

Emerald Crescent

The Emerald Crescent is Edmonton’s new backyard: a place to breathe, connect and explore.

“The Emerald Crescent will be Edmonton’s newest and best connected parks and open space system. A natural gem in the Decoteau neighbourhood where water, wildlife and people will flow seamlessly across the rolling terrain - a park network worth discovering.”

The City of Edmonton is prioritizing its parks and open space strategy as the foundation for the development of the new Decoteau community. The local open space network has been named **the Emerald Crescent** and forms a 10 km connected stretch of parks, wetlands and natural areas that will connect the five new neighbourhoods that have been proposed within the Decoteau Area in Southeast Edmonton.

The City of Edmonton has partnered with a team of eight Master of Planning students through Ryerson University’s School of Urban and Regional Planning graduate studio (Studio Team) to develop a vision, guiding principles, and three mutually complementary scenarios that will inform the future planning and design of the Emerald Crescent in the Decoteau Area.

Identifying and conserving the ecological network before development presents an opportunity for the City of Edmonton to apply the *Breathe Strategy* at a neighbourhood scale.

The Studio Team identified six guiding principles that will offer important design considerations and guide the focus of the three scenarios that all incorporate the design principles but in different ways.

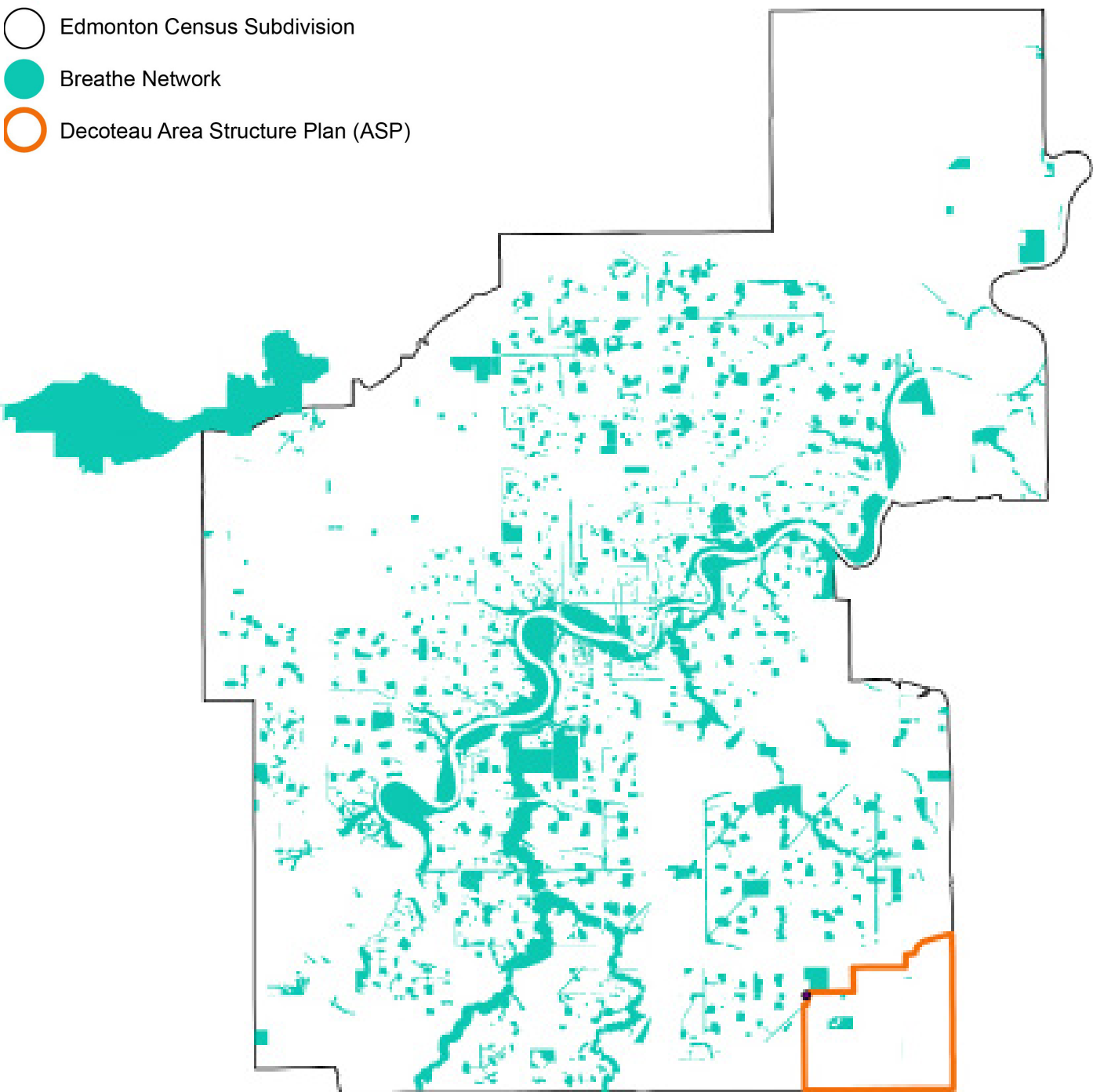


Wetlands in the Decoteau Area.

