

## Lasby, Mary

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**Subject:** Email - Communication - Meghan Mickelson - Northeast Swale and Small Swale Boundary - CK 4205-40  
**Attachments:** Swale Watchers Recommendation Jan 2023.pdf

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**From:** Web NoReply <[web-noreply@Saskatoon.ca](mailto:web-noreply@Saskatoon.ca)>  
**Sent:** Sunday, February 5, 2023 8:35 PM  
**To:** City Council <[City.Council@Saskatoon.ca](mailto:City.Council@Saskatoon.ca)>  
**Subject:** Email - Communication - Meghan Mickelson - Northeast Swale and Small Swale Boundry - CK 4205-40

--- Replies to this email will go to [swalewatchers@gmail.com](mailto:swalewatchers@gmail.com) ---

Submitted on Sunday, February 5, 2023 - 19:41

Submitted by user: Anonymous

Submitted values are:

**I have read and understand the above statements.:** Yes

**Date:** Sunday, February 05, 2023

**To:** His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

**First Name:** Meghan

**Last Name:** Mickelson

**Email:** [swalewatchers@gmail.com](mailto:swalewatchers@gmail.com)

**Address:** ■■■ 2nd st e

**City:** saskatoon

**Province:** Saskatchewan

**Postal Code:** s7h ■■■

**Name of the organization or agency you are representing (if applicable):** Swale Watchers

**What do you wish to do ?:** Submit Comments

**What meeting do you wish to speak/submit comments ? (if known)::** Feb 8 - Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services

**What agenda item do you wish to comment on ?:** 7.2.3

**Comments:**

It is a pleasure to present the Swale Watchers vision for Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design in UH3, please read

below and view the attached document.

First, a little background: The Northeast Swale Working Group (NSWG) was established several years ago to address a slate of concerns raised by Swale Watchers. The group brings together community stakeholders with City staff to discuss issues surrounding the conservation of the Swales. Establishing the boundaries of the Swales, in advance of planning for the proposed UH3 subdivision, is the last remaining issue on the NSWG agenda.

In early December, the NSWG was called together to discuss City administration's latest proposed boundaries for the Northeast and Small Swales. In addition to representatives from Meewasin and the City, the December meeting was attended by spokespeople for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (Saskatchewan), the Saskatoon Nature Society and Swale Watchers. Each of these groups expressed serious concerns about the proposal that was put on the table that day; the same proposal is currently before the Committee. Critiques of the City's plan included:

- failure to meet minimum standards for protecting the sharp-tailed grouse dancing ground in the Northeast Swale
- failure to protect all known areas of high-quality habitat and biodiversity hotspots
- failure to address the need for functional habitat connectivity between the Northeast and Small Swales
- failure to adequately buffer the hydrologically sensitive Small Swale
- failure to reroute commuter traffic away from the Ecological Core of the Northeast Swale

The consensus among the conservation groups present was that the City's proposal, though well intended, would lead to further and potentially ruinous damage and loss to these unique natural areas. The value of ecological services provided by these areas (estimated at over \$700,000 annually for the Small Swale alone) would be put at risk.

Everyone agrees that this is not the future we want. We all want these miraculous fragments of grasslands and wetlands to thrive, for the sake of the hundreds of species that rely on them for survival. For the sake of our own well-being. For the sake of future generations.

After the December meeting, the Swale Watchers began working on our own plan that offers wins both for the conservation of these irreplaceable natural areas and for harmonious development in Saskatoon. We are proud to present an approach that foregrounds the long-term health of the Swales and, at the same time, provides an opportunity for the City of Saskatoon to fulfill its goal of growing in harmony with nature. Our plan, which is detailed in the attached document, identifies two levels of protection:

- The Swale Protected Area includes all remaining natural grasslands and areas of high biodiversity value, as documented in recent studies. No significant development would be permitted in the Protected Area.
- The Swale Borders includes buffers and wildlife corridors necessary to safeguard the ecological and hydrological functioning of the Protected Area. "Soft" development such as trails, linear parks, storm water ponds and other amenities could be situated in the naturalized Swale Borders.

