Tweets** delivered **29,500** impressions

3 **Facebook posts** delivered **3,800** impressions

20 **Comments** on social media posts

Advertising

Digital ads published to Google Ads spaces, Facebook and Instagram

8 million+ views

21,600 clicks

Facebook/Instagram ads

2 million+ views

3,800 clicks

848K unique users

Digital boards

17

15 million+ impressions

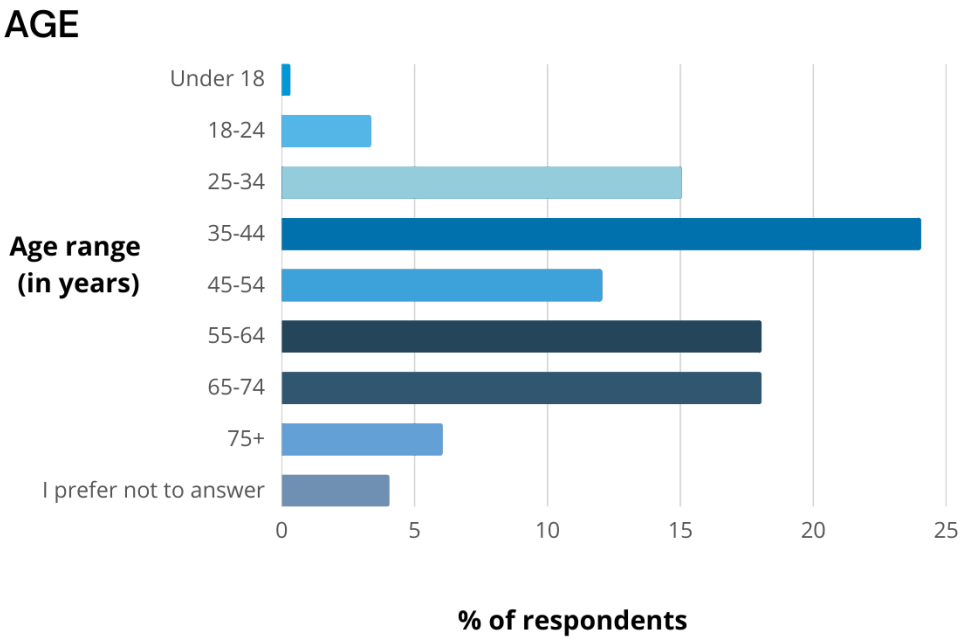
Who We Heard From

Public

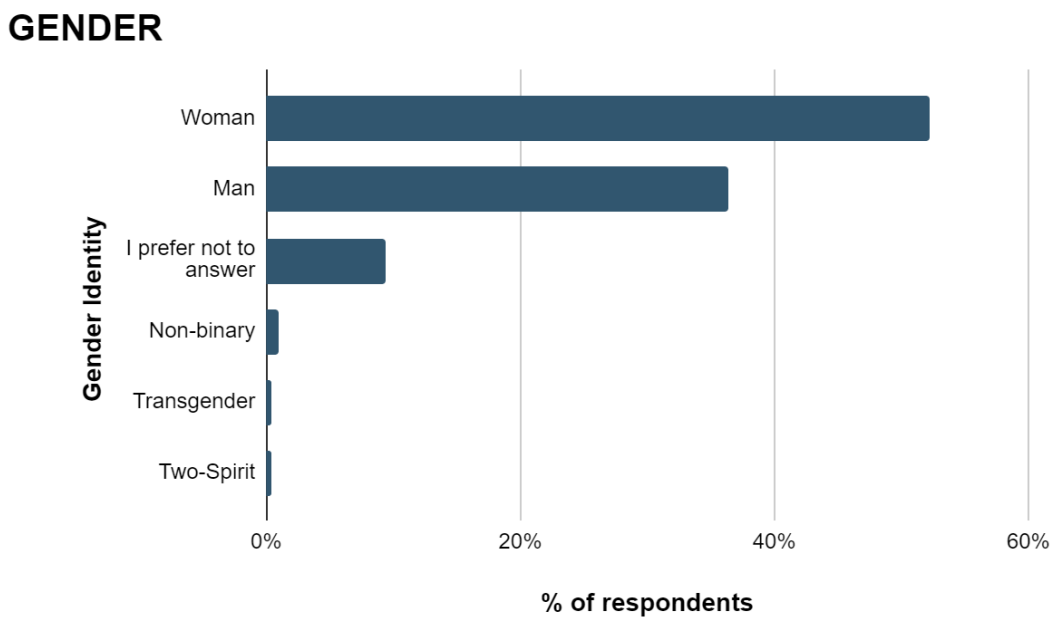
The City staff had approximately 145 in-person interactions at the pop-up events and distributed 120 postcards that had a QR code to the Engaged Edmonton website for people who were unable to take the intercept survey. Postcard handouts at pop-up events also provided an opportunity for the City to raise awareness about the online interactive map where participants could pin naturalization and tree planting locations.

The public online survey and intercept survey questions mirrored each other, and gave participants the opportunity to provide their feedback both on digital platforms and in person. The online survey was administered through the Engaged Edmonton platform and the intercept survey was administered to respondents at various in-person pop-up events.

The surveys (online and intercept) were open to the public from May 5 - 29, 2023. In total, the City received 431 responses. Of those, 394 were received through the Engaged Edmonton platform and 37 were received through in-person pop-up events.



Of the 431 survey respondents, the majority (24 per cent) were in the 35-44 years age range, followed by seniors who made up 19 per cent of the respondents. Fifty-two per cent of respondents identified as women, 36 per cent as men and nine per cent preferred not to answer.



Indigenous and racialized people

The engagement also sought feedback on naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting from diverse groups, and the respondents had intersecting identities. The demographics included:

- 8.3 per cent racialized/visible minorities
- 6.1 per cent persons living with disabilities
- 3 per cent Indigenous persons
- 1 per cent racialized/visible minority/persons with disabilities
- 1 per cent new to Canada
- 1 per cent racialized/visible minority/new to Canada
- 0.2 per cent were persons with disabilities/Indigenous
- None of these (65.4 per cent chose this)
- Prefer not to answer (14 per cent chose this)

