

**Subject:** Email - Communication - Joel Hall - Proposed Walkway Closure Policy - File CK 6295-0

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**From:** Web NoReply <[web-noreply@Saskatoon.ca](mailto:web-noreply@Saskatoon.ca)>

**Sent:** Monday, April 5, 2021 1:10 PM

**To:** City Council <[City.Council@Saskatoon.ca](mailto:City.Council@Saskatoon.ca)>

**Subject:** Email - Communication - Joel Hall - Proposed Walkway Closure Policy - File CK 6295-0

--- Replies to this email will go to [REDACTED]

Submitted on Monday, April 5, 2021 - 13:09

Submitted by user: Anonymous

Submitted values are:

Date Monday, April 05, 2021

To His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

First Name Joel

Last Name Hall

Phone Number (306) [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

Address [REDACTED] Turtle Place

City Saskatoon

Province Saskatchewan

Postal Code S7K [REDACTED]

Name of the organization or agency you are representing (if applicable)

Subject Proposed Walkway Closure Policy

Meeting (if known) Transportation Committee

Comments

Dear Mayor Clark and Saskatoon City Councillors,

I am saddened, disappointed, and frustrated by the report and recommendations being put forth to Council. As someone who has lived next to a walkway for two decades, and fought for it's closure for 14 of those, the proposed "changes" are offensive to me as they will only maintain the status quo. If you're wondering why, please read the attached document that clearly articulates why the walkway next to our home MUST BE CLOSED (the document was submitted to Council and/or the Transportation Committee last year).

When I last addressed Council in October, 2019, I was met with compassion and empathy from Council members. Among whom, I specifically recall Councillors Dubois, Hill, and Donauer vocalizing their compassion and empathy for what me and my family have endured for, as of this month, 20 years living next to a walkway - and promising to finally rectify the situation. I cannot imagine these three Councillors agreeing to the recommendations, and I am hopeful that there are others who are willing to protect our children and to truly listen and put themselves in the shoes of those being hurt by the walkways.

After speaking to Council, I was invited to sit down with several Transportation/Safety members. At the time, I felt heard and understood, but in the year since that conversation, the concerns I explained seem to have been forgotten or

ignored as the proposed policy will do nothing to rectify the walkway problems - in fact, they will only ensure they continue.

Without wanting to spend much additional time, I would just like to point out the top three problems with the proposal to move to a petition model for walkway closures:

Imbalance of power. If you're looking for majority support, it will almost never happen. When considering putting in a stop sign and crosswalk on a street next to a daycare do you poll the six children and 70 motorists to see what the majority wants? Are you going to ask the parents of those children to petition each motorist and ask them if it would be ok to make the change so none of the children gets hurt. And then if they agree, the City will consider the change? Absurd. And this is for safety on the street - let alone in the daycares backyard play area! For most walkways, two property owners will support closure, most of the remaining residents in the catchment area will be opposed or indifferent. And why not? It's not them or their children being threatened daily - and some of them may even be mildly inconvenienced. Now, a masked stranger at their door is telling them that used drug needles are being thrown in the stranger's backyard from the walkway - and they're supposed to care? You know what nearly every person will say, "I'm sorry that happens, but my kids use that route for school." Even though a safer route of equal distance is available for their kids, they have no incentive to change.

No acknowledgement of new protocols due to Covid. I'm supposed to go door to door and to have additional public meetings (and actually get people to attend)? Not to mention, sending people down a narrow, fenced walkway, seriously jeopardizes social distancing regulations. The walkway is 11 feet wide, to shut it down, I am better off putting a lawn chair in the middle of it, sitting down, and insisting on six feet of space - thus effectively blocking it from use - but almost ensuring verbal, if not physical, confrontation.

No firm criteria. Within the recommendations, I see no type of firm criteria for a homeowner to know they have met the requirements for closure - especially safety criteria. I realize it's difficult to create a mathematical formula for closure: In one closure policy, "inconvenience" was defined as "having to walk more than 5 additional minutes." And if closing the walkway caused an inconvenience, it must remain open. But how do you define "unsafe" and justify closure? (eg. if you can demonstrate that in the past year you've had five graffiti tags, or four 911 calls, or three needles or two arson cases, etc. the walkway must be closed). Councillors have told me that since the current Walkway Closure Policy was implemented (2011?) applications have virtually ceased. Why? No homeowner wanted to pay \$2000 up front to play a game that had no clear rules (or, that one neighbor could cancel by not wanting to participate). With the petition model, I have to spend hundreds of hours pleading with strangers to solve a problem for me - a problem they don't share. And if I convince them? Council still will not guarantee closure. As stated in the recommendations, "The final closure decision would be addressed through a public hearing." No one will do this.

Please don't think these are the only problems with the recommendations being put forward, they are simply three I'm choosing to address. Since 2007, I have begged Council to protect my children (and my property) and while their (your) inaction violates numerous City policies, they (you) have relentlessly clung to the status quo. The only reason I give this any more time at all, is because, if you don't act, someone will eventually get very sick or even die (it may have already happened - how would you know?).

Also, much of the walkway closures discussions appear to be about graffiti, and while that's a problem that kills property values and leads to more serious problems, paint on my fence won't kill my child or my pets, but diseases they catch from drug needles, broken glass, and now, used masks, just might. It takes a minute to paint graffiti, it takes a second to throw a needle over a fence. While you have chosen to keep the walkway open, you have not come close to solving the graffiti problem - how can you expect the City/city police to stop all the other problems?

Read the document attached. Read your own city policies (some of which are included in the document)...In the case of the walkway next to our home, alternate routes are not only available, they are equal distance and safer, but no allowance is even made for this situation. And for those walkways that do add convenience, according to our (your) own promises, in Saskatoon, safety ALWAYS trumps convenience.

From the City of Saskatoon Five Guiding Values:

"We will:

- Put safety at the forefront of all decision making.
- Never compromise on the safety or well-being of ourselves, coworkers or the public."

[BTW, the policies from other cities are irrelevant. How were those cities chosen? Since adopting their current policy, have things improved? What are the guiding values of those cities (do they put the same emphasis on safety as Saskatoon claims to? Instead of asking what other cities are doing, how about starting with the question, "Has any city improved the situations regarding walkways (according to the residents)? If so, what did that city do? Why emulate cities who may have made no progress or the problem is getting worse?]

Again, I can only speak to one walkway - the one next to my home that poses a real and ongoing threat to my family. In spite of proving time and again that there is a safer alternative route for the few people who actually use the walkway - everything about the current and recommended policies wrongly assume that this walkway is a vital part of the neighbourhood (see attached document), yet blind bureaucracy prevents me from protecting my family.

I'll close with this: Until the problem is rectified, how would you feel if every time my fence was graffitied, I came and tagged your fence (or if you don't have young children or pets, imagine this happening where your grandchildren live). Every time I find a needle in my backyard, I take it and throw it in your backyard. Every time a used mask, used condom, trash, or broken bottles are found in my backyard, I throw them into yours. And every time someone bangs on my house or starts a fire at three in the morning, I come do it to your house...How would this affect your urgency and satisfaction with the status quo?

Really...think about it.

Now, please, please, please, act as if it was your home. Do the right thing.

Sincerely,  
Joel Hall

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

***“You have to take the information you have and make the best decision  
you can to build a strong community for everyone.”***

Mayor Charlie Clark, CTV News, November 6, 2019

## **Introduction:**

When our neighbourhood was developed in the late 70s, City Planners unwittingly placed a powerful criminal magnet next to our home. For the last 18 years, my family and I have experienced and witnessed the physical, psychological, and emotional damage inflicted on us and other residents as we live in a community that is continually being defaced and destroyed. We are living in a home where the criminal element poses an ongoing – and growing – threat to our personal safety and mental well-being.

This magnet has attracted vandals, used needles, drugs and drug paraphernalia, garbage, illegal alcohol consumption, public drunkenness, beer bottles and broken glass, pornography, urine, thieves, graffiti, and air and noise pollution. While the magnet itself is located on City property, the massive amounts of collateral damage it creates regularly spreads onto our property.

As time has passed, this magnet is increasingly attracting violence and gangs. There have already been at least two walkway-related arson cases near our home, and, just last week, citizens of Saskatoon witnessed a gang/drugs related murder in an east-side neighbourhood that’s very similar to ours. No longer are gangs confined to one area of the city, they are looking for vulnerable areas to occupy and control...and, right now, Lawson Heights – *and the area right next to my home* – is proving to be a prime target.

Everyone knows we live in an area of the city that receives little to no regular policing. For the most part, police come only when called. As such, police usually take well over an hour to reach our home. Even when the criminal activity is still going when assistance arrives, thieves and vandals have easily escaped through the opposite ends of the walkway.

Historically, discussions around these problem walkways were framed by misperceptions that assume or overstate the supposed need of a specific walkway, while largely ignoring or downplaying the severity of the threats these walkways pose. Worst of all, alternative to closure “solutions” do not recognize how these walkways pose a clear and present danger to the personal safety and mental well-being of those living adjacent to these criminal havens.

This walkway problem goes well beyond the ability of the police, or lighting, or neighbourhood watches to combat. The size and power of the magnet is too strong, and it is increasingly attracting drug users and gangs. As Council Members, it is not only within your power to remove this magnet, it is your obligation and your duty to provide me and my children peace, protection, and peace of mind on our own property and in our own home. I am again asking for your help... Don’t wait any longer...close this walkway before something *really* terrible happens.

Dear His Worship and Saskatoon City Council Members,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to come to Chambers on October 28<sup>th</sup> to speak to the ongoing walkway issue.

First, I would like to echo the sentiments of several Members who expressed their appreciation to Councillor Donauer for bringing this matter back to Council for consideration. The overwhelming support he (and I) received was surprisingly emotional for me...as Councillor Donauer spoke about the situation, it felt extremely good to feel like we are finally being heard.

Based on the questions, comments, and concerns expressed by Council Members, and the fact that walkway closure has seen such a lack of urgency, it is clear that people who have not had first-hand experiences living next to these walkways have no idea what transpires. Because they (you) may not understand the severity of the situation, the walkway “debate” has been inadequately and inaccurately addressed, and it’s been allowed to sit dormant for far too long.

As you review our case and reconsider the existing policy, I feel I must do everything I can to paint you a picture of what life has been like living next to a walkway for the past 18 years. While I’m sure most of the other unfortunate property owners who live next to a walkway have similar experiences, **I’ll be speaking specifically about the walkway next to our home.**

I would also like to acknowledge the fact that Council represents *all* Saskatoon residents, so I will, therefore, explain the *appropriate* way to gather community input to avoid neighbour vs neighbour conflict. As you will see, closing of the walkway next to our home will not only allow my family and I to finally feel safe in our own home and yard; closure will reduce crime, enhance neighborhood appeal, and save taxpayer money – benefitting *every* Saskatoon resident.

My letter to Council will come in four sections:

1. [REDACTED] Place Walkway Facts and Images (this section)
2. [REDACTED] Place Walkway in Light of Policy
3. “Victim’s Impact Statement”: How Living Next to a Walkway has Affected Us
4. Moving Forward: Considerations and Suggestions for Future Walkway Policy

You may feel like this approach is long or excessive; I agree that it is long, but it is *not* excessive. Rather than responding to this issue with frustration and anger, I have chosen to respond with the corresponding amount of information, as I feel this will be more productive.