Although the co-chairs of the Swale Watchers are unable to attend the meeting to speak to our recommendations for the swale boundaries, Sara Bryson from the Saskatoon Nature Society will be speaking on our behalf.

Meghan Mickelson and Candace Savage, co-chairs  
Swale Watchers

**Attachments:**

- [Swale Watchers Recommendation Jan 2023.pdf](#) 1.05 MB

**Will you be submitting a video to be vetted prior to council meeting?:** No

February 6, 2023

Swale Watchers Vision Statement

## **Biodiversity Sensitive Urban Design and the Northeast Swales**



This document is in follow-up to a recent meeting of the Northeast Swale Working Group regarding the establishment of conservation boundaries for the Northeast and Small Swales to meet the requirements of the Official Community Plan or OCP (Section E.2.5 most particularly).

Realizing the OCP objective: *'To identify and protect important ecosystems, wildlife habitats, and other natural areas and assets as part of the land development process'* has never been in clearer focus. This important local task aligns globally with the urgent [business case](#) for conservation of nature recently communicated by more than 1100 corporations across 70 countries. The case emboldened nation-states to commit to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) which includes putting 30 per cent of the planet and 30 per cent of degraded ecosystems under protection by 2030.

The nation is watching Saskatoon as consideration of our region for a National Urban Park is underway. The Northeast and Small Swales represent a significant opportunity. The benefits of capitalizing on this opportunity are well articulated in the Green Infrastructure Strategy and the area further provides an opportunity to meet the preferences outlined in that Strategy (i.e. providing contiguity, proximity and size) to ensure the maximization of these benefits.

Delineating boundaries helps guide investment – for resource management that secures the sustainability of this green infrastructure and for the surrounding urban context.

By leveraging the expertise and knowledge available within the Swale Watcher network, we have summarized the results of area studies, regulations and conservation guidance in the form of maps. The outcome is useful for the activity of boundary-setting as the minimum standards shown on the maps may provide some hope that the valuable natural assets observed within the area may be sustained.

**Map 1: Swale Watchers Recommended Boundaries** highlights acreage prioritized for urban development, together with recommendations for additional conservation areas beyond those currently proposed by the City.

The Swale Protected Area, shown in purple and green, includes all remaining natural grasslands and areas of high biodiversity value, as documented in recent studies. Minimal development would be permitted in the Protected Area.

The Swale Borders, shown in blue and orange, includes buffers and wildlife corridors necessary to safeguard the ecological and hydrological functioning of the Protected Area. “Soft” development such as trails, linear parks, storm water ponds and other amenities could be situated in the naturalized Swale Borders.

**Map 2: Swale Watchers Sources** places our recommendations in the context of science-based studies of the area that have been conducted in recent years. The sources for this map are listed in the bottom left margin of the map as well as at the end of this document.

**In making our recommendations, we applied the following principles:**

- Conserve all documented biodiversity hot spots, including all remaining native and native-dominant grasslands. This includes areas of quality habitat identified in studies by Saskatoon Land, Meewasin and the City of Saskatoon, plus a small parcel in the northeast corner of the Small Swale previously misclassified as tame grass.
- Provide adequate protection for the sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds in the Northeast Swale by fully and willingly complying with provincial guidelines and standard practice, i.e. a 400-meter setback measured from the perimeter of the lek.
- Meet or exceed all other recommended setbacks and standards, acknowledging that these are minimums.
- Protect the wetlands in the hydrologically sensitive Small Swale by observing the topography.
- Provide functional habitat corridors to facilitate animal movement.
- Create opportunities for habitat enhancement through restoration of previously disturbed or degraded parcels.
- Maximize the economic, cultural and environmental potential of the proposed National Urban Park.
- Identify a viable acreage for a future-oriented neighbourhood offering exceptional livability.

