

Agenda – Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste, Riverbank Management and the Environment – April 4, 2022

REPORTS

Item No. 1 Riverbank Access along Palmerston and Wolseley Avenue

WINNIPEG PUBLIC SERVICE RECOMMENDATION:

1. That this report be received as information.

Agenda – Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste, Riverbank Management and the Environment – April 4, 2022

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On March 2, 2022, the Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste, Riverbank Management and the Environment granted an extension of time of 30 days for the Winnipeg Public Service to report back on the costs and feasibility of providing winter-only and/or all-season riverbank public access along Palmerston Avenue or Wolseley Avenue between Palmerston Avenue and Omand’s Creek Park.

On December 6, 2021, the Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste, Riverbank Management and the Environment concurred in the recommendation of the City Centre Community Committee and directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back to the Standing Committee in 90 days.

COMMUNITY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On October 29, 2021, the City Centre Community Committee passed the following motion:

WHEAREAS the community has been asking for riverbank access along Wolseley and/or Palmerston Avenue;

AND WHEREAS the community has done some fundraising for river access;

AND WHEREAS in winter 2020, at the height of the pandemic, the neighborhood often used the river to get out in nature and enjoy the outdoors;

AND WHEREAS the City follows strict accessibility guidelines and must ensure that all riverbank guidelines are adhered to, in conjunction with all levels of government;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste, Riverbank Management and the Environment be requested to direct the Winnipeg Public Service to report back on the costs and feasibility of providing winter-only and/or all-season riverbank public access along Palmerston Avenue or Wolseley Avenue between Palmerston Avenue and Omand’s Creek Park.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Title: Public River Access to the Assiniboine River along Wolseley Avenue or Palmerston Avenue, between Canora Street and Omand Park

Critical Path: Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste, Riverbank Management and the Environment

AUTHORIZATION

Author	Department Head	CFO	CAO
J. Veitch	J. Kiernan	N/A	M. Jack

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report evaluates eight public riverbank parcels predominantly located within the Wolseley Neighbourhood of Winnipeg along Wolseley Avenue and Palmerston Avenue, between Canora Street and Omand Park for suitability as a permanent, public pedestrian access point to the Assiniboine River. The locations considered are:

- Canora Green at 850 Palmerston Avenue
- Arlington Street right-of-way
- Robert A. Steen Memorial Community Centre
- Aubrey Green at 1020 Palmerston Avenue
- William Marshall Park at the Dominion Street right-of-way
- 1254-1256 Wolseley Avenue (at Clifton Street)
- Greenwood Park at 1270 Wolseley Avenue
- Omand Park

Of these locations, Omand Park is considered the most suitable for a riverbank access point as the existing path network and topography would likely accommodate a universally accessible facility with less complexity and at a lower cost than the other locations listed above. While construction of an access point is considered feasible at this location, there are a number of key considerations and challenges that would need to be addressed through more detailed analysis and design.

The Robert A. Steen Memorial Community Centre property may also be a technically viable alternative where public access to the Assiniboine River would complement the programming at the Centre; however, it would be costlier, and would not be as well connected with other Parks and active transportation infrastructure.

The remaining sites are not considered viable options for various site-specific reasons, but common across all the remaining options is that there would be a substantial impact to the existing riparian forest and inadequate space to construct the approximately 160 metres (~575

foot) long sloping paths that would be required to provide universal access down the +/- 8 metre (~26 foot) high banks.

Providing winter access is not recommended at any of the subject locations without also implementing a corresponding operations program that would undertake regular monitoring of ice conditions, snow clearing and maintain corresponding safety measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report be received as information.

REASON FOR THE REPORT

On December 6, 2021, the Standing Policy Committee on Water and Waste, Riverbank Management and the Environment concurred in the recommendation of the City Centre Community Committee and directed the Winnipeg Public Service to report back in 90 days on the costs and feasibility of providing winter-only and/or all-season riverbank public access along Palmerston Avenue or Wolseley Avenue between Palmerston Avenue and Omand's Creek Park.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no implications as the report is to be received as information.

HISTORY/DISCUSSION

This report will discuss and evaluate several options for riverbank access along the north bank of the Assiniboine River predominantly located within the Wolseley Neighbourhood between Omand Park and the intersection of Palmerston Avenue and Canora Street.