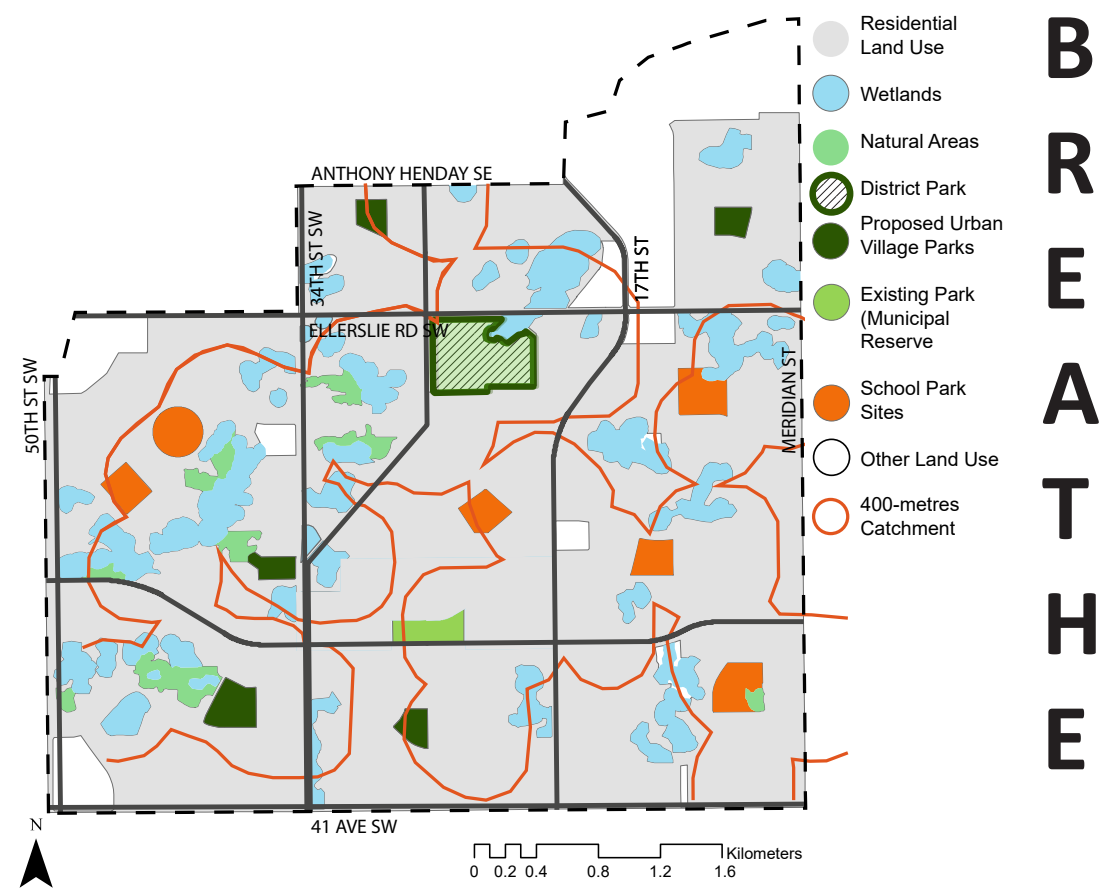


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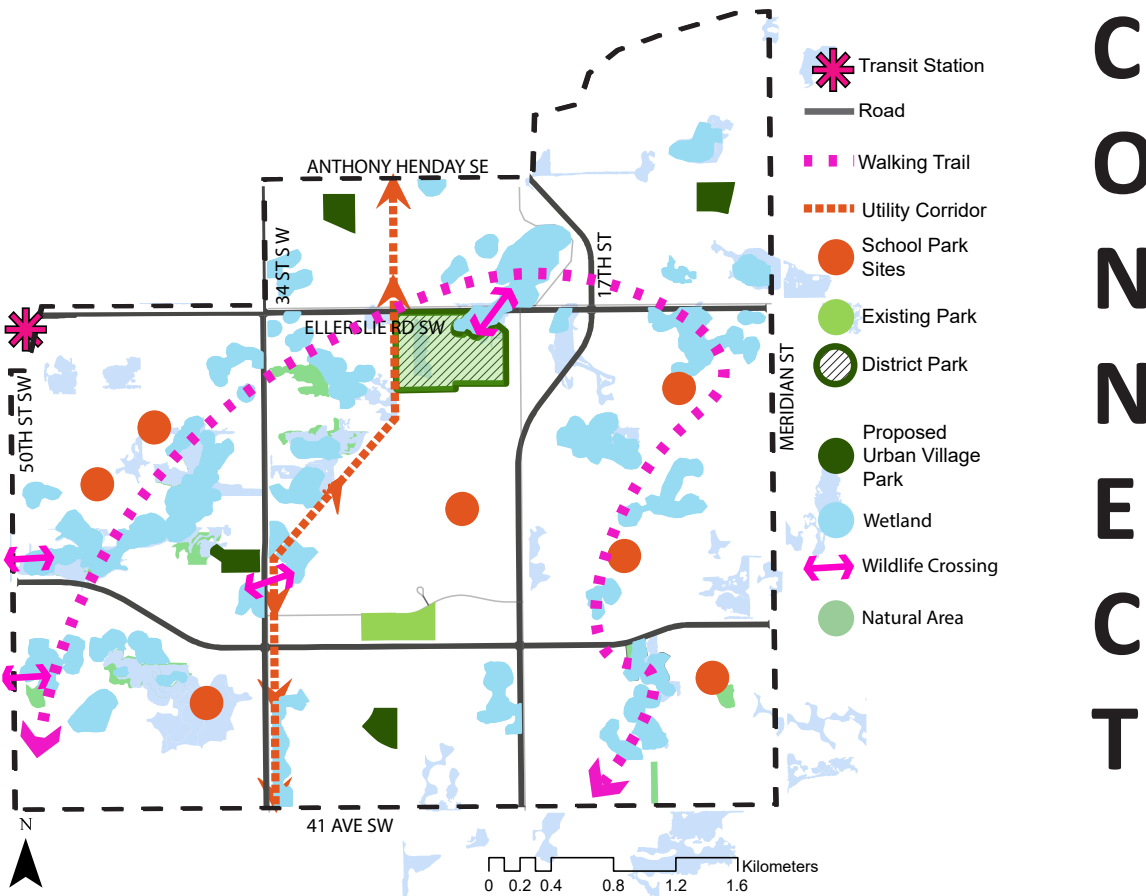
Emerald Crescent in Relation to Edmonton



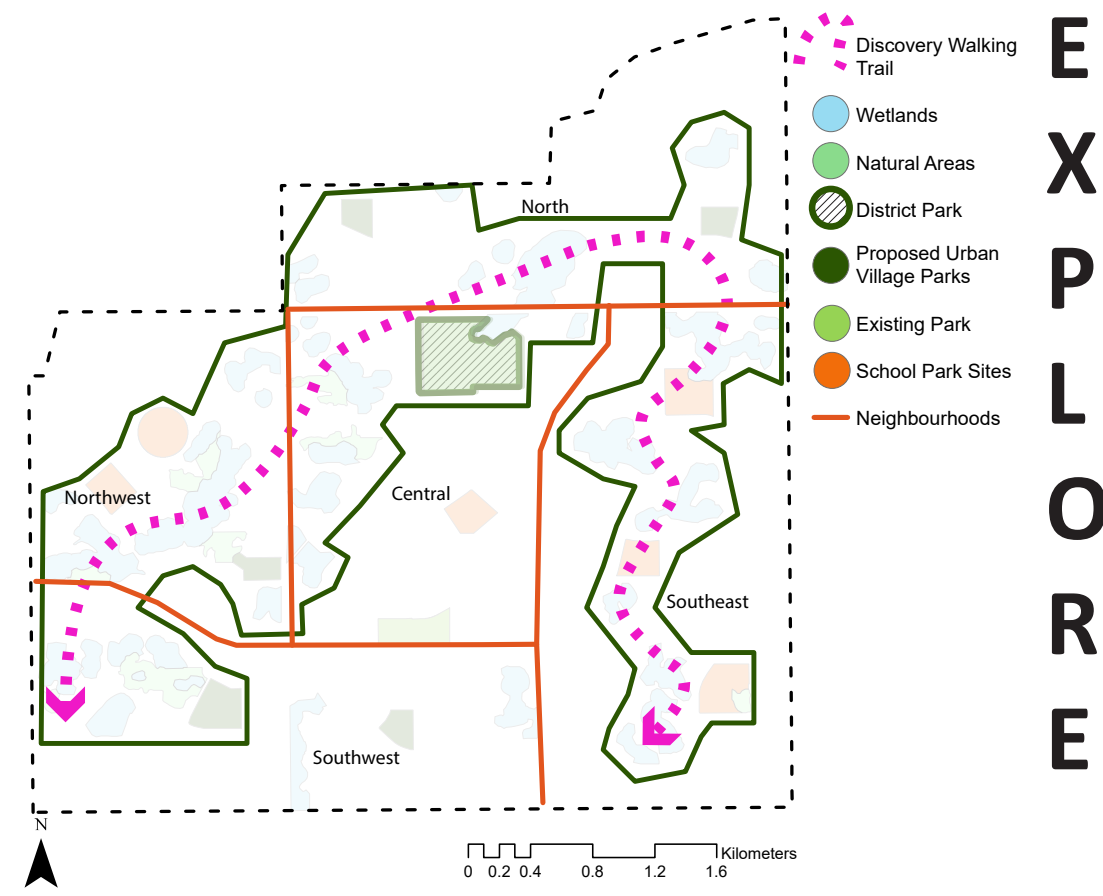
Current park and open space network of the *Breathe Strategy*. The Decoteau Area is 1,960 ha including many significant environmental features not yet included in the Breathe Strategy. The community will continue to grow from a population of 280 today to 75,000 over the next 30 years, highlighting the need for planning the parks and open space network now.