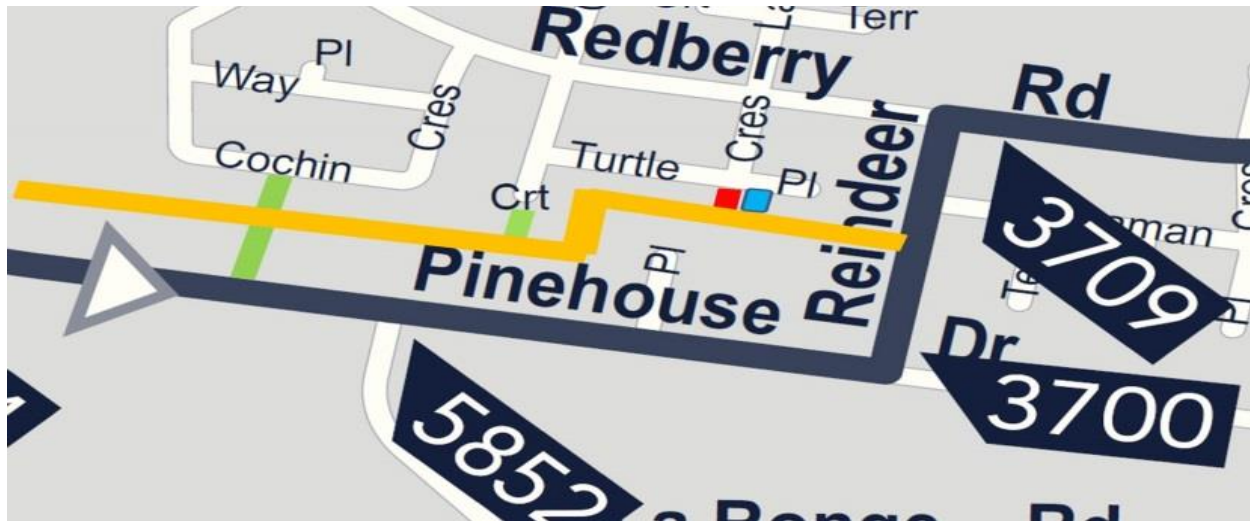
It takes time to explain/grasp the issues, and I am asking – no, I am *begging* you to take that time, so you can make informed decisions and treat this matter with the importance and urgency it demands. If the health, safety, and well-being of *your* children were being threatened, *literally in your own backyard*, would it be worth this time to protect them?

**Council Members, thank you for your time and consideration in this important matter.**

Yours truly,  
Dr. Joel Hall

## The Facts:

In 2001, my wife and I, along with our 2 year old twin boys, moved into our current home at [REDACTED] Place in Lawson Heights. The property sits at the intersection of two walkways. The longer walkway (Reindeer Rd Walkway) runs east/west behind our property separates homes from the apartment complexes behind. The shorter runs north/south alongside our home and connects [REDACTED] with the longer walkway. While both walkways have issues, most revolve around the shorter walkway. The [REDACTED] Place Walkway is dark and secluded, making it a magnet for crime and destruction; it serves no purpose...and it must be closed immediately.



- Our Property
- Walkway I Want Closed
- Long Walkway to Reindeer
- Other Walkways
- Blue Arrow are Bus Routes

In 2002 we had another son, and in 2004 our daughter was born. This house is the only home these two children have ever known. Recently, we added a puppy to our family.

When we first moved in, we spent over \$7000 landscaping our backyard. We removed trees, placed decorative stone, installed underground sprinklers, and laid sod. We bought a large playset with swings and a slide and a sandbox. Our kids LOVED it!





Our Family, 2004



Our Family, 2018



Our Puppy, Mose

As you can see, the members of our family have changed significantly over the years, but the dire situation around our home has not.

Unfortunately, that money was wasted. Soon after completing the yard, we realized how often walkway users were discarding dangerous materials into our yard. It was also clear that putting a fun play area in front of our children's eyes, but forbidding them to use it, was cruel. We removed the playset, and we stopped maintaining the lawn. The problems created by the walkway not only caused us to waste thousands of dollars, it stole countless hours of fun from our children.

For over a decade, our backyard has resembled a prison yard more than a family play area:



View of our backyard from upstairs window

For far too long, I have endured living in a deplorable environment that has unnecessarily jeopardized the health, well-being, and peace of mind of my wife, our four children, and our pets. We have sat back as our property has been invaded, stolen and vandalized; and we've been left to continually inspect, replace, repair, and repaint.

Since our application for walkway closure was denied, we have spent over \$10,000 to try to keep the problems of the walkway from entering our home or overrunning our yard...we have been unsuccessful.

Among other things, we have:

1. Built a six foot fence around our entire back yard (the highest fence allowed by city bylaw)
2. Built a partial front yard fence.
3. Across the back of your yard, we had a 12 foot tall chain link structure built.
4. Added privacy slats to chain link fence.
5. It was unsightly, so we bought hundreds of dollars of vines to grow on it.
6. We installed motion sensor lights (these became targets for rocks and bottles)

Not included in this list is all the money (and time) we've spent removing graffiti, repairing the fence, repairing the side of the house, and cleaning up our yard (and the walkway).

The money we've spent could have been used to pay for a family vacation-of-a-lifetime, to buy a decent car, or even cover several years of university tuition. Instead, we spent it just trying to keep our kids from contracting a deadly disease in our own back yard.

We really need your help!

As our family discussed the walkway this week, our children have told us stories of items they discovered in the yard over the years. The list included (among other things) needles, fireworks, used diapers, half-full bottles of alcohol, pornographic magazines, cigarettes, caps, and "shells or bullets or something." It was alarming to know that in spite of our best efforts to scour the backyard of these remnants of night-time passersby, our children had still been repeatedly exposed to these things without us even know about it. It is scary to think about how easily they could have been infected with any number of diseases...right in our own back yard.

Is my concern justified, or am I overstating the matter? Let the [FDA](#) decide:

"Used needles and other sharps are dangerous to people and pets if not disposed of safely because they can injure people and spread infections that cause serious health conditions.

The most common infections are:

- Hepatitis B (HBV),
- Hepatitis C (HCV), and
- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)."



Please don't let familiarity with these diseases cause you to skip over how serious they are, or the threat these needles pose.

According to the World Health Organization, the three diseases the FDA says my children are most likely to contract from used needles in my own back yard are:

“[Hepatitis B](#) is a potentially life-threatening liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). It is a major global health problem. It can cause chronic infection and puts people at high risk of death from cirrhosis and liver cancer.

Hepatitis B is transmitted...through horizontal transmission (exposure to infected blood)...needlestick injury, tattooing, piercing and exposure to infected blood and body fluids, such as saliva and, menstrual, vaginal, and seminal fluids.

[Hepatitis C](#) is a bloodborne virus. It is most commonly transmitted through:

- injecting drug use through the sharing of injection equipment;
- the reuse or inadequate sterilization of medical equipment, especially syringes and needles;

Symptoms include: fever, fatigue, decreased appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, grey-coloured faeces, joint pain and jaundice

#### [HIV/AIDS](#)

- HIV continues to be a major global public health issue, having claimed more than 32 million lives so far.
- 770 000 people died from HIV-related causes in 2018 and 1.7 million people were newly infected.

In the first few weeks after initial infection people may experience no symptoms or an influenza-like illness including fever, headache, rash or sore throat.

As the infection progressively weakens the immune system, they can develop other signs and symptoms, such as swollen lymph nodes, weight loss, fever, diarrhoea and cough...they could also develop severe illnesses such as tuberculosis (TB), cryptococcal meningitis, severe bacterial infections, and cancers such as lymphomas and Kaposi's sarcoma. AIDS is defined by the development of certain cancers, infections or other severe clinical manifestations.”

**How comfortable would you be if your children were continually being exposed to used needles that may be carrying these diseases...right in your back yard?**

My family and I also recounted numerous successful and attempted robberies that stemmed from walkway access. The two most recent occurred this past summer: In May, my son's \$1800 summer tires and rims were stolen from our yard. They were from my son's first car, the one he

had saved up for by doing flyers from the time he was 11. Ironically, he didn't want them damaged, so he was waiting to take off his winter rims until he knew for sure it would be safe.

The other theft was my younger son's wallet. It went missing out of our vehicle in July. We found the wallet down the [REDACTED] walkway and around the corner in the Reindeer walkway – contents strewn about. All the cash was gone.

### **How long has this been going on?**

Please pause and indulge me just for a moment...Think back to when the sub-prime mortgage crisis/market crash happened. Now, remember the historic election that first put Barack Obama into the White House. Do you recall the horrific murder that took place on that Greyhound bus?

When you think of these events, do they feel like they happened recently, or do they feel like quite a long time ago?

In fact, they all took place in 2008. *This is the same year we first applied to have the walkway next to our property closed* [since writing, it was discovered that we actually applied in 2007]. We were denied...with the promise that the city would rectify the situation. Now it's the end of 2019, and the problem is worse than ever.

Because of the amount of time that's passed, it can be difficult to determine exact facts as most documents are long since destroyed and any electronic documents were several computers ago. That said, the following information is the best of our recollection, and since it sounds like our information is still on file with the city, I invite a fact-check as any discrepancies will be minor:

1. The last time we *inquired* about closing the walkway was 5 years ago (2014), but *our application/denial was actually in 2008: 11 years ago.*
2. At that time, we applied, met with committees, drew maps outlining parks and schools and bussing, and explained the negative impact the walkway had on our lives...Pretty much the exact same things we are doing again right now.
3. A person sitting by our home for 8 hours counted the number of users...there were seven.
4. The city also confirmed that closure would have no impact on walking to school or parks (see attached map).
5. The city said that closure would have little or no impact on access to bussing (see map).
6. In spite of these findings, the proposal was denied. As there was no other reason for the denial, I assume it was based on the receipt of two letters from residents:
  - a. A neighbour one block away opposed closure because he liked to "people watch."

- b. A neighbor two doors down from us (who has access to the longer walkway behind our houses and would, therefore, NEVER have need of the walkway next to our house) told Council that we “Just wanted to increase our property value” and that we “Should just take better care of our yard.” [Ironically, this comment was a result of our application itself: When we submitted our application, the city advised us not to fix any graffiti or damage to the fence that may occur prior to inspection so vandalism could be verified. During the six weeks it took for the city to come by, our fence became in such disrepair that our neighbour commented on our apparent negligence – only 6 weeks]
7. With the denial, the city promised better lighting, increased police services, and facilitating community watches. To my knowledge, none of this happened.
8. Even the “new” (2012) policy stipulates that after one year, if the situation proved “unmanageable” walkways would be closed. Even applying this more restrictive policy, **that one year trial would have ended over a decade ago** and one does not need to look twice to see that the situation is unmanageable. Even the city ‘green box’ (power?) that sits next to the walkway is covered on every side with graffiti (the communication on the box between vandals would be laughable if not so sad – see image below).
9. On April 2, 2014 I contacted Councillor Donauer about the situation. He replied, regretfully stating that “Our policy makes it very difficult to close catwalks.” I was forwarded the revised policy.
10. He was right. And worse than being difficult, what it takes for closure was vague, and, as an additional slap in the face, the revised policy included a stipulation that I would have to pay a *non-refundable* \$2000 application fee. Considering my previous application was denied because of ‘people watching’ and me ‘just trying to raise property values,’ I’m sure you can understand why I did not pursue it again. (Also, *please note the glaringly obvious admission by the neighbour and by Council, that **walkways decrease property values*** – otherwise, how would removing them *increase* property values?]
11. [side note] If I understood Councillor Hill at Oct. 28, 2019 Council, after receiving dozens of applications for walkway closures 10 or 12 years ago, there have been no (one?) applications for closures since the new policy came into effect in 2012. This does not mean that walkways are no longer a grave threat, it means that homeowners probably feel the same as me: not listened to, abandon, vulnerable, and unwilling to bet \$2000 on a long-shot – especially when we don’t really know the rules.

The following pages are pictures of the walkway that were taken in the past two weeks. They show:

1. The walkway lighting situation.
2. The state of the City electrical box located in the walkway.
3. Example of damage to our lawn caused by snow removal.

