

To. Councilmen Randy Donauer – Ward 5

May 12, 2021

& The City of Saskatoon Council

**Re: Silverwood Heights Walkway**

I am a resident of the Silverwood Heights area, owning one of the two houses on either side of a walkway providing access to the schoolyard and park. Before purchasing our current house, we rented multiple residences in Silverwood Heights over a number of years and grew to love the area with its many green spaces and proximity to the river. We have taken many walks and bike rides through the area, using the many pathways and parks in the area. I tell you this to help paint the picture that when we decided to buy in the Silverwood Heights area we believed we already had a good understanding of how the pathways and parks were structured and what the traffic using them could be like. However, in the six years since we have lived in our current home, we have found that the walkway beside us is well outside anything we had seen or experienced with other walkways in the area. As you will see from the details below, we believe this walkway suffers much worse conditions as the result of its close proximity to Marion Graham Collegiate, combined with the city and school both trying to shift the responsibility elsewhere.

It is well known that these walkways are a continuous problem for crime and vandalism; a problem that currently must be cleaned up by the residents whose property is damaged. This is not unique to the walkway beside our house – you can walk all over Silverwood and Lawson Heights and find pathways painted top to bottom with years' worth of spray paint. It is, however, very frustrating that the City of Saskatoon, the School, and our Police service have offered very little help in the matter. When the Police are called it takes 48 hours to respond, as the damage is already done and it is a low priority item for them. Meanwhile, the City will send a letter informing us to clean up the vandalism at our own cost with specific deadlines, while all other vandalized areas in the park and the sidewalk of the walkway are left not cleaned up for months. Again, this puts all responsibility on the residents to manage this alone without any accountability from the City, who approved the walkway installation.

In addition to the “usual” walkway issues, we have also had to deal with chronic problems that are a direct result of the walkway's proximity to the school. Below is just a small sample of situations and damage that are specifically from students loitering in the walkway during school hours:

- Repeated graffiti on our property, clean up at our cost. This is over and above the other spray paint issues, usually done with nail polish, markers, lighters, and other tools the students have on hand while they are on smoke breaks.
- Garbage and poisonous items all through the walkway and also tossed over the fence into our yard, clean up at our cost. Items we have found in our backyard repeatedly include:
  - Cigarettes, used nicotine patches and other drug-related products.

- Bags of half eaten lunches and rotten food, many of which are dangerous for our dogs to consume.
- Personal sanitary items “tampons, toilet paper, used masks”
- Shredded school work and books
- Broken bottles and glass, making it dangerous for us or our pets to walk in the yard or in the pathway
- We are unable to allow our family and dogs to go in the back yard without prior inspection.
- Our fence has been scorched and set on fire a number of times by students, repairs at our cost.
- Fence boards damage resulting in dogs escaping and running loose, repairs at our cost.
- Students sitting and climbing our fence.
- 10 to 20 students in the walkway consistently disturbing the peace daily from 07:00 to 16:00. This can also spill into the street in front of our house, with students standing on our lawn, halfway up our driveway or in the private area beside our garage while playing loud music from their cars and smoking cigarettes or marijuana.
- Witness to drug use daily by the student of Marion Graham Collegiate.
- Between September and June we frequently am unable sit in our yard, or open a window while school is active. The constant loud music immediately outside our fence in the walkway is too loud and the marijuana and cigarette smoke is unavoidable, even inside our house.

Additional problems that we have also witnessed outside of student-related problems include:

- Public and City workers urinating in the walkway.
- Stolen vehicle damaged fence while using walkway to evading police.
- Use of the walkway to break into our vehicles and make quickly escape into the park (multiple times), repair/replacement at our cost.

We have made many efforts to deter this behaviour using means within the boundaries of what we are legally able to do - including the installation of CCTV, talking to the students and school, and painting our fence an undesirable color to spray painters. Since these actions have only mitigated the spray painting and other vandalism slightly. We have tried to plant vines but find the students are ripping it out faster than it can grow and pulling the lattice off of the fence.

Over the 6 years we have lived here, we have spent in excess of \$8000.00 in costs from our own pockets. This is unacceptable for a tax payer to cover while the city’s property facilitates this continued cost and taking no accountability for what they are responsible for.

I understand that the walkways are a part of the community but the one next to our residence is the worst I have seen in the area. We believe it is only because of its location in relation to the school; the walkway vandalism and issues are exacerbated because it provides a location students can be away from the school while also remain relatively hidden from anyone seeing what they are doing. We have made an attempt to talk to the school about the issues, but they will not take any responsibility as it’s not school property.