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Design with Nature focuses on inspiring innovative development techniques that enhance the unique natural environment



Flow focuses on planning interventions that are predicated on seamless movement across the Emerald Crescent



Destination focuses on designing key nodes for celebration, wellness, and natural spaces



Discover supports actions that will instill a sense of place that sparks excitement and pride for residents and visitors alike



Adapt integrates flexibility into design to ensure the Emerald Crescent responds to the dynamic changes in the environment



Inclusivity promotes design opportunities to create an inviting and accessible park system



Place to Breathe

Nature at your doorstep: for people to celebrate and embrace their natural landscape.

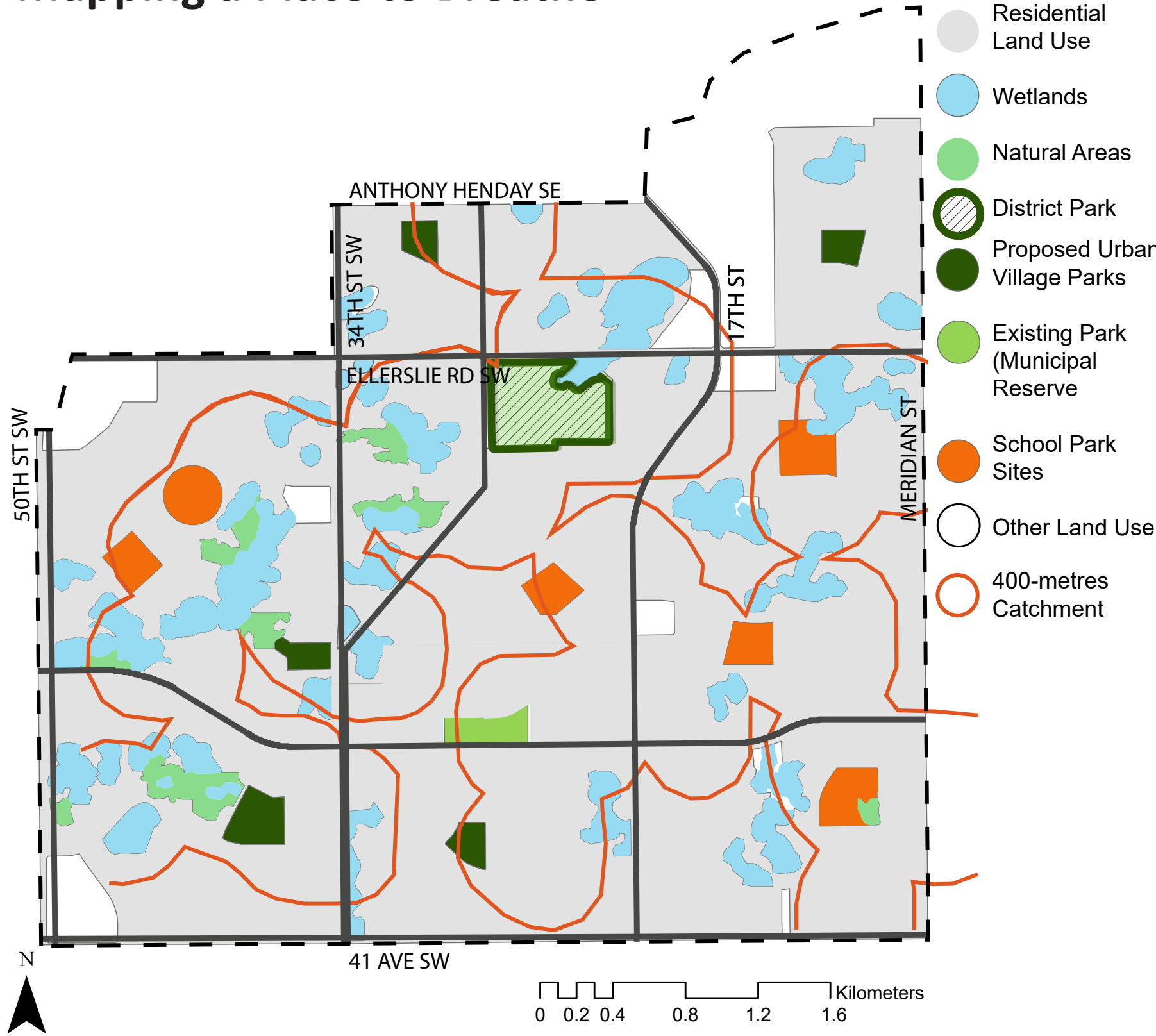


Mapping a Place to Breathe

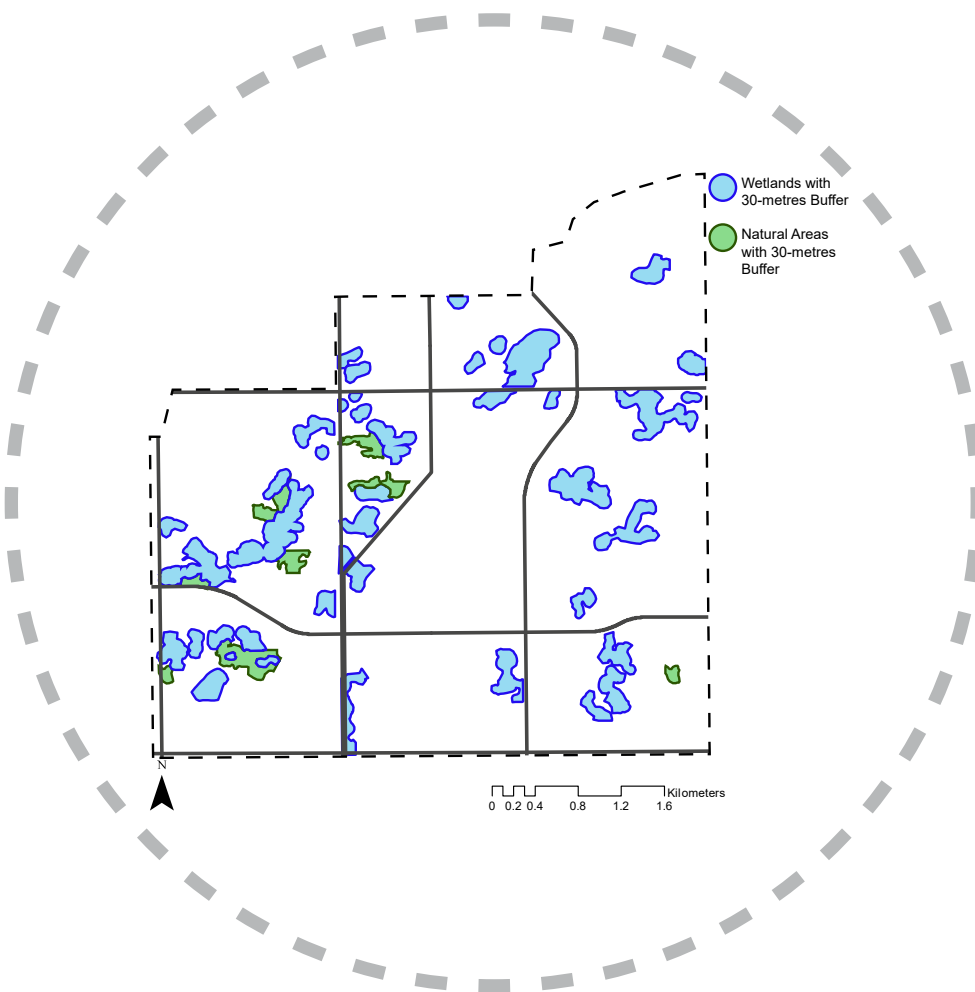
“Decoteau will be a community where everyone has nature at their doorstep. An area in Edmonton for people to celebrate and embrace the unique, natural landscape.”

