

Janzen, Heather

Subject: FW: Email - Communication - John Krowina - Northeast Swale and Small Swale Boundary Endorsement - CK 4205-40
Attachments: V2 swale submission to Stoon council feb 20 2023.docx

From: Web NoReply <web-noreply@Saskatoon.ca>

Sent: Monday, February 20, 2023 4:44 PM

To: City Council <City.Council@Saskatoon.ca>

Subject: Email - Communication - John Krowina - Northeast Swale and Small Swale Boundary Endorsement - CK 4205-40

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

Submitted on Monday, February 20, 2023 - 16:43

Submitted by user: [REDACTED]

Submitted values are:

I have read and understand the above statements.: Yes

Date: Monday, February 20, 2023

To: His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

Pronouns: He/him/his

First Name: John

Last Name: Krowina

Phonetic spelling of first and/or last name: Kroweena

Phone Number : [REDACTED]

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City: Saskatoon

Province: Saskatchewan

Postal Code: [REDACTED]

What do you wish to do ?: Submit Comments

What meeting do you wish to speak/submit comments ? (if known):: Regular Business Meeting of City Council

What agenda item do you wish to comment on ?: 9.3.1

Comments:

Please see attached.

Attachments:

- [V2 swale submission to Stoon council feb 20 2023.docx](#)23.18 KB

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

Submission to Saskatoon City Council in respect of Agenda Item No. 9.3.1, Meeting of February 22, 2023

Introduction

Any job worth doing, is worth doing well.

-Proverb

1. This submission pertains to the recommendation made by the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Community Services at its meeting on February 8, 2023, that Council endorse the boundaries for the Northeast and Small Swales as set in Option 3.
2. Option 3, while better than Option 1, is deficient in fundamental respects which will leave the Swales' survival in doubt. It fails to provide a level of protection which is appropriate to the level of threat they face as a result of encroachment by UH3.
3. Any revenue foregone by scaling back UH3 is replaceable. On the other hand, the Swales are irreplaceable and priceless. If the Swales are properly protected, they can be a living treasure for Saskatonians for 100, 300 or 800 years.
4. Option 3 should either be significantly amended as suggested by the Swale Watchers, or the discussion of this topic should be adjourned for further study by independent experts.

The Swales are environmentally significant, vulnerable and home to endangered and threatened species

5. It is not disputed that the Small Swale and the Northeast Swale ("the Swales") are important and ecologically-sensitive natural areas.
6. The Swales are currently home to over 200 species of plants, 170 species of birds, and many species of mammals, amphibians and reptiles.
7. The Swales contain at least 17 species that are listed as endangered or threatened federally; and 15 species that are listed provincially. This is incredible.
8. The City of Saskatoon's own website says that the Swales are a "unique environment, having ecological, hydrological and hydrogeological characteristics. It is a natural and cultural connection to the past and future of Saskatchewan...[it]offers high quality biodiversity, proximity to urban areas, economic benefits for education and recreation, and a natural filter for our air and water....Maintaining biodiversity within the Swale is crucial to maintaining resilience in this ecosystem which faces human induced and natural stresses." [underlining added]

9. The City of Saskatoon promotes what it calls “Green Infrastructure” and talks about a “Green Network” which “provides the community access to continuous, high quality green space and provides a home for the other wildlife we share the city with”. (Saskatoon.ca, “Green Infrastructure Strategy”). Green infrastructure, according to the City, provides space for recreation, water and air filtration, and carbon storage. It goes without saying that the Swales would constitute, at present, high-quality green infrastructure.

10. In 2017 Chris Tennent, then-Chair of the Meewasin Valley Authority, called the Swales an example of one of the world’s most imperilled ecosystems. Phil Tank, regular columnist for the Saskatoon StarPhoenix, called it “an irreplaceable amenity for everyone in the City.” (Saskatoon Star Phoenix, June 1, 2020).

11. The City’s Official Community Plan envisages a city that “grows in harmony with nature” and that “thrives in harmony with its natural environment, conserves resources, and consistently demonstrates environmental leadership.”

12. The OCP includes a commitment to prioritize nature in urban design: “Developments shall incorporate, preserve, and complement all significant natural features (and) shall respect the physical capacity of land to accommodate development ...” (Wild About Nature: Real Action Needed to Protect Nature in Sask”, Saskatoon StarPhoenix, Dec. 18, 2022).

13. A reasonable person might expect that protection and preservation of the Swales to the maximum extent possible would obviously follow from such statements of how valuable and important it is.

14. However, in Saskatoon that reasonable person would be very wrong. On the contrary, the City has contradicted its words and commitments by steadily encroaching on the Swales with residential and other kinds of development and harmful measures, while consistently rejecting proposals to protect it. (Phil Tank, “Efforts to Preserve Saskatoon’s NE Swale dealt blow”, StarPhoenix, June 1, 2020; and “Save the Swale efforts move at a glacial pace”, StarPhoenix, March 13, 2017.)

Option 3 is deficient in important respects

15. The Swale Watchers present a thoughtful, cogent and well-grounded analysis of the deficiencies of Option 3.

16. Essentially, Option 3 is similar to Option 1 in trying to slice-and-dice the Swales in order to maximize the profitability of the UH3 subdivision.

17. The buffer zones proposed in Option 3 are seriously inadequate, particularly in respect of the sharp-tailed grouse leks (dancing areas), but in several other respects as well.

18. In 2011 the Province of Alberta adopted Wildlife Land Use Guidelines which recommended a minimum setback of 500 metres for sharp-tailed grouse leks. (Government of Alberta, Fish

and Wildlife Division, Sustainable Resource Development, April 28, 2011), p 5/5). Option 3 provides for a setback of less than 400 metres.

