An Omand's Creek Crossing for Everyone

Pre-Design Public Engagement Summary

Background

The bridge in Omand Park is old and must be replaced. Putting a new bridge in the old spot isn't ideal because:

- The bridge floods nearly every year
- The low-lying location is not accessible – it is dangerous to reach for people using wheelchairs or vulnerable users on bikes or other wheels

We previously studied the bridge in 2010. At that time, the public told us the designs would all negatively affect how the community uses the park.

This time around, it was important for us to involve the community before we started design. We went to the community in May and June 2024 to listen, confirm what we heard in the past, learn what's changed, and determine our best steps forward.

Engagement

The pre-design engagement process was developed to help us better understand:

- Key areas of park use and value
- Opportunities to improve pathways around the bridge
- What the community wants to see in a potential future bridge
- A vision for a future river access point
- Whether feedback from the 2010 design and public engagement was properly interpreted and/or is still relevant

We invited the community to talk to us via an online survey and online mapping tool. We also talked with people in-person at an in-park event and nearby community pop-up. We held two stakeholder meetings for key organizations.

Table 1 provides an overview of all public engagement opportunities.

Promotion

We promoted public engagement opportunities using:

- Project webpage – launched May 14, 2024
  - Total of 4,738 visits as of July 11, 2024
- News release – May 14, 2024
- Social media – four posts throughout the program's duration
- Geo-targeted Facebook and Instagram advertisements – May 16 – June 9, 2024. 620 clicks
- Postcard – Delivered week of May 13, 2024 to 5323 area homes and businesses
- Posters – Posted May 14, 2023 at 17 area businesses and message boards
- Subscriber email – Delivered May 14, 2024 to 52 subscribers
- City of Winnipeg public engagement newsletter with over 5,800 recipients – May 17, 2024 and June 6, 2024

Table 1: Public engagement opportunities

Date	Activity	Details
May 13, 2024	Online meeting	The project team met with the Wolseley Residents Association to introduce the project and share ways to advertise the project
May 14 through June 10, 2024	Online survey	1,570 responses Self-selected participation (not a representative sample) Survey results are in Appendix A
May 14 through June 10, 2024	Online mapping tool	141 pinned comments by 59 contributors Mapping results are in Appendix C
May 29 and June 25, 2024	Two stakeholder meetings	11 organizations represented Report is in Appendix D
May 30, 2024	In-park event	100 attendees Feedback themes and comments are in Appendix E
June 6, 2024	Wolseley Farmer's Market pop-up	65 interactions Feedback themes and comments are in Appendix H

Who we heard from

Online 1,570 people took the survey to share how they use the Omand Park area. Sixty-two percent of those who provided demographic information live in the R3G postal area, which covers the Wolseley neighbourhood and residents north of Portage Avenue. The postal code with the next highest participation was R3N at seven percent. This area is directly south of Omand Park. Postal code had little bearing on respondents' opinions. A map of responses by postal code can be found in Appendix B.

Key stakeholders helped us better understand the perspectives of both nearby residents and vulnerable park users (this includes children, seniors, and persons with disabilities). The stakeholder report in Appendix D outlines outreach, involvement, and feedback.

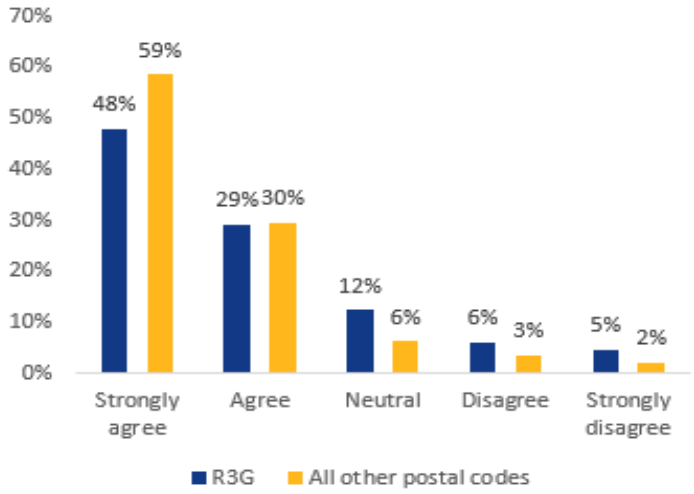


Figure 1: Comparing R3G residents with other survey respondents

How do you feel about the statement: It is important to reduce the impacts of flooding and ensure the bridge is useable year-round.