### Map 1: Swale Watchers Recommended Boundaries

**Sensitive Areas**

 Species at Risk breeding bird habitat

 Rare Plant Area

**Proposed Boundaries**

 City 2022/2023

**Swale Protected Area**

 City 2022/2023

 protection & restoration

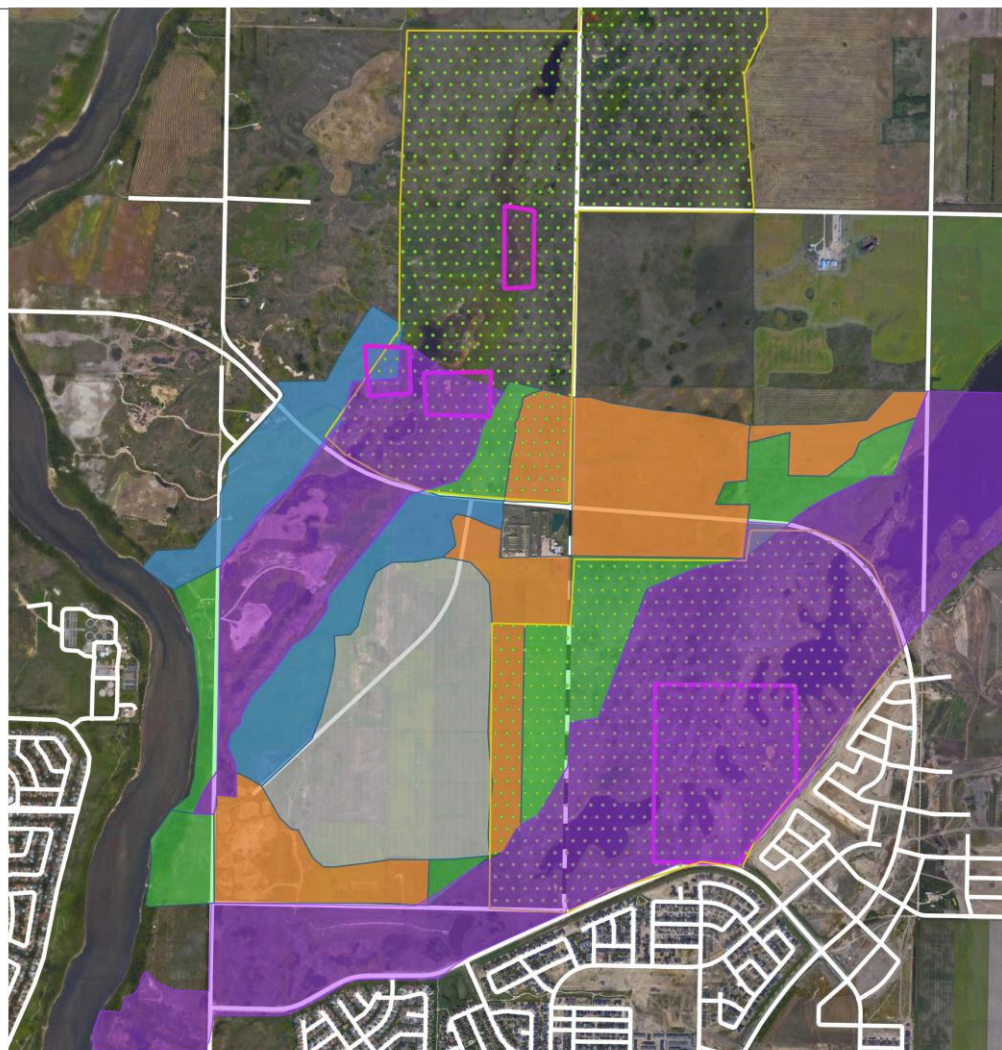
**Swale Borders**

 naturalized drainage buffer

 naturalized wildlife corridor

**Development Area**

 subdivison



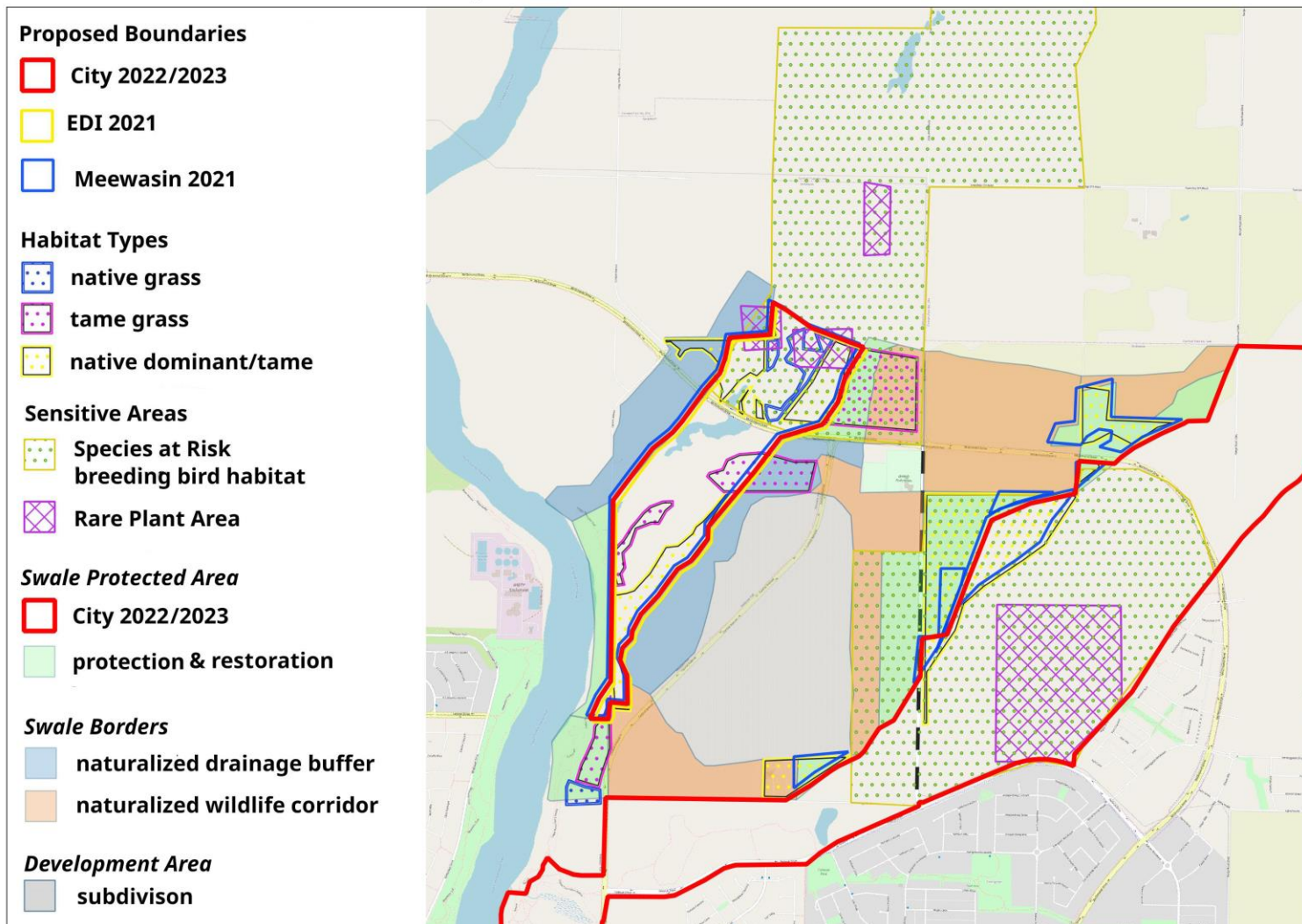
**Map Sources**

Environmental Dynamics Inc., 2021 March 16, UH3 Natural Area Screening Study Area  
 Environmental Dynamics Inc., 2021 March 16, Habitats Identified in the Study Area  
 Environmental Dynamics Inc., 2021 January 22, Recommended Ecological Zones and Linear Design Features within the Study Area  
 Meewasin, 2020 March 18, Saskatoon Freeway Study Area  
 Meewasin, 2021 November 17, UH3 Natural Area Screening Report Review and Proposed Recommendations  
 City of Saskatoon, 2022 August 15, UH3 Natural Area Screening Recommendations  
 City of Saskatoon, 2020 February, Saskatoon's Green Infrastructure Strategy - Map 18 Significant Natural Areas  
 City of Saskatoon, 2020 February, Saskatoon's Green Infrastructure Strategy - Map 20: Ecology Actions and Priority Areas  
 Inaturalist, [https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?place\\_id=any&project\\_id=meewasin-northeast-swale&subview=map](https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?place_id=any&project_id=meewasin-northeast-swale&subview=map)



