

Green Infrastructure 10-Year Implementation Plan

ISSUE

The *City of Saskatoon 2022-2025 Strategic Plan* includes an action to “Implement actions in the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Implementation Plan within proposed timeframes”. This report presents Pathways for an Integrated Green Network (Green Pathways), the 10-year implementation plan for the Green Infrastructure Strategy (Appendix 1). Green Pathways advances the network of green infrastructure across the City comprehensively through a series of interconnected initiatives that work to restore the urban environment and ecosystems, support climate action and nature-based solutions, and improve quality of life for residents and visitors. Green Pathways includes initiatives that have been funded to proceed in 2022-2023 and outlines medium to long term initiatives that seek resourcing and approvals in the future.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities, and Corporate Services recommend to City Council that *Pathways for an Integrated Green Network*, an implementation plan for the Green Infrastructure Strategy, be approved in principle.

BACKGROUND

At its meeting on February 24, 2020, City Council received *Saskatoon’s [Green Infrastructure Strategy: Towards an Interconnected Green Network](#)* (the Strategy) report as information. The Strategy outlines 15 actions that the City and community can take to reach an interconnected green network that provides sustainable habitat for people and nature.

The Standing Policy Committee on Environment, Utilities, and Corporate Services received the [Green Infrastructure Strategy Implementation Plan, Near Term Actions, and Financing](#) report as information at its meeting on June 7, 2021. The report outlines near-term initiatives and related funding requirements for the 2022-2023 multi-year budget deliberations. Next steps identified in that report are the finalization of a 10-year Implementation Plan.

At its meeting on August 9, 2021, the Standing Policy Community on Environment, Utilities, and Corporate Services received the [Sustainability Reserve Project Funding](#) approval report, and resolved in part that:

- That the following capital projects be established, and funding allocated from the 2021 Sustainability Reserve as follows:
 - a. Sustainable Food Pilot establish Capital Project – \$140,000
 - c. Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment Capital Project P.02390 - \$225,000

- d. Street Garden Expansion P.02390 - \$51,500

At the same meeting, the [Sustainability Portfolio and 2022-2023 Business Plan Options](#) report was received as information. The report includes the work plan of the Sustainability Department through 2026, including the Strategy's work plan.

At the 2022-2023 Business Plan and Budget meeting, City Council resolved, in part:

- That the Green Infrastructure Strategy Sustainment of \$165,000 in 2023 be approved; and
- That the Reserves for Capital Expenditures list be adopted as presented with the remainder to be held in contingency.

For clarity, the Reserve for Capital Expenditures includes \$595,000 in 2022 and \$405,000 in 2023 for the Natural Areas Management – Pilots and Policy Development project.

At its meeting on January 31, 2022, City Council approved the City of Saskatoon 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. An outcome in the Strategic Plan is, "The Green Network is integrated, managed, and enhanced to protect, land, air, and water resources". Key actions include:

- Implement actions in the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Implementation Plan within proposed timeframes; and
- Develop proactive policies, strategies, and practices to ensure the environment is protected from damage and, where possible, ecosystems are enhanced.

Official Community Plan

Green Pathways is in alignment with the following policies of the *Official Community Plan, 2020 (Bylaw No. 9700)*:

- E1.1(2a) Facilitate the creation of a connected green network to support ecological systems and increase equitable access to green spaces and the larger green network; and
- (2b) Urban development should avoid impacts to Natural Areas with particular consideration given to interconnected sensitive ecosystems, such as swales.

Engagement

From 2017 through 2019, feedback from over 700 community members, technical experts, and the Indigenous Technical Advisory Group informed the development of the Strategy. The [2019 Comprehensive Engagement Report](#) summarizes the feedback received during the development of the Strategy.

In addition to this work, from June 2021 to February 2022, the City engaged with the community on the implementation of the Strategy. Feedback from 407 participants was received through a community survey, a series of virtual workshops, and individual meetings, asking participants to validate and prioritize the initiatives within the Strategy. Over 80% of participants strongly support all the proposed initiatives represented within

the Strategy. Initiatives within *Pathway 1.0 Healthy and Thriving Natural Areas* received the strongest support (96%), followed by *Pathway 3.0 Leading by Example for an Integrated Green Network* (94%) and *Pathway 2.0 Connecting and Regenerating Green Spaces* (93%). The most common themes throughout participants' comments were support for the Strategy as a whole and for the City in taking on this work, and for the initiatives to be implemented as soon as possible to protect Saskatoon's green network.