R3G responses: 873

All other postal code responses: 545

**152 respondents did not provide postal code information*

What we heard

Key themes

- Improvements to accessibility are welcomed while balancing impact to Omand Park's natural environment.
- A new bridge must balance flood mitigation and impacts to the park environment.
- Steep park paths are dangerous for cyclists and those using mobility aids. The risks are higher when paths are slippery.

Review of past study/design concerns

This is the second time in recent memory the City of Winnipeg has discussed changes to the pedestrian bridge in Omand Park. The project team needed to check in on key issues raised in 2010. According to survey responses, themes remain like 14 years ago:

- Preserving the park's trees (92 percent overall important)
- Making the community aware of the design process (81 percent overall important)
- Ensuring winter recreation is unaffected (75 percent overall important)

When asked their feelings on keeping costs low, nearly half of participants were impartial (49 percent were neutral; 27 percent felt it was important; 24 percent felt it was unimportant).



In park event on May 30, 2024. Credit: Julie Penner

Common ground

Feedback revealed two areas for common ground: support for accessibility and maintaining the natural character of Omand Park.



92 percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement: ***Everyone should be able to use Omand Park***. Groups who agreed most strongly were those who identified as having a disability (66 percent strongly agree) and those who identified as a parent, guardian, or caregiver of a dependant (65 percent strongly agree).



93 percent of survey respondents believe the following statement is important: ***Maintaining the park's natural environment.*** Groups with the strongest feelings towards this statement were those who identified as having a disability (78 percent very important) and those who identified living in the postal area of R3G (71 percent very important).

Other themes

Bridge replacement



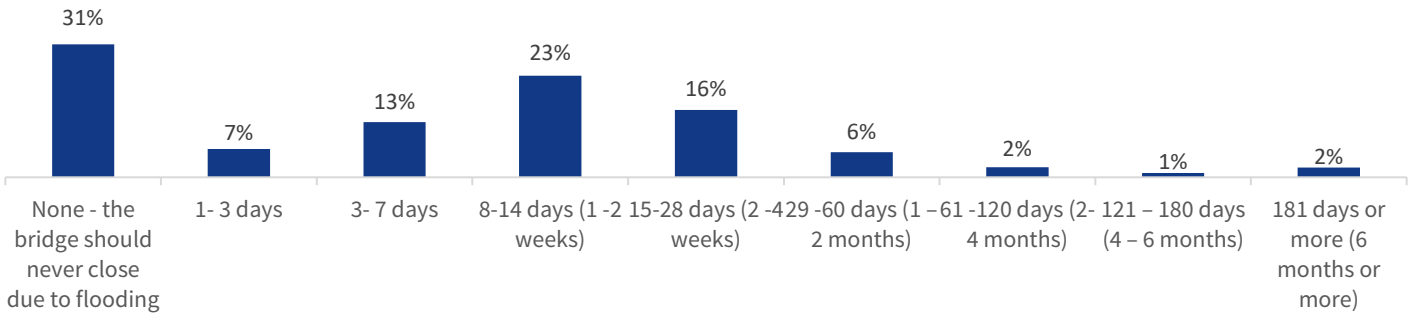
81 percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement: ***It is important to reduce the impacts of flooding and ensure the bridge is useable year-round.*** New to the conversation this time around was finding a balance between mitigating flood events and the impact of a new structure on park character and environment.

The project's stakeholder group noted the bridge design should balance flood mitigation but may not need to always be above flood levels and that flood mitigation should not affect naturalized spaces, accessibility, or aesthetics.