The rivers in the City of Winnipeg have been very important to area residents throughout history. In modern times, providing the general public with access to the rivers has been a priority, and many of the City's regional and local park spaces are situated along the City's various rivers. Specific initiatives, such as the Riverbank Acquisition Policy and Seine River Waterways Acquisition Program, have been used to amass additional riverbank lands for public access. Other projects and programs have provided infrastructure such as the Assiniboine River Walk, Tache Promenade, CAR-RAC docks, and the various paths and parkways aligned along the riverbanks. However, safe and convenient access to the water surface is still not available in some neighbourhoods due to a variety of reasons such as: private land ownership, high and steep banks, dense vegetation, fluctuating water and ice levels, and the absence of constructed access points that can bring pedestrians to the water's edge. Access options are much fewer for those with limited mobility or vision impairment as much of the existing infrastructure was not designed to the current Accessibility Design Standards which would be applicable to the construction of a new access point today.

A 2006 project by the Planning, Property & Development Department provided improved landscaping and amenities such as plazas and stairways to the riverbank viewing areas at several of the locations considered herein, including Canora Green, Arlington Green, Aubrey

Green, William Marshall Park and Greenwood Park. However, none of the 2006 project locations provide formalized access to the river edge, though there is evidence that some members of the public have regularly used these locations to scramble down the slope to the water and ice surface.

The desire of the public to access the river for both winter and summer activities has been especially evident during the pandemic as a significant number of residents have been pursuing recreational and leisure activities that are available locally and are not impacted by restrictions. Through consultation with the Ward Councillor, it was determined that key considerations for selecting a site should include separation from private residences, connectivity with active transportation infrastructure, proximity to other public amenities, visibility, and impact to natural areas (mature trees in particular).

The following evaluations consider each of the public properties that have riverbank frontage as shown in Figures 1 and 2, below.



Figure 1. Palmerston Avenue and Wolseley Avenue between Dominion Street and Canora Green.



Figure 2. Wolsley Avenue between Raglan Road and Dominion Street

The specific sites, discussed in order from east to west, are:

Canora Green at 850 Palmerston Avenue

This small park has a short set of stairs and path constructed in 2008 which brings pedestrians to the mid-bank area, but not to the edge of the water. This 14 metre (~46 foot) wide parcel is bounded by single-family homes on each side. Constructing a ramp system to traverse the nearly 8 metre (~27 foot) high slope would significantly impact the landscape of the property and would result in the removal of most of the riparian forest on this parcel. There is also a major outfall at this location with associated gate chambers.

Constructing a universally accessible riverbank facility is not considered viable at this location because of the limitations of the site touched on above.

Arlington Green along Arlington Street Right-Of-Way

This site is very similar to Canora Green in that it is relatively narrow, it has a small plaza feature and stairway to the mid-bank area, and is the location of an outfall. This 19 metre (~ 62 foot) wide right-of-way is bounded on each side by single-family dwellings. Similarly, on the basis of the very significant challenges and impacts of trying to fit a universally accessible riverbank facility into this location, such a facility is not considered viable at this location.

Robert A. Steen Memorial Community Centre

The Robert A. Steen Memorial Community Centre presents more opportunity than many of the other sites as it already is a popular community gathering location for a range of recreational activities, events and services, with some parking available on-site. With a site width of 60 metres (~200 feet) it is less constrained than the narrow properties, though access to the street would have to be aligned around the parking lot, building and pool. The property and building layouts do limit visibility from the street and other higher traffic areas. There is also a large storm relief outfall at the upstream end of the site that may limit site development opportunities.

The bank height from the parking lot to the edge of the river is approximately 8.5 metres (~28 feet) and so a sloped path 170 metres (~557 feet) in length would be required to traverse this height at the 5% grade which is specified in the City of Winnipeg's Accessibility Design Standard. A significant portion of the riparian forest between the fence-line and the river would need to be removed to accommodate the alignment and construction of an accessible facility.

It is understood, from informal discussion with individual Community Centre board members at various times, that the Community Centre is supportive of constructing a riverbank access at this location and is pursuing the opportunity independently as well. However, future discussions and agreements with the Community Centre and associated stakeholder groups would be required before embarking on a project at this location.

The stability condition of the riverbank at this location is uncertain, and a geotechnical investigation and assessment would be required to determine whether additional riverbank improvement works would be required.

The cost to construct a universally accessible riverbank facility at this location is estimated to be in the range of \$400,000-\$1,000,000 (class 5 estimate), with riverbank stability being a major uncertainty. The form and layout of the facility would need to be carefully designed and vetted to ensure that the solution was acceptable to the Community Centre and the various community stakeholders.

Aubrey Green at 1020 Palmerston Avenue

Aubrey Green serves as the location of the Midtown Feedermain which crosses the Assiniboine River along a dedicated bridge structure. It is also the location of several major outfalls with gate chambers, lift stations and accessory structures taking up much of the upland area that also limit sightlines to the riverbank area. The high bank height and other limitations imposed by existing infrastructure mean that this is not a suitable site to provide a public riverbank access point that would be inclusively accessible.