Stakeholders

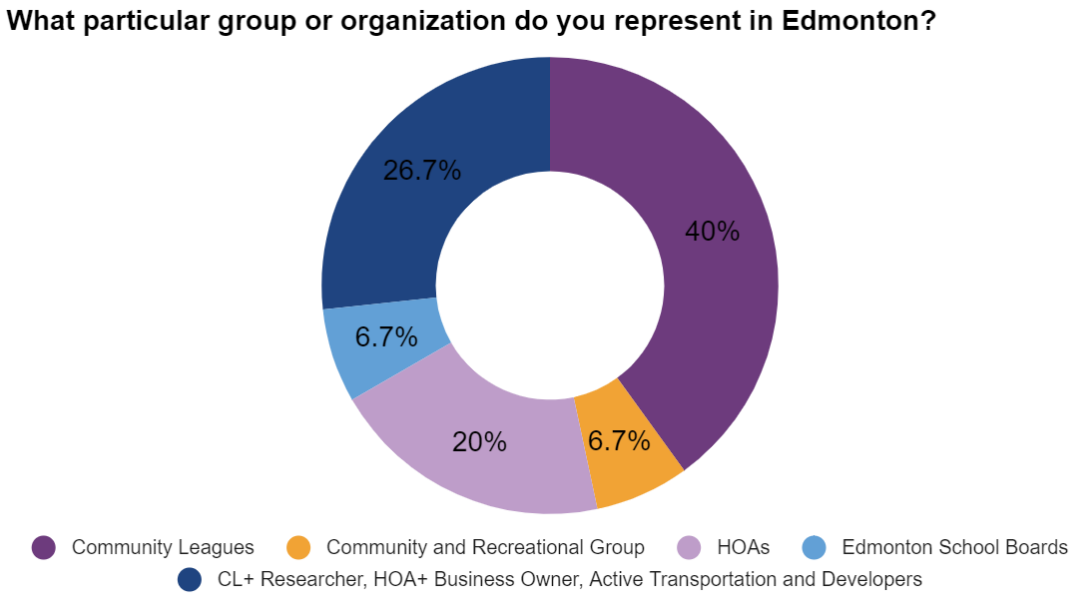
The table below breaks down the stakeholder engagement opportunities and participants during Phase 2 engagement.

Stakeholder Engagement Opportunity	Venue	#Invitations Sent/ Surveys	#Participants/ Respondents	Details
Online Survey	Engaged Edmonton Online Link	Email with link was send to 364 stakeholders	15 survey and 11 email responses were received	Some stakeholders preferred to submit their feedback directly through email. Thus, in addition to the 15 survey responses, 11 respondents provided their feedback and perspectives through email. Responses received were from representatives of the following groups; Community Leagues, HOAs, developers, community and recreation, researchers/academics, business, environment and active transportation groups.
Online Meeting, May 16, 2023	Google Meet	364 stakeholders	5 signed up	**4 attended**, including representatives from the following groups in Edmonton; Environmental Observatory Lab, Edmonton Mountain Bike Alliance, researcher with a focus on environmental justice for minority groups such as refugees and newcomers, ERVCC.
In Person Meeting, May 17, 2023	Edmonton Public Library - Idylwylde Bonnie Doon	364 stakeholders	5 signed up	**4 attended**, including representatives from the following groups in Edmonton; Edmonton Native Plant Group, Woodhaven-Edgemont HOA, Academic/Researcher, Partner in Parks volunteer.

The table below summarizes the stakeholder events where the City staff was invited and attended to gather feedback.

Name of Stakeholder Engagement Opportunity	Venue and Date	#Invitations	Details
Greater Windermere Community League Board Meeting	Zoom May 11 at 6 p.m.	Invitations were shared with group representatives who sent to the rest of the group.	5 board members were in attendance. Based on the pre-engagement email to stakeholders, the CL board invited the public engagement team to their scheduled board meeting to allow board members to give feedback on the naturalization and tree planting project.
Terwillegar Homeowners Association Pop-up Event	Terwillegar Gardens May 27 at 12 p.m.	Invitations were shared with group representatives who sent to the rest of the group.	5 board members were present. Both board members of the HOA and residents (10) of Terwillegar Gardens were engaged on this day.
Joint Use Agreement - Land Management Committee Meeting (school boards)	Google Meet May 11 at 2 p.m.	19 invitees	12 attended. The Joint Land Use Committee's vision is that Edmonton is an active, engaged and inclusive community enhanced by the provision and shared use of schools, parks and recreation facilities.
Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Advisory Group Meeting	Hybrid-Google Meet and Millcreek Office (Bonnie Doon) May 24 at 1:30 p.m.	18 invitees	16 attended. The IPM advisory group supports and provides their expertise to Citystaff and City hired contractors to undertake pest management activities guided by the IPM policy.

The chart below is a representation of the stakeholders that provided their feedback through the online survey.



What We Heard - Public Engagement Results

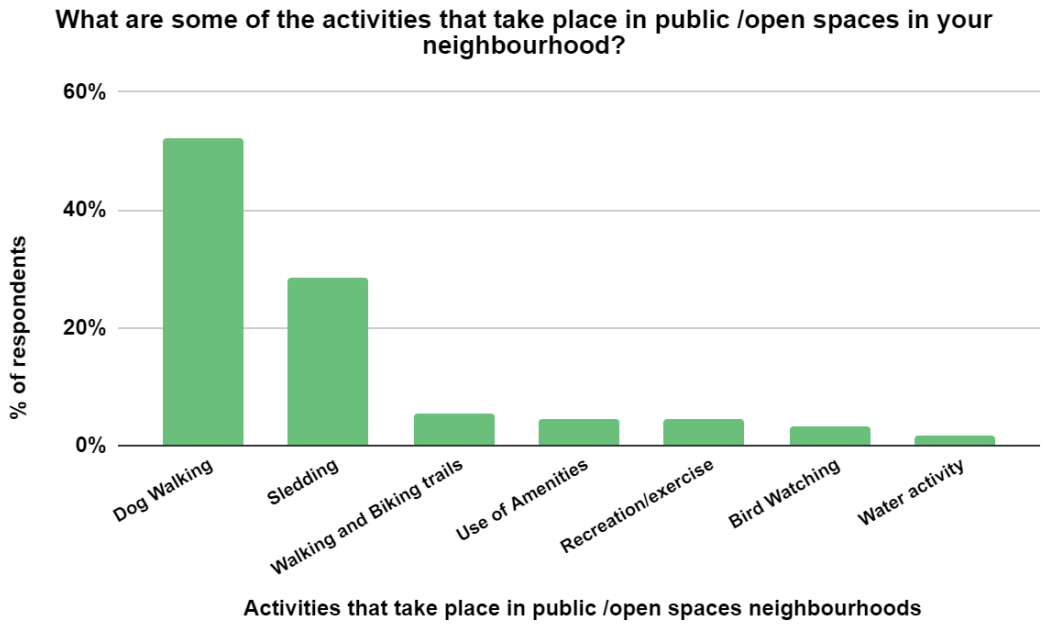
Online and Intercept Survey

The online survey was administered through the Engaged Edmonton platform and the intercept survey was administered to respondents at the various in person pop-up events. We asked respondents to provide feedback on the following questions (categorized into What, How and Where), which focus on localized/neighborhood feedback as opposed to the generalized questions from the Phase 1 survey:

a) WHAT

- activities take place in public/open spaces in your neighbourhood?
- the City should consider when naturalizing and planting boulevard and open space trees in your neighbourhood?
- ways would you like the City to support your participation in naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting community initiatives?

