

1974/
1975

EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

COMMENTS AND RESEARCH
ON THE RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITIES

1974 - 1975

BRIEF TO THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, CITY COUNCIL, EDMONTON

Edmonton Social Planning Council

December 2, 1974

"Comments on the River Valley Study"

The Edmonton Social Planning Council supports the process by which the City's policies regarding the River Valley are being reviewed: i.e., by the preparation of a comprehensive research report and through the provision for public comments on this report to the Public Affairs Committee. (More advance notice regarding such opportunities for comment would probably improve the quality of the process still further.)

We would like to commend the Planning Department for producing a document which provides both a broad overview of the salient issues regarding River Valley policy, and significant concrete information with which one can judge the different points of view on these issues.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council has not established a special committee or task force to review the document in detail; but we would like to note those items in the report which relate to other projects of the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is presently conducting two task forces which relate to some of the issues raised in the River Valley study: a Task Force on Mini-parks (being funded by the Alberta Environmental Research Trust) and a Task Force on City Land Purchases. Members of the former have expressed clearly their desire that the City place higher priority on the development of small parks in residential, commercial (including the downtown) and industrial areas.

It is noted that: a) in 1973, 86% of the expenditures to acquire parkland were made to purchase land in the river valley; b) the estimated current value of the river valley land designated to be acquired is over \$22 million; and c) with the total acquisition averaged over a 20 year period (and assuming a 5% annual inflation factor) that \$1.6 million will have to be spent annually to acquire all the designated land in the river valley (p.p. 74 - 79 of the River Valley Study). It is our understanding that there are no funds forthcoming from the Provincial Government for the

acquisition of property in the residential communities of the river valley. Since the value of the land in these communities represents about 80% of the total land designated to be purchased in the river valley, then essentially, it seems, the citizens of Edmonton will have to provide the funds for perhaps as much as \$1.28 million (about 80% of 1.6 million) per year, if the river valley communities are to be purchased over twenty years.

Meanwhile, the development of small parks in other areas of the City proceeds very slowly. In our research for the Mini-parks Task Force, we discovered that in 1955 the Parks Department prepared a comprehensive assessment of Edmonton's park needs and resources in which it was recommended that an area totalling one city block be bought in the Norwood area. Whether or not a whole block is needed in Norwood could be questioned today, but it is still the case that after 20 years, the recognized necessary parkland acquisitions have yet to be made in Norwood. This relates to the concern of the Task Force on City Land Purchases: that property is being acquired for city-wide purposes -- purposes often unpopular with the local residents -- in many neighbourhoods, while not enough land seems to be acquired for the uses of the local community. In the case of the river valley communities, it is not clear just what are the public purposes for acquisition of the land, other than to expand general parkland. Since no designated uses for the land have been provided, one cannot estimate the degree of public (city-wide) need for such parkland.

Because of the concerns of these two Task Forces, the Edmonton Social Planning Council questions whether the purchase of parkland in the river valley communities should have such a high priority as it presently appears to have. We recognize that a slower acquisition rate may only make the community death all the more painful because of decreasing services and the developing pattern of dangerously isolated houses. We therefore suggest to City Council that it place a moratorium on purchasing land in the residential communities of the river valley until such time as it has determined which residential areas it can afford to purchase (given the competing needs to purchase land for other purposes such as mini-parks) and which residential areas are not part of viable communities. Such determination should be made within the next six months so that further deterioration of the communities which are to be preserved can be minimized.

EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

June 13, 1975.

A SUBMISSION TO
CITY COUNCIL, CITY OF EDMONTON
regarding
RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

The Edmonton Social Planning Council remains concerned about the proposal to convert the central city residential communities in the River Valley, possibly excepting Riverdale, to parkland. The Council is concerned for the following reasons:

- (a) the social consequences of destroying entire communities
- (b) the opportunity costs of allocating a major portion of the parkland acquisition and development budget to one area of the city.

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNITY DESTRUCTION

The social consequences of community destruction include:

- loss of community and neighbourhood ties
- loss of community identity, affecting not only present residents but persons who have previously lived in the community and those who have come to know the community as a landmark in the city
- continuous anxiety for the individual: because of the possibility of being forced to leave the neighbourhood; because of concern about when neighbours will go and when neighbourhood services will decline
- costs for the individual of avoiding preventive home maintenance resulting in costlier problems later on; the costs of moving; the difference between new home and present home price
- loss of services in a disintegrating community
- loss of housing stock for the city as a whole.