William Marshall Park at the Dominion Street Right-of-Way

William Marshall Park within the Dominion Street right-of-way is situated along an outside bend of the Assiniboine River and is a popular location for area residents who want to be able to get close to the river. There is a wooden staircase along the west edge of the property that brings people to an approximately 45 metre (~150 foot) long grassed mid-bank area. While there is more space than at Canora Green or Arlington Green (for example), constructing a universally accessible structure would be complex, expensive, and would take up much of the available space at this site. Slope instabilities have been documented in the vicinity in the past, and they are considered to be an ongoing risk that would need to be considered, and possibly addressed with stabilization measures.

Based on the above, and the fact that there may be better, more cost-effective and functional options within the vicinity, William Marshall Park would not be prioritized for a riverbank access location.

1254-1256 Wolseley Avenue (at Clifton Street)

1254-1256 Wolseley Avenue is situated at the southern terminus of Clifton Street. This property contains a pump station, gate chambers and several outfalls within its 15.5 metre (~ 51 foot)

width. The only way to reach the river is along a meandering alignment around the various structures, with no visibility to the street. As such, this is not considered a viable location for a public riverbank access.

Greenwood Park at 1270 Wolseley Avenue

Greenwood Park is a 38 metre (~125 foot) wide park situated between Telfer Street and Clifton Street. It currently has a short path, a few benches, as well as an open greenspace at the top of the bank. At approximately 7 metres (~23 feet) in height, the riverbank is not quite as high as at some other locations, though constructing an access point at this location would still involve extensive impacts to the riparian forest and the open greenspace.

Stability conditions at this location are uncertain, and major stability improvements may be required in order to ensure that the integrity of the river's edge landing and associated ramps and retaining walls are not structurally at risk.

While Greenwood Park presents a better opportunity than Canora Green, Arlington Green or William Marshall Park, it is still not considered suitable, particularly in light of there being more favourable options.

Omand Park at 1430 Portage Avenue

There are several locations within the approximately 14.7 acre Omand Park that may accommodate a river access, in particular immediately upstream and downstream of the confluence of Omand's Creek with the Assiniboine River. At both of these locations, an access route could be constructed with minimal impact to mature riparian forest. From the Omand's Creek pedestrian bridge, the grade change to the edge of the river is less than 3 metres (~10 feet), and as such the length of the path required to provide an accessible connection to the water's edge would be less than 60 metres (~200 feet) which is considered viable within the available space, though it may still require retaining walls, other landscaping features, and will likely impact some existing trees.

The Omand Park site is unique amongst the sites considered as it is served by a dedicated active transportation path that connects to a network extending north, south and west of this location. While the path connections to the Omand's Creek bridge were constructed prior to the adoption of current Accessibility Design Standards, the average grades along the path to the west are close to the current design standards, and upgrades to the path could be undertaken to satisfy the standards with moderate landscape impacts.

Of the eight sites, this park is the largest, it is the only one that has pedestrian and cycling through traffic, and it has the greatest visibility from the street to the river and through the whole area. This is a potential deterrent to unwanted activity and possibly a benefit with respect to public safety.

Riverbank stabilization measures are not likely required at this location, though engineering input will still be required to design the various structures and grading works. Heavy siltation is known to occur at this location after major floods. How that might impact a proposed riverbank access point is uncertain, and to some degree will be a function of the design. However, occasional removal of silt may be required.

The cost to construct a universally accessible riverbank facility at this location is estimated to be in the range of \$300,000-\$600,000 (class 5 estimate) subject to stakeholder input and final design.

While outside the present study area, the connectivity with Sir John Franklin Park located on the south bank of the Assiniboine River should be considered as an opportunity, as there may be one riverbank access location that effectively serves populations on both the north and south sides of the river via the CP rail/pedestrian bridge.

Should a riverbank access project be proposed at the Omand Park location, consideration should be given to expanding the scope to include the removal of the two rockfill piles situated in the channel of the river. These are believed to be relics of the former railway bridge crossing.

Other Considerations

As stated in *OurWinnipeg* (Section 02-2) the City wants to promote the usage and appreciation of our waterway resources. However, there are a number of considerations in accommodating those opportunities.

A canoe and kayak dock including a launch structure could either be permanent or include both permanent and removable components. Permanent structures have the benefit of reduced operating expenses but tend to be costlier to construct with some additional functional limitations. The permanent components of a dock structure must be designed to withstand flooding, erosive forces, earth pressures and ice and debris impacts. As such, they are typically robust concrete or steel structures supported on deep foundations, and much more expensive relative to removable floating docks.

The Assiniboine River is appreciated by paddlers, especially those embarking on a one-way trip towards downtown. However, fast currents make upstream paddling slow, and a challenge for novice paddlers who may struggle with an upstream return trip. The actual demand for a canoe/kayak launch and docking is uncertain, and a facility might be utilized more if situated along a bus route to accommodate return trips. In this regard, Omand Park is situated relatively close to Portage Avenue which has frequent bus service to downtown.

