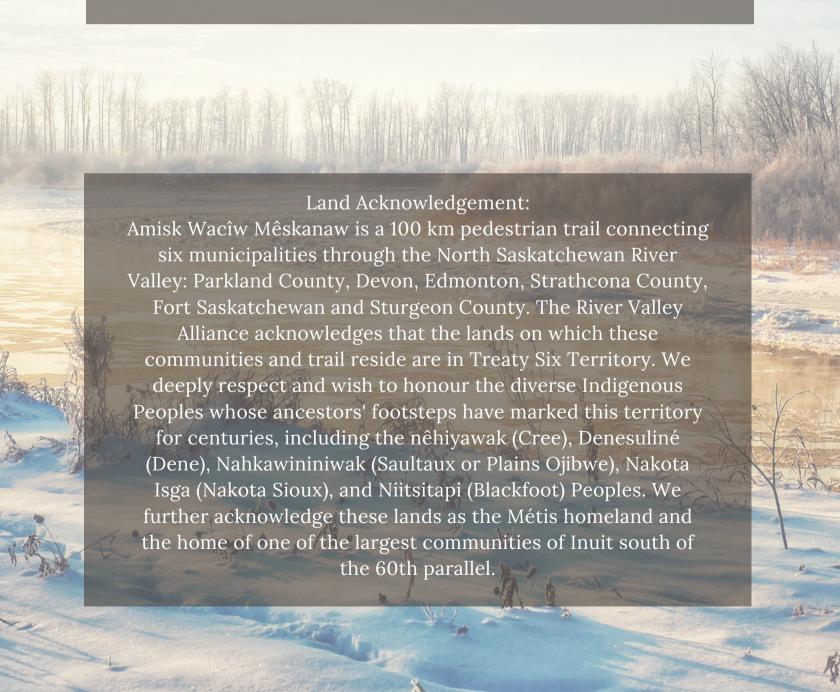


Design and layout by Makennah Walker

Additional photos were taken by Kyle Schole, Harmony Wolgemuth, Katharine Weinmann, Talana Hargreaves, UnCloked Photography, Mark Gibbons, Dallas Curow, and Marie Lafreniere.









"In every Walk With nature one receives far more than he seeks." - John Muir



## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

The Final Mile. The Last Gap. The End.

Whatever you call it, the River Valley Alliance (RVA) is in the home stretch of building an historic, multi-generational, multi-million project that will become North America's longest river valley trail.

The good news: we are 75 percent done.

The bad news: the last 25 percent is proving to be the hardest stretch to build.

As I finish up my Chair role and tenure on the RVA board this spring, my urgent call to action to the remaining board and anyone who has ever cared about this project or the river valley: get it done!

Most of the heavy lifting has already been completed, including several pedestrian bridge projects and reclaiming the trail's original Cree name, Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw Trail (Beaver Hill Road), earlier this year. It's now going to take laser-focused political will and leadership, money (both public and private) and ambitious land negotiations to help this project finally cross the finish line and connect Devon in the west to Fort Saskatchewan in the east.

Thanks to our six municipal partners, the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada, for already investing so much time and money into connecting the capital region's communities, which call the shores of the mighty and meandering North Saskatchewan River home.

Thanks also to the RVA Staff, the Board of Directors and our numerous volunteer committees, including the Community Engagement Committee, for their commitment and tireless work on completing the trail.

And lastly, thanks to you, our fellow neighbours and community members, who love Beaver Hill Road and use it year-round. It's what connects us, in good times and bad, on that warm June night, or on a -40 January morning. It's always there for us. Let's be there for it and future generations.

KATHERINE O'NEILL, RVA BOARD CHAIR

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2023, the River Valley Alliance achieved a significant milestone. The longest river valley pedestrian trail in North America now has a rediscovered name! The name is Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw (ahmskwahCHEE oh MESS-kah-now) or Beaver Hill Road. Elder Jerry Saddleback generously shared this name and its origin in Ceremony. Throughout the two-year process of naming the trail, we had conversations with many Elders and Knowledge Keepers. These conversations made it evident that names are incredibly important from all Indigenous perspectives. They are not just a label; they inspire individual and collective identities, histories and futures. They recognize relationships, values and ways of moving through the world. They demonstrate an understanding and respect for what and who is connected to a name. During the process, it was understood that several names may be used to refer to this trail. This name was chosen to respect and honour this place's past, present and future by acknowledging and reflecting upon it as home to Indigenous people since time immemorial.