Affiliated with the



Community Fund

A. LOSS OF COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD TIES:

The sociological literature is replete with experiments and theoretical work illustrating that a community, in which individuals are bound to each other by supportive emotional relationships covering a large number of activities, takes much time to develop.

Community is important; where it exists, the large-city phenomenon of a person in obvious trouble being unaided by lookers-on cannot occur. People who know each other and care about each other are more likely to help each other; indeed they seem more likely to help a stranger in their midst (assuming they can identify him as potentially one of them).

Communities can exist in a big city, either geographically - determined communities created through "neighbouring", or interest-determined communities created as people with similar interests get to know each other across a city. Both types of community are valuable, but each plays a certain role in the overall life of a city. It is only the former which can keep streets safe to walk on, houses or apartments safe to live in. Because one's neighbours may have different interests than oneself, especially in a large city, the geographical community or neighbourhood develops further the social range of contacts a person has. Finally, for the many people who find it difficult to get around the city for one reason or another, geographical community may be practically the only way to develop friendships.

When we destroy a community, especially a long-standing one, we destroy the neighbourliness that has built up over the years; individuals from the community will hopefully integrate into developing communities elsewhere, but still the city has lost one important strand of its social fabric. The more in number, and the more frequently, communities are destroyed, the more the city becomes less and less a socially friendly and secure place in which to live.

B. ANXIETY:

Anxiety, a state of psychological state of unease because of not knowing what ill the future holds, is characteristic of a community which is slated for destruction. It occurs because an individual does not know what will be paid for his house, to where he will move, and what to expect there; and in the case of a community undergoing long-term acquisition, about the time he, or his friends, have left in the community. The amount of anxiety a

person suffers because of community destruction varies with the individual of course; with his wealth, his social confidence, his age, his skills in finding new housing, etc. We do not know what pain we are causing residents of the river valley communities with the proposal to take over their homes for parkland; some idea might be gleaned from some of the briefs presented by the river valley communities. (It should be noted that the anxiety felt by people who will eventually be forced to vacate their homes only differs from the pressures put on individuals by apartment-to-condominium conversions in terms of time the anxiety is experienced. For some, the short-term pressure of the conversion to condominium may be worse; for others, it may be easier than living with the sword of Damocles hanging over one's head for years.)

C. LOSS OF COMMUNITY IDENTITY:

This is perhaps the subtlest social consequence of all. It is generally agreed that people need landmarks in all aspects of one's life; if everything changed everyday -- our environment, our friends, our goals -- we would become, or already be, mad. It is probably for this reason that a knowledge of history is considered to be important, that historical buildings and areas are judged valuable to retain. At the very least, most will agree that to the extent a person is unable to relive memories because a neighbourhood has been obliterated, this fact reduces quality of life.

It is agreed that a completely static situation (in the extreme, sensory deprivation) is also deleterious to the individual sense of well-being. Just what is the proper balance between order and change and just what constitutes change and order, are sensitive questions. But it seems safe to say that in this city we do not suffer from a shortage of change.

D. FINANCIAL COSTS FOR COMMUNITY RESIDENTS:

People who put off repairing their home because it will be torn down in ten or twenty years anyway may find that more serious damage occurs before that time -- damage which must be repaired if they want to stay in their home or if they want to get a reasonable price for it in selling. Moving costs may be significant, and the difference between present home price and new home cost may be a great burden to bear, even if the new home is smaller.

E. LOSS OF SERVICES:

As the population of a community declines the services (public and commercial) are withdrawn; this lack of services is added to the other problems which people remaining have to face. An alternative to slow physical deterioration of a community is to allow people to rent homes in the area until all houses are acquired, then to remove them all at once. However, this would place a great extra burden on the city's housing supply in the year that the complete demolition occurred.