Fifty-two per cent of respondents indicated they use public/open spaces for dog walking and 28 per cent for sledding. Respondents also use public/open spaces for sporting, community and family events and for kids' outdoor learning and playing. Other activities such as community gardening, skating, forest bathing and sunbathing were also mentioned. Others brought forth concerns about encampments in public/open spaces and indicated the City should consider this when planning for naturalization and tree planting.



Participants shared a variety of feedback when asked what the City should consider when naturalizing and planting boulevard and open space trees in their neighbourhood. Key themes included:

Diversity of native trees and plants

- The majority of respondents emphasized the need for the City to consider planting a diversity of native trees and plants with edible fruits for the benefit of people as well as birds
- Plant diversity of trees to help curb the spread of diseases (on both private and public property)

Integrated Approach to naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting

- The City should consider how open spaces are currently used, whether for kids and families playing sports, flying kites, teaching kids to ride bikes and other general recreation
- Continue to strengthen partnerships with the schools to hand out different types of trees to plant. For example, continue the current practice of providing spruce seedlings to grade ones on Arbour Day and consider expanding on the type of species provided
- Engage with homeowners who live directly adjacent to spaces planned for naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting
- Educate residents about the plants and information about how they were selected, including allergy related information

- Incorporate faster approaches to naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting
- Coordinate with other business areas and work with developers to increase areas available for parks
- Consider overall costs and responsible use of public funds when it comes to naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting

Tree protection and maintenance

- Respondents stressed the importance of preserving existing trees
- Creating stricter criteria for when a tree can be cut down on city land
- Ensure funding for care and watering is in place before planting boulevard and open space trees
- Consider an incentive program for homeowners who are close to naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting sites. For example, an incentive program could allow homeowners to take part in maintenance of new trees and in turn receive a property tax break

Aesthetics of neighbourhoods

- Consider how property values are impacted by naturalization and ensure an approach where naturalization does not allow for overgrowth of weeds or grass
- Where naturalization has already happened, the City should consider putting signs up to remind dog owners that they must pick up dog waste

Pest management

- To avoid pesticide, herbicide and use of other harsh chemicals where children play in those spaces
- Some respondents emphasized the City should not use pesticides or mow and to let whatever grows, grow

Maintaining sight lines

- Design considerations to avoid large areas of dense biomass (e.g. trees, shrubs, grasses), ensure sufficient open spaces and maintain sight lines for safety and security reasons

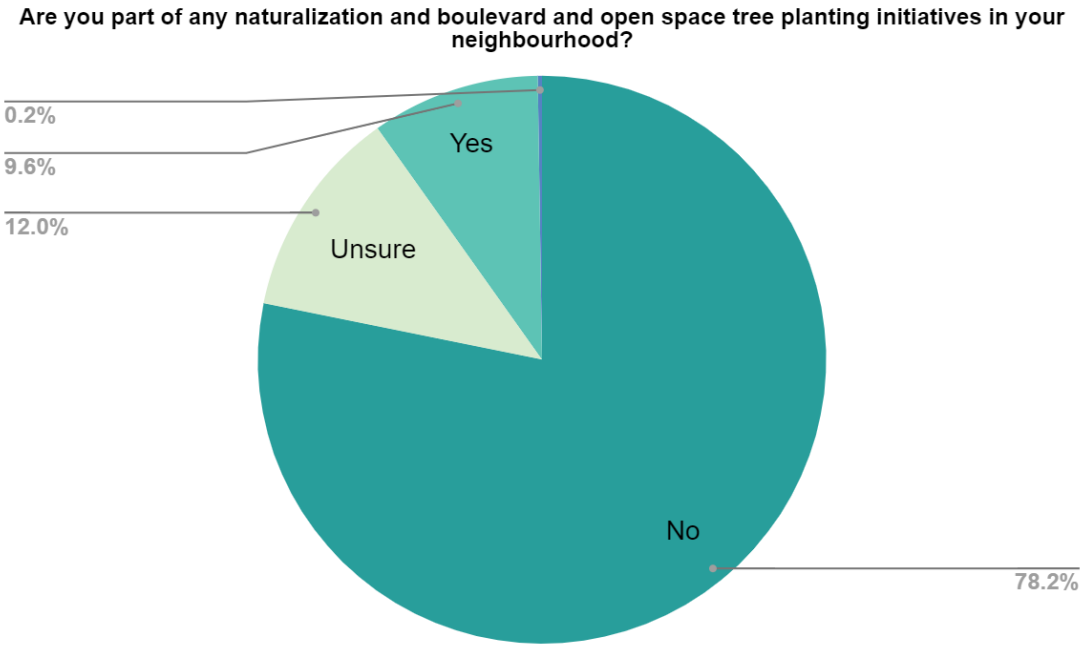
Accessibility to public spaces

- Consider how naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting impacts movement of people. Examples include placing benches along walkways for people that want to enjoy the view, or for seniors or people living with disabilities that may have mobility issues but would like to stop and enjoy nature