## Walkway Lighting:



**North Side:** Street light faces away from walkway



**South Side:** Apartment has a small light that comes on *intermittently* at night.  
Even when it is working, it is mostly obscured by tree branches

Here's a [one minute video](#) that demonstrates lighting. It was taken from our 2<sup>nd</sup> floor bedroom window late Thursday (last night – Nov. 22, 2019, 3:37am) after we were awakened by loud sounds from the walkway. Perhaps a shopping cart or something being pushed up and down walkway. Please play the video with your speakers turned on, you will hear the noise towards the end as the person resumes walking. As you will see, the picture is mostly black, at the beginning, I scan to the left - away from the walkway - to show a light from an apartment. I then return the shot to “show” the walkway itself.



## Graffiti on Electrical Box (on City property)

Graffiti on every side - and top.



East Facing



West Facing

Notice in second picture: one “artist” seems to be apologizing to another for painting over the previous graffiti with his tag (black paint wrote “sorry” to white paint).

These vandals look out for each other.

Who looks out for me and my children and my property; and those of other law-abiding citizens?

## Snow Removal:

I hesitate to mention this, because the *walkway issues are NOT about maintenance* (in fact, by clearing them, the City makes it easier for criminals to use...I'd rather snow was never cleared).

However, City maintenance on the walkway does get done, and it often damages our property. After last week's snow, images show dirt and grass scraped out of our front yard and pushed out either end of the walkway. This time, the damage was minor. Numerous times, however, our lawn has been severely damaged and underground sprinklers have been broken by the plow.



Above: Oct. 30, 2019 [Since letter was initially written, walkway has been cleared 2 more times...]



Nov. 14, 2019



Dec. 28, 2019: City plow scraped the corner of lawn. Notice tufts of lawn and soil pushed out onto the street.

Again, I am just showing another way our property gets damaged because of the walkway...

**I am not asking for improved maintenance.**

(Remember, this is the the path that drug users and crooks use to get near my property - and to threaten the health of my children. So, again, do not misunderstand, ***I am showing you the damage even good intentions are causing, I am NOT asking for you to help give these criminals better access to my home and children by better maintaining it.***)

The following letter will address the [REDACTED] Place Walkway closure in light of City of Saskatoon Policies.

### **[REDACTED] Place Walkway Closure in Light of Policy**

Obviously, the first – and main – avenue for protecting our family and remedying this situation is existing City policies. I will, therefore provide existing City Policies and Documents along with how that policy relates to the [REDACTED] Place Walkway:

1. **Provide links (blue),** and
2. Quote relevant policies (black)
3. **My comments (red)**

### **Graffiti**

#### **Who is affected by Graffiti?**

Graffiti is a crime that effects all members of the community.

- Property owners have to pay to remove graffiti.
- Business owners can lose customers from the negative image that graffiti leaves.
- Communities suffer because graffiti can make people feel the community is in decline.
- Residents in the city whose tax dollars are spent removing graffiti on public buildings, monuments and park structures.
- The public who are concerned about the vandalism and what the graffiti means.

City property, such as the electrical box and light poles, and private property, such as our fence and home, are regular targets for graffiti.

The city recognizes the severity of the graffiti problem and acknowledges that *graffiti is both an indicator, and a cause, of much more serious issues than a little paint on a fence.*

#### **What can you do if you are a Victim of Graffiti?**

- 1) Record - Take a picture of the graffiti vandalism as soon as it is identified. **DONE, 2008.**
- 2) Report - Report all incidents of damage to your property by calling Saskatoon Police Service at [306-975-8300](tel:306-975-8300). To report graffiti vandalism on property other than your own call [306-975-2828](tel:306-975-2828). **DONE NUMEROUS TIMES.** The only thing done was once, about 10 years ago, a work crew came and painted over the graffiti with a random paint colour that looked worse than the graffiti itself. I had to paint over that anyway. As far as I know, no other police action (if any has ever been taken in this regard) has ever impeded graffiti or helped with removal.
- 3) Remove - If the graffiti is on your property, remove it as quickly as possible. The faster and more frequently graffiti is cleaned up, the less it reappears. **DONE...many times since 2001.**



### Here are some things you can do to prevent graffiti:

- Remove any graffiti as soon as it appears. The faster graffiti is removed, the less desirable your property becomes to vandals. **DONE.** Not only does this take lots of time and adds unnecessary expense to Saskatoon home-ownership, the chemical that best removes graffiti is also very hard on the wood fence...causing it to degrade much more quickly than it otherwise would. This means even more expense replacing boards or entire fence.
- Make every effort to keep the appearance of your property clean and neat. Litter, broken fences and overgrown shrubs send a message of indifference, which can attract vandals. **DONE.** Although the city electrical box and some other fences and the apartments next to the walkway are not always maintained quickly – so my efforts have little or no effect anyway.
- Move vehicles, dumpsters and other items away from walls and cover pipes to prevent access to the roof or upper levels of a building. **Done** where possible, but since walkway is only about 3 feet from HOUSE. top of fence provides easy access to roof – unless walkway was completely enclosed access to house roof cannot be prevented.
- Consider applying a special coating to protect surfaces from potential damage caused by graffiti removal. **Does this mean spending several hundred additional dollars to put on a coat of special primer that may or may not help? If so, this is done to cover up damage.**
- Design and build structures that are not attractive graffiti targets. Avoid large, smooth and light coloured surfaces. **Done.** Fences were painted dark grey.
- Use fences and other barriers to discourage through traffic near your home or business. **We have built the tallest fence allowable by city bylaw next to our home (6 ft), as well as a 12 foot structure inside our backyard property line. We have been wanting to erect a fence to block access to the walkway since 2008...the city has not allowed it.**
- Work with community artists to commission a mural on a persistently targeted wall. **Perhaps if the health and safety of my family and property weren't at stake, and paint on the fence was the only issue here, I may consider this option.**

**I have also installed lighting at my own expense. Lights on house were targets for rocks and bottles, therefore they made the problem worse as they became a danger that had to be removed.**



## What you can expect from us [the City]...

5. [Graffiti] Unit targets graffiti removal within 7 days of it being reported, subject to resources, **safety considerations** and weather permitting. **The city is (rightly) concerned about the safety of its employees as it pertains to graffiti...perhaps the safety of my children could be given consideration also. The damage, destruction, and threats to safety caused by these vandals does not stay on the other side of the fence.**

## There are some general indicators that your child may be involved in graffiti including:

- Frequently staying out late at night (**Taggers usually work between the hours of midnight and 6 am**). **The discussions around “alternatives to walkway closure” are absurd. How long does it take to paint a tag or smash a bottle or throw a used needle? Does the Council really expect a neighbourhood watch to monitor the walkway every night from midnight to 6am with less than 30 seconds between passes?**

**This fact shows that the City recognizes how “alternatives to closure” options that don’t provide all-night surveillance, with immediate on-site response, aren’t feasible.**

## Walkways

Walkways add to the “walkability” of our neighbourhoods. When walkways are closed, walking distances can (“can”: **It is possible, but not an assumed fact**) become much farther to specific destination points such as commercial development sites, schools, community centres and bus stops. **Walkway Policy 3.1 acknowledges that this is not always the case: “Some walkways may serve no direct public need.”** In this case, it has been repeatedly shown that the [REDACTED] Place walkway “serves no direct public need.” Because it serves to need but causes significant harm, it should be closed immediately.

The walkway will be considered for closure if:

- At least one adjacent property owner is willing to purchase the land; and
- All fees and land costs are paid by the application(s) prior to a public hearing;
- The application fee for each adjacent property owner shall be \$2,000;
- The land cost for each adjacent property owner shall be \$2,000;
- All costs over and above the application fees and land costs stated above will be paid by the City of Saskatoon except for the cost of utility relocations, which will be the responsibility of the applicants;
- Walkway applications must be received in writing and signed by all adjacent property owners indicating reasons for closure.
- Walkways serving as part of the storm water management system will not be considered for closure unless suitable arrangements can be made for the adequate provision of this service.
- If a walkway meets the guidelines above, but the adjacent property owners are not willing to purchase the lane (at least one property owner per parcel), there will be a three year waiting period for another application.

I followed the walkway closure policy that was in place at the time (2008) and met all conditions. The city found no evidence that the walkway served any public need. The city ran a public newspaper ad and directly contacted many neighbours. From our city of about 220,000 people at the time, two households opposed. One (a block from walkway) thought the closure would impede their desire to “people watch.” The other, a home two doors down and with access to the back walkway via their own backyard (therefore NO need for this walkway), claimed that we just wanted the walkway closed to increase property values. Based on these two letters, our application was denied.

Also, according to policy at the time (*“The survey catchment area will include residents who may be considered to use the walkway as their shortest distance to a specific location.”*), **at least** one of these letters should not have been considered as the walkway closure would have had not effect on their walking route (like us, their back property line is on the Reindeer Walkway – so they do not need secondary access).

**After having our application denied for such frivolous and arbitrary reasons, is it reasonable to expect us to pay \$2000 to apply again?** Especially since I see no clear criteria for what I need to demonstrate to ensure closure...

We decided our money was better spent building a 12 foot protective structure...which we did (it didn't help).

## **WALKWAY POLICY**

3.1 Walkways are an integral component of pedestrian traffic infrastructure. Again, for this walkway, this statement was proven untrue in 2008 and remains untrue to this day.

Walkways can serve as routes for pedestrians to specific destinations within neighbourhoods. Alternative routes of equal distance to park and school are readily available.

Some walkways may serve no direct public need. This is the case with this walkway, so why would it remain as it not only threatens the health and safety of me, my family, and my property? Just look above at what one of those crimes (graffiti) can do to a neighbourhood and a city!

4.3 The Saskatoon Police Services shall be the main point of contact for all concerns dealing with vandalism, graffiti, illegal activity, or a public safety issue that cannot be addressed by Infrastructure Services. Although police have been contacted many times, it is unrealistic to think they could prevent these things, especially in Lawson Heights – a neighbourhood that has dozens of walkways and little to no regular police presence.

More importantly, according to this policy, the police should not be the main point of contact as this is clearly an issue that can be addressed by Infrastructure Services (by closing the walkway).

**4.3.1 Walkway closure recommendations will need to be based on any type of illegal activity, vandalism, or public safety issue happening in the walkway. This one policy alone should have been enough to close the [REDACTED] Place Walkway ten years ago – and it should be all it takes now...Time and time again all these things have been proven to occur – AND THEY ARE STILL OCCURING.**

4.3.2 Any concerns dealing with graffiti will need to be handled by the Police through their graffiti unit. Already addressed above – since we moved into our home in 2001, they have taken one known action (painting over with random colour). It is also my understanding that the designated graffiti unit was dissolved several years ago.

4.3.3 If within a one-year period, the concerns identified in 4.3.1 are unmanageable by the Police, a recommendation can be made for closure. Clearly **this situation is unmanageable – It has been OVER 10 YEARS.**

I wonder, was this recommendation made? Was it approved? One of these two didn't happen – why do me and my wife and my children have to keep paying for this lack of action on Policy?

A Community Meeting will be conducted to inform residents of walkway issues and to encourage neighbourhood patrols and options to improve the safety of the walkway. Based on the feedback from the meeting, a decision will be made whether or not to pursue closure of the walkway. This was done a decade ago. The only opposition was frivolous compared to the safety and cosmetic issues this walkway causes. I will further address community meetings below.

## 6. RESPONSIBILITY

6.1 Infrastructure Services shall be responsible for:

- a) The administration of this policy. **In the case of the walkway in question, was all walkway policy administered correctly and in a timely manner?**

## Hidden Policy

Although I see nothing in the Walkway Closure Policy about current usage of the walkway being a factor, it appears that most discussions begin with usage. So, I will address usage by asking...

### *What effect would closing the walkway have?*

To answer this question, I will first address one of the incorrect premises of previous walkway discussions, next I will show why closing this walkway will not only have no effect on pedestrian traffic, *it will enhance the safety of young children*. And finally, I will show how access to bussing will be minimally affected, if at all.