Appendix 2 – Final Engagement Report provides a full summary of engagement that occurred for the development of Green Pathways.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The green network is Saskatoon's collection of green infrastructure including parks, natural areas, the urban forest, and other green spaces. As Saskatoon grows, the green network is under increasing pressure to provide high quality green space to all residents, while also supporting urban cooling, habitat, storm water management, carbon sequestration, and other services. Emerging threats such as climate change and biodiversity loss are also compounding the pressure on the green network to provide these services. Approaching green network planning holistically will allow the City and community to maximize co-benefits and service delivery.

The Strategy defines 15 actions that the City and community can take to develop the integrated green network that provides sustainable habitat for people and nature. As an implementation plan, Green Pathways provides an actionable structure to progress the green network vision through five "pathways" grouped thematically, which define actions and phased initiatives over the next 10 years. Development of Green Pathways occurred in 2020-2022 through a series of workshops with City stakeholders and engagement with the public and development community, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Green Pathways and Vision Statements

	Pathway	Vision
1.0	Healthy and Thriving Natural Areas	Natural areas provide habitat, sequester carbon, and are celebrated as part of our cultural landscape through protection, restoration, and management.
2.0	Connecting and Regenerating Green Spaces	High quality green spaces connect residents to nature and support municipal and ecosystem services across the green network through enhancements and naturalization.
3.0	Leading by Example for an Integrated Green Network	The built-up public realm is people- and nature-friendly through coordinated municipal policies, planning, development, and asset management.
4.0	Growing Community for a Livable City	Community-led stewardship of the green network and its uptake on private lands is supported and encouraged to

		facilitate placemaking, to share knowledge about the unique biodiversity of the region, and to honor cultures.
5.0	Food Security from Seed to Table to Soil	The sustainable and just local food system is strengthened through community partnerships, provides access to healthy and fresh food, promotes local food initiatives, and considers the full food system from seed to table to soil.

Within each pathway, actions and initiatives define partners, timelines, and success measures through a phased approach that aligns with the City’s multi-year budgeting. Phases are designed to progress an initiative from initiation to operations.

While high-level engagement and best practices research has occurred to prioritize the initiatives, further work to develop each initiative will be needed before it is launched, and additional approvals will be needed from City Council. Specific initiatives will seek approval on a budget-by-budget basis. Status reports on the integrated green network will be provided every two years, in alignment with the budget cycle.

Green Pathways will be updated every five years, to reflect implementation progress including capturing additional initiatives that are anticipated to arise as initiatives progress through phases.

2020-2021 Short-Term Initiatives

The 2020 [Green Infrastructure Strategy: Towards an Interconnected Green Network](#) report identifies five short-term initiatives to guide early implementation in 2020-2021. These initiatives will be reported on through the associated Green Pathways initiative going forward. For example, “Develop education materials about the green network, including promotion of biodiversity and urban agriculture” is proceeding with phase 3 implementation in 2022-2023 and progress reports will occur through Initiative 4.1.1 – Green network awareness campaign. A summary of the status and next steps for each initiative is provided in Appendix 3.

2022-2023 Initiatives

Several initiatives have received funding to proceed in 2022-2023 or are continuing work from 2020-2021. These include 1.2.1 - Natural Area Management Plans and 1.3.1 - Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment. A complete summary and status of 2022-2023 Initiatives is provided in Appendix 3.

Green Network Program Status

The green infrastructure implementation progressed from 2020-2022 through capital funding. To consider it an ongoing civic program, sustainment of green infrastructure work through a Green Network Program was presented as a growth item in the operating budget for the [2022-2023 Business Plan and Budget – Operating and Capital Options](#) report at Budget Deliberations. At that meeting, City Council resolved, in part, that the Green Infrastructure Strategy Sustainment \$165,000 in 2023 be approved.

Starting in 2023, a dedicated staff position will develop, sustain, and manage the Green Network Program. This position will progress Green Pathways, including leading specific initiatives as needed, preparing business cases for future initiatives, and overseeing the following core responsibilities:

- developing partnerships with the community, research institutions, City departments, and other levels of government;
- overseeing communications to increase awareness of green infrastructure;
- providing subject matter expertise for other departments;
- coordinating external funding opportunities for capital projects;
- coordinating and complete annual monitoring and reporting;
- overseeing data and studies; and
- refining the 10-year work portfolio including business cases for multi-year budget submissions.

The continuation of a dedicated \$10,000 for green infrastructure in the Environmental Cash Grant program is also included in this scope.