Safety and security

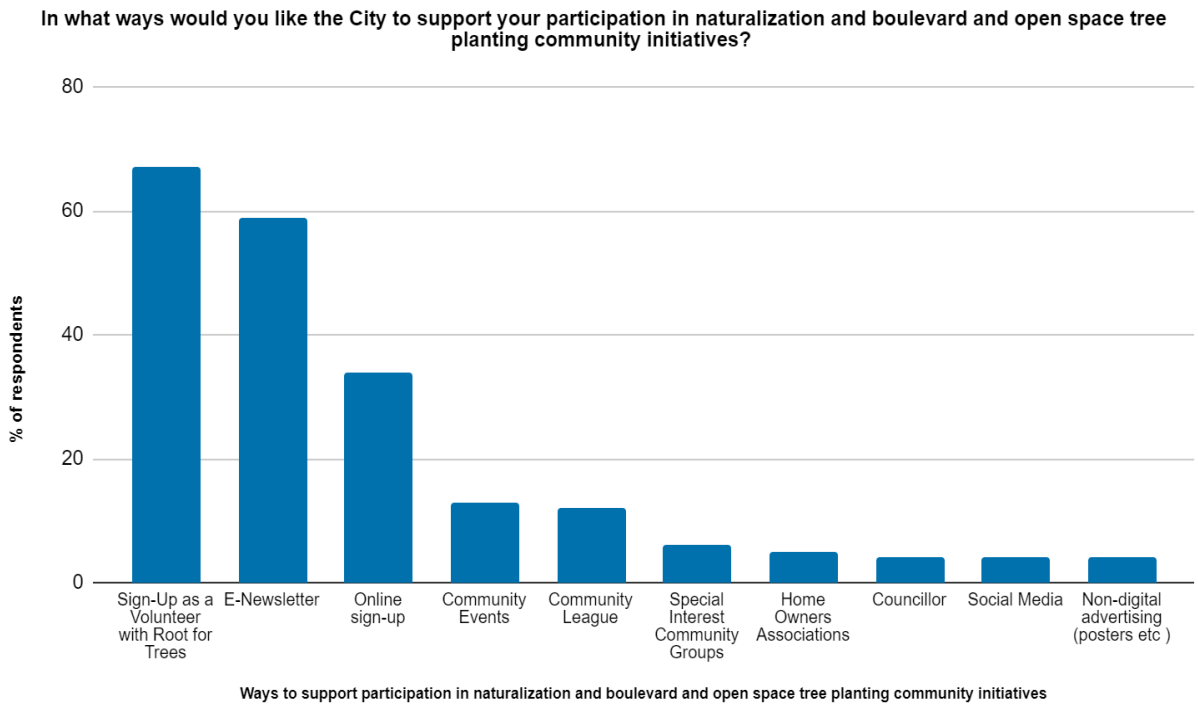
- Invasive weeds, pests (for example, ticks and mosquitoes) and larger animals like coyotes may pose health and safety risks to residents
- Tall grasses and bushes as potential risks for crime, specifically mugging and sexual assault[1]

Participants were asked to share whether they are currently a part of any naturalization and tree planting community initiatives. The majority of respondents are not part of any such initiatives in their neighbourhoods.



When asked if they would need any support from the City in order to participate in naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting community initiatives, respondents provided ways in which they would like to receive information about existing community initiatives. Thirty-two per cent of respondents were interested in volunteering for the Root for Trees program and 28 per cent would like to receive more information on community initiatives through e-newsletters.

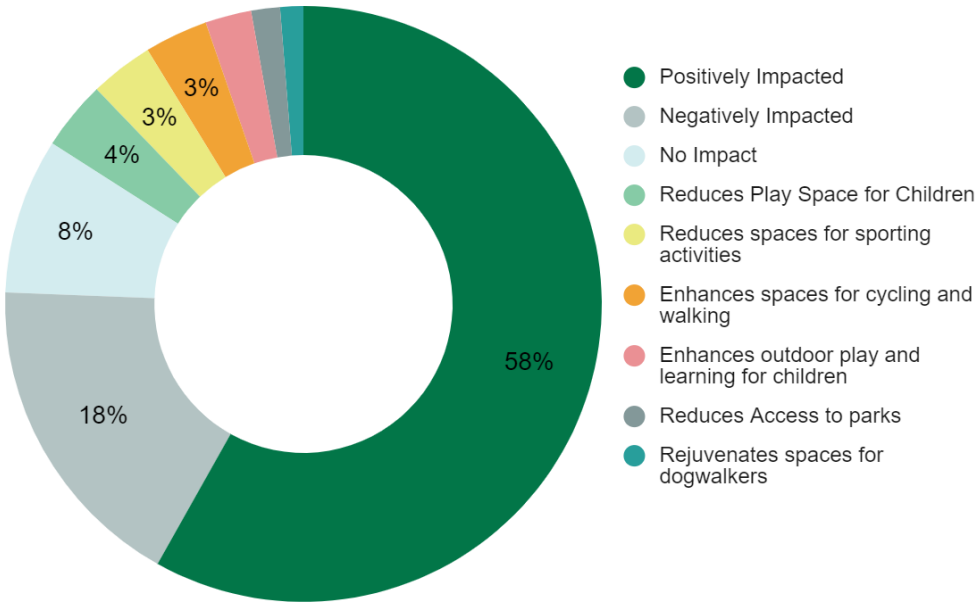
[1] The City currently uses CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) guidance



b) HOW

- activities could be impacted by naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting in your neighbourhood?
- the City should communicate when naturalization and tree planting is happening in your neighbourhood?

Participants shared how activities could be impacted by naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting in their neighbourhoods.



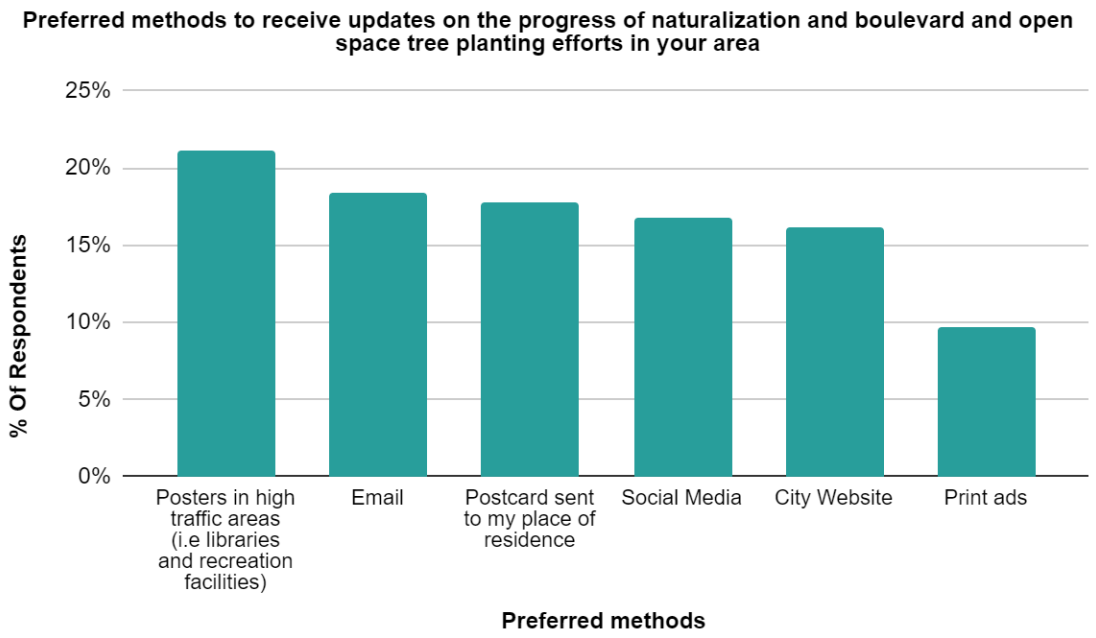
Fifty-eight per cent of respondents indicated naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting would positively impact activities in their neighbourhood for a number of reasons including:

- Presenting a new range of activities, like fruit picking if the City plants edible fruit bearing trees and plants
- Increasing biodiversity will allow for more lively birdwatching
- Reducing heat islands will make walking and cycling more enjoyable and public spaces cooler in summer, with less noise and dust
- Allowing open spaces to continue to be used for sporting activities like soccer, baseball and sledding when more trees are planted along playground perimeters
- Increasing community events and networking opportunities, for example with more trees, parents are able to mingle under the shade while they watch their children run/sled on hills and ride their bikes

Eighteen per cent of respondents said naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting would negatively impact the activities that take place in public/open spaces in neighbourhoods. The following comments from respondents expanded on why activities would be impacted negatively.

