

**Walter, Penny**

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**From:** City Council  
**Subject:** RE: Email - Lenore Swystun - Request to Speak - Housing Accelerator Fund - CK 750-1

May 20, 2024

Dear Members of the Municipal Planning Commission:

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## **RE: HOUSING ACCELERATOR FUND / SASKATOON'S HERITAGE**

Respectfully requesting the ability to speak to the following, in person, on behalf of the Saskatoon Heritage Society, on May 28, in response to the City planning agenda item about the Housing Accelerator Fund.

What price do we put on our city's history and cultural identity? As Saskatoon proceeds with its application to the federal Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) in the hope of addressing the need for affordable housing, it is important that we have this conversation.

There has been little public discussion about this new planning direction for the city, despite the fact that the zoning changes required by the HAF could change radically the face of several historic neighbourhoods. We run the risk of destroying historic streetscapes with no guarantee that these actions will provide the kind of housing we are looking for.

The areas most affected by the HAF program will be those lying within 250 metres of Bus Rapid Transit lines and those properties facing arterial and collector streets. These will include parts of Nutana, Varsity View, Riversdale and Caswell Hill – neighbourhoods which, together, tell the story of early Saskatoon.

One of the stated aims of the HAF program is to facilitate the development of increased housing density, particularly in areas adjacent to BRT lines, such as those referred to above. Four storey residential development and four-plexes will be permitted (provided certain development standards are met), with the goal of providing a variety of housing options. This, of course, will encourage demolition of existing housing stock.

Sadly, the historic value of these neighbourhoods has never entered into the discussion and we question if the full impact of the HAF requirements on these neighbourhoods has been adequately considered. These neighbourhoods have evolved over time and already include dense housing development and a diversity of housing options, ranging from single - family dwellings, to row housing and multi - storey apartments. Significantly, they also are home to some small affordable apartments and other rental accommodation, which will be at risk of replacement by higher-end development. This would lead to a reduction in affordable accommodation for the very people Saskatoon is trying to help – an unfortunate unintended consequence. A post by Julian Mirabelli to UrbanToronto.ca, a construction, development and real estate website, voices some similar concerns, stating "older buildings often have lower rents and unique spaces that fill a crucial role in the real estate market". [<https://urbantoronto.ca/news/2024/04/sustainability-month-important-link-between-heritage-sustainability.55758>]

A major value of these historic neighbourhoods, which is not often recognized, lies in the community cohesion they provide. A strong sense of an historic place and an appreciation of the built environment binds residents together. The

HAF program introduces an unwelcome de-stabilizing effect. This is a major concern of Frank Palermo, professor emeritus at Dalhousie University School of Planning in Halifax, and a member of a coalition seeking a better housing plan for their city. [ [Halifax group concerned about potential impacts of the Housing Accelerator Fund | CBC.ca](#) ]

The areas in the core neighbourhoods marked for proposed zoning changes include many buildings of heritage interest. Many of them lie along the transit corridors, where they are at considerable risk, especially if the City follows through on the “no off-street parking requirement”, which will make it easier for new development to take place.

The Saskatoon Heritage Society would like to see a more nuanced approach to providing increased and more diverse housing. This would start with a recognition of the heritage value of these core neighbourhoods and an inventory of those buildings and streetscapes of heritage interest, which contribute so much to the richness of this city. With this information, we would urge the City to enter into discussions with HAF administrators about the possibility of introducing a flexible 250 metre boundary which would allow for preservation of our built heritage, while at the same time increasing density in appropriate areas.

History, architectural heritage, sense of community, cultural identity, environmental issues, adaptive re-use of buildings - none of these things have played a part in discussions around the Housing Accelerator Fund. We think it is time they did.

We would be pleased to be a part of such a discussion. We recognize the need for an increase in affordable housing but it does not need to be at the expense of our built heritage. Please allocate some time during the HAF application process to allow for further discussion.

Sincerely,

Lenore Swystun, President

On behalf of the Saskatoon Heritage Society

Warm regards,

Lenore

Ps apologies, notorious for quick thumb typos and autocorrect garb.