A Place to Breathe focuses on the two main guiding principles of **Design with Nature** and **Destination**. This scenario is all about designing new communities with the natural environment as the starting point and foundation to build development around and in consideration of important ecological features. These features should be protected, and ecological function should be maintained and enhanced through incoming development.

The following highlights three parameters that will help to translate the vision and guiding principles from conceptual ideas into action.



Buffers



Edmonton’s Environmental Reserve Guidelines places a minimum 30 ms buffer from the wetlands edge for the purpose of pollution prevention. This restriction on development helps to maintain the ecological health of these sensitive habitats and the wildlife that depends on them.

Iconic Spaces



Children’s Playground, Malmö, Sweden

Within the Emerald Crescent, the City of Edmonton has identified a District Activity Park within the Central Neighbourhood Unit. This site is intended to be a key celebration node for residents of the new Decoteau Area as well as draw in visitors from across Edmonton.

Nature Close to Home



One important element acknowledged within the Breathe Technical Analysis is the value of having a park or open space within an approximately 15-minutes walk, or 400 ms. The Decoteau Area should embrace this principle and ensure that 100% of residents have easy access to nature.

Environmental Reserves and Buffers



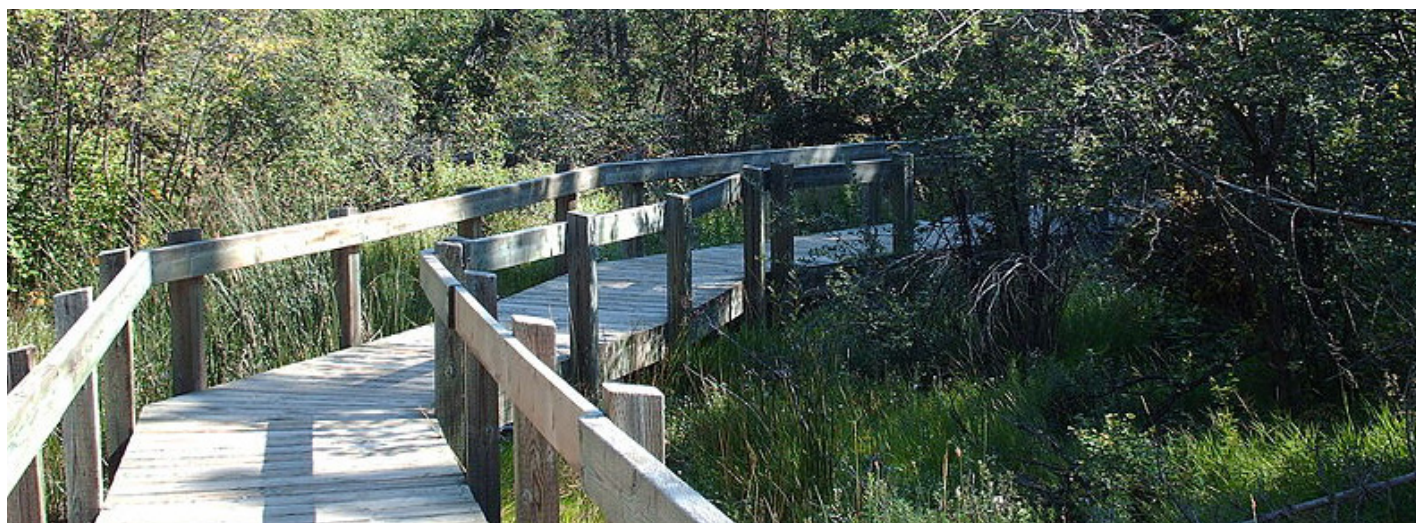
Ensuring **Low Impact Development** methods are used in the building, design and siting of new communities within the Decoteau Area will help maintain natural water movement and embrace natural systems that are present within the area.



Encouraging the usage of parks space in the winter time is engrained in Edmonton’s **Winter Design Guidelines** which state that “public spaces support outdoor winter programming, recreation and everyday winter life”. Public art provides cultural, social and economic value to public spaces.



The benefits of having access to nature are well documented, and can have positive impacts on mental health and well-being. By having **access to natural areas and green environments**, people have demonstrated the development of stronger neighbourhood and social ties, which will be important elements of building a new community within Decoteau.



Trail development, boardwalks, and signage can guide users along established trails and help redirect passive human activity from sensitive areas. The successful use of boardwalks in wetland habitats has been demonstrated at Evergreen Brickworks in Toronto’s Don River Valley.



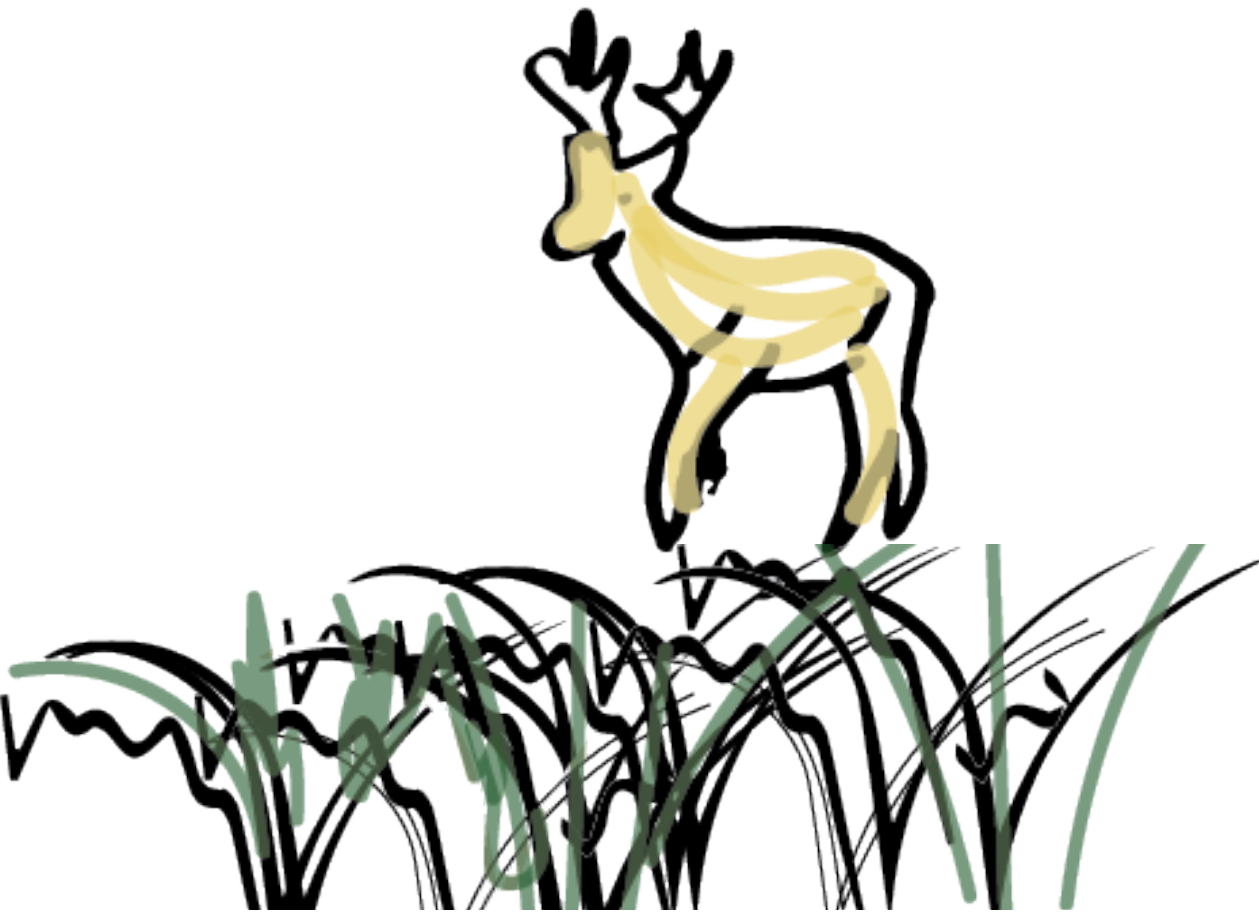
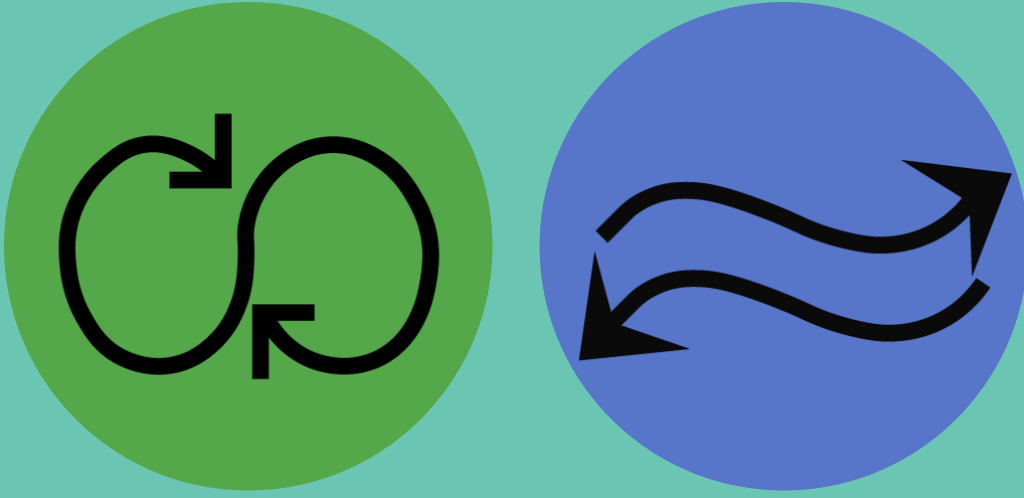
Across the Emerald Crescent network, both programmed and unprogrammed spaces should be considered. This will allow for the design of **Community Hubs** and the ability for neighbourhood groups and Community Leagues to create their own special spaces.