## Walkway Usage

The first question people tend to ask when considering walkway closure has been: *How many people use the walkway?*

Here's why that question is almost completely irrelevant:

Whether walking, biking, driving, or flying; a person usually has several route options to get from point A to point B, and there are many factors as to why a person chooses the route they do. Regardless of which route they take, two things are true: 1) A person must take *some* route; and, 2) One cannot assume their motives.

For example, when I drive to downtown, I take Spadina. If the city was considering closing Spadina, they could see me drive on it and assume that if they closed it, they would prevent me from getting downtown or, at the very least, really inconvenience me. *They would be wrong.*

I would just take Warman Road.

At first, I might complain about having to change my routine. But the fact is, it's the same amount of distance/time either way. So (unless the increased traffic from closing Spadina would burden the operation of Warman Rd), for people like me, closing Spadina would simply a matter of changing my habits.

Regarding the walkway, the City has already determined (as I will demonstrate below) that because routes of equal time and distance are readily available, pedestrian access to schools, parks, and businesses would be completely unaffected. Furthermore, burden to another route is not a factor, so this fact wouldn't change if 100 times the normal number of people used this walkway.

Granted, people don't like change, and they will likely complain about having to take a slightly different route...for about a week. More importantly, as common decency would dictate – and city policy confirms – unnecessarily threatening the health and safety of Saskatoon residents,



especially young children, is far more important than the relatively insignificant inconvenience of a few people having to changing walking routes.

So, the question closest to being valid is: *How many people must use the walkway?* Or, even more liberally, *How many people would be significantly inconvenienced by closing the walkway?* (previous policies defined “significantly” as adding 5 minutes or more to walking route – while I dispute the relevance of this, you will see how even this definition will not apply to anyone).

### **How many people would be significantly inconvenienced by closing the [REDACTED] Place Walkway?**

Closing this walkway will have **no** effect on the “walkability” of Lawson Heights with regard to schools, parks, or businesses. In fact, closing it will *increase* pedestrian safety.

Here’s the neighbourhood map:



### **School and Park Access**

The primary park/school that people would be accessing is Lawson Heights Elementary School (top right) – at the corner of Redberry Rd and Reindeer Rd (the Catholic Elementary School and more park area is farther northeast behind the Lawson school – so, as it pertains to the closing of this walkway, the same routes would apply).

To walk from the Reindeer Walkway directly behind our home to the school or park, people currently have at least two options:

**Route 1:** Use the [REDACTED] Walkway (next to our house). From the back of our property [START HERE], walk north through [REDACTED] Walkway. Cross [REDACTED] Crescent, walk north and cross Redberry Rd, then walk east to School.

**Route 2:** Use the Reindeer Walkway. From the back of our property [START HERE], walk east on Reindeer Walkway to Reindeer Rd, walk north, cross Redberry Rd, then walk east to School.



(The pink shaded area has complete access to entire Reindeer Walkway (the orange one))

**Notice: The two routes are exactly the same time & distance.**

Additionally, **taking Route 1 (the [REDACTED] Walkway) adds unnecessary dangers.** The second route is safer (especially for children going to the elementary school) for the following reasons:

1. Reindeer Walkway is much more open and well-lit than [REDACTED] Walkway.
2. Route 1 ([REDACTED]) requires crossing 2 streets ([REDACTED] and Redberry); Route 2 only requires crossing one street (Redberry). (One less street to cross may also decrease walking times)
3. Route 1: The speed limit at first crossing ([REDACTED]) and second crossing (Redberry at [REDACTED] intersection) is 50km/hr. For Route 2, the speed limit at the Redberry/Reindeer intersection is in a school zone and therefore only 30km/hr.
4. The Redberry/Reindeer intersection (Route 2) is equipped with additional school crossing signage as well as concrete safety barriers for additional protection.

**As you can see, closing the [REDACTED] Walkway poses no inconvenience to people trying to access the nearest community parks and elementary schools. Moreover, closure would also add to the safety of young children getting to and from school.**

This begs the question:

*Why would City Council continue to needlessly jeopardize the health and safety of young children by keeping this more dangerous route open when a much safer route of equal distance is readily accessible?*

### **What about High Schools, other Parks, and Local Businesses?**

**West and South.** Because the demonstrated walking routes also work in reverse, access to all amenities west and south (Bishop Mahoney school, businesses on Primrose Drive (across from BJM), the Library on Primrose, the small strip mall and the parks south of Pinehouse, etc) would all still be equally accessible via the Reindeer Walkway, other walkways, and Pinehouse sidewalks.

**North.** The only amenities to the north that haven't already been addressed are Marion Graham and the surrounding park. These are six to eight blocks north/northeast of this walkway. Numerous walking options of equal distance are available.

**East.** The only amenity to the east that has not already been addressed is the river. People living in the nine homes on the north side of [REDACTED] Crescent who wish to walk to the river may have to walk an additional ½ block (about the width of four city lots).

### **How Would Closure of the Walkway Affect Bussing?**

The City previously determined that nearly every community resident would still be able to access the bus stop they currently use, without additional time added to their walking route.

The only residents who would potentially be affected are those living in the nine homes on [REDACTED] (the same nine homes listed above). *If* any of these residents use the Reindeer Rd bus stop, they would either have to switch to one of the two other bus stops which are equal distance away (on Pinehouse Dr or on Redberry Rd), or, to keep using the bus stop on Reindeer, they would have to walk an additional ½ block. A minor inconvenience that could easily be avoided by going to a different bus stop. If even this was too much to ask, the City could add (or move) a bus stop.

I have clearly demonstrated that the [REDACTED] Place Walkway has no significant benefit to the community. Even more, not only does keeping the walkway open endanger my own children by attracting illegal and illicit activity right into our backyard; children who use this walkway are

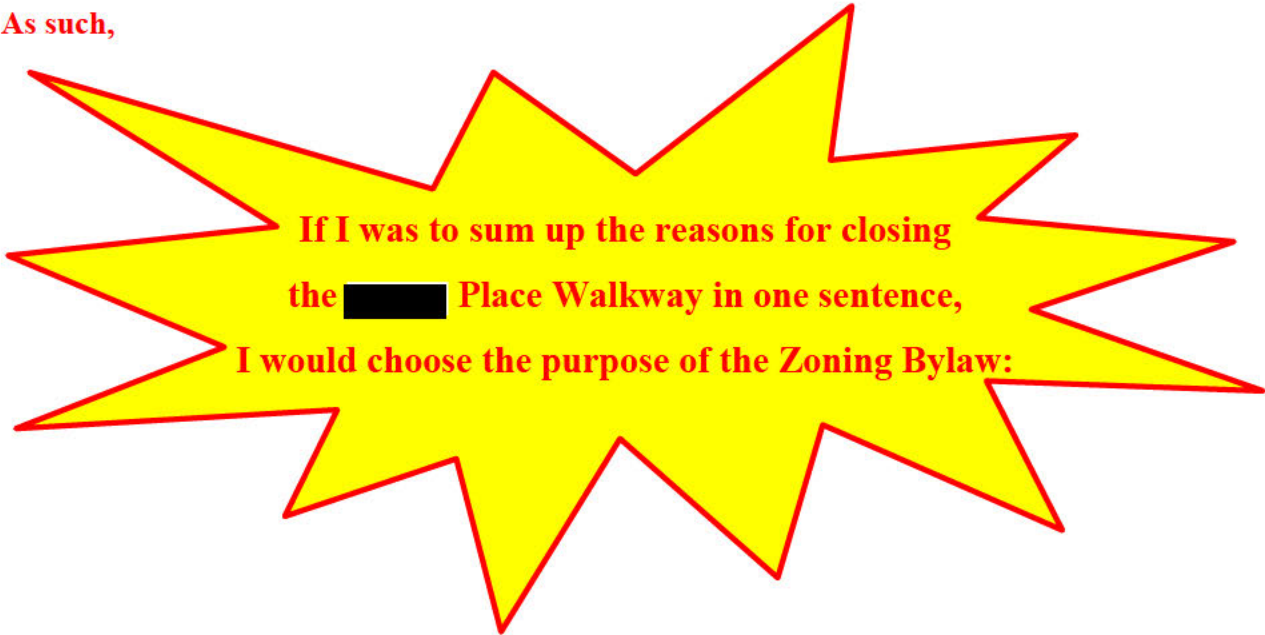
being subjected to dangers that alternative routes of equal time and distance do not pose. There is no reason to keep this walkway open.

## City of Saskatoon, Planning and Development, Land Use Complaints

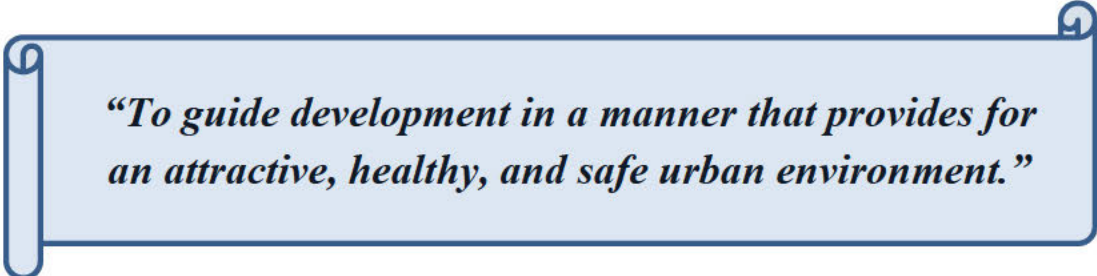
**The walkway closure “debates” and corresponding hostile community meetings seem to boil down to an argument between convenience vs safety. We all want both, but the City has already answered which is more important:**

Community Services Department Planning and Development is responsible for managing and enforcing the City of Saskatoon Zoning Bylaw No. 8770. The Zoning Bylaw details the regulations that govern the use and development of land in the City, and reflects the development standards expected by the community. **The purpose of the Zoning Bylaw is to guide development in a manner that provides for an attractive, healthy, and safe urban environment.**

**As such,**



**If I was to sum up the reasons for closing  
the [REDACTED] Place Walkway in one sentence,  
I would choose the purpose of the Zoning Bylaw:**



*“To guide development in a manner that provides for  
an attractive, healthy, and safe urban environment.”*

Since convenience is not even mentioned, it is clear:

**In any case where the city is asked to choose between *attractive/healthy/safe*, or *convenient*; Attractive, healthy, and safe MUST prevail.**

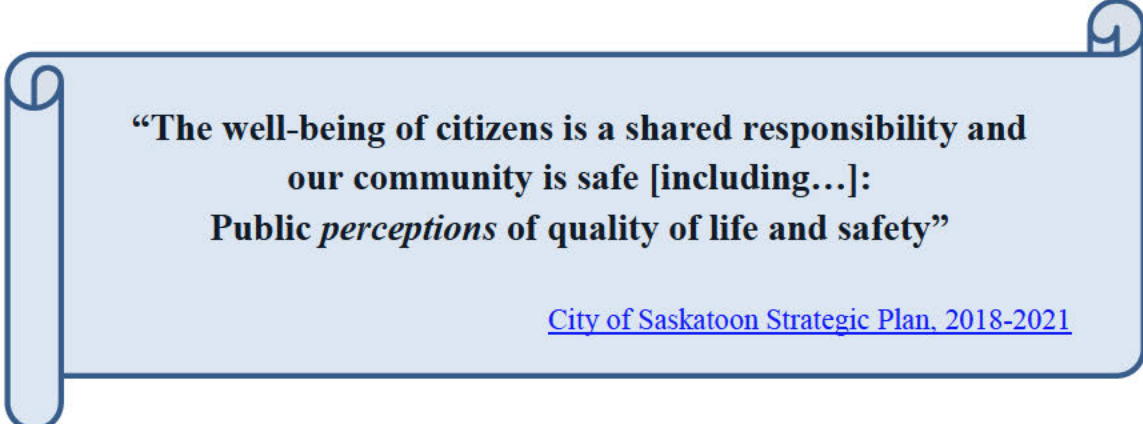


### **Historical Context:**

As one final effort to use existing policy to make sure the ██████ Place Walkway Closure does not become another “alternative to closure discussion,” I would like to remind Council that in order to resolve this situation, they cannot ignore the historical context...