The trail name, Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw, is in nêhiyawêwin, the Cree language. For many Indigenous peoples, language is a means of communication and a connection to the land. Speaking a language Indigenous to the place where you are located is like singing the song of the world. It helps Indigenous and non-Indigenous people connect profoundly to each other and the land they call home. It can also challenge the erasure of Indigenous peoples and root us all to an older and larger story, inspiring awe, belonging, and purpose.

Next time you're outside enjoying the trail, take a moment to reflect on the trail name. Engage with it; practice speaking it out loud. We learned that sincerity and effort in speaking words in an Indigenous language can be seen as a sign of respect—regardless of their accurate pronunciation—and is warmly appreciated by many Indigenous people. Referring to this trail as Beaver Hill Road is also acceptable and encouraged until you have practiced the nêhiyawêwin pronunciation to your comfort level. By engaging with the trail's name, you show respect and appreciation for the Indigenous culture and history it represents.

In 2024, interpretive signs and a wayfinding symbol will be added to the trail within the RVA's six shareholder municipalities. We offer our sincere appreciation to Elder Saddleback and all Elders and Knowledge Keepers who so generously informed the process. Thank you to Dene-Métis artist and author Matthew Weigel for creating the wayfinding symbol. Thank you to the RVA's Trail Naming Committee, Jacqueline and Hunter Cardinal of Naheyawin, for their invaluable guidance and Fuse Consulting for working with us to create interpretive signs that honour and speak to the Indigenous trail name. Thank you to the RVA Shareholders, Board and Committee members and the provincial and federal governments for your continued support as we work to complete this legacy project.

I look forward to seeing you soon on Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw!

KRISTINE ARCHIBALD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## PROJECTS SUMMARY

In 2023, connections blossomed with the culmination and commencement of various projects, alongside the revival of a unifying name, weaving together the intricate tapestry of history, community, and place.



#### Naming and marking of the end-to-end trail

In close collaboration with Naheyawin, the RVA sought input from diverse Indigenous voices to guide the trail naming work. This inclusive approach ensured a rich variety of perspectives, encompassing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ways of knowing and being. Through these enlightening conversations, we came to appreciate the profound significance of names within Indigenous cultures as they shape identities, relationships, values, and worldviews. The trail's chosen name, graciously gifted by Elder Jerry Saddleback, who also offered his continued guidance and advice to the RVA, is in nêhiyawêwin, the Cree language. This name invites everyone to "sing the song" of the river valley, nurturing a deeper sense of responsibility and belonging for all who traverse the trail.

### Amisk Wacîw Mêskanaw Trail (Beaver Hill Road Trail)

In 2024, an interpretive sign will be installed at a key location in each of the six municipalities. These signs will provide the trail name, wayfinding information and a QR code that links to additional historical facts and place-based storytelling. There will also be a wayfinding symbol, created by Dene - Métis artist Matthew Weigel, installed along the trail from end to end.

The RVA worked with Elder Saddleback and an Indigenous film company, Two Canoes Media, to bring the story of the trail to life.



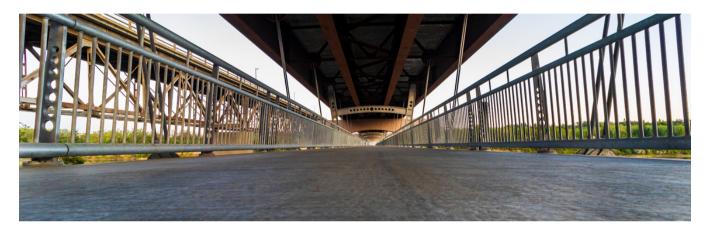




# PROJECTS SUMMARY CONTINUED

#### Construction Completed on the Highway 15 Pedestrian Bridge

Construction on the new "underslung" pedestrian bridge was completed in conjunction with the twinning of Highway 15, connecting Sturgeon County trails to those in the City of Fort Saskatchewan. Trail connections to the existing trail and the new bridge were completed in July, and the bridge was open to the public. This is a critical piece of infrastructure in achieving our regional connectivity goal from Devon to Fort Saskatchewan and into Sturgeon County.



### Construction on the Edmonton to Strathcona Pedestrian Bridge Began

Construction began in the summer of 2023, and the bridge is slated to be open to the public by the spring of 2026. This critical piece of infrastructure will bring complete connectivity from Sturgeon County/ Fort Saskatchewan all the way to the West Henday Anthony Bridge in Southwest Edmonton.



## WHAT'S AHEAD

The RVA's priority areas include completion of connectivity through trails and key infrastructure, trail marking, and public engagement through social media and our website. We also continue to work on advocating for funding for the Phase 2 Initiatives, which will connect the final 25 kms of trail in southwest Edmonton.