- Potential increase in people at risk of houselessness taking shelter in the naturalized areas
- Open spaces already limited and with population set to increase, naturalization and tree planting will reduce space for additional amenities
- Overgrowth of trees could impact areas for sledding
- Reduced use of space due to noxious weeds and tall grass that invites mosquitoes
- Increase in rodents and coyotes which will inhibit informal sporting, dog walking and kids outdoor activities
- Reduced passive activities like pond viewing because of the undesirable aesthetic

To ensure Edmontonians receive information about naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting efforts in their neighbourhoods, participants were asked to indicate all their preferred communications methods for receiving information. The two most preferred methods were posters in high traffic areas (21 per cent) and via email and postcard (both 18 per cent).



Additional preferred communications included newspaper, local news, homeowners associations and via Councillors' offices. Text message, digital media, community league, Engaged Edmonton site and at public events were also mentioned.

c) WHERE

- are there underutilized spaces that have potential for naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting in your neighbourhood?

We also asked participants to indicate any underutilized spaces that have potential for naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting in their neighbourhoods.

Twenty-three per cent of respondents cited boulevards as having the greatest potential for naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting and emphasizing that any green space that is along roads, in between roads, along the LRT Valley line project or in front of commercial areas could all use more greenery.

Nineteen per cent of respondents noted there weren't any underutilized spaces in their neighbourhoods and that naturalization would make spaces much less appealing and would make the City look messy and unkempt. On the other hand, 81 per cent of respondents noted spaces they thought would be available for naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting. These spaces include boulevards (23 per cent), parks (15 per cent), trails and pathways (eight per cent), open fields/lots (eight per cent), school yards and playgrounds (seven per cent), highways (five per cent), transport utility corridors (three per

cent), parking lots (three per cent), stormwater management facilities (two per cent), ravines (two per cent), along residential fencing (one per cent), dog parks (one per cent), bike parks (0.9 per cent), malls (0.9 per cent), stadium yards (0.6 per cent) and library grounds (0.6 per cent).

Parks, especially near school playgrounds and along the edges, were said to have potential for naturalization and provide shade and different play opportunities for kids. Borden Park and Kinnaird Park were two of the parks mentioned that are well used and could use more naturalization.

Both sides of major roadways, including Whitemud Drive, Anthony Henday and Terwillegar Drive, have the potential for naturalization and tree planting and to act as a sound barrier and reduce the strong winds in adjacent neighbourhoods.

Online Mapping Tool

The online mapping tool at engaged.edmonton.ca/NaturalizationAndTrees was available during the open engagement period from May 5 to 29, 2023. Forty-four pins were placed on the map by 22 participants. During the design phase, the Project Team proactively addressed potential risks that could have arisen with the use of the mapping tool. This included various cross checks to ensure that users with various hardware would be able to interface with the map in a meaningful way.

Demographics are not included in this summary due to the low number of map participants that shared demographic data about themselves (five total).

What We Asked

Participants were asked how they currently use green spaces. For each pin dropped on the map, participants chose one of the following categories:

- Birdwatching
- Dog walking
- Recreation/exercise
- Use amenities (i.e. playgrounds, benches and picnic areas, washrooms, spray parks)
- Walking & biking trails
- Water activities (i.e. swimming, fishing, boating)
- Other activities

Participants also had the opportunity to:

- Leave an open-ended comment
- Share their comfort level with new naturalization in this location (scale from very comfortable to very uncomfortable)
- Share their comfort level with boulevard and open space trees in this location (scale from very comfortable to very uncomfortable)

The pins collected on the map included recommendations for naturalization and tree planting, notes on current activities and ideas for general public space improvements. The comments collected on the mapping tool are summarized below and on the maps on the following pages.

Naturalization and Tree Planting Recommendations

- Reduce mowed grass areas and convert to naturalized meadows (i.e.. along pathways, open/unused field space)
- Increase plants and flowers for wildlife, birds, pollinators, etc.
- Add a variety of plants and trees along trails and roads
- Balance naturalized spaces with maintained spaces for recreational use
- Stop loss of natural areas and wetlands
- Maintain shelter belt trees along fences and roads (missing trees)
- Collaborate with schools to naturalize parts of school yards
- Ensure clear sight lines around trees/plants at intersections
- Encourage tree planting and naturalization on private industrial lands