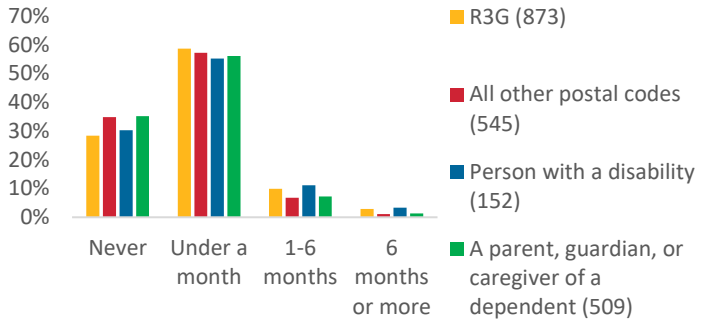
During the in-park event on May 30, 2024 there were a few comments about keeping the bridge in the same location, or removing the bridge when it comes to the end of its service life and relying on the Portage Avenue park entrance. These participants were often motivated by a strong desire to maintain the park's natural elements and character.

Survey respondents had a range of views when it comes to how flood resilient (and ultimately how high) a replacement bridge should be:

How many days of closure, per season, due to flooding would you be okay with? (1,534 responses)



How many days of closure, due to flooding would you be okay with? Demographic comparison/response categories condensed



As shown in graph to the left, postal code, ability, or care of dependents did not cause difference in opinion. The survey response category of "None – the bridge should never close due to flooding" received the most overall responses (31% of all respondents). However, when the three choice categories under a month are added together there was a greater number of respondents who were comfortable with a number of bridge closure days that ranged from a few days to under a month (58% of all respondents).

Current issues with paths

The paths to the creek are very steep. Stakeholders acknowledged people with accessibility and/or mobility needs often have issues accessing Omand Park. We heard the paths are particularly inaccessible in the winter for people who use mobility aids (e.g., wheelchair). The group recommended less steep and more accessible pathways as a key priority.

During the in-park event City staff heard repeated concerns about conflicts or near misses between cyclists and pedestrians. The concern was repeated by the stakeholder group, survey respondents, park event attendees and mapping tool. Opinions on why the conflicts happen are varied but include: speeds caused by changes in elevation; the narrow paths/ bridge; sharp turns on the path; and a belief that some cyclists do not slow down.

Access and detours via Portage Avenue

In times that the pedestrian bridge is decommissioned park users must cross Omand's Creek at Portage Avenue. The project team heard a range of feedback about using the Portage Avenue crossing and the associated impacts of a new pedestrian crossing:

Sample of survey/mapping tool quotes about using Portage Avenue entrance	
Dislike Portage Avenue connection	Comfortable with Portage Avenue connection
• *Omands is a wonderful place for our family to exercise and connect. Flooding allows for very limited access at certain times of year and we really miss the park during those times. With two little ones we don't often bother to take the trip all the way around (via Portage Ave) when the bridge is non operational.* • *I'm excited about being able to plan this route and follow through with it. It is inconvenient to find that the path is flooded and one must backtrack to Portage Avenue (which is the opposite environment of this peaceful park)* • *Being able to use the bridge more consistently over the year and not having to do my commute along portage during flooding would be more comforting.* • *Year round access!! More accessible park space! Being able to bike the Wellington loop with my kids without having to detour to Portage ave!*	• *It is no problem to walk around to the Portage Avenue entrance when the bridge is flooded. The hill on the walking path is nice and should not be flattened.* • *Yes, we love the area the way it is and don't mind the flooding because we just go up to portage to cross. I'm worried about additional traffic and river bank erosion and losing the unique space to flatten it and make it more accessible.* • *I'm afraid that you're going to change the park I love a lot into something that I don't like as much. The bridge flooding is a minor inconvenience because it's only .75mile to go around, for a cyclist, walker or runner it's a matter of a few minutes to go around it to portage avenue. The Portage entrance is also where wheelchairs can easily access the park from.* • *Omand's Creek park is still easily accessible during this season as people are able to access the park via Portage. This is a slight hinderance that does not last that long. I have very big safety concerns regarding a bridge being built that would potentially have space under it for people to live.*