Having access to green or natural areas offer residents a variety of different experiences and programming activities. Respondents from an Insight Survey conducted on the area felt strongly about having access to nature within a **10-minutes walk** from their home for reading a book or visiting their local community garden.

Place to Connect

Weaving it together: a seamless integrated network for animals, people, and water to move freely.

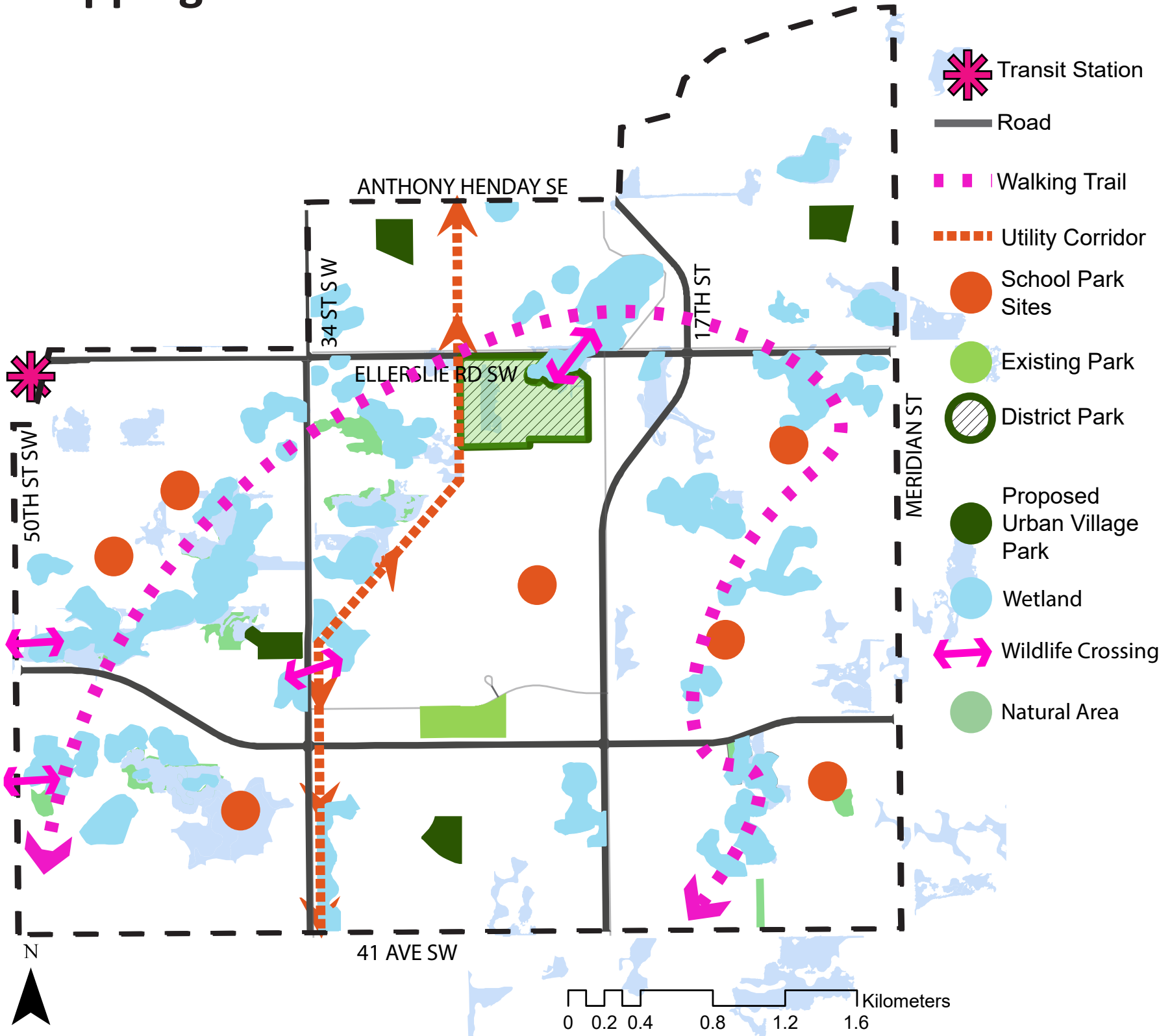


Mapping a Place to Connect

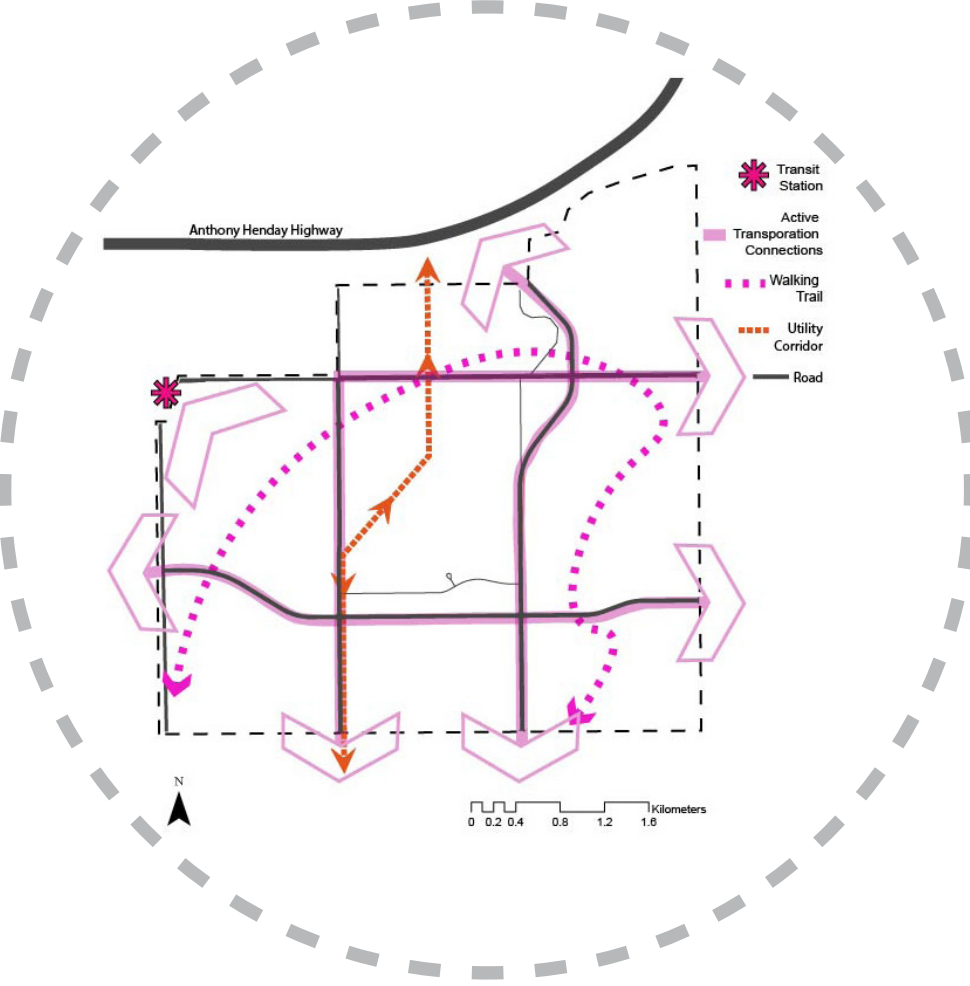
“The Emerald Crescent is envisioned as a seamlessly integrated network that allows for easy movement and connections for people, wildlife and water within the Emerald Crescent and beyond.”

This scenario embodies **Flow** and **Adapt** as the two main guiding principles. These principles showcase the Emerald Crescent as a catalyst in creating a connected, integrated, and multi-functional landscape for people, wildlife and water. Even though Decoteau is an area with formal boundaries, people, wildlife, and water are not confined to them. This scenario emphasizes the importance of flow, movement and multi-functionality in order to allow for flexibility and resiliency to changes over time.

The following highlights three parameters that will help to translate the vision and guiding principles from conceptual ideas into action.



Human Connections



The Decoteau community should be designed to allow for the safe and efficient movement of people both inside and outside the boundaries of the Area Structure Plan. Active modes of transportation for both commuting and recreational purposes should be emphasized.

Encouraging Active Transportation



The existing **utility corridor** provides a significant north-south connection in the Decoteau community. There are numerous opportunities associated with this piece of infrastructure. By activating the utility corridor in an intentional way, it can become a major connector in the heart of the community.