It is not every night, that our property is infiltrated with dangerous or potentially lethal debris, but, because we are not notified when these situations occur, every morning we are forced to assume that something bad was deposited the night before...and we must respond accordingly.

For 6752 days (and counting), we have woken up with the very real possibility that our backyard contains something that would endanger the lives and health of our children or pets. This has created a feeling of never feeling safe in our own yard. Even after close daily inspection, we can never really be sure that we didn't overlook one piece of glass, a small needle, or even “something that looked like a bullet.”



**“The well-being of citizens is a shared responsibility and  
our community is safe [including...]:  
Public *perceptions* of quality of life and safety”**

[City of Saskatoon Strategic Plan, 2018-2021](#)

When Council takes action, you cannot merely reduce (or try to reduce) the number of incidents that occur. To have any tangible impact on our quality of life - and restore the public perception of safety - all reasonable possibilities of infestation must be removed.

Once this has happened, and we are allowed to feel the same level of safety and security every other homeowner in our neighbourhood enjoys, I foresee it will still take a year or two of daily vigilance – and zero incidents – before we will finally be able to let down our guard and relax.

## Conclusion:

I conclude the application of the [REDACTED] Place Walkway as it pertains to existing policy with a reminder of two City Policies:

First, the Walkway Closure Policy:

***4.3.1 Walkway closure recommendations will need to be based on any type of illegal activity, vandalism, or public safety issue happening in the walkway.***

Closure is based on illegal activity, vandalism, or public safety issues...these have all been continually demonstrated so the basis for closure has been satisfied.

Second, The Zoning Bylaw:

***The purpose of the Zoning Bylaw is to guide development in a manner that provides for an attractive, healthy, and safe urban environment.***

If this, somehow, is still a debate between the convenience of the walkway vs the unattractive, unhealthy, and unsafe environment the walkway creates...**City bylaw clearly dictates that making the community attractive, healthy, and safe shall take priority over convenience, therefore, the [REDACTED] Place Walkway must be closed...immediately.**

Sincerely,

Dr. Joel Hall



## Put Yourself in Our Shoes

What would you do if you had a neighbour who was a very nice person, but, unfortunately, was one who:

- Leaves their home for months on end; and while they are absent,
- Allows guests to use their yard to party at all hours of the day and night,
- Allows guests to be loud, urinate on your fence, drink and do drugs, and leave the neighbour's yard in a constant mess,
- Tolerates "guests" breaking your fence and painting graffiti on it,
- Allows guests to bang on the side of your home at all hours of the night,
- Allows guests throw garbage and used needles into your back yard. They also smash beer bottles against your home,
- Seems oblivious to the situation. They don't seem to understand the severity of the situation (because they are nice – but rarely home – it is the guests that are the issue).

Now, what if you complained to your neighbour and told them all the problems that happen while they're away...

Your neighbour is friendly and nice about it, but because their guests are used to hanging out there, and your neighbour doesn't want to be unpopular, they refuse to deny their guests access to their yard when they aren't home.

Instead of banning access to his yard, in what he calls a "compromise," your neighbour tells you that he's come up with some "*alternatives to closure*."

He says, "We'll put up some lights, and maybe we'll organize a neighbourhood watch program so you and the other neighbours can police *my* yard while *I'm* out of town."

Many years pass and yet nothing changes. In this scenario, there's no one you can appeal to – you are at the mercy of your neighbour and his willingness to put himself in your shoes.

How would you feel? What would you think of your neighbour?

## Our Situation:

You may think the previous description portrays our situation. Unfortunately, with our neighbour, the situation is even worse than the one listed above...

Before I am allowed to even talk to my neighbour about the vandalism and safety threats, I have to *pay them* \$2000. Even with the payment, there is still no guarantee my neighbour will do anything to address the problems.

But, the problem is even worse...

Even though my neighbour often goes months, or even years, without addressing graffiti on their property; they happen to know someone at City Hall – so, if I get graffiti'd (even if it's by my neighbour's guests), they will have the City come and make me clean my fence within seven days.

Oh, and it's even worse...

When I have to replace my fence (which I have to do more often than most people because of the damage caused by my neighbour's guests), I have to pay the full amount for my new fence – my neighbour won't even split the materials cost with me!

How do you think I feel?

Because of the illicit, illegal, and disruptive behaviour of the guests, I have been left feeling vulnerable, helpless, and afraid for the safety and well-being of my family.

Almost as bad – and in some ways worse – I feel frustration and anger at my neighbour: For many years, my neighbour has known about – and has had the power to correct – this issue, ***but has chosen not to***. This has left me feeling completely ignored, powerless, and abandoned, by a neighbour that I thought was my friend.

City Council Members, as the owner of the walkway next to my home, *you* are my neighbour.

I wonder, *is this the kind of neighbour you want to be?*

And, *is this the kind of neighbour you are to those living next to your own home?*

I would think the answer to both these questions is “No.” So, just like the character described above, you are probably a “nice” person, but you have been an irresponsible neighbour who does not control their “guests.”

I am, therefore, sending you a victim impact statement so you can hopefully understand the effect that your [current and previous Council Members] inaction has had on me and my family:

## **Victim Impact Statement:**

Not only have my family and I been victims of multiple crimes, we continue to be vulnerable to any number of ongoing crimes and illicit activity. All these things have taken their toll on our quality of life. As judges are instructed to do, I ask that you seriously take into account what you are about to read as you consider our walkway closure and review the walkway closure policy.

## **Victim Impact Statement**

According to the Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice:

*The Victim Impact Statement...is an opportunity for victims of crime to tell the court how a crime has affected them emotionally, physically and financially...*

In other letters, I have documented the financial costs that exceed \$7,000 in wasted landscaping, more than \$2,000 in stolen property, and over \$10,000 in fencing and trying to keep the walkway problems away from my children. For this Victim Impact Statement, therefore, I choose to focus on the emotional hardships this walkway next to our home has created. And to try to make you understand the mental anguish that the walkway's mere presence continues to inflict on me daily...

As I walked around my home taking pictures to try to demonstrate to Council what life is like next to a walkway, I was surprised to find how emotionally disturbing I found it.

The process forced me to slow down and actually look with fresh eyes at the state of things just outside of our fence, and to think back to all the times I've cleaned up broken glass and other trash from in and around our yard.

I also think of our children. We are so fortunate that (to our knowledge) nothing serious has happened to them (yet), and that they don't seem to have contracted any deadly diseases (yet). But, as I look ahead to grandchildren - or to the next young family that moves into this house - I am scared...and I am ashamed.

Familiarity has obviously blinded me to how bad the situation is, and numbed me to how long we have put up with being prisoners on our own property, and there is no reprieve...

Winter is bad because people loiter in the sheltered walkway to drink and smoke drugs in a secluded spot that's out of the wind.

Spring is bad because when the snow melts, we have to search for four months' worth of needles, trash, and glass hidden amongst the mud and wet leaves.

Summer is bad because the warm weather brings much more criminal and illicit activity in the walkway. It is also difficult because summer is when our children are home more and want to play outside.

Fall...It is ridiculous that we had to teach our teenaged children that how they grew up wasn't normal. We had to explain that most children can run barefoot in their own yard without fear of getting an infection from stepping on glass, or Hepatitis from a needle. We've tried to assure them that when they have kids and a home of their own, they'll be able to let them play in the leaves in the Fall – something we could not do after we raked because we didn't want them stabbed by a used needle that may have been hidden in the pile.

I have become complacent. I am appalled at the disgraceful situation I have tolerated for far too long. Is this what living in Saskatoon means? It's truly sickening.

For over 18 years, I have felt powerless and vulnerable, fighting a never-ending battle of trying to keep my family safe. I have never been able to just relax and enjoy watching my children play in our own backyard. I am always scared that I didn't find some broken glass or worried that I missed a needle that was somehow hidden out of sight. Many times we just kept our children inside as we did not feel comfortable letting them go into our own back yard.

Not only does this make us feel like prisoners in our own home, it creates uncertainty and mental anguish that never goes away: **We don't know what was done or when it happened...so we can NEVER relax.**

This is not just a problem from the past. Every morning we *have to* (“*have to*”, present tense) assume that something lethal has been discarded into our yard.

Because this situation has been allowed to continue for so long, the problem has compounded to also include not just the danger itself, but also the *fear* of danger. **Therefore, any change in policy that does not alleviate both the direct damage and dangers – but does not also eliminate the threat of the dangers – is essentially useless.**

If you feel like this is too much for me to ask, please review the [City of Saskatoon Strategic Plan, 2018-2021](#):

“The well-being of citizens is a shared responsibility and our community is safe [including...]:

**Public perceptions of quality of life and safety”**

We cannot have peace of mind until this walkway is closed. The upcoming actions of City Council must not only protect our property and the health and well-being of my family,

**Council must follow their plan and provide us with the *perception* of safety that they promised to us.**

Anything less is a violation of your own strategic plan:

***“TRUST: Demonstrate consistency between actions and words.”***

So, can you be trusted?

Will your actions be consistent with your words?

Will you close the [REDACTED] Place Walkway?

For the sake of my children and future grand-children, I sure hope the answer is “Yes” to all three questions.

Sincerely,

Joel Hall

### **Put Yourself in Our Shoes**

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Winter is bad because people loiter in the sheltered walkway to drink and smoke drugs in a secluded spot that's out of the wind.

Spring is bad because when the snow melts, we have to search for four months' worth of needles, trash, and glass hidden amongst the mud and wet leaves.

Summer is bad because the warm weather brings much more criminal and illicit activity in the walkway. It is also difficult because summer is when our children are home more and want to play outside.

Fall...It is ridiculous that we had to teach our teenaged children that how they grew up wasn't normal. We had to explain that most children can run barefoot in their own yard without fear of getting an infection from stepping on glass, or Hepatitis from a needle. We've tried to assure them that when they have kids and a home of their own, they'll be able to let them play in the leaves in the Fall – something we could not do after we raked because we didn't want them stabbed by a used needle that may have been hidden in the pile.

I have become complacent. I am appalled at the disgraceful situation I have tolerated for far too long. Is this what living in Saskatoon means? It's truly sickening.

For over 18 years, I have felt powerless and vulnerable, fighting a never-ending battle of trying to keep my family safe. I have never been able to just relax and enjoy watching my children play in our own backyard. I am always scared that I didn't find some broken glass or worried that I missed a needle that was somehow hidden out of sight. Many times we just kept our children inside as we did not feel comfortable letting them go into our own back yard.

Not only does this make us feel like prisoners in our own home, it creates uncertainty and mental anguish that never goes away: **We don't know what was done or when it happened...so we can NEVER relax.**

This is not just a problem from the past. Every morning we *have to* (“*have to*”, present tense) assume that something lethal has been discarded into our yard.

Because this situation has been allowed to continue for so long, the problem has compounded to also include not just the danger itself, but also the *fear* of danger. **Therefore, any change in policy that does not alleviate both the direct damage and dangers – but does not also eliminate the threat of the dangers – is essentially useless.**

If you feel like this is too much for me to ask, please review the [City of Saskatoon Strategic Plan, 2018-2021](#):

“The well-being of citizens is a shared responsibility and our community is safe [including...]:

**Public perceptions of quality of life and safety”**

We cannot have peace of mind until this walkway is closed. The upcoming actions of City Council must not only protect our property and the health and well-being of my family,

**Council must follow their plan and provide us with the *perception* of safety that they promised to us.**

Anything less is a violation of your own strategic plan:

***“TRUST: Demonstrate consistency between actions and words.”***

So, can you be trusted?

Will your actions be consistent with your words?