F. LOSS OF HOUSING STOCK:

There are a total of 965 homes in the river valley communities slated for destruction, 529 in the communities other than Riverdale which is being considered for partial retention. In 1974, the City issued building permits for 3,905 new dwelling units, 1,905 of which were single family dwelling units. (Source: Statistics Canada). In 1974, 315 demolition permits were issued for single family dwellings (about the same number as in other recent years). Thus there was a net increase in single family dwellings in 1974 in Edmonton of 1,590, (disregarding when the actual construction or demolition, as opposed to the permit insurance, actually took place). Thus the demolition of the river valley homes could offset 60% of the total net growth of housing stock in this city in 1974. What are the consequences for the city as a whole of a loss of this magnitude?

Sometimes it may be necessary for a city to destroy a community, despite the social consequences discussed above. The question is: is there the necessity in this case? Our answer to this question is based on considerations of overall parkland development in Edmonton, as discussed in the next section.

THE NEED FOR PARKLAND

Table I was compiled for us by Parks and Recreation. It will be noted that of the total amount spent for the acquisition of land by Parks and Recreation over the last seven years, a total of 60% of all expenditures was in the river valley. Just over a third (34%) was for the acquisition of river valley properties in the residential communities, (40% in the last five years), while another quarter (26%) was spent on other river valley properties.

What is more significant, however, is that 69% of the funds expended to buy property in residential areas were in the river valley communities. This emphasis on river valley community purchases has been growing; in the last five years, 84% of all residential purchases were in the river valley communities. The results are shown in Table II. Only 44 lots have been purchased in the residential communities "on top", despite the necessity for small parks in many neighbourhoods as indicated by the deficiencies noted in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, by the Edmonton Social Planning Council's study on Mini-parks, and the requests by many communities to have some parks in their area.

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan calculated neighbourhood level "A" priority acquisitions (to be completed in the early 1970's) at 37.13 acres plus an indeterminate amount in the most deficient neighbourhood of all, Oliver, and an indeterminate amount also in Malmo Plains. Taking a conservative estimate of an acre encompassing four lots, we see from Table II that 11 acres (one of which is in "B" priority areas) have been acquired, compared to the over 37 acres deemed necessary to acquire in the early 1970's -- disregarding the indeterminate recommended acquisitions, disregarding the fact that we are now into the mid-1970's when "B" priority acquisitions should be well underway, and ignoring the "A" priority recommended acquisitions at the district (as opposed to neighbourhood) level which would require another 24.23 acres. (Incidentally the recommended acquisitions are not adequate to meet the calculated neighbourhood deficiencies).

The \$1½ million spent on acquiring river valley property in the residential communities (which land was not acquired for the benefit of those communities, of course), could have bought some 100 lots, or 25 acres (based on the apparent average price of the 44 residential lots purchased for parkland since 1969) in and for neighbourhoods which are deemed to badly need them.

In other words, the goal to acquire the "A" priority neighbourhood parks could have been almost met, had the river valley community acquisition program not taken up almost 70% of residential acquisition funds. Of course other problems might have slowed down this program, such as finding suitable space, but it seems likely that at least some of the 100 lots could have been purchased -- especially considering that Parks and Recreation had thought in 1970 that it was reasonable to expect the "A" priority acquisitions could be completed in the early 1970's.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council's study "Mini-Parks for Edmonton" found that the two primary determinants of mini-park distribution seemed to be neighbourhood age and wealth. In terms of age, neighbourhoods developed prior to 1947 and those developed after 1968 most often lacked mini-parks (neighbourhood level parks) -- 31% of the 35 old neighbourhoods and 33% of the 12 new neighbourhoods had no such parks at all.

In all age categories, the richest neighbourhoods -- probably the areas which need them least -- seemed to have the greater portion of the mini-parks.

Thus while many neighbourhoods -- the richer and/or those built in the 1950's and 1960's -- have a reasonable supply of local parks, a number of neighbourhoods are still severely deficient in local parks.

A long-range budget for the development of all parkland in the City needs to be undertaken. The River Valley study and associated reports analyze the costs of acquiring and demolishing the homes in the river valley communities. However, no indication is made as to how these costs, plus the unknown park development costs for the area, can be met or how they fit budgetarily into the total picture of park development in Edmonton.

A long-range plan and budget for development of all Edmonton parkland would require answers to the following questions:

- 1) How much parkland does the City own now which is as yet undeveloped?
- 2) What are the plans for this land and what are the development costs?
- 3) What are the maintenance costs for existing and proposed parkland? (It would be particularly useful to know what really are the maintenance costs for small parks versus those for large parks).
- 4) What would be the costs of meeting the acquisition priorities presented in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan?