### Strategic plan

Our updated <u>Strategic Plan</u> sharpens the focus on the next steps needed to accomplish our vision. In addition to identifying strategic priorities for advancing our work (funding, land access, Phase 2 infrastructure), the updated plan reaffirmed the importance of connecting people to the river valley regardless of age, ability, or socioeconomic means. We also focussed on communicating trail etiquette and balancing use with preserving and protecting this amazing natural area.

#### Land acquisition

The RVA will continue to investigate land access in the southwest quadrant (Rabbit Hill Creek to West Anthony Henday Bridge) to fulfill the vision of a fully connected 100-km river valley trail. Work will continue to secure access through rights-of-way and easements along the top of the bank in areas designated as environmental reserve.

### Marking the trail with the new name

In the summer of 2024, an interpretive sign will be installed at a key location in each of the six municipalities. There will also be a wayfinding symbol, created by Dene - Métis artist Matthew Weigel, installed along the trail from end to end.

#### Government grants

The RVA will continue to engage with the Provincial and Federal Governments to advocate for collaborative funding of Phase 2 infrastructure that will result in the longest river valley pedestrian trail in North America,

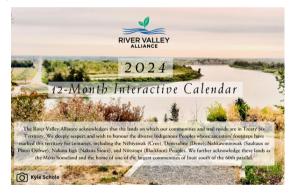
## CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY

#### 2023 was a Full Year of Events

2023 was a year full of in-person community events. The RVA and the Community Engagement Community hosted seven community walks, one bike tour, and our annual trail clean-up. We shared the RVA's history and what it takes to connect 100 km of trail with grade 4 and 5 classrooms at RiverHawks School. The RVA attended the Wellness on Wheels community event in Sturgeon County. The RVA was nominated for and received the Sustainable Edmonton Tourism Award. The Sustainable Tourism Award celebrates the exceptional efforts made by organizations prioritizing environmental preservation, conservation, and responsible practices within the tourism industry.

#### **Interactive Calendars**

The 2023 Calendar highlighted trails and walks within all six of our partner municipalities, including interactive QR codes. This year's calendar focused on showcasing the trail's new name.





### **RVA Merchandise Celebrating the New Name**

After finalizing the new trail name and symbol, the next step was incorporating them into promotional items to raise awareness and engagement of the rediscovered name.





#### Hosted trail walks

RVA staff and Community Engagement Committee members hosted seven trail walks in 2023 to highlight RVA projects. All of the walks were enthusiastically attended, with great feedback from attendees. During the June walk, we explored the trail from Prospectors Point to the new stairs, where we enjoyed a guided meditation led by CEC member Amanda Papadopolous.

Over the summer break, the RVA held an 8-week virtual contest to share the new name and encourage people to explore trails unfamiliar to them. Thanks to our scavenger hunt prize sponsors, Fortsask Runners, Florida Pizza, Devon IGA, Paddle Station, River Watch Alberta, Shift Happens, Square 1 Coffee, Trackntrail, United Sports, U of A Botanic Garden, 7 Summits Snacks, Snow Valley, Srathcocounty, Canoeheads, Fort Heritage Precinct.



#### Trail Trek How-To Blogs

An important component of the RVA's Strategic Plan is to support the respectful use of the trail system by providing tools and resources to make it easy to share and enjoy it. In that spirit, last year, the RVA added videos on social media to support the Trek the Trails How-To Blogs. The blogs are hosted on the organization's website (rivervalley.ab.ca/trekthetrails) and feature how-to routes of short and medium trail distances all set in these magical, natural surroundings - many of which highlight RVA projects and other interesting geographical landmarks within the six RVA shareholder municipalities. This continues to be the most popular of the online content produced and distributed by the RVA. Be sure to check it out!

# GOVERNANCE AND STAFF

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

#### Chair

Katherine O'Neill

#### **Municipal Directors**

Councillor Ben Gronberg, Town of Devon - Joined October 2023

Councillor Gurk Dhanoa, Town of Devon - Left October 2023

Councillor Sally Kucher Johnson, Parkland County

Councillor Michael Janz, City of Edmonton

Councillor Ashley Salvador, City of Edmonton

Councillor Robert Parks, Strathcona County

Councillor Birgit Blizzard, City of Fort Saskatchewan - Joined October 2023

Councillor Patrick Noyen, City of Fort Saskatchewan - Left October 2023

Councillor Dan Derouin, Sturgeon County

#### **Directors at Large**

Bryan Karbonik, Strathcona County CEC Chair Ron Walker, Treaty 6 Territory Marcel Chichak, City of Edmonton Mark McRae, City of Edmonton Katherine O'Neill, City of Edmonton Margot Ross-Graham, City of Edmonton Nancy Thornton, Strathcona County Brad Armstrong, Strathcona County