Motorboats, including the water taxi, cannot reach this portion of the Assiniboine River due to the shallow water and, therefore, would not need to be accommodated.

While access to the river in both summer and winter for recreation and transportation is not prohibited, the City advises individuals against going onto river ice without undertaking investigations to confirm that the ice conditions are safe. Ice conditions on the Assiniboine River, especially upstream of the Sherbrook/Maryland bridges is known to be unreliable. There are several reasons for this, including:

- There are numerous outfalls along the Assiniboine River, and many of them discharge at, or above, the winter ice level. These outfalls can discharge warmer, saline water which will degrade the ice.
- Due to the channel gradient, flow velocities are relatively high (compared to the Red River for example) which means that ice is slower to form and/or may not form to be thick enough to safely support recreational use or maintenance equipment.

- The meandering alignment and variable depths and widths of the Assiniboine River channel result in ice that forms at different rates and with inconsistent thickness depending on flow characteristics of the river at a specific location.
- Flows in the Assiniboine River can fluctuate significantly over the winter for several reasons, including controlled releases from the Shellmouth Reservoir. Increased flow rates can lift the ice and erode previously-sound ice.

The City does not have the operational programs to undertake activities such as regularly monitoring ice conditions, providing signage, and barricading unsafe areas of the Assiniboine River ice surface that would be required to mitigate safety risks. As such, the river access points would not be intended to accommodate access to the ice within the context of current resources.

The design phase for any of these project locations would require input from various professionals possibly including geotechnical engineers, hydrotechnical engineers, landscape architects and possibly public engagement specialists. In particular, the specific riverbank stability conditions have not been considered at this stage, and future investigations at a selected site may identify the need for erosion protection and/or riverbank stabilization improvements to ensure the long-term performance of the selected design.

No external stakeholder engagement has been undertaken and feedback from area residents, adjacent property owners, and other stakeholder groups should be considered when making final site selection and design decisions. The scope and general findings of this study have been discussed with the Ward Councillor, including that the provision of formal winter access is not advised for the reasons provided in this report.

While outside the scope of this report, when considering supplemental riverbank access points, locations should be considered on a regional basis with the objective of addressing large gaps between access points. Priority should be given to projects that support universal access, minimize impact to natural areas, and that can be implemented without requiring major riverbank stability improvements.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial Impact Statement

Date: February 25, 2022

Project Name:

**Public River Access to the Assiniboine River along Wolseley Avenue
or Palmerston Avenue, between Canora Street and Omand Park**

COMMENTS:

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Mike McGinn Feb. 25, 2022

Mike McGinn, CPA, CA
Manager of Finance

CONSULTATION

This Report has been prepared in consultation with:

- Public Works Department
- Water and Waste Department

OURWINNIPEG POLICY ALIGNMENT

OurWinnipeg

- Section 01-1b: Create a transportation system that supports active, accessible and healthy lifestyle options
- Section 02-2: Promote the use of rivers and riverbanks

Complete Communities:

- Section 04 Direction 1
 - Promote a quality public realm with a high level of accessibility to community services and amenities and opportunities for gathering and social interaction
- Section 07 Direction 1
 - Shape and support city and neighbourhood character by creating dynamic parks that attract residents and meet a diverse range of community needs.
 - To best serve the population, parks must be accessible, available and inclusive, implementing the principles of Universal Design, affordability and physical proximity.
 - Match communities' active and passive needs with appropriate park opportunities.
- Section 07 Direction 3
 - Protect and enhance public access to our riverbanks and forest environments and expand ecological networks and linkages.

A Sustainable Winnipeg:

- Section 09 Direction 2: Recognize and preserve Winnipeg's parks, green spaces and riverbanks as green oases in our urban setting
 - Develop a city-wide natural network connecting neighbourhoods, communities and the river system, providing ecological, recreational and transport benefits.
- Section 09 Direction 7: Promote the use of rivers and riverbanks
 - Facilitate public access to rivers and riverbank lands
 - Encourage the use of Winnipeg rivers for transportation and recreation through the provision of boat launches, docks and other accessibility improvements
- Section 09 Direction 8: Support Waterway Management
 - Protect and prolong river access and recreation opportunities during the ice-free season.

WINNIPEG CLIMATE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT

N/A

WINNIPEG POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY ALIGNMENT

N/A

SUBMITTED BY

Department: Planning, Property and Development
Division: Urban Planning and Design
Prepared by: Kendall Thiessen P.Eng. – Riverbank Management Engineer
Date: March 3, 2022
File #: UD2022-002