The answers to these questions would allow us to judge whether we can afford to undertake all these park developments. Our strong suspicion is that we cannot undertake them all in the foreseeable future and that we will short-change the much-wanted but less-than-glorious small local parks in favor of the large prestigious parks, and that it is even possible we will not be able to afford to develop the river valley parks after we have bought out so many homes as to make the remaining residential communities unviable. The area could be redeveloped residentially, and probably would, but one can imagine the bitterness of those already pressured to leave on the pretext that the area was needed as a park.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The residents of the River Valley Communities do not want their communities destroyed.
2. There will be social costs not only for the residents but for the City as a whole attending the conversion of the River Valley communities to parkland.
3. Other communities want and need parkland in their neighbourhood. We do not seem to be able to afford both to supply many local parks and to develop the River Valley to the extent currently envisaged.
4. We are unaware of any public calls for conversion of the River Valley communities to parkland.

We therefore draw the conclusion that it would be out of tune with the wishes and interests of the citizens of this City to proceed with massive park development in the River Valley communities.

TABLE I
EDMONTON PARKS AND RECREATION
LAND ACQUISITION

YEAR	RESIDENTIAL		OTHER		TOTAL LAND ACQUISITION	TOTAL DEBENTURES	SOURCE OF FUNDS				TOTAL CAPITAL EXPENDITURES
	RIVER VALLEY	NOT RIVER VALLEY	RIVER VALLEY	NOT RIVER VALLEY*			PARKLAND PURCHASE RESERVE ACCT.	PUBLIC WORKS RESERVE ACCT.	COMMON. GAMES	CAPITAL CITY PARK	
1968	17,000	6,100	217,086	41,238	281,424	234,702	--	46,722	--	--	2,212,902
1969	79,000	38,000	428,500	18,828	564,328	450,120	114,208	--	--	--	2,899,216
1970	133,174	203,042	18,700	32,760	387,676	242,556	145,120	--	--	--	3,198,057
1971	113,035	135,353	966	118,629	367,983	286,587	81,396	--	--	--	2,861,651
1972	151,830	114,188	11,910	218,967	496,895	382,707	114,188	--	--	--	5,040,749
1973	601,587	161,150	94,481	60,000	917,218	653,068	183,500	--	--	80,650	3,629,806
1974	479,389	51,000	398,250	636,500	1,565,139	1,302,151	8,500	--	--	173,000	7,753,841
	1,575,015	708,833	1,169,893	1,126,922	4,580,663	3,551,891	646,912	46,722	253,650	81,488	27,596,222

* THIS LAND IS NOT SOLELY FOR USE AS PARKLAND.
IT ALSO INCLUDES LAND PURCHASED FOR SERVICE GARAGES, ETC.

June 12, 1975

TABLE II

PARKLAND ACQUISITION (IN THE OLDER RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBOURHOODS)
IN THE CITY OF EDMONTON SINCE 1969 - EXCLUSIVE OF THE RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITIES

LOCATION *	NUMBER OF LOTS		
	PURCHASED	NEGOTIATING	TOTAL
West Jasper Place (A)	20		20
High Park (A)	8		8
Beacon Heights (A)	1	2	3
Norwood	2	6	8
(A)	5	5	5
Scona (A)	2		2
Beverly Heights (B)	2		2
Eastwood (A)	1		1
Spruce Avenue (C)		4	4
Grovenor (A)	1	2	3
Canora (B)	2		2
Hazeldean (C)		2	2
Boyle Street (B)		1	1
Cromdale (B)		1	1
TOTAL	44	23	67

As provided by Bruce Wilson, Parks and Recreation, June 12, 1975.

* Letter in bracket refers to parkland acquisition priority given to neighbourhood by Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

PARKLAND ACQUISITION IN THE CITY OF EDMONTON SINCE 1969

LOCATION	QUANTITY	PARTICULARS
West Jasper Place	20 lots	
High Park	8 lots	
Beacon Heights	1 lot	2 - negotiating
Norwood	2x1 lot 1x5 lots 5 lots	2x3- negotiating purchasing negotiating
Scona	2 lots	
Beverly Heights	2 lots	
Eastwood	1 lot	
Spruce Avenue		negotiating for 4
Grovenor	1 lot	negotiating for 2
Canora	2 lots	
Hazeldean		negotiating for 2
Boyle Street		negotiating for 1
Cromdale		negotiating for 1

As quoted by Bruce Wilson, Parks and Recreation, June 12, 1975.

