

## City of Saskatoon Natural Areas Engagement Overview

### Purpose

This appendix provides an overview of:

- Past engagement opportunities related to natural areas, as it relates to the Green Infrastructure Strategy (GIS); and
- Current engagement opportunities as part of the Natural Area Policy and Process (NAPP) project.

For additional information related to each specific engagement opportunity, links have been included for the outcome documents, typically in the form of a report or summary.

### 1. Past Engagement on Green Infrastructure Strategy

#### Background

The City of Saskatoon (City) has been engaging on the integration of natural areas into Saskatoon's urban development for several years. Recognizing the value of ecosystem services for a healthy community, the GIS aims to establish the vision, actions and implementation framework to enhance Saskatoon's Green Network, by integrating green infrastructure into land use planning and asset management.

Table 1 summarizes recent engagement conducted under the umbrella of the City's GIS.

<b>Table 1: Natural Areas and Green Infrastructure Strategy Engagement Timeline</b>			
<b>Date</b>		<b>Engagement Activity</b>	<b>Outcomes (Reports/Summaries)</b>
<b>Year</b>	<b>Month</b>		
<b>2017</b>	December	Green Infrastructure Strategy Information Gathering Workshop	<a href="#">March 2019 - Natural Areas – What we Heard: Green Strategy Workshop 2 Summary.</a>
<b>2018</b>	October	The Green Strategy Workshop 2: Natural Area Standards and Urban Forest Infrastructure Strategy and Natural Area Standards	
<b>2019</b>	February	Shaping a Natural Community (Student Workshop)	<a href="#">Green Infrastructure Strategy Comprehensive Engagement Report (December 2019)</a>
	April	Action Identification Survey	
	May	Growing a NatureCity	
	June	Green Strategy pop-up events	
	July	Indigenous Technical Advisory Group Meeting	
	August	Emerging Priorities Survey	
	November	Our Green Network Workshop Event	
<b>2021</b>	June–July	Help Grow our Green Network Community Survey	<a href="#">Green Infrastructure Strategy Implementation Engagement Report (June 2022)</a>
	June-July	All Participants Survey	
	June-July	Community Partners and Subject Matter Experts Workshops	
<b>2022</b>	February	Saskatoon & Region Homebuilders Workshop	Workshop was hosted online and was recorded.
	February	Wetland Policy and Process Improvements Developers Workshop	

## **Engagement Results**

From June 2021 to February 2022, Administration engaged with the community on [Pathways for an Integrated Green Network](#) (Green Pathways). The [Final Engagement Report](#) found, overall, the community strongly supports (>80% of participants) all Green Pathways initiatives, with the strongest support for the Natural Areas Program (96%). Participants stressed the importance of implementing levels of protection for natural areas and called on the City to be more aggressive in conserving green spaces through new policies and regulations.

When asked to state their level of support for the proposed initiatives within the Natural Areas Program, most respondents either strongly or somewhat supported (≥94%) all the initiatives. The level of support is summarized as follows:

- Natural Areas Management Plans (96%);
- Natural Asset Framework (95%);
- Natural Storm Water Management (95%); and
- Natural Area Process and Policy (94%).

## **2. Natural Area Policy and Process Engagement**

The purpose of the NAPP project is to evaluate different policy processes and tools related to natural areas and determine, through research and engagement with stakeholders, appropriate options for Saskatoon. These processes include methods for identification, prioritization, conservation and management of natural areas within an urban environment, principally through the development process.

The NAPP project team completed a policy review of Canadian Municipalities and engaged with key stakeholders between Quarter 3, 2022 and Quarter 3, 2023. During this time, Administration identified several potential policy tools, appropriate within the context of Saskatchewan's *Planning and Development Act*, and reviewed these with stakeholders.

Table 2 outlines engagement activities as part of the NAPP project.

