

Walter, Penny

Subject: FW: Email - Communication - Gayle Nemeth - Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee - Optimist Park Heritage Designation - CK 610-11
Attachments: optimist_park_-_heritage_designation_mhac.pdf

-----Original Message-----

From: Web NoReply <web-noreply@Saskatoon.ca>
Sent: Saturday, March 27, 2021 10:23 AM
To: Web E-mail - City Clerks <City.Clerks@Saskatoon.ca>
Subject: Email - Communication - Gayle Nemeth - Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee - Optimist Park Heritage Designation - CK 610-11

Submitted on Saturday, March 27, 2021 - 10:23
Submitted values are:

==Your Message==

Service category: City Council, Boards & Committees
Account Number:
Subject: To the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee - Optimist Park Heritage Designation
Message:
Hello,

Please forward the attached letter to the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee.

Thank you,
Gayle
Attachment:
optimist_park_-_heritage_designation_mhac.pdf

To the Saskatoon Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee,

We are writing to inquire whether your committee has ever advocated for the heritage designation of a park? In the event that this is the case, please advise us on what criteria a heritage park designation is based. A number of us who live near Optimist Park are wondering whether it would be possible to have this park designated as such.

We believe that preserving Optimist Park from demolition and unsympathetic alterations is important. There are discussions about potentially placing a large school, daycare, and possibly a rec centre in this park, but we feel this is an incompatible use, as it would detract from the public use and accessibility of this space, would result in the removal of valuable trees and park space, and lead to significant wear and tear. The park is used by a diverse range of people – if the City Centre School is built there, we are concerned that they will not have the same kind of access to this space as they do now, and that the park may be altered in ways that detract from current community uses. Having visited and worked at many schools, I worry that if Optimist Park became a school ground, it would no longer be a welcoming place for all people, at all times of day.

There are many reasons that Optimist Park deserves heritage recognition. Not only is Optimist Park one of Saskatoon's oldest parks, but it also:

- Serves the highly diverse neighbourhoods of Riversdale, West Industrial, Pleasant Hill, and King George.
- Is used throughout the day for a variety of uses, such as accessing the paddling pool and playground area in the summer, and the snow hill and community-made cross country ski trails in the winter. There are groups who dance and play music in the park every Sunday. Families and friends gather to use the basketball courts, ball diamond, rink, and barbecue area. Dog walkers frequent the park. And it is also a well-used path for people traveling through the area.
- Has been a place of community gathering for over 100 years and has a rich history in our city as a public park.
- Enhances the attractiveness of the area, especially considering its current and historic roots as a park that borders industrial uses.
- Is one of very few green spaces in the core area.¹
- Provides mature trees and habitat.
- Is an historic place that our community takes pride in.

While the City of Saskatoon Junction Strategy's vision has not yet been fully realized, it is still the most recent plan we have for our neighbourhood. It shows that this area is intended to support green space, culture, industry, and artistry. We believe that a heritage designation for this park would help the City of Saskatoon realize and secure its vision for this area and provide community members with the reassurance that our park will remain as a public park into the future.

Below are some examples that show the value and history of Optimist Park. Additional photos of Optimist Park can be found through the Saskatoon Public Library's Local History Collection.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,
Gayle and Daniel Nemeth

¹ The City of Saskatoon's [Green Infrastructure Strategy](#) shows just how "under-greened" our West Industrial neighbourhood is and the City's [Recreation and Parks Master Plan](#) has a goal that "Local natural resources are protected and nurtured." We have less than 1.5% green space in our West Industrial neighbourhood and only 3-5% canopy cover. Compare that to other neighbourhoods in our city - some of which have over 15% green space and over 25% canopy cover. This is why Optimist Park is so vitally important. The park offers mature trees, shade, recreational opportunities, mental and physical health benefits, wildlife habitat, stormwater management, and so much more. If a school were to be built in the park, we worry that it would lead to the removal of trees, that park space would be fragmented and paved over, and that our existing amenities would be depleted.

2011 Optimist Park Safety Audit Report

Source: <https://www.saskatoon.ca/sites/default/files/documents/community-services/planning-development/neighbourhood-planning/neighbourhood-safety/FINAL%20Optimist%20Park%20Neighbourhood%20Safety%20and%20Cover.pdf>

"The original land use plan for Riversdale was proposed in August 1904 by Dr. Willoughby, a graduate in medicine from the University of Toronto. Originally the land use plan had no land set aside for parks with many lots shallower than others of their time. This design was created to increase land development profits, not to attend to the amenities desired by many of the citizens. As a result, citizens were quick to demand a park and, in 1910, development began on what was to become Optimist Park (originally known as Westside Park), one of Saskatoon's oldest green spaces.

Located in the southeast of the Riversdale neighbourhood, Optimist Park intersects Avenue K South, between 18th and 19th Streets, and has grown and changed over the years. Between 1924 and 1931, it was expanded and landscaped as part of an unemployment relief project. Later, a skating rink and rink house were added, and a speed skating oval built, establishing Optimist Park as Saskatoon's home of speed skating until the 1971 Canada Winter Games, when the Clarence Downey Speed Skating Oval was built. The park has since been developed to include winding tree-lined paths, tennis courts, a ball diamond, paddling pool; play structures and a toboggan hill."



November, 1947, community members enjoy a winter day on the community skating rink.



1947 Westfield Park (renamed Optimist Park in 1953) Sandbox Competition

A view of the recreation unit, ball diamond and paddling pool in Optimist Park – 1960



2004 West Industrial Local Area Plan

Source: https://www.saskatoon.ca/sites/default/files/documents/community-services/planning-development/neighbourhood-planning/West_Industrial_Final.pdf

“As would be expected at the time, the value of planting trees in an industrial area was not understood, which explains why there is a significant absence of trees, or other types of vegetation in the area.”

