



Public participation is critical to the success of the Lethbridge River Valley Parks Master Plan (RVPMP). From November 2014 to January 2015, the project team engaged with Lethbridge residents, river valley users, stakeholder groups, and city staff to gather information about current uses of the river valley, and to identify opportunities and constraints. This document presents a summary of the first phase of engagement. Complete findings and a record of comments are available in the What We Heard Report.

### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the initial engagement was to create project awareness, gather input on how the river valley is currently used, what works well, and what needs improvement, as well as gather input on shared values and a vision for the future. The output of this phase of engagement was used to inform the State of the Valley Report (situational analysis), and to develop the vision, principles and objectives that guide the development of the RVPMP.

### ACTIVITIES AND LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

A combination of activities were used to engage stakeholders and residents. In total, over 1,400 comments or ideas were provided. Engagement activities and their associated level of engagement are listed below:

- Sounding boards at the Helen Schuler Nature Center and at City Hall (120+ comments)
- Online map tool (360+ comments)
- Online survey (230+ surveys)
- Open house (100+ participants)
- Stakeholder workshop (60+ participants)
- Staff workshop (20+ participants)

### WHAT WE HEARD

#### WHAT IS VALUED

The river valley is seen as a significant civic asset. Users value the river valley landscape, the pathway and trail system, and the myriad of opportunities to experience nature. Off-leash dog areas emerged as a well-liked feature, as well as bike parks, playgrounds, and the Helen Schuler Nature Centre. Other passive uses enjoyed in the park include family outings and opportunities to learn about the area's history.

### WHAT COULD BE CHANGED

Future desires for the river valley include a better connected pathway and trail system, and better trail design and maintenance. Access emerged as an important issue, which led to a desire for greater universal access to the pathway and trail system. A desire for better access to the river for river-based recreation activities, including provisions for parking and safe boat launches, were also voiced. There is a desire to improve park amenities, such as washrooms (year-round accessible) and water stations, as well as signage and wayfinding. Safety was also brought to light as an important issue. Participants identified a need for greater emergency access and better site design to accommodate first responder access and traffic flow in the event of emergencies. The need for more enforcement was also highlighted to address trespassing, off-highway vehicle use, off-leash dog use in undesignated areas, and other undesirable uses. Finally, there is concern about "over development" of natural areas from a visual and ecological perspective. Over development was described in terms of expanding active recreation uses and residential encroachment into the river valley.

#### Pathways and trails

Runners and many nature enthusiasts prefer naturalized trails because they accommodate both trail runner and mountain bikes while maintaining the look and feel of a naturalized landscape. However, others would like to see more paved trails to improve universal access and safety.

#### Expansion of current and future uses

There was a difference in opinion over the expansion of off-leash dog areas, allowing festival or event-based programming, disc-golf or camping in the river valley, and maintaining the current location of the shooting range.

#### Off-leash dog use

There are use conflicts between off-leash dogs and runners, and between dogs and wildlife (e.g off-leash areas in rattlesnake habitat).