Multi-Functional Spaces



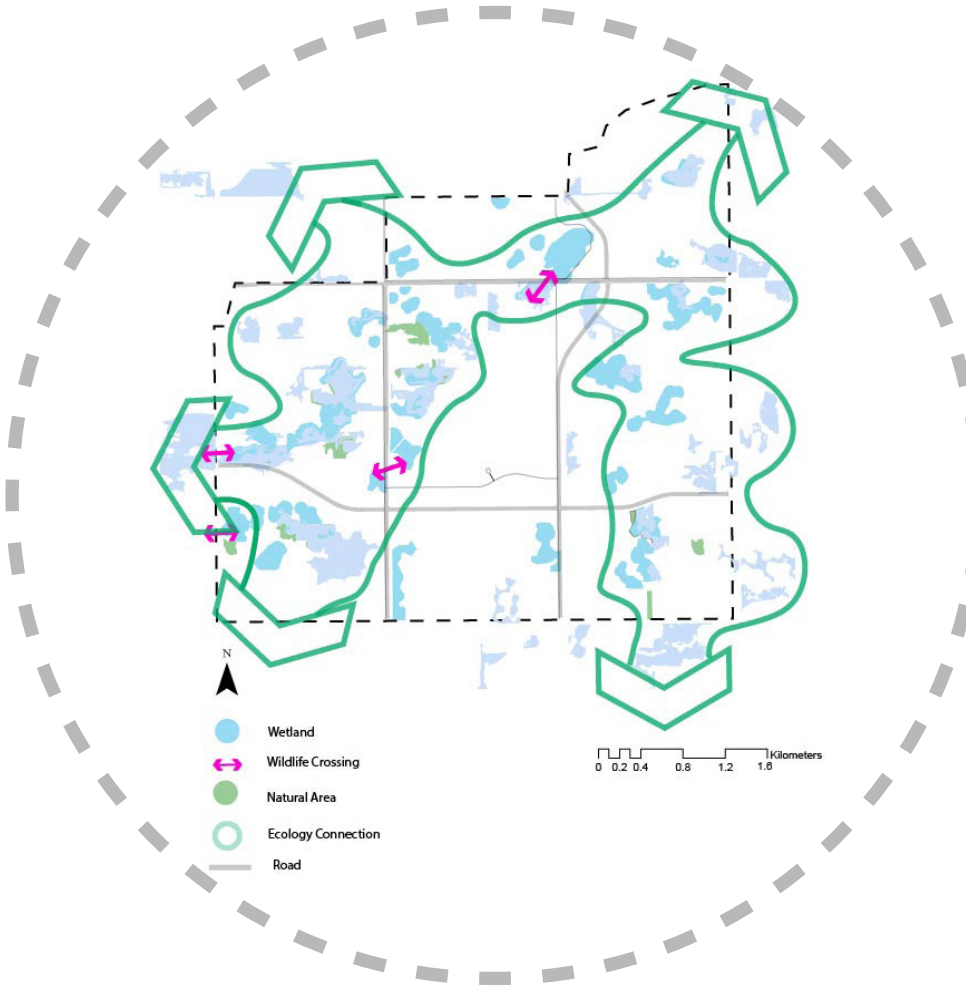
It will be important for the parks and open space system to become a community asset, both for recreation and ecology, as well as green infrastructure. These spaces can be designed in a multi-functional way that will enable opportunities for connection and celebration, but also accommodate elements of living green infrastructure (e.g. storm water retention).

Roper Pond Constructed Wetland, Edmonton



School sites were identified as keys areas that could serve many different functions. Schools should be designed to serve both an academic and ecological function. A unique opportunity exists to **collaborate with the schools** to proactively plan for a multi-functional design.

Wildlife Connections



Growth and development in the Decoteau community should occur in tandem with the preservation of the ecological network. It is therefore imperative that planning and design interventions for the Emerald Crescent consider both the flow of wildlife and hydrology through the landscape.

Movement of Wildlife



Edmonton's Wildlife Passage Engineering Design Guidelines emphasize the need for **wildlife connectivity**. These should be highlighted in order to accommodate wildlife. There are various scales of wildlife crossings that could help to maintain habitat connectivity, including culverts, over and underpasses and simple interventions like curb cuts.



The presence of the planned transit hub at the corner of 50th St SW and Ellerslie Rd presents an opportunity to encourage residents to use **active transportation** as part of their daily commute to work. The provision of amenities, such as bike lockers, will help to make the prospect of cycling at the first and last leg of their commute more appealing.