“Today, it is clearly recognized that one of the simplest and most affordable ways to ensure a reasonable quality of environment in a core industrial area, is to ensure there are ample trees available to:

- Enhance the appearance of what would otherwise be an unattractive area;
- Provide a visual screening between residential and industrial land use;
- Aid in storm water management;
- Produce oxygen and reduce the level of carbon dioxide generated from industry processing;
- Reduce energy consumption by breaking up winter wind and provide cool shelter on hot summer days;
- Help define and articulate space; and,
- Filter out dust, smog and other air pollutants common to industrial areas.”



creating transitional development activity between industrial and residential land use through the provision of commercial activity. The Study also proposed that the neighbourhood boundary for Riversdale and King George be altered in order to form the West Industrial Area.

In 1993, the *Riversdale Neighbourhood Study Review* was initiated to primarily redefine the Land Use Policy Districts in Riversdale as a means to ensure land use compatibility and neighbourhood stability. Even though the West Industrial Area was outside the study area, it was proposed that industrial sites that abutted residential use adjacent to Optimist Park be redesignated Medium or Low Density Residential. Most of this proposal was defeated in 1997 as a result of strong opposition by some industrial property

owners, and despite the organised lobby efforts of residential stakeholders. Only the 500 block of Avenue K South was successfully changed from Light Industrial (I.D.2) to Low Density Residential (RM1), which was a reflection of the existing land use. (Picture of Westfield Park and Imperial Oil in background, ca. 1947. Photo courtesy of the Local History Room).

Source: [https://www.saskatoon.ca/sites/default/files/documents/community-services/planning-development/neighbourhood-planning/junction/junction final reduced size feb 13 2014.pdf](https://www.saskatoon.ca/sites/default/files/documents/community-services/planning-development/neighbourhood-planning/junction/junction%20final%20reduced%20size%20feb%2013%202014.pdf)

Today and into the future, the fundamental challenge for the area is to blend all the elements that make it unique without major displacement. The Junction Improvement Strategy seeks to build on the momentum already started and looks for creative connections where possible. When fully realized, The Junction area will be a shining example of a truly complete community.”

THE JUNCTION CONCEPT



The Junction Concept Overview

- A. Transition Zone:** The Transition Zone (see map on page 11) is the area bordered by 17th Street & the CP Rail tracks and Avenues N & P. In the Transition Zone, re-use of existing industrial properties should occur as they become available, transitioning the area from heavy industrial to uses more complementary with the surrounding neighbourhoods. Where feasible, large buildings should be re-used to showcase environmental and sustainability benefits.
- B. Industry and Artistry:** By marketing and promoting The Junction as a destination for entrepreneurs and creative industries, a unique and vibrant business area will result. This part of The Junction should provide a mix of employment - public consultation revealed that non-disruptive, light industrial uses in the area are important for providing varied and higher-wage job opportunities, which aligns with the City's Strategic Goal of Economic Diversity and Prosperity. It is important to note that this district would target businesses that use artistic talents - such as furniture-building and creative industries for example.
- C. Cultural Branding, History and Heritage:** The unique heritage of The Junction should be promoted, conserved and retained by recognizing heritage properties and historic Churches in the area, but also through the installation of historical markers and public events. Due to the concentration of Ukrainian cultural elements at Avenue M and 20th Street, there is potential to create Saskatoon's first Heritage Conservation District. Other cultures on 20th Street, both historical and current, should be formally recognized and promoted.
- D. The Green Square:** This area, bordered by 19th & 20th Streets and Avenues K & M, contains large pieces of vacant and contaminated land. It has the potential to produce renewable energy while land is reclaimed. Public consultation confirmed the importance of starting remediation on these vacant lots so that they can be reused and developed for the benefit of the community. As contaminated lands become available in the Green Square, a solar energy park could be constructed on the site while in-situ remediation is performed - a concept that has been implemented elsewhere. Once reclaimed, these sites should be given consideration to help address leisure needs in the core neighbourhoods.
- E. Growth / Renewal:** This concept area of The Junction has the potential to transform into a vibrant pedestrian area with rejuvenated housing. In the long-term, this area should serve as a transition, with higher-density properties closer to 20th Street transitioning to single-family dwellings towards 19th Street. In addition, area stakeholders have identified home ownership as a priority and that affordable housing should occur in a more balanced and less concentrated manner in this area and throughout The Junction.

The Improvement Strategy also recommends broader improvements throughout The Junction in the following areas:

Connectivity - Connectivity is an important aspect of the Strategy for The Junction – specifically connecting the area to both the City Centre and other neighbourhoods. The overriding concern from stakeholders is in regards to the safety of people crossing busy corridor streets such as 20th Street to access new developments (including schools and seniors centres) in the area. The other major obstacle in terms of connectivity and pedestrian corridors is with the CP rail line that bisects the area. Pedestrians and cyclists routinely cross these tracks without the assistance of defined crossings and often use the rail line as a path - as such, completion of the Safety Pathway is a key priority.

20th Street Commercial Corridor and Design - Good design can mitigate an unwelcoming urban environment. Currently, The Junction has a lack of urban design street enhancements and feels disjointed with the intersection of the rail line. Pedestrian improvements, including planters, benches, street trees and other amenities will enhance the area further by raising its level of aesthetic. On 20th Street, from Avenue H to Avenue P, pedestrian improvements will create a welcoming environment. An emphasis on improving safety at key intersections is a priority.

Health, Recreation and Parks - A recurring theme identified during public consultation was demand exceeding supply of leisure and recreation opportunities in the area, and the desire for a leisure centre nearby. Opportunities for enhancing Optimist Park were also identified.