Will you close the [REDACTED] Place Walkway?

For the sake of my children and future grand-children, I sure hope the answer is “Yes” to all three questions.

Sincerely,

Joel Hall

## **Walkway Closure Policy Moving Forward**

### **Moving Forward**

I assume that the intent of Council is based on a desire to truly understand the situation and to act in the best interests of all residents. I also assume that the status quo will not prevail over doing the right thing. As someone very well acquainted with this issue, I would like to offer some observations and suggestions as you consider policy moving forward:

### **Previous Policy Discussions**

As I have reviewed previous and current policies and the Council minutes from 2008-2011, there appears to be some misunderstandings/misconceptions about the negative effect walkways often have on adjacent property owners. This has led to improper handling of applications, contentious Community Meetings, irrelevant proposed solutions, and overall low priority of getting troublesome walkways like the one next to our house closed. I would like to address these situations and propose a better way based on the reality of the situation.

### **Misconceptions about Walkways**

For those who have not had first-hand experience with walkways, there are at least five common misconceptions...at least as they pertain to the walkway alongside our home:

**First Misconception:** *People assume walkways get regular use and serve a public need to access schools, parks, and busses.*

When council considered our application 11 years ago, *they found none of this to be true*. In an eight hour period, 7 people used it. More importantly, alternative routes are available. I have already demonstrated how unnecessary the walkway next to our home is.

**Second Misconception:** *People assume walkways don't cause problems...or, that any problems that do happen are minor nuisances.*

Our fence and home regularly get graffiti and our fence is often damaged. In the middle of the night, people climb on our fence and bang on the side of our home, waking up us and our children. On many occasions, *in our own backyard*, we have found needles and other drug paraphernalia, broken glass, bikes, garbage, cigarette packs (some partially full), pornography, and things that appeared to be stolen-wrecked and then dumped. These are not minor nuisances.

If people actually stop and imagined how they would feel if they regularly found these things in their backyard – especially if they have children or pets, I'm sure they would quickly agree – walkways cause problems – big problems.

**Third Misconception:** *Some people assume the graffiti and damage are our (the homeowner's) fault, and we should have known better when we bought the house – so we should just maintain our yard and fence better.*

We have built a six foot fence around our entire back yard and partial front yard. This is the highest fence allowed by city bylaw. When graffiti and damage appear, we quickly repair it. Inside our property line, across the back of our yard, we had a 12 foot tall chain link structure with privacy slats built. It is unsightly, so we planted vines to grow on it. We installed motion sensor lights on our house facing the walkway. The lights themselves became a target for rocks and bottles.

In all, we have spent over \$10,000 to try to keep the problems of the walkway out of our yard. If all of this is not enough to stop the graffiti and the damage (and it hasn't been), I don't know what else a person can do.

**Fourth Misconception:** *Walkway problems are limited to (and remain within) the confines of the walkway.*

*This is the biggest misunderstanding as this **completely false belief** has framed all discussions surrounding walkway closure. The effects of the criminal element that walkways attract very often spill over into the adjacent homes and yards.*

I already mentioned some of the theft because of the walkway. There have been other incidents of people breaking through (or climbing over) our fence in the middle of the night and stealing our property. This summer, at 4:30 in the morning, one man broke through our fence from the walkway and I caught him trying to break into the back door of our home.

This is not an issue of “alternative to closure solutions” like increased maintenance or better lighting or neighbourhood watches or more police presence...it takes less than a second to throw a used needle into my yard or to smash a bottle against my house. Even if a police officer did get to the scene on time to witnesses an offense, the very nature/design of the walkways provides criminals with easy escape routes. Police don't have a chance...and neither do homeowners.

As I believe I have clearly demonstrated, this walkway serves little to no public good, it is not merely a nuisance, and the resulting crime and damage is not our fault.

Most of all, walkway-related crimes, mischief, and destruction are not contained by the surrounding fences...no matter how tall you build them.

The spillover from this crime-magnet regularly comes into our yard. The noise and disruption have entered our home and criminals utilizing the walkway have attempted to infiltrate our home...our *home*.

Even when we do not leave the enclosure of our own yard, the needles, the broken glass, and the laundry list of other debris that have come into our yard from the walkway all pose serious – and ongoing – threats to the health and safety of my children, my wife, myself, and our pets.

**This walkway has drastically limited the enjoyment we can get from our own home and yard, and it has made us feel like prisoners on our own property.**

**Fifth Misconception:** *Reducing incidents (through various “alternatives to closure” proposals) is sufficient.*

Most Walkways have been causing troubles similar to those I have experienced for as long as the current owner has lived in the house, for much longer, in fact. As a result of the continual encroachments into our yards, the mere perception of danger has become a serious issue that must be addressed.

I will once again reference the [City of Saskatoon Strategic Plan](#), 2018-2021:

*“...Our community is safe [including...]:*

**Public perceptions of quality of life and safety”**

It is difficult to imagine any solution short of closure that both accomplishes this promise while also being economically viable.

### **Community Meetings**

In partial recognition of the destructive nature of walkways, previous Councils have attempted to address the situation through walkway policies. Closure procedures have included several aspects that not only reflect a lack of understanding of the five issues addressed above, these misunderstandings have led to measures and “solutions” that are counter-productive and divisive. The best (worst?!) example is the community meeting.

Community input is good – having a voice is part of what makes it great to live in a democratic society. **I am by no means trying to impede input from the community when it comes to walkway closure. In fact, I encourage it. It just needs to be done properly.** We must first acknowledge that unless someone completely disagrees with the concept of the social contract or, more specifically, *social justice*, even in a democracy, no – *especially* in a democracy – majority *cannot* always rule...

As this pertains to walkway closure, one of the main concerns current Council seems to have regarding re-opening this walkway discussion – a matter that has sporadically been before Council for at least 13 years already – is the memory of nasty community meetings.

It is understandable that Council wishes to avoid the ‘neighbour-vs-neighbour’ incidents that so many of us went through a decade ago. And rightfully so, they can be brutal both during and afterward...

It is emotionally difficult to be bent over sweeping up glass from the catwalk – glass that your child just cut his foot on – and then to have someone from down the block (a person you know was instrumental in keeping the catwalk by your house open) drive by smiling and waving.

[Yes, this happened. And, if that wasn’t bad enough, it was the same neighbour who, a month later, had a laptop stolen out of his truck by a person who escaped through the walkway. Once that happened – and it affected him personally – *then* he said he wished they wouldn’t have opposed the closure.]

So, to get input from the community, **Council must approach the community with the right question.**

In the past, community meetings have been premised with the irrelevant and inflammatory question, “*Do you object to the proposed walkway closure?*” In light of the seriousness of the situation, the question posed to neighbours must change

Why?

This a matter of safety and well-being vs convenience (at most). Most often, in fact, it is safety and well-being vs only *preference*. As stated earlier, most people do not understand this. So I will explain...

Walkway closure is not like a political election or even a referendum. It is also not a vote of preference such as one would find on *America’s Got Talent* or *Canadian Idol*.

One of the reasons we have elected officials is to protect our rights and freedoms...especially when we are in the *minority*. We all have a right to be safe, and we certainly deserve to feel protected on our own private property...*regardless of minor inconveniences or the preferences of the majority*.



Any policy must fall within the stipulations of the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#). Since the *Charter* does not address *convenience* as a fundamental right of Canadians, I have included the closest section: Mobility. Compare the government's obligations when it comes to mobility and to providing life, liberty, and security:

***Mobility rights – Section 6***

6. (1) *Every citizen of Canada has the right to enter, remain in and leave Canada.*

***Rights to move and gain livelihood***

(2) *Every citizen of Canada and every person who has the status of a permanent resident of Canada has the right:*

1. *to move to and take up residence in any province; and*
2. *to pursue the gaining of a livelihood in any province.*

***Life, liberty and security of person – Section 7***

7. *Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.*

Once can easily see that when one looks at Walkways through the lens of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Council is under no obligation to provide them, but Council is clearly under the obligation of providing all citizens with life, liberty, and security.

Since the walkway adjacent to our home deprives us of two of those rights, and because it was built, and is currently being sanctioned by, Saskatoon City Council, any policy and any action that does not restore liberty and security to me and my family would be in violation of the *Charter*.

Here is a hypothetical example to demonstrate how prioritizing convenience over safety is foolish, and you will easily see the absurdity of the “debate”:

Imagine living in a city where any one of your neighbours could come into your home uninvited – day or night – and take a cup of sugar.

Why are they allowed to do this?

Because, for your 20 neighbours, it is more convenient to come take your sugar, than it is for them to go all the way to the store. And convenience is the priority (*especially* if it is more convenient for the majority).

Understandably, you, as the homeowner, don't like neighbours (and strangers) coming into your home. Not only do they take your sugar, they sometimes wreck things and leave drug needles

and broken bottles in your kitchen. Since you have children in the house, it also makes you very fearful for their safety as you've sometimes seen strangers leave the kitchen and go into other rooms. You've even had to chase one man off as he attempted to go upstairs where the bedrooms are. This situation has forced you to change how you live your life.

Every morning before your kids get out of bed, you go downstairs to make sure nothing poisonous or contagious was spilled on the floor overnight, and to ensure that there is no broken glass that your kids could step on invisibly embedded into the carpet. Inexplicably, people often spray paint on your walls and fence.

No longer able to tolerate the situation, you go to City Council to put a stop to it.

What would a just Council do?

Some might say, *we live in a democracy, so we should vote on it...* democracy means majority rules, right? The fact is, in a vote among your neighbours, you would probably lose 20 to 1. Would you be satisfied?

No.

Maybe it wasn't 20 to 1. What if a few people agree with your right to feel secure in your own home, and a few others don't eat sugar. You are able to swing 9 of the votes. You still lose 11-10...so people are still allowed to keep coming onto your kitchen and to keep taking your stuff. Knowing the democratic process of voting was followed, would you be satisfied now?

Of course not.

Now, what if Council said, *"OK, we can see you don't like this, but your sugar is so convenient for your neighbours. How about we install motion lights in your house so you'll know when someone comes in? That way it will be easier to see if they go anywhere else besides the kitchen? We'll also arrange a schedule shifts for members of your family to stay awake all night and watch to make sure no one goes anywhere but the kitchen (after all, most "borrowing" happens between midnight and 6 am)."*

*"By the way,"* they add before you can object, *"If one of them damages your door when they break in, you have seven days to fix – or pay someone to do it for you - it or you can either be fined or we will come and fix it and send you the bill."*

Absurd.

Obviously, this scenario is ridiculous. We would never tolerate allowing the convenience of a situation to threaten a family's health and safety... especially on their own property. Moreover, to rectify the situation, we would **never** put it to a "majority rules" vote!

*The fact of the matter is, the community meetings regarding walkway closures are even worse than this...*

According to policy, the City does not even go by majority rules...It's much worse:

*If a mere 21% of my neighbours feel it is OK for my home and property to be damaged and my family's health and safety to be threatened – in our own home and yard – our elected government (you, City Council Member) have allowed it.*



### SAY WHAT??

With current policy, if everyone in the city would agree that the walkway next to my home should be closed, but my next-door neighbour disagrees – or would even just prefer not to get involved – I cannot even *approach* City Council for help! **It only takes one person to stop me from trying to protect my home and family.**

When people who live next to walkways complain about the dangers these walkways pose, and Council offers to *put up some lights*, it is a slap in the face, and a direct indication of Council's level of commitment to the safety and security of Saskatoon citizens while on their own private property. The only other explanation is that Council just doesn't understand - something I'm confident will no longer be the case.

Similarly, anyone witnessing an ugly community meeting would either conclude that people are selfish and heartless people who don't care about anyone but themselves, or, you would conclude that the *neighbours just don't understand the situation*.

Is it really up to those of us living next to a walkway to go in front of each of our neighbours and explain the impact the crime and violence has on me and my family when people "take our sugar"?