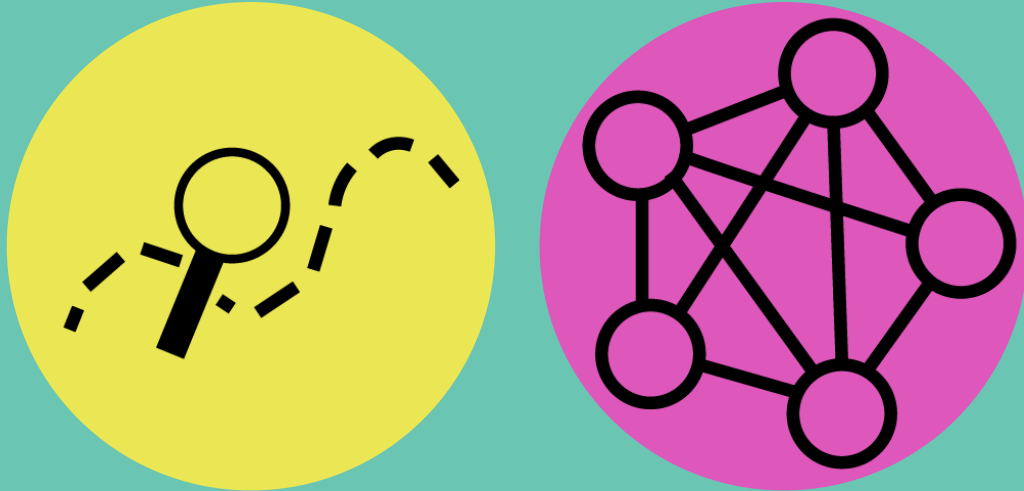
The utility corridor offers an opportunity for both human connections and other functions, such as a **community garden**, that could be used for local food production. This is aligned with the policy goals mentioned in the City Wide Food and Agriculture Strategy.



Development must occur in a way that does not disrupt the natural flow of surface water which feeds the wetlands. **Bioswale planters, and medians** help to reduce the volume of stormwater runoff, promote pollutant uptake through soil and vegetation, and increase groundwater recharge.

Place to Explore

Getting to know your landscape: stay curious and engage with the landscape all year long.

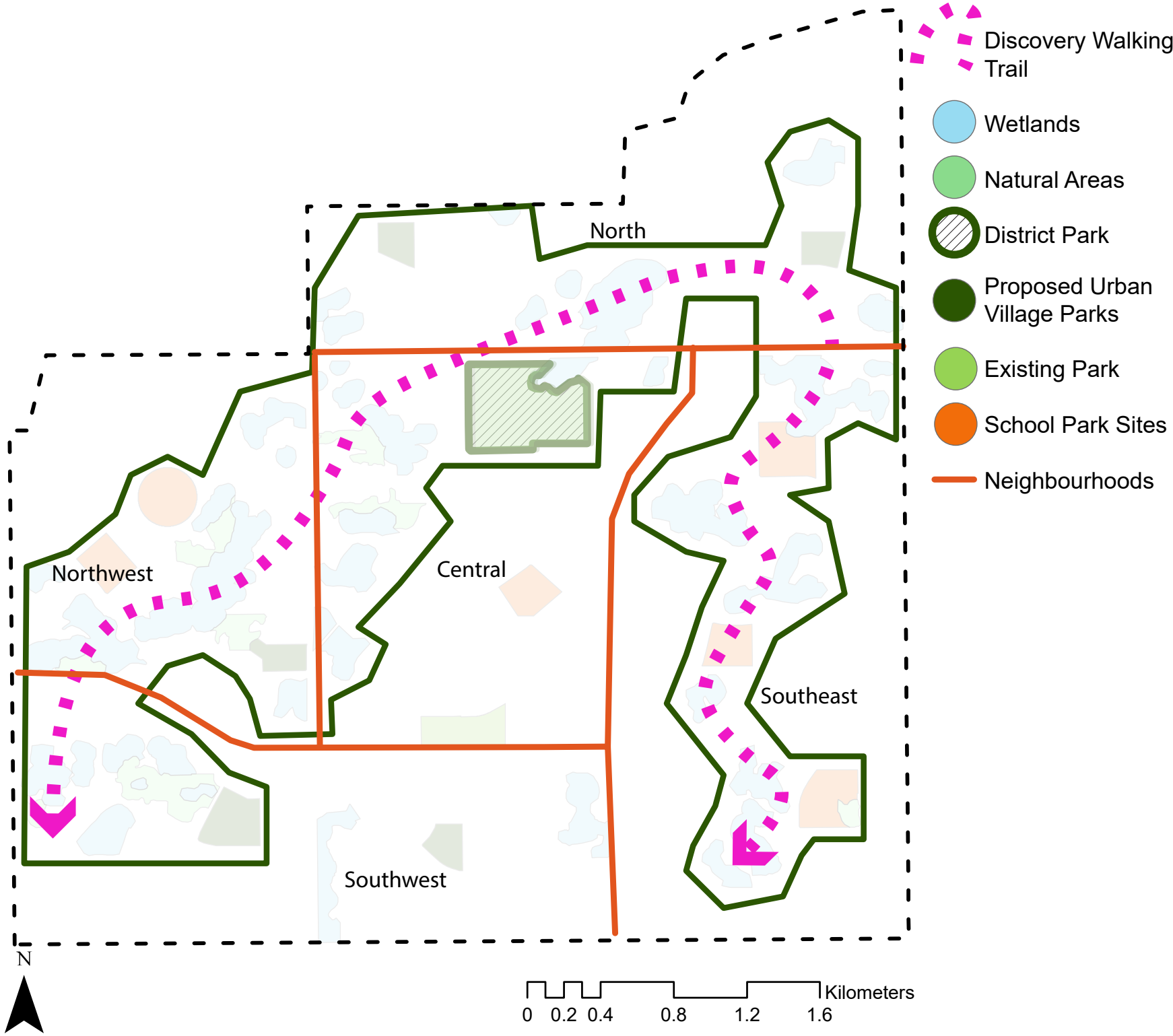


Mapping a Place to Explore

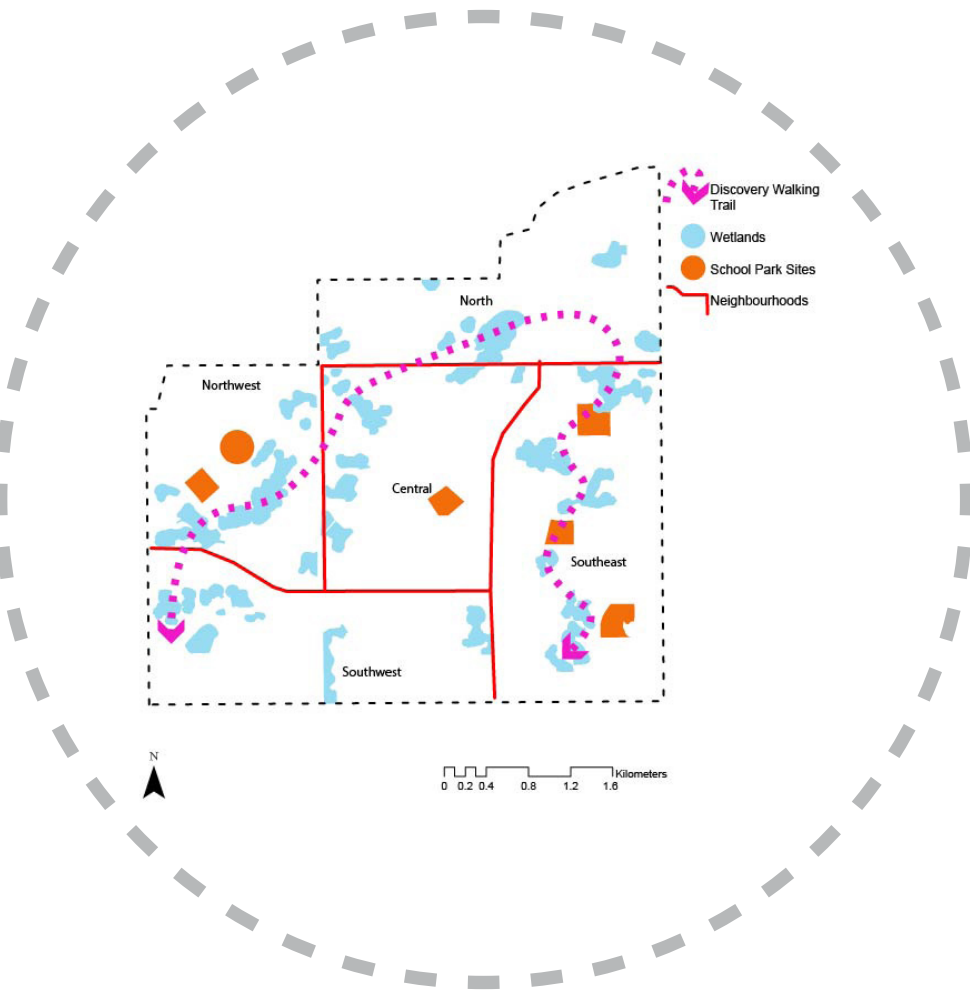
“The Emerald Crescent will be a place that offers multiple opportunities for staying curious, exploring, and engaging with your landscape - all year long.”