Park character

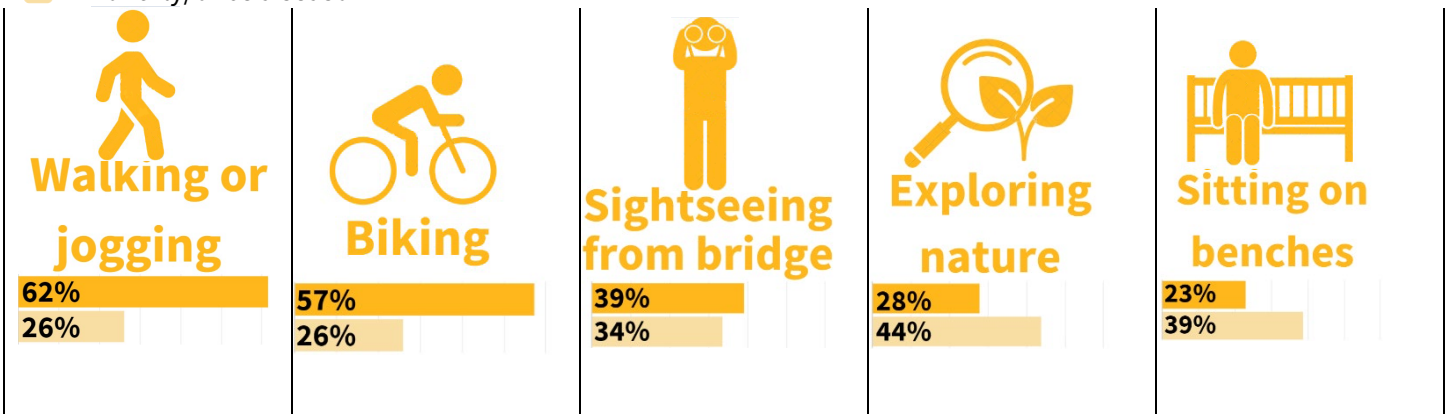
A word cloud was made from survey respondents' responses (words mentioned between 31 – 191 times)

Question: List a few words that come to mind when we ask you to describe the character of Omand Park

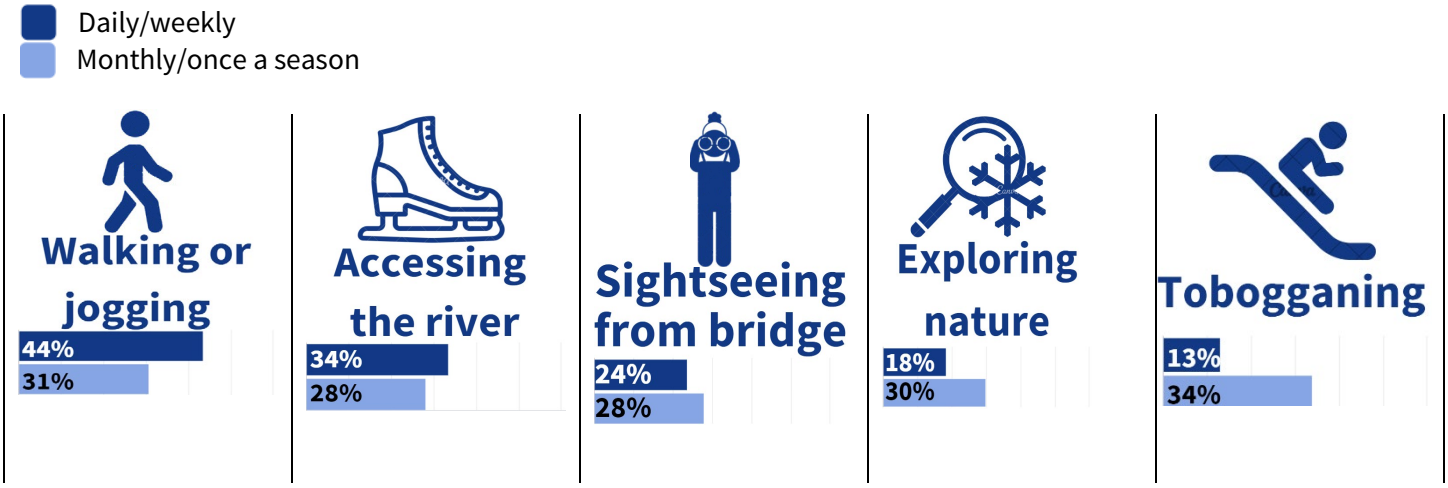


We heard people do the following activities in the park:

When the weather is warm:



When the weather is cold:

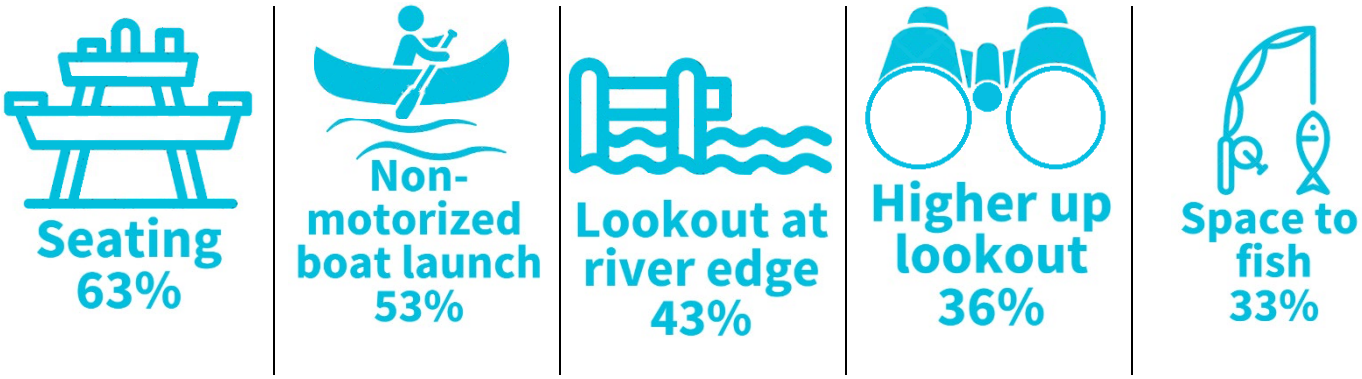


River access point

When talking about new development on the riverbank, people were once again concerned about accessibility and maintaining park environment and character.

Sixty-three percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement: ***Omand Park should have a formal river access point.*** Twenty-seven percent were neutral; ten percent disagreed.

The survey identified some elements that could be included in a new river access point. The top five most supported were:



Stakeholders desire safer, all-ability access down to the shoreline. This theme was repeated twenty-seven times under the "other" category in the survey.

A common theme across all engagement was the desire for a safe and accessible connection to Assiniboine River when frozen. This included 49 comments under the "other" category in the survey.

Table: What we heard and how it was considered

What we heard	How it was considered
Key themes	
Accessibility – Participants were enthusiastic about improvements to the steep paths. They highlighted the importance of making the park more accessible for people with mobility issues, anticipating a safer, more inclusive space that caters to everyone's physical needs.	The City is legislation-bound to provide equitable and safe access for persons of all ages and abilities. Paths that connect to the Omand's Creek Pedestrian Bridge will be designed according to the City's accessibility design standard. According to the accessibility design standard, pathways should have less than five percent slope. The slope is currently greater than 10 percent on some pathways here. One option for making a path less steep is a switchback path. The standard also indicates how wide pathways should be to safely accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists. The current bridge and pathways are less than 2.5 m wide, which is too narrow. We would design a new bridge and pathways a 3.5-metre width.
Maintaining natural character, minimizing change – Omand Park is a cherished space. There's a strong desire to keep the park's wild and natural feel, avoid disrupting nature, and prevent overdevelopment. We heard people want to preserve the environment, trees, and landscape while ensuring new elements blend in harmoniously.	We understand that preserving the natural environment and current user experience is very important. A landscape architect that specializes in preserving park environments will be part of our design study team. We will present any future design concepts for feedback as part of the continued public engagement process. The design will consider the park as whole and ensure any changes to the bridge and pathways are integrated into the existing landscape.
Flood mitigation – Any new bridge should address flooding issues, ensuring year-round access. It is important to strike a balance between the height of the bridge and impact on the park character and environment. Respondents anticipate a higher bridge would decrease flood impacts, make the park more usable and safer, and improve seasonal access and connectivity.	We cannot maintain the current bridge at its current elevation because it floods and does not meet provincially mandated accessibility standards. The bridge and pathways must be accessible for all users. In late summer/fall 2024 the Public Service will present a report to the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works about what we heard from the community and a recommendation to replace the pedestrian bridge at a height approximately 2.8 meters higher than the current location. Following the direction of Committee, the exact height is to be confirmed during the design phase by the engineering consultant hired. Our design consultant, when hired, will be responsible for investigating historical flood information and confirming the projected flood frequency at Omand Park.