19. The Alberta-recommended setbacks “are based on what experts believe are the thresholds at which human disturbance is likely to cause degradation and possibly abandonment of key wildlife areas.” (Ibid., p 3/5)

20. Moreover, the Alberta guidelines state that “attempts should be made to place all new human developments in locations that minimize vegetation, soil, and hydrology disturbance” and that “developments should attempt to exceed the distances recommended below”. (Ibid., p 4/5)

21. Where development takes place within the 500 metres recommended, the Alberta Guidelines recommend the adoption of a broad scale, long-term, scientifically-rigorous monitoring program to ensure that wildlife populations are not negatively affected by the development. (Ibid., p 5/5)

22. In the case of a residential subdivision, the disruption caused cannot be undone once the houses go in. It is crucially important to make the right decision from the beginning. We need to err on the side of conservation and give the benefit of the doubt to the species impacted by the proposed development.

23. The Swale Watchers’ proposal also provides for buffer zones for all biodiversity hotspots within the area under consideration, which is lacking in Option 3, and which also protect the ecologically-sensitive wetlands in the Small Swale.

24. Option 3 also fails to provide adequately for the movement of wildlife not only between the Swales, but also between the Swales and the South Saskatchewan river valley.

25. Wildlife corridors are accepted by experts today as indispensable requirements for maintaining healthy populations of wildlife and preventing the adverse effects of habitat fragmentation.

26. The wildlife corridors included in Option 3 are narrow walkways that have been identified by at least 1 expert (Dr. Ryan Brook) at the University of Saskatchewan as potentially acting as barriers to wildlife movement. This is a risk that can’t be taken, given what is at stake here.

27. Adequate buffer zones and wildlife corridors are not dispensable add-ons or frills that can readily be discarded. They are core requirements.

28. Not including adequate buffers and provision for wildlife movement in Option 3 is like building a house but intentionally leaving off the roof.

Benefits of more protection for the Swales

29. A recent study established a natural capital valuation for the Swales of \$7.36 million per annum. (Natural Capital Asset Valuation of the Meewasin Northeast Swale for the Preservation of Saskatoon's Natural Resources, harvest.usask.ca/handle/10388/12803)

30. The City's own Natural Capital Asset Valuation Pilot Project estimated the value of services provided by the Small Swale at \$731,200, per year in 2020.

31. Obviously, the real value of the Swales goes far beyond the capital valuation exercise. Such areas are really invaluable.

32. Urban planning which emphasizes biodiversity protection includes the following benefits:

- a. promoting community health and wellbeing;
- b. reducing the impacts of climate change on urban areas;
- c. providing habitat for threatened or endangered species;
- d. providing a close-by opportunity for urbanized populations to have direct experience of nature;
- e. opportunities to connect with Indigenous culture and history;

(Biodiversity sensitive Urban design@ Glen Junor, draft Report prepared for Trent McCamley and Partners, S. Bekessy, G. Garrard, et al, August 2018)

Commitments aren't real unless they are acted on

33. From the foregoing it appears that approving Option 3, which contains insufficient safeguards to protect the ecologically-sensitive and valuable Swales, may result in damage which could lead to its end as a vibrant, thriving ecosystem, the proverbial "death by a thousand cuts".

34. To date, I have not heard any reasons why it would not be possible to strengthen the protections afforded to the Swales to the extent necessary/advisable, other than potential loss of revenue.

35. In making this decision City Council must wear 2 hats, both of which are essential and legitimate.

36. One hat is that of land developer. In this capacity the City promotes land sales and strives to extract maximum revenue from them.

37. The other hat is that of conserving and protecting environmental quality for Saskatonians, which includes parks and natural spaces.

38. Two hats cannot be worn at the same time. In order to properly wear its environment hat, the developer hat must be put on the rack. The City must come up with a plan that provides a

level of support which is proportionate to the threat that the Swales face, which will give them a reasonable shot at long-term survival.

39. If we look at the Swales with the environmental hat on, the decision regarding whether and how much to protect the Swales, is actually easy.

40. However, it appears that the City is allowing its developer role to interfere with carrying out its environmental role, such that financial considerations are driving the environmental discussion. The result is to effectively abandon the environmental role and thereby put the existence of the Swales in jeopardy.

41. A proper balancing of these roles would involve designing UH3 in a way that allowed the City to carry out both of them properly, instead of sacrificing one of them.

42. Any loss of revenue that may result from scaling back UH3 is readily replaceable by way of other developments (of which there is no scarcity) and does not in any way justify putting the Swales in serious danger.

43. The Swale Watchers' proposal includes minimum levels of protection advisable to give the Swales a fair shot at survival. To adopt what their report contains is reasonable and would not represent an undue loss of revenue to the City.

44. If we lose the Swales, we will lose something precious and irreplaceable.

45. On the other hand, if the Swales receive proper protection they may remain treasures to be enjoyed long after we are gone. They will be part of the identity of Saskatoon and the very thought of damaging or destroying them will be abhorrent.

46. Doing so will improve Saskatoon's credibility with respect to environment and conservation, as well as its reputation and profile nationally and internationally, and help to make it a "cool" and desirable place for young, talented people to locate and raise their families here.

Conclusion

47. Option 3 does not provide the protection that is needed and deserved by the Swales. Option 3 provides weak protection not adequate to the existential threat posed by UH3 being built so close to the Swales.

48. Option 3 should either be significantly amended as suggested by the Swale Watchers, or the discussion of this topic should be adjourned for further study by independent experts.

49. Thanks to City Council for allowing me this opportunity. These submissions are my own views only.

John Krowina, Saskatoon