This scenario emphasizes **Inclusivity** and **Discover** as the main guiding principles. It is predicated on the idea that providing people with opportunities to explore their landscape will foster an appreciation of the intrinsic value of these spaces. These spaces therefore need to include thoughtful design interventions that **balance ecological preservation objectives with the ability to interact with the natural environment**. By allowing people to engage with the Emerald Crescent, they will be more likely to advocate for the protection of environmentally sensitive areas, thus becoming stewards of their community.

The following highlights the three parameters that will help to translate the vision and guiding principles from conceptual ideas into action.



Nature as Your Playground



The planned school sites are in close proximity to significant ecological features, such as wetlands. This presents an exciting opportunity to encourage experiential learning. Providing access to natural elements, such as wetlands and plant life, will help evoke creativity and imagination in school children.

Discovery Walking Trail



The Humber Arboretum School Program in Toronto, Ontario is a notable precedent that offers a **“hands-on, environmental education”**. Through this program, kids are educated in the areas of recycling, ecological stewardship, and environmental monitoring.



Similarly, in the Evergreen Brickworks Children’s Garden, children are encouraged to participate in unstructured, loose parts play, with natural elements. This allows for **child-directed creativity** and healthy risk-taking in play.

Getting to Know Your Neighbourhood



The presence of a significant trail network will help to make the Emerald Crescent a legible, indexed landscape that can be easily navigated by residents and visitors. Inspiration for the creation of this trail can be drawn from the Bruce Trail and the Don Valley Arts Trail.

Bruce Trail, Ontario

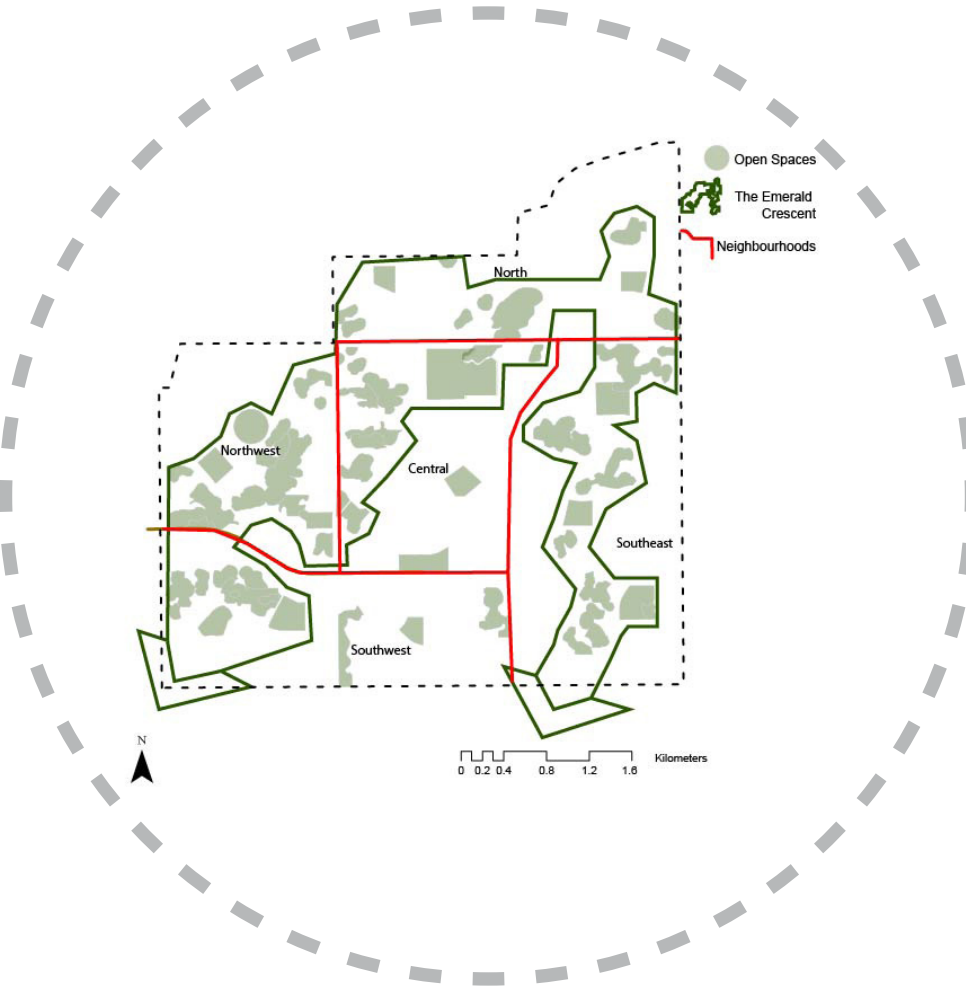


The Bruce Trail in Ontario connects over 400 kms of parks and open spaces for hikers to enjoy across a regional scale. It is Canada’s longest and oldest footpath. This **trail system** is an important act of stewardship for the communities it intersects. There are over 1,500 volunteers who help care for, steward, and protect a section of the Bruce Trail.



Incorporating both **iconic art and beautiful trails**, the Don Valley Arts Trail in Toronto is a curated series of temporary public artworks taking place along the Don River. Artists are invited to create site-specific projects that speak to the many histories and present-day realities of the Don Valley and its surrounding communities.

Cohesive Community Identity



Decoteau will encompass five neighborhoods, and the network of parks and open spaces that make up Emerald Crescent will play a significant role in creating a cohesive community identity. The Emerald Crescent runs through all of the proposed neighbourhoods and will be a shared connected park system for all residents to enjoy.

Emerald Crescent Network



The Toronto ravines offer a significant example of how a connected natural system can foster a sense of **inclusion and shared identity**. Furthermore, dedicated community events, such as the Ice Castle Festival in Edmonton, provide opportunities for placemaking and community building.



Edmonton’s *Winter Design Guidelines* understand that winter is a core part of Edmonton’s identity. In order to realize the full return on our investments, development and public infrastructure **projects should work year-round**, not just for summer conditions. Ottawa celebrates its winter season by putting on events to engage the community.