Access and detours via Portage Avenue park entrance – This topic generated a range of views. Some respondents find the detour via Portage manageable and propose routing cyclists through Portage Avenue to reduce pedestrian-cyclist conflicts and preserve the park's natural state. Some suggested the study is wasteful, pointing to this secondary access point. Other respondents' support a higher bridge to reduce the need to detour via Portage Avenue. Issues with the Portage Avenue detour include inconvenience, discomfort, and a belief it is less safe, especially for those with children or wheeled devices.	Our Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies obligate us to create usable, desirable routes for pedestrians and cyclists. In our studies, we have determined the path through the park is a highly desired route and also the shortest distance to get from west of the park into Wolseley. Not creating an accessible path through the park and new bridge and relying on the detour does not meet accessibility guidelines. This would exclude people from the park experience and require an unreasonable detour length. The Pedestrian and Cycling Strategies document, which identifies this as an important route, was approved by Council in 2015. People travelling to and through the park are a large user. Attempting to design the new bridge and approaches to exclude bikes would result in low compliance and create conflicts, especially if the path was designed for pedestrians only.
Current park uses	
Preserve mature trees - Participants are strongly concerned about preserving the park's mature trees, emphasizing their importance to the park's beauty and character. They oppose cutting down established trees, preferring to retain all trees and the natural landscape.	The future design project will prioritize tree preservation. Where tree removals are absolutely required, we will replace the tree with another of equal value.
Connecting with nature and wildlife – In addition to the most common activities of walking and biking, park visitors indicated that they enjoy birdwatching, wildlife spotting, foraging, and plant identification. Activities in Omand Park point to a hub for connecting with nature.	We understand that an important aspect of the park is engagement with nature and will create designs with this in mind. We will work to minimize construction impacts on the site and ultimately promote a healthier habitat. Our team will include naturalists, landscape architects, and others whose focus will be preserving the natural environment.
Maintain tobogganing slopes – There is a continuing desire to preserving the tobogganing slopes in Omand Park, which are valued by families and youth.	We understand that in the winter the park is a popular destination for tobogganing. We will keep this top-of-mind when designing the new bridge.
Expand project limits west to Assiniboine bridge and rail line - Other areas for improvement outside the project scope include widening the active transportation bridge across the Assiniboine River and improving the connecting paths.	We are aware of these issues; however they are outside the scope of this project. We will communicate the issues to BNSF Railway and Manitoba Hydro as part of a potential future project.

Bridge replacement	
Conflicts between users on the bridge – The bridge was often described as a pinch point causing conflict between users.	The new bridge will be 3.5m wide. This will safely accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists.
Bridge design – A new bridge was seen by some as an opportunity for a creatively designed bridge that enhances the park's character and attractiveness. There's excitement for a thoughtfully-designed bridge that balances beauty with practicality, adding a distinctive feature to the community.	We understand that bridge aesthetics is an important consideration. We will ensure the new bridge looks aesthetically pleasing within the park environment.
Crime -Some respondents were concerned about more crime and encampments caused by a larger bridge in the park. They believe it will attract more graffiti, and unsafe conditions, worsening existing issues. Many feel unsafe at night and suggest focusing resources on addressing crime and homelessness rather than building a new bridge.	Safety is paramount. The new bridge will be designed with safety and crime prevention standards in mind. Additionally, all new pathways will include acorn style lamp standards for pathway lighting.