Further detail regarding the Green Network Program is found in Appendix 4.

Related Work

Urban Forestry Implementation update

Implementing the Urban Forestry Management Plan is an action of Green Pathways. The Parks Department is currently developing an Urban Forestry Implementation Plan to identify opportunities to lead, partner, and support initiatives that will contribute to the effective management, protection, enhancement, and growth of Saskatoon's urban forest. This Plan aligns with the Green Infrastructure Strategy's Recommendation 10 "Protect and grow the urban forest" and will be presented to City Council later this year.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

2022-2023 Funded Initiatives and Workplan

Table 2 summarizes the workplan with confirmed funding available for 2022, including capital funding carried over from previous years and items included in the approved funding plan for 2023. The 2023 funding will be approved at the 2023 budget deliberations.

Green Infrastructure 10-Year Implementation Plan

Table 2: Workplan and Confirmed Funding for 2022-2023 Initiatives

#	Initiative(s)	Cost Centre/ Project	2022 Approved Funding	2023 Funding Plan
1.1.1	Natural area policy and process	Watershed Initiatives P.02263	\$240,000	\$0
1.2.1	Natural Area Management Plans			
1.2.3	Tree protection in natural and naturalized areas			
1.4.1	Natural asset framework			
1.5.1	Naturalized Park Program expansion			
		Green Infrastructure Strategy P.02390	\$595,000	\$405,000
1.3.1	Traditional Land Use and Knowledge Assessment	Green Infrastructure Strategy P.02390	\$225,000	\$0
4.3.1	Street Garden Program	Green Infrastructure Strategy P.02390	\$51,500	\$0
5.1.1	Green network food program	Sustainable Food P.10013	\$140,000	\$0
4.1.1	Green network awareness campaign	Green Infrastructure Strategy P.02390	\$289,000	\$0
4.1.2	Natural areas education			
1.2.2	Natural area restoration processes			
2.3.2	Storm Water Management Facility restoration			
	Green Network Program	Green Network Program P.100413	\$0	\$165,000

Applications have recently been submitted for federal funding opportunities including the Large Project Stream of Infrastructure Canada's Natural Infrastructure Fund and Environment Canada's Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund. If successful, federal contributions would allow Green Pathways' initiatives to expand in scope or proceed earlier than anticipated.

For funding applications, municipalities must usually provide matching funding, as well as funding to support ineligible expenses, such as internal staff time and operational expenditures. As such, initiatives that receive funding during City Council's budget deliberations are well positioned to leverage additional funding from external sources, while unfunded initiatives are unable to meet the matching requirements, and therefore, not often eligible for external funding unless a new funding source is identified or reallocated from an existing project and pending City Council approval.

2024-2031 Funding Options

Further financial requirements for initiatives scheduled for 2024 and beyond will be brought forward through future reporting, and initiatives will be submitted for approval on a budget-by-budget basis. Financial analysis and projections will occur through the Green Network program.

Initiative funding can occur through various mechanisms including capital funding requests (e.g., Reserve for Capital Expenditures, Sustainability Reserve), and external funding opportunities.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no privacy or legal implications identified.

Triple Bottom Line Implications

Initiatives within Green Pathways are anticipated to achieve multiple co-benefits such as improved access to nature for the community, equity and reconciliation, climate mitigation, and habitat provision. Triple bottom line analyses will be completed for specific initiatives as they are developed to better understand benefits, limitations, and trade-offs.

NEXT STEPS

Projects and initiatives that are proceeding in 2022-2023 will report to Committee and City Council on a project-by-project basis as information or decision milestones are reached. By Q2 2023, additional information on business cases and funding requirements for 2024-2025 will be brought to the Standing Policy Committee – Environment, Utilities and Corporate Services.

Progress towards a healthy and sustainable green network will be monitored through the Green Network program with progress reports every two years. Reporting will occur in alignment with the budget cycle so that business cases, budget submissions, and priorities are linked directly to progress and risks.

APPENDICES

1. Pathways for an Integrated Green Network
2. Final Engagement Report
3. 2020-2021 and 2022-2023 Initiatives and Status
4. Green Network Program

Report Approval

Written by: Jessie Best, Environmental Project Manager

Reviewed by: Katie Burns, Community Leadership and Program Development Manager
Twyla Yobb, Environmental Protection Manager
Jeanna South, Director of Sustainability

Approved by: Angela Gardiner, General Manager, Utilities and Environment