



November 6, 2023

Dear Mayor and City Councillors,

Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition recommends the following amendments to the City's Fall 2023 Supplemental Capital and Operating Budget Adjustments 2023-2026. Our recommendations align with the City Plan's goal of preserving what matters; they enable greater alignment with the city's carbon budget goals; and they will save money.

Recommendations

To Fund:

- **River Valley Trails Strategy.** As we outlined in a recent meeting with the City Manager, this could be undertaken with *no additional funding* by utilizing the city's existing Biodiversity Sensitivity Maps (completed a few years ago) and the trail apps Strava and TrailForks. Layering the BSM map over the trail apps maps would clearly identify which illegally built trails need to be closed and the areas restored. There is no need for further study, and the restoration work can be done by volunteers.
- **River Valley Land Acquisition, Natural Areas Acquisition, and Mature Areas Land Acquisition – For Parks** (all *recommended funded* by Administration in the 2023-2026 proposed budget). As Edmonton's population increases, and in light of the bylaw renewal changes, acquiring land for protection is critical.
- **Indigenous-led Housing and Wraparound Support.** The current plans to end homelessness are not working. Last month, 53 people living homeless died in Edmonton. This is unacceptable. The current plans miss the root causes of racism and colonialism and thus a strategy is needed that is Indigenous-led. The wraparound support could include a therapeutic river valley work program and hence some funding could be transferred from city operations.
- **Office of the Environment.** ERVCC has long urged City Council to create this office to ensure proper advocacy for conservation, biodiversity, and natural solutions, and to ensure accountability for the City's environmental commitments. In this time of climate and biodiversity crisis, we cannot afford to *not* have an Office of the Environment.
- **Execution of Urban Forest Management Plan.** Edmonton is falling way behind on tree protection and the urban canopy. The 2023-2026 budget made reference to 20% canopy by 2071 – a date we do not recall seeing in the City Plan. We cannot wait that long. For comparison: Ottawa already has 25% tree canopy and its goal is 40%.

- **Funding for WildNorth.** This organization, which cares for injured and orphaned wildlife across the northern part of the province is in great need of support. Funding could partially come from existing budgets as it would mean fewer conflicts that enforcement officers need to deal with.
- **Implementation of the City’s [Dogs in Open Spaces Strategy](#).** This Strategy recommends “locat[ing] Off Leash Areas away from areas of environmental sensitivity, such as natural areas, wildlife corridors, or other important ecological areas.” We would also like to see all off-leash areas in the river valley enclosed; funding could partially come from existing budgets as it would mean fewer conflicts that enforcement officers need to deal with.

To Not Fund:

- **River Crossing.** This carbon-intensive project further degrades the river valley ecologically and culturally. We should stop building in floodplains and consider greater setbacks; see the province’s [Stepping Back from the Water](#) guidelines. EPCOR’s “flood mitigation” project will already increase costs for taxpayers. Why would the City build more in a flood plain? This area needs to be off-limits for further infrastructure and desperately needs to be rewilded instead.
- **Integrated Pest Management.** This group is misinformed (they included beavers in a list of invasive species and nuisance animals in their request for funding in the 2023-2026 budget cycle) and they cause ongoing harm in our city. They need to be replaced by cost-effective nature-based solutions that could be increasingly undertaken as part of a therapeutic river valley work program (see above). In this way, there could be a reallocation of existing funds away from mowing, pesticide spraying, and other heavy uses of fossil fuels and chemicals toward restoration of the river valley, parks, and storm water ponds. We also would like to see the public education that was promised by Administration in 2015 on the problems of pesticides and on healthy, ecological alternatives.
- **Enhanced snow and ice control service.** While we agree that snow removal from sidewalks, bike lanes, and roadways is important, ERVCC does not support the use of salt brine or of plastic bristle snow-clearing machines. We have raised concerns many times in the past of the chemical and plastic pollution these practices cause for the river (and oceans) and for aquatic life. We would like to see the city move to simple blading, and for river valley bridges and stairways to be cleared by shovel through the therapeutic river valley work program mentioned above.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,
 Kristine Kowalchuk
 Chair, Edmonton River Valley Conservation Coalition