Is it up to us to plead with them, and ask them if maybe, if it's ok with them, would 80% of them please mind going to the store instead? And, am I really at the mercy of the whims of my next-door neighbour to even broach the topic?

Or, can I just explain it to Council and trust they will do the right thing and avoid all of this unnecessary conflict (as they did with a very similar issue described below)?

Our realizations regarding social justice make it clear that actively harming a few for the sake of the majority is not acceptable. We've seen that it has been in these situations that humankind's

worst atrocities have been committed. Walkways are obviously not on the same scale of slavery or concentration camps or residential schools, but the same principle certainly applies:

*Every person has a right to their personal freedom, safety, and well-being, regardless of what the majority says.*

Any reasonable and unbiased person would agree that it is much more important to inhibit crime, reduce vandalism, avoid arson, and prevent having children acquire infectious diseases while playing in their own back yards, than it is for a few people to have to use a different bus stop.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the voices in the community should not be heard...

When it comes to the safety of residents, community discussions cannot be framed around “alternatives to walkway closure,” they must be framed around, “Alternatives to using the (former) walkway.”

An appropriate invitation to the community to communicate with Council would go something like this:

“Due to unmanageable crime and ongoing dangers to public safety and private property, the walkway will be closed effective 30 days from today. See map below for alternative routes.

If the alternative route suggested is unreasonably disruptive, please help us arrange for alternatives by answering the following two questions:

1. *What do you currently use the Walkway for?*
2. *How can we help minimize the impact that closing it will have on you?”* For example:
  - a. Post maps in the neighborhood so people can plan alternative routes
  - b. Add a bus stop, etc.

This approach allows our elected officials (City Councillors) to protect the right of citizens to feel safe and protected in their own home and on their own property, while still obtaining and acting upon community input.



The above approach is also consistent with existing City Policies and Previous Council Actions:

Excerpts from the [City of Saskatoon Strategic Plan, 2018-2021](#):

*The well-being of citizens is a shared responsibility and our community is safe.*

- *Public perceptions of quality of life and safety*

### **Five Guiding Values:**

[Most of these values apply in this issue, but I have highlighted a few that are especially worthy of noting with regard to walkway closure policy:]

#### **COURAGE**

- *Lead with passion.*
- *Seek innovation.*
- *Willingly admit mistakes.*
- *Face adversity with strength and confidence.*
- *Respectfully challenge the current way.*
- *Be brave enough to forgive and move forward.*

#### **RESPECT**

- *Recognize everybody's contribution and celebrate successes.*
- *Value individual's beliefs, diversity, aspirations, skills and experiences.*
- *Take time to listen and understand.*
- *Have open and honest discussions because we care about the perspectives of others.*
- *Embrace the role and responsibility of others.*
- *Support decisions with an explanation.*

#### **INTEGRITY**

- *Be accountable and take ownership of our work.*
- *Ensure actions are always honourable and ethical.*
- *Make wise decisions, help others and lead by example.*
- *Lead and embrace change.*

#### **SAFETY**

- *Put safety at the forefront of all decision making.*
- ***Never** compromise on the safety or well-being of ourselves, coworkers or the public.*
- *Take responsibility for your safety and those around you.*
- *Respectfully address unsafe behaviour.*

#### **TRUST**

- *Demonstrate consistency between actions and words.*
- *Support, inspire and empower others to do their job.*
- *Honour commitments.*

With these Guiding Principles in mind, I will remind you of City Policy and the words of Saskatoon City Council...*your* words. As you read your promises to residents like me, ask yourself:

**Are rampant graffiti, crime, arson to homes, and prison-like backyards  
in line with your description of Saskatoon?**

If not, then it's time to write walkway closure policy accordingly and get these walkways closed.

City of Saskatoon Strategic Plan:

*"A great city has plentiful parks, safe, inviting streetscapes, amenities and gathering places where people eagerly come together and enjoy the richness their community has to offer."*

*"Saskatoon is a great city...Together, we draw upon our diversity to build a community of which we can all be proud. Saskatoon [my backyard] is a great place to live, work, learn and play."*

Purpose of Zoning Bylaw:

*"The purpose of the Zoning Bylaw is to guide development in a manner that provides for an attractive, healthy, and safe urban environment."*

And finally, City Council has the "Guiding Value" of **TRUST**:

***"[We will] demonstrate consistency between actions and words."***

Will you?

Not wanting to leave anything to chance, I would like to briefly touch on several more things that Council must consider moving forward:

1. Fences, bylaws, parking, and neighbours
2. Environmental and Economic Impact
3. Consistency between Council Actions (lead pipes)
4. Policing
5. The real threat
6. Wide spread issues among long-term neighbourhood residents
7. Why did I go to all this effort?



## Four More Walkway Issues

I have never heard the following three issues discussed, but they are worthy of consideration in any walkway discussions:

1. Fences above 1 meter are not permitted on corners (front yards) – blind for vehicles. Due to tall fences, the walkway intersection behind our house is blind creating a threat of bike/bike or bike/pedestrian collisions. I have witnessed the latter.
2. City bylaws prevent building within 6 meters of sidewalk. I assume this is in place for safety reasons. Why does the same logic not apply to [REDACTED] Place walkway which was built less than 1 meter from our home.
3. Parking issues created by the walkway. Apartment residents are using spaces in front of our homes and then using walkway. This forces Homeowners on our street to park farther away. This not only creates parking issues, it also *inconveniences* homeowners who must now walk farther to get to their vehicles.
4. Previous policy that insists that both neighbours must apply. I rarely foresee this being an issue, nonetheless, why would one neighbour be able to prevent me from acting to prevent the other neighbour from trying to take action to protect his home and family?

## **What about the Environmental and Economic Impact of Walkway Closures**

Reports to City Council addressing potential walkway closures (2008-2011) often list *Environmental Impact* as a category, but in none of the application reports did I find any impacts listed. Similarly, Financial Impact was listed for general discussion about walkways (On Dec. 1, 2008, the cost for walkway maintenance was said to be \$60,000/yr), yet economic impact did not seem to be a consideration for individual walkway closures. This seems unusual and strangely biased...

### **Environmental Impact.**

Closure may not have a *negative* environmental impact, but *not* closing (i.e. keeping walkways open) does harm the environment. As long as a walkway remains open, the City environment is continually being damaged by:

- Paint chemicals (from graffiti),
- Solvent chemicals (from cleaning graffiti),
- Even more paint chemicals (from repainting over graffiti),
- Waste from repairing/rebuilding fences,
- Pollution from gas/diesel powered snow plows.

On the ground, there is:

- Garbage,
- Needles,
- Broken bottles,
- Human urine and feces.

The Environmental Impact of allowing the walkway to remain open also means:

- Increased noise pollution (screaming, swearing, fighting, police sirens) - especially at night,
- Increased air pollution from fewer cigarette and drug smokers just outside of homes.

**Considering the negative environmental impact of walkways, residents should be demanding to know why Council isn't immediately closing every walkway.**

## **Economic Impact**

The positive economic impact associated with keeping most walkways open would – at absolute most – be that a person spends several minutes less walking to the bus or to work. Even then, it likely wouldn't mean more time at work – as the bus leaves at the same time either way (and work probably starts at the same time as well), so this is, once again, at most, a convenience – not an economic benefit.

### **The negative economic impact of walkways, however, is enormous...**

When walkways are closed, the city will no longer be responsible for maintenance such as mowing the grass and snow removal. It will also no longer have as much graffiti to remove.

As the City and the business communities note (in numerous articles below), the costs of graffiti goes well beyond removal:

According to the City of Saskatoon:

“Graffiti is a crime that effects all members of the community.

- Property owners have to pay to remove graffiti.
- Business owners can lose customers from the negative image that graffiti leaves.
- Communities suffer because graffiti can make people feel the community is in decline.
- Residents in the city whose tax dollars are spent removing graffiti on public buildings, monuments and park structures.
- The public who are concerned about the vandalism and what the graffiti means.”

Further, as the City acknowledges, graffiti leads to an increase in other forms of crime and vandalism...what are the costs of:

- Extra policing?
- Repairs?
- Insurance premiums increases?
- People/Businesses choosing to relocate?
- People/Businesses not coming to Saskatoon because of crime rate?

Obviously, the above list is far from exhaustive. While walkways are not the only source of problems, increased graffiti, increased crime, reduced property values and countless other direct and indirect negative economic impacts can easily be traced to walkways.

This list also only addresses the costs related to graffiti, what about the other elements that walkways attract: Gangs? Drugs? Vandalism?

How much does policing/repairing each of these cost the residents of Saskatoon each year?

And, again, what are all the indirect costs that come from having a city with a high gang/drug/crime rate?

**Considering the numerous negative *environmental* impacts, and the incalculable negative *economic* costs that walkways inflict on Saskatoon, it makes one wonder:  
How the City can justify keeping any of the walkways open?**

### **Star Phoenix Articles Pertaining to the War against Graffiti:**

#### ***City Of Saskatoon Plans To Better Coordinate Graffiti Cleaning*** [Star Phoenix, Nov 27, 2016](#)

“The city’s cost of fighting graffiti has jumped in recent years, to \$91,296 in 2016 from \$36,402 in 2014.”

“Keeping the city free of unsightly tags fits into its plan to improve quality of life and enhance civic pride, the report states.”

#### ***Graffiti Removal Expert Says Saskatoon On Slippery Slope...*** [Star Phoenix, Feb. 26, 2017](#)

“Tom Douglas, owner of Bernie’s Mobile Power Wash Ltd., makes his living removing graffiti says, ‘Four or five years down the road, all of a sudden, the place is going to start to look like Detroit.’”

“Police Chief Clive Weighill said... ‘The last thing we want is to have the city to digress with a bunch of graffiti.’”

#### [Star Phoenix, Oct. 18, 2017](#)

“...the police force no longer has an officer dedicated to graffiti — the position was redeployed to patrol duties”

“However, Randy Pshebylo, executive director of the Riversdale Business Improvement District (BID), said the reported cases of graffiti in the police statistics are ‘the tip of the iceberg.’”

“(They) [business owners] cannot continue to dip into their pockets — that are empty — to try and keep up with this.”

“Pshebylo said graffiti taggers tend to target areas where graffiti is already present, sometimes in response to a certain tag or symbol, and the cycle repeats itself without police intervention.”

“We’re getting hammered,” he said.

“DeeAnn Mercier, executive director of the Broadway BID, said ...unwanted graffiti can mean a ‘huge cost’ for merchants.”

“You don’t necessarily know what graffiti means or what it’s implying, so then it also creates a lack of safety in the area as well,” she said.

“Having staff and customers feel safe is of utmost importance.”

[Star Phoenix, Jan. 11, 2018](#)

“Saskatoon's downtown businesses want police action after a large spike of graffiti in the area.”

“Any time that someone comes along and damages property, it's time, cost and effort to get it back to its proper form.”

“Between 2016 and 2017, graffiti complaints in the downtown area spiked by 80 per cent.”

“Up until 2015, the Saskatoon Police Service assigned one of its police officers to the graffiti beat full time. However, the position was re-assigned to the patrol unit that year.”

### **Summary of Walkway Policy and Graffiti:**

These articles show how graffiti such as that continually found in walkways is an ongoing drain on resources and the overall economy of Saskatoon.

The Walkway Closure Policy (2012) included reference to (and reliance on) a designated graffiti unit which seems to have been abolished in 2015.

While graffiti is obviously getting worse all across Saskatoon, restoring the assigned graffiti officer is insufficient. Even when there was a designated graffiti unit, the City was losing the war against graffiti in 2008 when we applied for walkway closure.

The best solution/deterrent is to remove access to the places that are prime locations for these vandals, i.e. walkways.

## **Policing, Disease, Drugs, and Crime:**

The City clearly recognizes that two things associated with drugs are disease and crime:

[CBC News Safe Consumption Site](#), Sept 9, 2019

“...The Safe Consumption Site will also reduce the spread of HIV and other diseases.”