## COMMITTEES

## **GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

Nancy Thornton, Committee Chair Margot Ross-Graham Katherine O'Neill, RVA Board Chair

### IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

Marcel Chichak, Committee Chair Brad Armstrong Pat Butler Darryl Howery Alex Bonokoski Katherine O'Neill, RVA Board Chair

### FINANCE COMMITTEE

Mark McRae, Committee Chair Neil Cockburn Katherine O'Neill, RVA Board Chair

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Bryan Karbonik, Committee Chair
Grant Geldart, Town of Devon
Gary Lukawesky, Town of Devon
Suzanne McAfee, City of Edmonton
Amanda Papadopoulos, Sturgeon County
Chelsea Turner, Sturgeon County - Joined January 2024
Graham Taylor, City of Edmonton
Maryann Woodman, Fort Saskatchewan
John MacMillan, Fort Saskatchewan
Shelly Chen, Edmonton
Emma Ausford, Edmonton
Andrea Kluck, Edmonton
Chris Edgelow, Edmonton - Joined October 2023
Laura Brown, Strathcona County - Joined January 2023

## NAMING COMMITTEE (AD-HOC)

Margot Ross-Graham, Committee Chair
Katherine O'Neill, RVA Board Chair
Benjamin Gronberg, Devon
Carilyn Bjarnason, Parkland County
Heather Knowles, City of Edmonton
Matthew Dance, City of Edmonton Naming Committee
Erin McDonald, City of Edmonton Naming Committee
Leslee Laing, Strathcona County
Lyndsay Francis, Fort Saskatchewan
Wayne Bokenfohr, Sturgeon County
Bryan Karbonik, CEC Chair
Rosa LaClare, Public Member
Kristina Sitas, Public Member
Emily Riddle, Public Member
Tracey Hyatt, Public Member

Naheyawin Hunter Cardinal Jacqueline Cardinal





# VOLUNTEERS



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Thank you to our Community Engagement Committee members for their continued dedication and support of the RVA through community outreach!







## STAFF

Kristine Archibald, Executive Director Makennah Walker, Marketing and Communications Manager Sydney Brown, Administrative Coordinator - Left October Tara Delver, Administrative Coordinator - Joined October



## SPECIAL THANKS

Phil Krysa, Principal, Architectural Works Inc
Darlene Gara, C&C Services
Kyle Matheson, NetSmart
Trevor Tessier, Strong Coffee Marketing
Chris Schulte, King and Company Chartered Accountants
Sally Wu, King and Company Chartered Accountants
Thomas Rotundo, King and Company Chartered Accountants

## SPONSORS:

#### NON-CAPITAL PROJECTS

Keyera Energy

**Edmonton Community Foundation** 

Fortsask Runners, Florida Pizza, Devon IGA, Paddle Station, River Watch Alberta, Shift Happens, Square 1 Coffee, Trackntrail, United Sports, U of A Botanic Garden, 7 Summits Snacks, Snow Valley, Srathcocounty, Canoeheads, Fort Heritage Precinct.



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#### INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the Shareholders of The River Valley Alliance

#### Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of The River Valley Alliance (the corporation), which comprise the statement of financial position as at December 31, 2023, and the statements of operations, changes in net assets and cash flows for the year then ended, and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the corporation as at December 31, 2023, and the results of its operations and cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations.

#### Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements section of our report. We are independent of the corporation in accordance with ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in Canada, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Responsibilities of Management and Those Charged with Governance for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is responsible for assessing the corporation's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless management either intends to liquidate the corporation or to cease operations, or has no realistic alternative but to do so.

