

BRIEFING

**Community Services Briefing to
Combined Meeting of Council
2019 October 21**

**ISC: UNRESTRICTED
C2019-1346**

River Access Strategy Update

PURPOSE OF BRIEFING

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a comprehensive response to a question that was raised by Councillor Keating during Question Period at the 2019 October 7 Strategic Council Meeting with respect to river access points and the status of the River Access Strategy (the Strategy). This briefing contains an update on work to date at river access sites and other initiatives contained within the Strategy, along with a project budget summary to provide a context for future budget considerations.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

Calgary Parks works closely with community partners, non-profit river user groups, commercial users, the Province and other City business units including Water Resources and Calgary Fire Department to provide accessible river access points that allow Calgarians to enjoy our river amenities in a safe and convenient manner.

On 2017 February 13, the River Access Strategy (CPS2017-0103) was received for information by Council. The Strategy outlines public river access opportunities along the Bow and Elbow Rivers and identifies some sites as higher priority for development. The Strategy proposed 10 boat launches (7 new) and the formalization of 18 hand launch sites. Most sites are simple hand launches that require only minor upgrades. Other sites require bank stabilization and construction of a concrete pad for launching larger boats and rafts. There are currently approximately 5 boat and 10 hand launches open for public use along the Bow and Elbow Rivers within the city.

The Strategy is a working document and river access points are continually reviewed and workplans updated as river conditions and user needs change and funding becomes available. It should be noted that budget requirements for boat launch sites are greater than originally projected in 2017 due to the unanticipated complexity of work along the river bed and shore. All river access locations and the Strategy can be found online at: www.calgary.ca/riveraccess.

Since 2017, City funding in the amount of \$1.95 million along with \$145,000 in grant funding has been secured, and work on the priority 1 sites and an educational signage initiative is either complete or currently underway as per the summary charts below.

River Access Budget Summary

2017 Council Approved Budget	\$1,690,000.00
CFEP Grant (to cover portion of work on Ogden site)	\$125,000.00
Alberta Conservation Association Grant (to cover portion of costs for signage)	\$20,000.00
Additional Parks Capital Funds (added in June 2019)	\$256,000.00

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TOTAL BUDGET	\$2,091,000.00
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Summary of Work to Date – Priority 1 Sites and Initiatives

Project	Description	Status
Inglewood Bridge	Further investigation is required now that a new launch site is located nearby at St. Patrick's Island.	On hold
Albert Park	The site has been eliminated due to safety concerns, both on the river and accessing the site from 17 Avenue SE.	Eliminated
Ogden Bridge	Development applications are currently with Alberta Environment and Parks for approval.	Fully funded. Completion anticipated by September 2020
Sunnyside	Hand launch facility has been designed and will be incorporated into the larger Sunnyside Flood Barrier project.	On hold to align with Sunnyside Flood Barrier work in 2020-2021
West Baker Park	Two new boat ramps have been built at this location, one dedicated for emergency response use and one for public use.	Fully funded. Construction scheduled for completion by the end of October 2019
Graves Bridge	Installation of concrete blocks for vehicle control.	Completed November 2017
Educational Signage	Educational signage was installed at four locations. The next phase of signage has been fabricated and will be installed as new sites are completed.	Ongoing

Partnerships

Work completed to date could not have happened without support from community partners, who are organized under the Calgary River Use Access (CRUA) group. Their input and expertise, as well as additional funding through grants, has been invaluable.

The Strategy recommended a "River Ambassador Program" whereby ambassadors promote responsible river behaviour and act as positive role models on the river, utilizing education and promotion items to reinforce messages. The City partnered with RiverWatch Institute of Alberta (a non-profit group) who secured funding from the Calgary Foundation to implement the program. In 2018, River Ambassadors spoke with almost 1000 people each week at multiple river access sites. They also provided three-hour guided Eco-Float tours throughout the summer of 2018 and 2019 and this allowed the public to observe Calgary's river ecosystem, wildlife and river engineering projects.

The Calgary Fire Department (CFD) uses 8 boat launch sites for emergency response purposes. These are generally not for public use due to the need to maintain access for public safety purposes, however CFD has an agreement with RiverWatch to allow their educational river tours to access the Cushing Bridge (17 Ave SE) site.

Next Steps

Calgary Parks will continue with its work program to ensure the completion of the West Baker Park and Ogden Bridge boat ramp facilities. Coordination is ongoing with our community partner, CRUA, to introduce in 2020 temporary directional and informational signage at multiple locations along the Bow River. Priority 2 sites and initiatives as identified in the Strategy are currently unfunded in the current budget cycle.

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