[Aids Saskatoon](#) (organization opening Safe Consumption Site)

Aids Saskatoon is partly funded by the City of Saskatoon. This means that every taxpayer is paying the price to try to keep people from being unnecessarily harmed by drug use and resulting diseases that come from infected drug paraphernalia.

**These are the same diseases and same used needles endangering my children;  
Do they not deserve the same protection?**

Everyone knows that the North End of Saskatoon gets little to no regular police presence.  
Consider this:

[CBC, Nov 8, 2019](#)

“New Police Unit associated with Safe Consumption Site will add over \$800,000/year in police costs.”

“The Saskatoon Police Association applauds the request for eight new positions for officers but its president says they are still short almost 40 officers.”

It is neighbourhoods like Lawson Heights that bear the brunt of this shortfall –

Leaving a walkway next to our home in this unpoliced area is practically entrapment.

**If the City cannot afford to adequately police our neighbourhood,  
it is irresponsible and negligent to continue allowing these criminal magnets  
to exist right next to our home.**

*Some may think that Homeowners next to Walkways should just be more careful.*

Here is what happened to a grown man - a trained City of Saskatoon Police Officer (wearing leather gloves)...

[Global News Saskatoon: Police Officer Poked](#), Aug 14, 2018

“Over the weekend, an officer had to be taken to hospital and receive treatment [after he] poked himself on a dirty uncapped needle. The officer was wearing leather gloves at the time and was taken to hospital for treatment which included drugs to combat any communicable diseases.

“It’s an unnerving incident that might be far from over.” According to Huisman, “the officer could be facing ongoing medical appointments for the next year.”

**“You can only imagine what’s going through that officer’s mind – he’s a young man, he’s got a family at home and you know he’s concerned that he potentially could infect others.”**

If this can happen to a trained police officer while on the job, does the average citizen, let alone a child, who has to regularly deal with things like this in their own yard, really have a chance?

***Yours is an isolated issue.***

If the walkway next to my home was the only one causing problems, it should still be closed immediately...knowing that my backyard is the only one being littered with used needles from the walkway will be of no consolation if one of my children gets HIV on my property.

That said, we are not the only ones experiencing troubles:

[Global News: Silverwood Fire](#), Oct. 25, 2019

“Tyler Friesen could put up with the graffiti on his fence, but a recent fire at his Saskatoon home was too much to take.

He suspects a narrow walkway next to his Silverwood house allowed an arsonist to get to or from his recycling bin. The blaze on Sept. 9, spread from the bin, damaged his neighbour’s home and left him in fear.

‘When it gets to the point of now my family’s lives are in danger, as well as my neighbours’, that’s a big stress in a guy’s life,’ Friesen told Global News.

He’s also had his garage broken into and his truck stolen from the driveway.

Friesen’s fence along the path and his neighbour’s adjacent fence are tarnished with countless examples of graffiti. There’s often broken glass and trash strewn about.

Eight years ago, Grant Myhre spent \$6,500 to build a new fence, only to see it defaced by vandals. At all hours of the day, he’s seen people drinking, using drugs and urinating in the path.

‘It’s a great area, but when you have to deal with this, it’s very frustrating,’ said Myhre, who has lived at the home for over 21 years.”

While the details of illegal and illicit activities may vary slightly between walkways, because of the danger they attract, most – if not all - should be closed...and policy should be written accordingly.

Like myself, these are long-term stable residents who have lived in the same neighbourhood, and the same home, for about two decades. Why is the City not looking out for us?

**Who is the better resident you want to take our place as we begin to feel forced out of our homes and our city?**



## Consistency between Council Actions Must be Maintained

To demonstrate how inconsistent, unsafe, and frustrating the current Walkway Closure Policy is, I will compare it to the policy Council created to address a similar issue that has recently been in the news: Lead Pipes.

In the past 10 to 20 years, Saskatoon has had two very similar issues: lead pipes and walkways. For some reason, however how Council has handled the situations has been very differently.

First, here is how they are similar:

1. Decades ago, the City attempted to add to the convenience and livability Saskatoon by providing amenities to neighbourhoods: water pipes and sidewalks.
2. In both cases, the infrastructure built by the City sometimes (in the cases of *lead* pipes and walkways) *inadvertently* brought toxins right up to private property.
3. In both cases, the problems do not always remain on the City side of the property line: Even if the pipes on private property are clean and safe, the lead pipes adjacent/leading to homes still bring toxins onto private property. Similarly, even when tall fences are erected, the toxins from the walkways regularly spill over onto private property.
4. Both of these problems create real and ongoing threats to the health and safety of Saskatoon residents.
5. Not every Saskatoon resident is directly affected by the problems created by either lead pipes or walkways, but they both indirectly affect every resident (economically, if nothing else)

While both issues present health and safety concerns that must be addressed, of the two, walkways pose the more imminent threat for two reasons:

1. According to Health Canada, it takes years of exposure to lead to develop health issues, while *a person can contract a deadly disease from one exposure* to an infected needle.
2. Lead pipes are buried out of sight, so while the problem may increase over time as the pipes corrode, it's a slow decline. Walkway problems, however, can compound quickly: What starts as trash and graffiti soon leads to gangs, drugs, alcohol, theft, and vandalism. This leads to more crime, more violence, and more danger. Unlike the pipes, if the walkway is not removed, each additional illicit element perpetuates the cycle, and the problem is magnified exponentially.

In spite of the similarities in the initial problems and the more immediate dangers of walkways, the City has handled the two issues very differently, here are some specific examples:

Unlike the Walkway Closure Policy, with the Lead Pipe issue, City Council...

1. *Acted swiftly and handled the matter as a group*...even though some wards were more affected than others – and some aren't affected at all.

2. Did not choose to leave the harmful lead pipes, and instead offer “alternative to replacement solutions” such as,
  - a. Leaving water continually running (at homeowner expense). This would have solved the problem, why wasn’t it a viable solution? Probably because *it deals with the effect, not the cause* (much like cleaning graffiti and picking up needles).
  - b. Neighbourhood residents taking turns hauling water from another neighbourhood at three in the morning (like a neighbourhood watch that needs to be active from midnight to 6am);
  - c. Having residents go through chelation procedures (heavy metal cleanses) to remove lead from their bodies (after-the-fact remedies like HIV treatment)...
3. Committed to addressing the *cause*, and did not stop at just trying to minimize the effects: Even though a solution (water filters) was available that not only restored safety to the homeowner, it also provided them with the *perception* of safety, the City did not stop there. Apparently knowing that they needed to fix the cause and not just reduce - or even eliminate - the effect (and possibly to remove the ongoing cost to the homeowner to buy filters), the City went much further with their policy...
4. Rolled out a permanent solution that Mayor Clark described as, “Extremely aggressive.”
5. Set a date (2026) to remove all lead pipes – *regardless of cost and inconveniences*. This is approximately 10 years from the discovery of the health issue.
6. Did not require affected homeowners to spend time or money trying to prove they were affected – the city identified the homes based on proximity to the cause.
7. Did not require homeowners to apply for the situation to be fixed, all homes with lead pipes are assumed to have health concerns.
8. Did not differentiate between those whose health and safety was a *little* threatened and those whose health and safety was *very* threatened...and they certainly didn’t try to balance that against the relative convenience or opinions of neighbours.
9. Did not require homeowners to pay *just to apply* to the City to take action to protect them from the toxins that spill over from City property. Moreover...
10. Did not require homeowner *to get the approval of their neighbour - just to apply* - to have their harmful pipes replaced.
11. Considered the matter non-negotiable (no public debate) – *because the City is committed to keeping its residents safe*.
12. Did not put the matter up for public debate, forcing affected homeowners to convince 80% of their neighbours to allow them to replace the lead pipes that were endangering the health and safety of the homeowner and the homeowner’s family.
13. Considered the matter non-negotiable (no public debate) - *because this was a health and safety issue, Council did not let the possibility that some people could be negatively impacted by the decision to replace the lead pipes stop them from doing*

- the right thing* (for example, health care workers or teachers' aides who are employed to help children who suffer conditions caused by long-term lead exposure could lose their jobs).
14. Considered the matter non-negotiable (no public debate) – *even though some residents would be inconvenienced: **safety trumped convenience**.*
  15. Considered the matter non-negotiable (no public debate) – *costs paid by the city are being spread among all taxpayers, even though not all taxpayers are directly affected.*
  16. Funds 60% of in-home repairs.
  17. Offers financing options.
  18. Provided additional funding options for low income families.

Perhaps someone might argue that these two issues are different because walkway closure may inconvenience residents more than lead pipe replacement would.

First, as has been clearly shown, at least in the case of the [REDACTED] Place Walkway, convenience is a non-issue due to alternative routes.

Second, and most importantly, I remind those people (and Council Members) of City Council's commitment to safety (as stated in the Strategic Plan, 2018-2021)[emphasis added]:

Put **safety** at the forefront of **all** decision making.

**Never** compromise on the safety or well-being of...the public.

Again, the only way City Council could have had such different responses to such similar issues is that – previous to now – they have not understood the true issues with the walkway, and even that is an inconsistency...

The City *made it their business* to find out the extent of the lead pipe issue, but has been largely passive in determining the extent of the walkway problems. Thus far, Council seems to have left their information gathering largely to homeowner complaints, and apparently waiting for a tragic incident to happen before they take real action.

Council must see the parallels between the lead pipes and the walkways – and the inconsistencies in how they've been addressed – and they must act accordingly to rectify the situation.

## **Why Did I Go to All this Time and Effort?**

So there is no doubt, I will conclude with 12 reasons why I provided you with so much detail:

1. Rather than using the newspaper or the TV news to speak to this issue (as I was requested to do), I chose to channel my anger and frustration into providing you with the information you need to understand and fix the problem. I feel like Council and I are on the same team, and I did not want an unnecessarily public discussion.
2. I am proud of my city and proud of my neighbourhood and I am tired of living amongst graffiti and damage.
3. I am tired of having my property damaged and having to spend so much time and money repairing it.
4. I am tired of having things stolen from yard.
5. I am tired of my family being woken up to pounding on our house or bottles being smashed against it.
6. I am tired of being a helpless victim. A prisoner in my own home, unable to enjoy my own yard.
7. I am tired of scouring my yard for glass and needles. And I'm tired of risking my own health and life cleaning them up.
8. I am tired of being afraid for my children and pets.
9. I am tired of people debating whether or not my property, my peace of mind, my tens of thousands of dollars, my health and safety, my wife's health and safety, my puppy's health and safety, and my home, my fence, my sleep, and most of all, my children's health, safety, and very lives; are more important than the possibility of perhaps inconveniencing one or two pedestrians who prefer to use a specific bus stop.
10. It appears inevitable that in the near future something very bad is going to happen to someone as a result of these walkways: A child will become infected with a communicable disease from a discarded walkway needle, a whole family will be killed in a house fire caused by arson related to a walkway, or, as gangs move more and more into our unpoliced neighbourhoods, an innocent person could easily be injured or killed in a shooting like what recently happened on the East side of Saskatoon.

11. By providing you with the information contained in these letters, if you do not take appropriate action to prevent these types of tragedies, **you will be without excuse:**
- a. **Personally**, it will be on your conscience knowing that you could have prevented the heartbreak and loss, and
  - b. **Legally**, as courts will see that the City was more than adequately warned, but did not take sufficient action.

Of course, knowing that Council Members feel guilty, or receiving a large cash settlement for the death of a child will be of little consolation to those left behind to grieve.

12. Most of all, I want to live in a clean and safe community. I want my children, my future grand-children, our pets; and any future owners of this home to feel free and secure. And, I want them to be able to fully enjoy their home and yard.

None of this can happen while the [REDACTED] Place Walkway remains open.

**Thank you for your consideration, and thank you for taking swift action.**

Sincerely,

Joel Hall