Those charged with governance are responsible for overseeing the corporation's financial reporting process.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial

As part of an audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards, we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit. We also:

(continues)

Independent Auditor's Report to the To the Shareholders of The River Valley Alliance (continued)

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or
  error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is
  sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement
  resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery,
  intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are
  appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the
  corporation's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by management.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of management's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the corporation's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the corporation to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

Edmonton, AB March 20, 2024

CHARTERED PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANTS

King + Company

#### THE RIVER VALLEY ALLIANCE

Statement of Financial Position

As at December 31, 2023

		2023		2022
ASSETS				
CURRENT				
Cash	\$	298,161	\$	313,107
Accounts receivable (Note 2)		22,548		15,071
Restricted accounts receivable (Notes 3, 12)		244,764		299,382
Prepaid expenses	_	4,679		4,300
		570,152		631,860
RESTRICTED CASH AND INVESTMENTS (Notes 5, 12)		19,789,685		20,695,005
CAPITAL ASSETS (Note 4)		796		1,770
	<u>s</u>	20,360,633	\$	21,328,635
LIABILITIES				
CURRENT				
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$	22,979	\$	25,320
Deferred contributions (Note 6)	-	9,012	2000	
		31,991		25,320
DEFERRED CONTRIBUTIONS FOR PLAN OF ACTION (Notes 7, 12)		20,034,449		20,994,387
DEFERRED CAPITAL ASSET CONTRIBUTIONS (Note 8)		531		1,180
	_	20,066,971		21,020,887
LEASE COMMITMENTS (Note 9)				
NET ASSETS				
Share capital (Note 10)		6,000		6,000
Invested in capital assets		265		590
Unrestricted municipal shareholder assets	_	287,397		301,158
	_	293,662		307,748
	s	20,360,633	\$	21,328,635

### ON BEHALF OF THE BOARD Director

Director

#### Statement of Operations

Year Ended December 31, 2023

		2023	2022	
REVENUE				
Contribution from Alberta Environment & Parks (AEP) grant				
(operations) (Note 7)	\$	253,677	\$ 255,473	
Contributions for trail naming initiative		126,721	1070	
Contributions from municipal shareholders		110,000	110,000	
Unrestricted interest		23,826	7,476	
Donations, sponsorships and other		5,225	15,050	
Amortization of deferred capital asset contributions (Note 8)		649	1,442	
	·	520,098	389,441	
EXPENSES		100000000000000000000000000000000000000	1277-2000	
Salaries and benefits		294,347	300,672	
Trail naming initiative		126,721		
General and administration		81,918	73,724	
Communications and branding		17,149	30,259	
Professional fees		13,075	9,888	
Amortization of capital assets		974	2,163	
	7	534,184	416,706	
DEFICIENCY OF REVENUE OVER EXPENSES FROM		(14,096)	(27.265)	
OPERATIONS		(14,086)	(27,265)	
OTHER RESTRICTED REVENUE (EXPENSES)				
Capital Projects Matched by Building Canada Fund (BCF)				
Capital projects (Note 11)		(4,855,435)	(226,270)	
Contribution from BCF (Note 7)		1,855,435	6970	
Contribution from AEP grant (Note 7)	(2)	3,000,000	226,270	
Capital Projects AEP Grant		7.0	894	
City of Edmonton project		2	(272,075)	
Preliminary design		(600,288)	(189,118)	
Project oversight		(27,933)	(26,519)	
Capital Projects AEP grant (Note 7)		628,221	487,712	
			748	
DEFICIENCY OF REVENUE OVER EXPENSES	<u>s</u>	(14,086)	\$ (27,265)	

	Invested in Capital Assets		Municipal Shareholder Assets	2023	2022	
NET ASSETS - BEGINNING OF YEAR  Deficiency of revenue over expenses	\$	590 (325)	\$ 301,158 <b>\$</b> (13,761)	301,748 \$ (14,086)	329,013 (27,265)	
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	\$	265	\$ 287,397 \$	287,662 \$	301,748	

	2023			2022	
OPERATING ACTIVITIES					
Cash receipts from other revenue	\$	140,958	\$	5,050	
Cash receipts from contributions by municipal shareholders		110,000		110,000	
Cash receipts from unrestricted interest		23,826		7,476	
Cash payments to suppliers and employees		(542,972)		(379,104)	
Cash flow used by operating activities		(268,188)		(256,578)	
FINANCING AND INVESTING ACTIVITIES					
Contributions from BCF		1,855,435		76,560	
Chargebacks from municipalities		1,815,000		-	
Interest received from restricted cash and investments		1,051,162		480,417	
Redemption of restricted cash and investments, net		905,320		244,392	
Payments for Devon and Parkland project paid by RVA to be					
reimbursed one-third by the municipalities		54,618		243,949	
Contributions from Trans Canada Trail (TCT)		40,000		-	
Payments to municipal shareholders for capital projects		(5,468,293)		(790,846)	
Cash flow from financing and investing activities	_	253,242		254,472	
DECREASE IN CASH		(14,946)		(2,106)	
CASH - BEGINNING OF YEAR	_	313,107		315,213	
CASH - END OF YEAR	s	298,161	\$	313,107	



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