<b>Table 2: Natural Area Policy and Process Engagement Timeline</b>		
<b>Date</b>		<b>Engagement Activity</b>
<b>Year</b>	<b>Month</b>	
<b>2023</b>	March - June	Meeting with Various Internal Departments - Current state - Tools Introduction
	June	<u>Natural Areas Working Group</u> Presentation - Current state - Introduction
	August	Meeting with <u>Saskatoon &amp; Region Home Builders' Association (SRHBA)</u> - Current state - Tools Introduction

### **Engagement Results:**

Throughout 2023, the NAPP project team engaged internal working groups and external stakeholders. The purpose of the engagements was to:

- Confirm the current state of the development process, as it specifically relates to natural areas;
- Confirm and identify any policy or process related gaps or barriers to planning for natural areas; and
- Introduce potential tool options and identify any concerns related to the possible changes associated with policy and process updates.

During engagement, internal working groups and external stakeholders were receptive to meaningful change. They confirmed there are policy and process gaps related to natural areas. There were several challenges identified during the early planning stages, which subsequently impact the City's ability to achieve their goals and objectives for natural areas during later stages of the planning process. Consistent themes emerged as gaps or opportunities for improvement. These themes are outlined in the table below:

<b>THEME</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>Unclear terminology</b>	Uncertainty over specific definitions of terms, such as natural area or natural asset.
<b>Transparency and participation</b>	How and when people can get involved and how their feedback is used in the design and decision-making process.
<b>Mistrust in the process</b>	Unclear and inconsistent decision making, a lack of confidence the City will follow through on their commitments, lack of trust that consultant reports are impartial when funded by the project proponent, as observed in some natural area screenings.
<b>Authority, and permanence of civic conservation tools</b>	The current tools, used to identify and designate land for management as a natural or naturalized area, lack legal authority to ensure they will remain natural/naturalized into perpetuity.
<b>Grey infrastructure planned before green infrastructure.</b>	There is a perception that grey infrastructure planning happens earlier than green infrastructure planning, and more information of where and how that infrastructure should be laid out is known before we know the condition or value of natural areas, which may be in the same areas.
<b>Reactive instead of proactive</b>	As an extension of the above gap, there is a perception that grey infrastructure is planned for before green infrastructure is accounted for, resulting in conservation work being focused on what area is left over, after infrastructure or developable land is accounted for, instead of being considered at the same time as other decisions.
<b>Timing of information gathering and analysis</b>	Administration doesn't have the right information about natural areas early enough in the process, compared to the level of information Administration has related to other development priorities when Administration is making decisions.
<b>Unclear, inconsistent, and un-enforceable compensation for loss of natural areas</b>	Under the current <a href="#">Council Policy C09-041, the Wetland Policy</a> , there is a hierarchy for avoid, minimize and compensate. During engagement on the Wetland Policy Improvement Project, comments were received that the process for review, approving and enforcing a compensatory condition is not clear enough to be actionable. This is a challenge that will need to be addressed for broader natural areas as well.

<b>THEME</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>Recommendations are not requirements.</b>	Administration is not able to hold project proponents to any standards since they are recommended best practices instead of minimum requirements, and Administration has been unable to enforce compliance with existing policies.
<b>Financially sustainable cost of development and growth</b>	Cost of development increases if the amount of developable land decreases and/or infrastructure is spread out further. This can mean when project proponents are required to extend services around natural areas, to avoid them, cost of development can increase, which can in turn impact the cost of housing through the increased cost of land.
<b>Competing and contradictory civic priorities</b>	The City has many civic priorities intended to be accomplished through development. Sometimes these priorities come into direct conflict with each other, and they cannot all be achieved. Currently, there is no consistent or transparent process for determining which civic priority should take precedent under various circumstances.

The tools discussed in Appendix 3 were identified with the intention of working to address the gaps brought forward by residents and stakeholders. The next phase of this work will require Administration to prepare detailed options that could be reviewed and commented on by stakeholders.