Current Activities

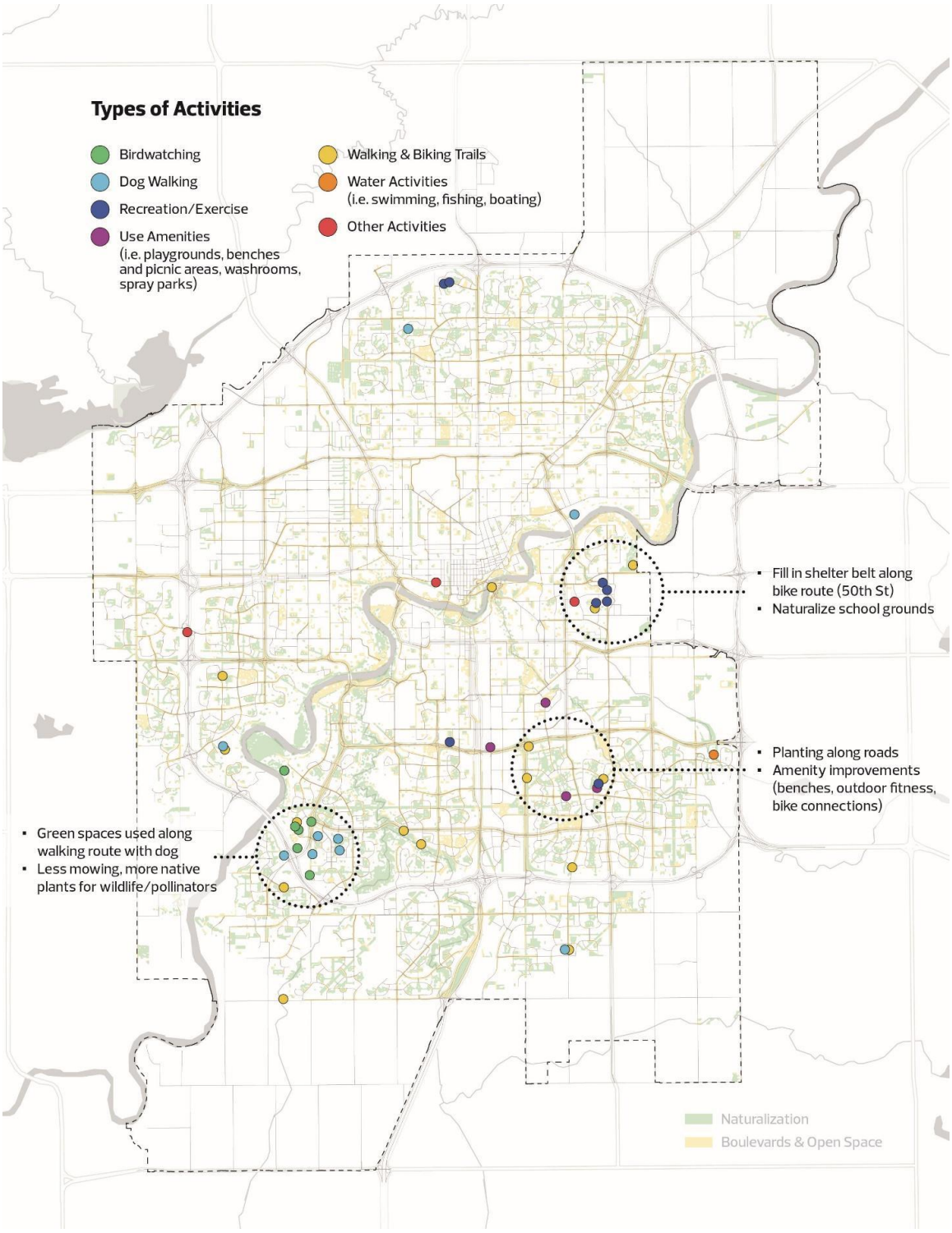
- Walking and exercising, especially with dogs
- Cycling and mountain biking
- Children playing and sports

Other Suggestions

- Suggestions for new park/greenspace locations
- Suggestions for new pathway connections
- Ideas for new amenities (i.e. benches, fitness equipment, fishing)