January 2023  
 Swale Watchers

## Map 2: Swale Boundaries, Sources



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It is noted that the lands that remain for potential future urban development encompass approximately 260 acres. For comparison purposes, the Riversdale neighbourhood is approximately 215 acres and Varsity View is approximately 315 acres while suburban neighbourhoods of the area are much larger at 635 (Aspen Ridge) and 655 (Evergreen) acres.

The University Heights Sector Plan anticipates a neighbourhood in this area. A unique neighbourhood, designed to fit a 260-acre footprint has the potential to meet many of the objectives set out in the OCP but sometimes described as requiring balance or trade-off. Here we wish to provide some helpful examples of urban developments that might be fit for purpose in this context.



Example of 15 du/acre (Low-mid density) development providing space for Biodiversity-sensitive urban design



Example of 34 du/acre (Medium density) development supporting at-grade retail and mixed uses



Example of a 44 du/acre (Medium-high density) development creating shorter walk distances

Communities working on similar concepts:

- Nanaimo, Canada  
(<https://greenplan.ca/2019/09/20/nanaimo-to-showcase-first-sustainable-green-neighbourhood/>)
- Cambridge, UK  
(<https://www.pbctoday.co.uk/news/planning-construction-news/sustainable-neighbourhood-cambridge/97710/>)
- Ecovillages across the United States  
(<https://www.treehugger.com/thriving-sustainable-communities-4863872>)
- Sample checklist for Neighbourhood Plans  
(<https://www.cse.org.uk/downloads/reports-and-publications/policy/community-energy/planning/renewables/how-green-is-my-plan-urban-suburban.pdf>)

These examples highlight how a unique neighbourhood in the University Heights sector could:

- Use higher residential densities – particularly ranging from Low-mid (12 to 20 dwelling units [du] per acre) to Medium (20 to 35 du/acre) – to accommodate sufficient population to achieve a complete and walkable neighbourhood as well as density sufficient to support retail such as a supermarket (which may require 900+ households to be viable).

- Include [Biodiversity-Sensitive Urban Design](#) principles.
- Incorporate other principles of livability and a low environmental footprint.

A unique neighbourhood utilizing a mix of Low-mid and Medium density development could be expected to realize a population of 6,500 (if 100% Low-mid) to 17,000 (if 50% Low-mid and 50% Medium). This assumes 30% of the developable area is allocated to utility and infrastructure requirements. This density compares to the neighbouring Evergreen neighbourhood (8,800) and projections for Aspen Ridge (12,500).

We appreciate development in this area may not occur for a while as the City's OCP, along with a number of other civic plans and strategies, highlight the criticality of encouraging a significant share of the city's overall housing development to take place within the Downtown, City Centre (including a new Entertainment District), corridors supporting Bus Rapid Transit, and other Strategic and Neighbourhood Infill areas identified in the City's Growth Plan. However, the type of development examples shown above are similar to the Low-mid and Medium density residential developments that many of these other priority development areas of our community will also desire to achieve the goals of the OCP.

As the desire for greenfield development advances to this area, Swale Watchers look forward to working with the City, Meewasin and others to develop clear biodiversity targets to guide decision-making, so that the natural assets of the Northeast and Small Swales are protected and enhanced for the benefit of future generations. In the meantime, we would welcome an opportunity to discuss our recommendations with you and answer any questions you may have.

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This vision statement was researched and written by the strategy committee of the Swale Watchers, including Meghan Mickelson, Dr. Warrick Baijius, Sara Bryson, Dr. Ryan Brook, Valerie Martz, Candace Savage, et al.

*This proposal is supported by:*



Saskatchewan  
Environmental  
Society

### Map Sources

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