I have been informed that soon the City Council will review a proposal from the Transportation Committee on the walkways. I urge council to consider the problems, costs and safety concerns owners

and residents in the area must deal with on a daily basis. With current bylaws, our hands are often tied and we have very few avenues open to us - and the ones that are can cost thousands of dollars out of our own pocket. Please consider helping tax payers like us by passing a motion to allow for an easier or simplified method of closing those walkways with severe and chronic problems. Other cities, including Winnipeg and Prince Albert, are or have closed their walkways as they recognized and took accountability for their problems. It is increasingly frustrating to us that a great city like Saskatoon has been unwilling to help residents resolve this and continually stalls when the issue is brought up.

I have attached a few pictures taken from my CCTV system to give you some idea of the kinds of problems we have experienced while living next to this walkway. Video can be made available upon request. Thank you and I appreciate that you are taking the time to review this major problem within our community.

Rick Townsend

Resident of [REDACTED] JJ Thiessen Cres, Saskatoon

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

*CC: Zach Jeffires, Bev Dubois, Sarina Gersher, Mairin Loewen, Cynthia Block, Darren Hill, Hilary Gough, David Kirton and Troy Davies.*



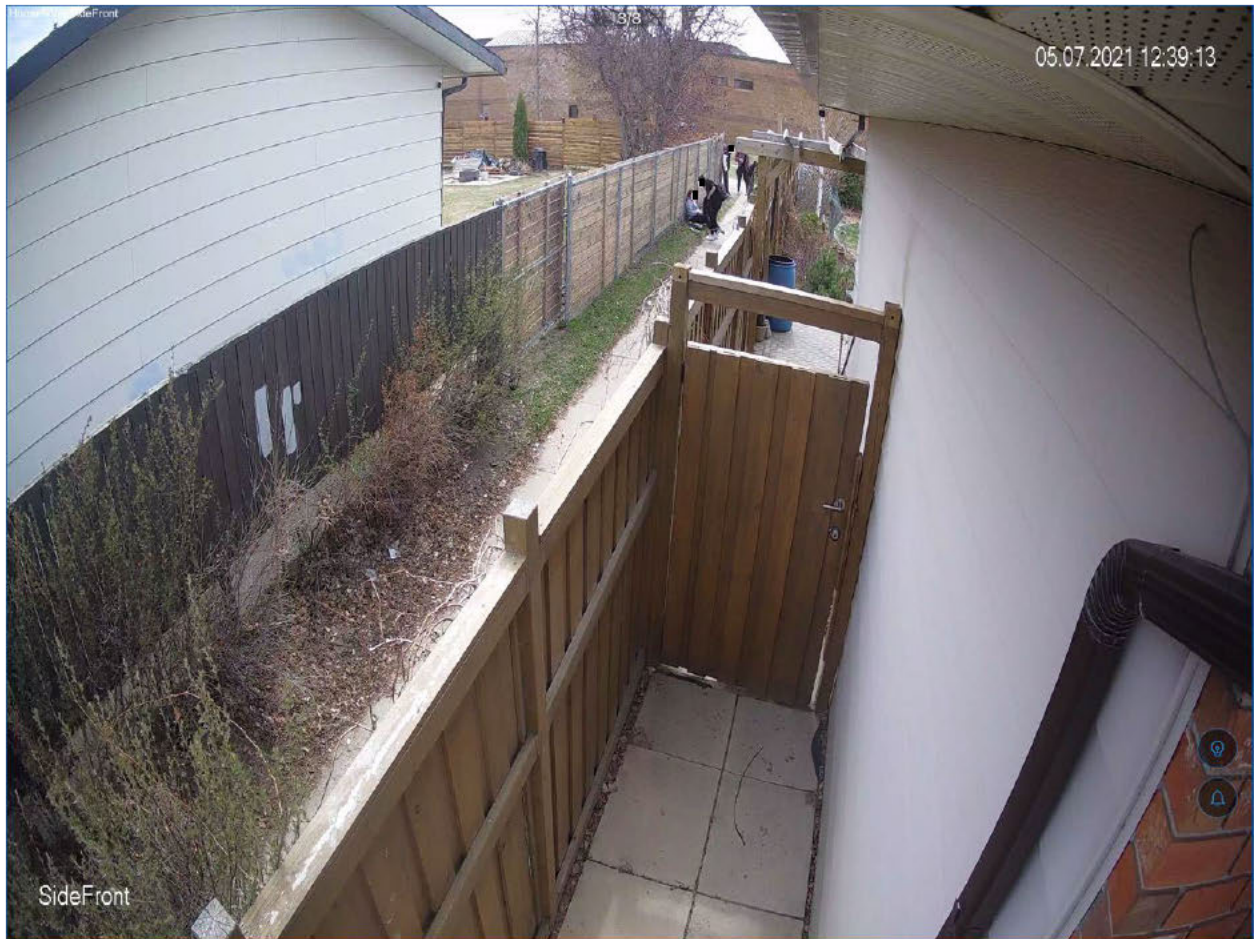
*Photo: Spray painting*



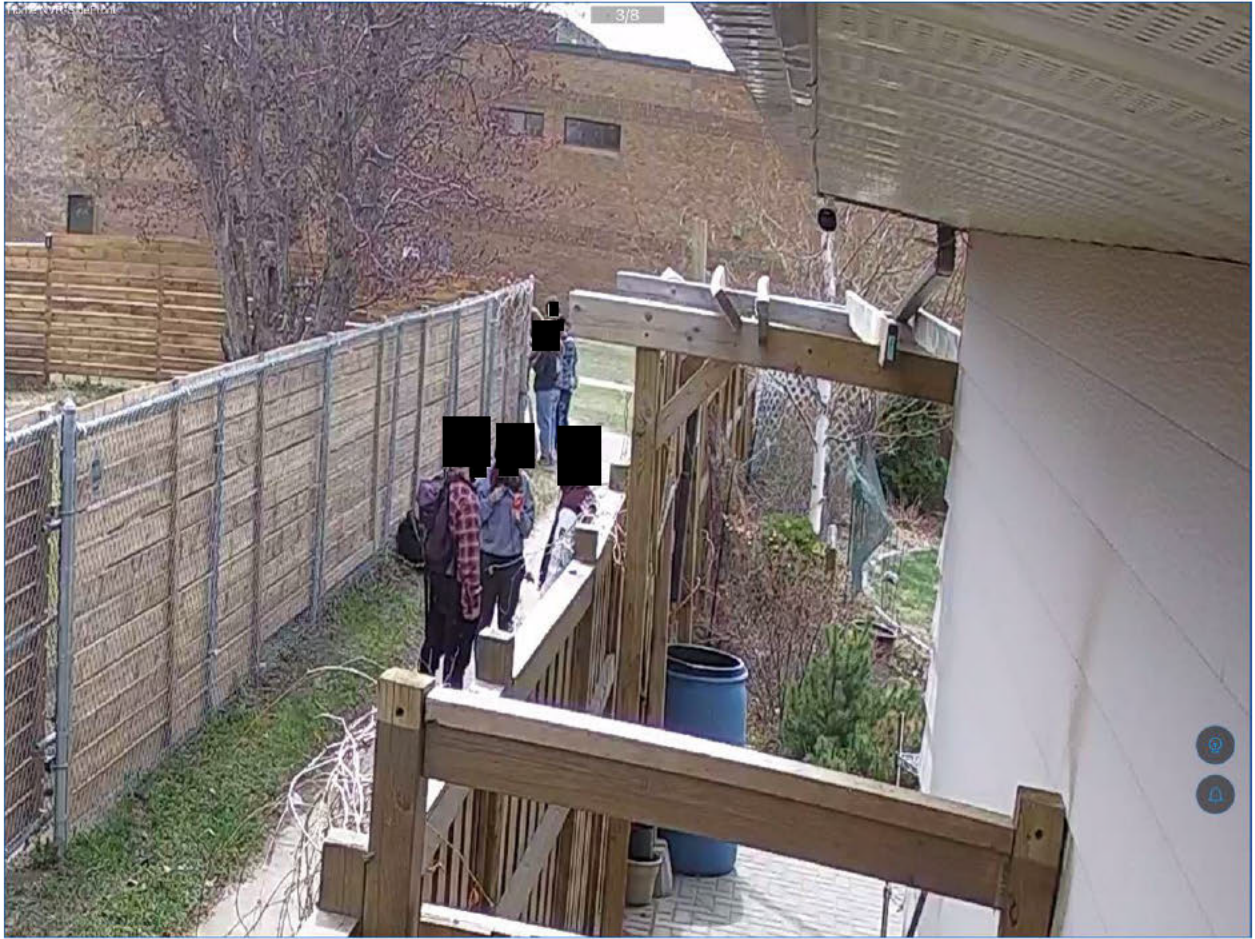
*Photo: Public worker urinating*



*Photo: Stolen Vehicle Evading Police*



*Photo: Students Loitering*



*Photo: Students Loitering*