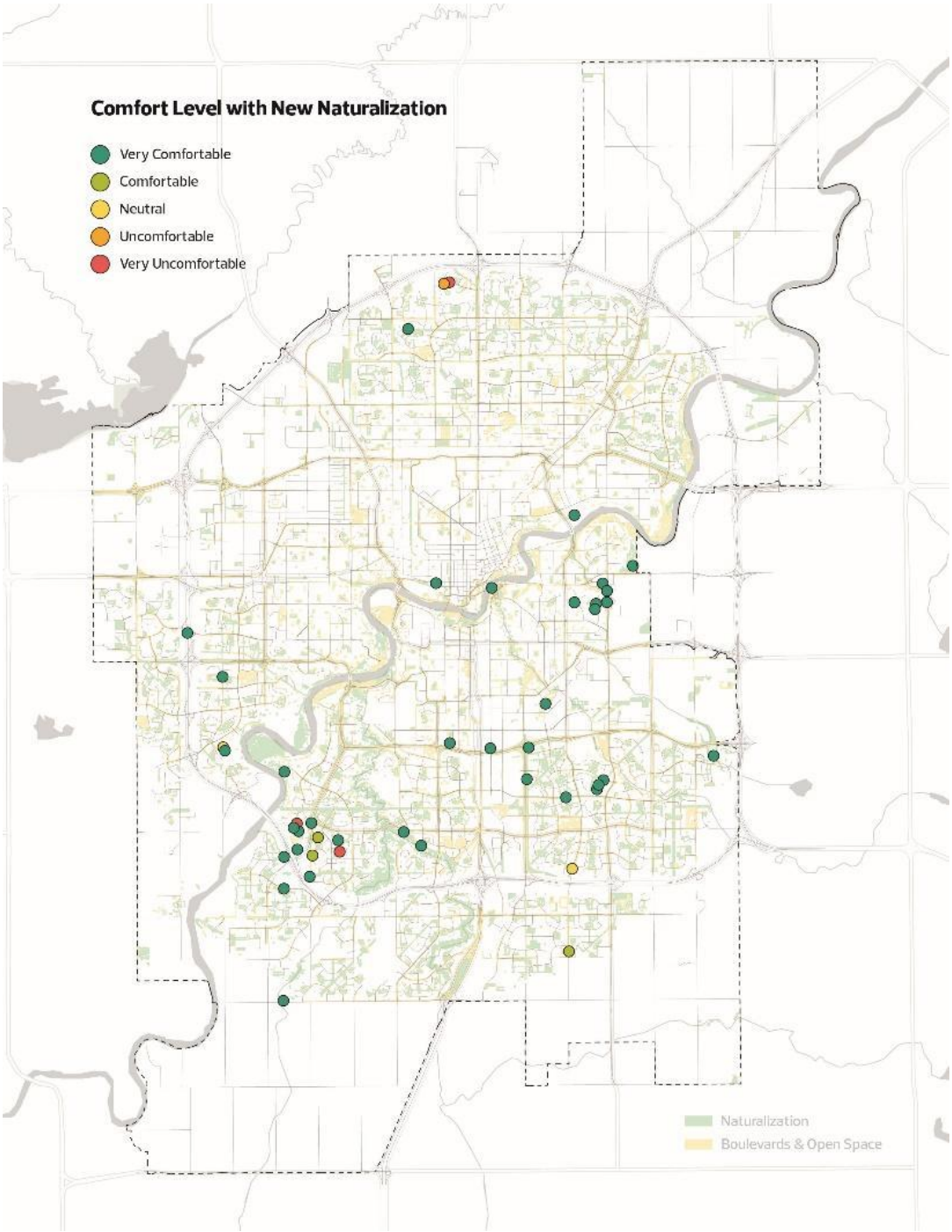
Activity Categories

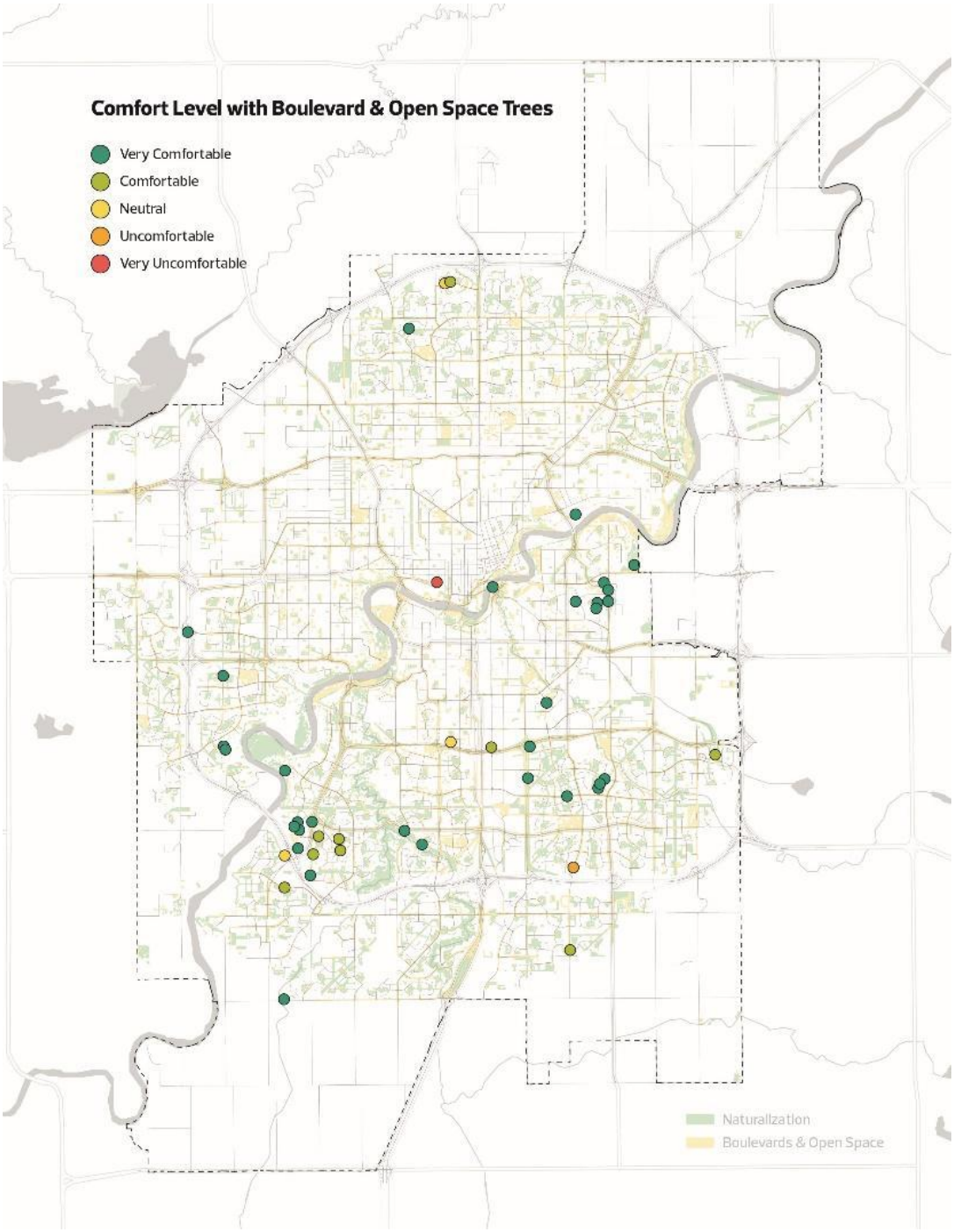
The categories with the highest number of pins were walking and biking trails (15), dog walking (nine), and recreation/exercise (eight). Not all comments were directly related to the pin category selected. For example, bird watching pins relate to naturalization for wildlife and insects of all kinds. See the map below for the types of activities highlighted in different locations and a summary of comments in clusters.



Comfort Level with New Naturalization and Boulevard and Open Space Trees

The majority of participants shared they were very comfortable with both new naturalization and boulevard and open space trees to be planted at the locations indicated, with a slightly lower level of comfort overall with trees. Several pins differed with less comfort, as shown on the maps below.


Comfort Level with New Naturalization
Very Comfortable
Comfortable
Neutral
Uncomfortable
Very Uncomfortable
Naturalization
Boulevards & Open Space


Comfort Level with Boulevard & Open Space Trees
Very Comfortable
Comfortable
Neutral
Uncomfortable
Very Uncomfortable
Naturalization
Boulevards & Open Space

Online Public Meeting

An online public meeting took place on May 24, 2023 at 12 p.m. The opportunity for Edmontonians to participate and give their feedback during this meeting had been communicated through various channels including:

- City of Edmonton social media platforms
- Engaged Edmonton web page
- Communications and Public Engagement Calendar
- Information packages sent via email to stakeholders including community leagues and homeowners associations

Twenty people registered to participate and eight people attended. Several key themes emerged from the public online meeting including:

Activities

- Participants stressed naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting could negatively impact activities including viewing, walking and sitting on benches at stormwater management facilities in Terwillegar Gardens and Windermere if sight lines to the water are obstructed

Tree maintenance and replacement

- Participants expressed concern about the financial resources available for the naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting project and whether there are sufficient resources that will be allocated towards maintaining the new trees
- In addition to tree maintenance, participants pointed out that the naturalization and boulevard and open spaces tree approach should also include replanting of trees, for example the trees that were removed for the Terwillegar expansion project

Safety Concerns

- Tall grass and thick underbrush, particularly near homes, were cited as a fire hazard and something the City should take into consideration
- The obstruction of school crosswalks due to poplar trees and weeds

Communication preferences

- A poll was launched during the public online meeting for participants to share their preferred communication methods to receive updates from the City on naturalization and tree planting in their neighbourhood. Eight people selected email, one social media and one selected posters in high traffic areas

- In addition to these select options, participants highlighted they would prefer to also receive updates through local news and asked that updates be sent regularly

What We Heard - Stakeholder Engagement Results

Online Stakeholder Survey

An online stakeholder survey was distributed to 364 stakeholders. Fifteen responses were submitted. Respondents included community leagues, homeowner associations, developers, community and recreation, researchers/academics, business and active transportation groups.

Eighty per cent of respondents indicated naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting could conflict with other community priorities, activities or interests while 20 per cent responded “unsure.” Potential conflicts identified included:

- Cross-country skiing
- Sledding
- Passive recreation use such as dog walking and picnicking
- Existing park concept plans
- Proximity to schools and sports fields
- Use of area for snow storage in the winter months

Mitigation measures to minimize conflicts were suggested including proactive consultation with community and key stakeholders and limiting naturalization to unused areas.