RIVER FLOW CHARACTERISTICS (CITY DATUM)

RETURN PERIOD IN YEARS	MAGNITUDE IN C.F.S.	RISK %	ELEVATION
50	150,000	63	2098.5
100	180	40	2101.2
200	222	22	2105.
500	270	9	2109.
1000	320	5	2112

Associated Engineering Services Limited, Conceptual Design Study for E.L. Smith Water Treatment Plant; information provided by T. Blench and Associates Limited, April 10, 1972.

REPORT TO THE RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITIES
RE FLOODING OF THE NORTH SASKATCHEWAN

A considerable amount of time was spent looking for material relating to: a) the flooding possibilities of the North Saskatchewan in Edmonton and b) information on the Brazeau and Bighorn Dams regarding flood control.

It was very difficult to find reports dealing specifically with these subjects. Much energy was expended in the "run around" process, that is, "Try this library" at which the usual retort was "Try this Library" (which I had just come from). After much digging, at the Provincial libraries (primarily the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources Building), the Journal library, and the University, a few documents of relevance were procured.

No firm conclusions could be drawn from the report found regarding either of the topics but at least the evidence should substantiate the belief that there is no concensus on either flood predictions or the effects of the dams on the flow of the North Saskatchewan.

The following report was prepared for the river valley communities (conclusions and recommendations were left for them to draw). As well, all research notes were given to them for future use.

RIVER FLOODING

Many experts that we have talked to from across the City agree that they cannot agree on flood predictions. There are different ways to compute the data (e.g., gumbel distribution or log normal distribution); not one of which can be said to be the correct way. Flood prediction studies for the North Saskatchewan through Edmonton that we have found vary from a one in fifty year flood plain(1) to a one in 10,000 year flood plain.(2). A leading expert in the field, Dr. T. Blench, estimates that it is probably at least one in 100 year flood plain. Also, in his words, the flood in 1915 was "a very unusual flood" and it is unlikely that a flood of that magnitude would occur again.

A 1915 Government of Canada study reports that there were unusual amounts of rain in May and June, 1915; the rain of June 24-27 was of exceptional density; it had rained continuously for 58 hours and 6 inches of rain had fallen; that in May and June the temperatures were below normal and therefore the evaporation rate was low. Plant growth absorption was low because the plants were still small; as well, there had been many forest fires the previous few years which had wiped out many square miles of forest so that a great amount of absorption capacity had been lost.(3).

The Brazeau and the Bighorn Dams must also be considered as they somewhat invalidate historical flooding data because of the effect they have on the flow. Although they were not built with the primary purpose of flood control, they would have a limited effect. To quote from a Calgary Power Brief on the dams "The resevoirs also provide benefits in the form of recreation, limited flood control and facility for possible future diversion for irrigation".(4). Calgary Power had been thinking of an additional Sundance Thermal powerhouse because of the greater expense to build a dam. However, the Provincial Government decided to contribute substantially to the Bighorn project. "What tipped the balance was the need for river control through the City of Edmonton and Alberta's PRIME concept."(5).

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- (1) Province of Alberta, Flood Plain Study of the North Saskatchewan River Through Edmonton, Spring 1975.
 - (2) Reid, J. L. and Brittain, K. G., Design Concepts of the Brazeau Development Including River and Hydrology Studies, Engineering Institute of Canada, 1962 Annual General Meeting, Paper #16, p. 8(?).
 - (3) Government of Canada, Surveys of the North Saskatchewan River - 1910 - 1915, Department of Public Works, pp. 120-126.
 - (4) Calgary Power, Storage of Water in the North Saskatchewan River Basin, submitted to the Public Hearing on Land Use and Resource Development in the Eastern Slopes, Alberta Environment Conservation Authority, July 5 - 7, 1973, Edmonton, p. 17.
 - (5) The Western Producer, Thursday, October 30, 1969.

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