Maintain the existing structure – A small number or participants questioned project claims that the current structure is at the end of its service life.	We will continue to communicate structural deficiencies as we move forward. These include: • Deep cracks in the bridge deck • Open/exposed areas • Damaged bearings (which what connects the bridge deck to the supporting structure) The bridge began to show signs of deterioration in 2010, which led to yearly inspections. Here is some of what we've observed in these inspections: • 2010 - Signs of deck deterioration, wide cracks, and open areas on the bridge itself • 2017 – The underside of the deck began cracking and we recorded early signs of deck failure • 2019 – Full-depth cracking appeared • 2021 – We observed deformed and bulging bearings; this damage prevents the bridge from functioning as intended We made temporary repairs to the bridge deck in 2022, but it isn't enough to keep the bridge usable. If additional cracking or other warning signs such as sagging occur, we would permanently close the existing bridge without warning. Some of these issues are because the bridge was built using atypical materials meant for indoor construction. The bridge was made using hollow core concrete slabs on the bridge deck. Concrete slabs aren't meant to withstand the excessive freeze-thaw bridge conditions and repeated deicing and flooding. Bridge construction more often uses solid deck material.

Path improvements	
Conflicts between users - Concerns about collisions and near misses between cyclists and pedestrians, emphasizes the need for safer paths to prevent accidents. Some suggestions for improving these challenges included: • Having a fast and slow lane (e.g., fast in the middle and slow on the sides) • Having more level trails (e.g., so cyclists have an easier time slowing down) • Having separated spaces for cyclists and pedestrians • Standards to share space with pedestrians (e.g., cyclist ring their bell)	The City's accessibility design standard indicates how wide pathways should be to safely accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists. The current bridge and pathways are less than 2.5 m wide, which is too narrow. We will design a new bridge and pathways to a 3.5-metre width and decrease the pathways' slope.
Steep pathways – We heard the current paths are inaccessible for people with disabilities and dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians (particularly at the bottom of the hill). Steep paths are hazardous in icy conditions.	The existing pathways do not meet accessibility standards because they are too steep. To meet accessibility standards the new pathways to/from the bridge need to be no greater than 5 percent longitudinal slope (i.e. 1:20). Slopes between 5-8% are possible, but would require the installation of handrails as well as landings every 9 m.
Multi-neighbourhood connection point - Improving the bridge and paths is important for connectivity between a wide variety of neighborhoods. Reliable and accessible connections are seen as important for both recreational (the "Wellington loop") and commuter use, linking diverse neighborhoods and making active transportation safer.	We understand that the east-west pathway through Omand Park is an important route in the pedestrian and cycling network connecting neighbourhood communities. This is the only means of access through the park.
Vision for river access point	
Seating and a boat launch are most desired Of the pre-determined options set in the survey seating (63%) and a non-motorized boat launch (53%) were selected as items respondents would like to see. Online twelve percent of respondents indicated they did not support a new river access point. A full breakdown of survey results are available in Appendix A.	We will look at what could work for a river access point and may include a conceptual design in what we present to the public for feedback. The project does not include river access construction at this time.

Winter access to Assiniboine River – There is desire for safe access to the frozen river trails. Respondents point to an increase in winter river activity since 2020.	We do not test river ice conditions for public safety in the winter at any river access points. A new river access point would likely be limited to summer access and winter viewing.
Misconception about parking lot development – Perhaps based on a survey option measuring importance of nearby parking, some respondents voiced concern about the creation of a parking lot.	We are not considering a parking lot as part of this project. Access to the park will be by means of on street parking only.

Next steps

In Fall 2024, we will present a report to the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works, Executive Policy Committee and Council about what we heard from the community and our recommendation for a new bridge approximately 2.8 meters higher than the current bridge. If approved, we will hire a design consultant. What we heard from the community during pre-design engagement will guide this design. We will come back to the public with options for feedback; this will likely be in 2025. The project would proceed to detailed design, followed by construction before 2029. This project will be funded from the Waterway Crossing & Grade Separations – Annual Program which is meant for major maintenance and minor replacements of Bridge Infrastructure. Cost estimate for replacement of the bridge is unknown at this time and will be determined during the design phase.

Appendices

Appendix A – Survey results
Appendix B – Survey respondents by postal code
Appendix C – Online mapping tool themes
Appendix D – Stakeholder report
Appendix E – Park event themes
Appendix F – Mapped feedback from park event
Appendix G – Presentation to Wolseley Resident's Association
Appendix H- Wolseley Farmer's Market booth themes
Appendix I – Project submissions
Appendix J- Project promotion