Respondents also want the City to consider weed control and management, naturalizing along roadways, maintaining mowing where houses back onto green spaces and planting fruit bearing trees.

Opportunities and Challenges

Survey respondents were asked about the opportunities and challenges that naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting present to their organization. Overall, creating a vibrant, sustainable and inclusive community through naturalization and tree planting is important to stakeholders. Finding the right balance between naturalization, tree planting, maintenance, stakeholder engagement and effective communication will help address concerns, ensure safety and enhance the overall well-being of a community.

The table below summarizes the feedback received.

Opportunities	Challenges
Enhance the overall quality of life and environmental conditions within communities	Maintenance, weed control and pest control
Increase the number of trees to provide benefits such as improved aesthetics, air quality and temperature regulation	Lack of stakeholder consultation in tree planting
Engage volunteers in beautification projects	Removal of trees and landscaping without replacement
Reduce maintenance costs	Usability of disc golf courses that have been naturalized
Expand food garden space for affordability and food security particularly for seniors	Perceived lack of maintenance increases complaints from residents
Educational opportunities related to naturalization and tree planting for school communities	Opposing naturalization and tree planting when it happens close to home or “in my backyard”
Educational opportunities for residents to deter mowing in naturalized areas	Understanding of the decision-making process regarding pesticide/herbicide usage
Plant more trees in fields for increased shade and encourage increased utilization of open field spaces	The effects of winter road chemicals on boulevard trees and plants
Replace stolen or vandalized plants to help maintain the beauty and integrity of the community	Challenges with naturalized areas creating safety concerns in school communities
Clarify the process for maintaining boulevards and weed control	Advocating for a balance between allowing naturalization in certain areas while ensuring ongoing maintenance, especially in high-usage areas around ponds and paths
Engage communities in decision-making processes regarding naturalization, landscaping and beautification projects	
Consult with stakeholders to determine suitable tree planting locations	

We also asked stakeholders to indicate all their preferred communications methods for receiving information. The three most preferred methods were via email (87 per cent), postcard sent to residence (47 per cent) and City website (40 per cent). Other preferences included social media (27 per cent), posters in high traffic areas (20 per cent) and print ads (seven per cent).

Other responses included communication via community leagues and updates given at the Joint Use Agreement - Land Management Committee Meetings.

Online and In-person Meetings and Stakeholder Events

What We Asked

- How open spaces are currently being used in neighbourhoods and where there are opportunities to naturalize or plant trees
- Where naturalization and tree planting may conflict with the public's interests and activities in their neighbourhoods
- Where there are opportunities for the City and stakeholders to collaborate on naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting

What We Heard

Use of public/open spaces, tree replacement and maintenance, weed control, safety risks and partnership explorations were the key themes that emerged from the stakeholder sessions.

Use of public/open spaces

- Stakeholders encouraged the City to continue local level engagement to understand neighbourhood priorities and use of land
- Open spaces in their neighbourhoods are utilized for recreational and sporting activities like soccer, tobogganing, children playing, seniors who enjoy viewing and sitting by the water at stormwater management facilities
- Citing the example of the stormwater pond in Woodhaven-Edgemont and how the neighbourhood would benefit from a natural area but also considerations to the amount of play space that could be left for the children
- Parking lots downtown could use more trees as well as underutilized parks
- Consider population vulnerabilities that have low equity on green spaces

Future School Expansion

- Consider future schools expansion plans and additions of modular classrooms when it comes to naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting.
- Some open spaces around schools may seem underutilized but are used for unprogrammed activities or to conduct fire drills
- Consider tailoring naturalization and boulevard and open space tree planting approaches to individual school sites as mature neighbourhood schools may have smaller open spaces as compared to newer neighbourhood schools

Tree replacement and maintenance

- Stakeholders were interested in understanding how the City defines maintenance
- The Joint Use Agreement - Land Management Committee supports exploring tree planting on school board lands if the City maintains the trees
- Consider planting site selection and the type of trees that can survive in the prevailing climate. Collector and arterial roadway trees may have a poor survival rate if they are planted in the "splash zone" and exposed to winter maintenance chemicals
- Stakeholders requested the City share the tree watering schedule with the public [2]
- Tree replacement was a concern, with stakeholders asking if there are systems in place to better maintain the roots of trees that may need to be removed for future development to easily transplant these trees around the school sites, for example

Safety risks

- Proximity to schools was also highlighted as a point of consideration as the green canopy may cause damage to a school roof

Weed Control

- The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Advisory Group, whose primary mandate includes weed control, cautioned that during drought the grass will likely deteriorate, resulting in an increase of dandelions.
    - Spraying pesticides poses a threat to pollinators and birds
    - The best scenario is seeing naturalization proceed with no pesticide use

[2] On more information about the City's urban tree care you can visit City of Edmonton's Urban Forest Operations

Partnership explorations

- Overall, stakeholders expressed keen interest to collaborate and partner with the City's urban forestry team and work with the City to plant trees
- Stakeholders would like to receive pertinent information and offer assistance and volunteers when needed
- Suggestions on new and existing partnerships that the City could explore include:
    - Foster partnership with Edmonton Mountain Bike Alliance so that they can maintain single track trails responsibly
    - Nature Canada, whose focus is on tree equity
    - Bent Arrow to identify where healing forests could go. The Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition is already doing this with Bent Arrow
    - Plant physiologist at the University of Alberta
    - Collaboration with ecological planners on the “natural connections” strategy
    - Edmonton Native Plant Society to provide information on the type of species to be planted
    - Shrubscriber, whose initiative includes planting trees with community leagues and schools, with the aim of planting more fruit-bearing trees
    - Community leagues, on how their community concept plans tie in with the City’s naturalization and tree planting plans
    - Site location walkabout opportunities for interested stakeholders
    - Strengthened partnerships between the City’s naturalization and tree planting team and utility companies
    - To get keen stewards to support maintenance efforts and to use a similar approach to community gardens

Next Steps

Feedback is currently being reviewed by the City Project Team and potential revisions to the NRRP and GIEM model will be considered based on what was heard during the public engagement process. This will provide valuable information for determining how and where the City will implement naturalization and tree planting from now until 2030, in alignment with The City Plan target to plant 2 million trees, and the City's larger goal for 20 per cent urban forest canopy cover by 2071.

Specific site level feedback and suggestions for opportunities to communicate naturalization and tree planting plans such as putting up posters in high traffic areas (libraries, recreation centers) will be considered for annual planning purposes.

Feedback gathered from both phases of public engagement will help improve the City's regular communications and education work around naturalization and tree planting.

Visit the New Urban Trees and Naturalization page for more information and to stay up to date on this project.