

September 19, 2024

His Worship the Mayor
Members of City Council
City Administration

Re: Council Meeting scheduled for September 25, 2024
Proposed Shelter at 210 Pacific Avenue, Saskatoon

We are writing to follow up the concerns voiced in City Council Chambers on Monday, September 16, 2024, as well as the numerous communications by email and phone calls to many of you.

There is speculation that this site has been considered by the City since shortly after the Sutherland location for an emergency shelter was rejected, in about February 2024. Yet, once again, and despite promises made, there have been no consultations with businesses or residents in the area, no investigation into the types of businesses and potential risks to business owners and their customers, clients, or patients. An announcement through the media was made September 9, 2024, with information sessions scheduled for September 16, 2024 and a vote by City Council to take place September 25, 2024. The short time frame makes it clear that a collaborative process with the affected community is not welcome.

Each time a site is chosen as a “temporary” location, as an “emergency” measure because “winter is coming”, the affected businesses and residents are frightened, traumatized, victimized, as a result of the loitering, drug paraphernalia and increased crime and vandalism that invariably follows. The suggestion by City Police representatives at the information session on September 16, 2024 to essentially “wait and see” what services and response times will be required based on data collected, is worrisome and implies that we cannot predict what will happen this time, despite the experiences of each and every other temporary emergency shelter.

Following consideration of the Sutherland location and the community outcry that it was too close to schools and a hockey arena, a motion was introduced and passed by City Council to prohibit shelters from being within 250 meters of elementary schools. Inherent in City Council’s decision to separate schools and shelters is the implication that it is not safe for elementary aged children to be near the site of a shelter. And yet, located less than 20 meters from the proposed new shelter site, there is:

- A collective pediatric mental health and developmental centre. Services are multidisciplinary and include 3 full-time PhD Clinical and part time Educational and Clinical Psychologists (The Prairie Centre for Child Development); 3 full-time pediatric occupational therapists (Milestones Occupational Therapy for Children); and 1 full and 5 part time Master of Social Work Counsellors as well as Educational Psychologists (Apex Counselling and Consultation Services).

All clinicians at the Centre provide care to elementary school aged children who have, or are at risk for, complex mental health conditions and diagnoses of childhood (ie. Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual Disability, ADHD, Anxiety, PTSD, etc.)

Last year, the Centre provided approximately 7,800 appointment times for school aged children and families accessing occupational therapy treatment, psychological assessment and treatment service, parenting support and trauma informed counselling. This number is projected to exceed 8,000 appointments for children and youth to address mental health concerns by 2025.

- Second Act - a private school outfitted with 5 dance studios and a consignment store for dancewear. The mission of this family-owned business is to make dance more accessible to all members of the community. Over a dozen companies call Second Act their home. Together, these companies have over 300 students, the majority of which are school aged children. Hundreds of students and groups also rent space for personal use. For example, Saskatoon Public Schools rents space to bring students from all over the city together to form a unified community that can explore different forms of dance. Other organizations that rent space and make this a viable business model, include Yevshan, a Ukrainian dance group, Saskexpress and Brenda's School of Dance. Second Act is also home to a Kindermusik program and a karate school. Most of this programming occurs after school hours, between the hours of 5pm and 10pm so students are walking to and from the building in the dark.

If this shelter site is approved, the implication is that private schools are somehow distinguishable from public schools; that children who attend public schools are entitled to better safety and security than children who attend private schools or after school lessons. Most concerning, is the implication that children who are particularly vulnerable and at risk and that are seeking psychological and mental health care, and who would typically require enhanced safety and security, are not worthy of even the same basic level of safety and security as otherwise healthy, neurotypical children attending public schools.


The suggestion by City Administration at the information session that schools are completely different operations than businesses and medical services that cater to children because the latter are “contained” and are “inside” is illogical and nonsensical. Schools also teach inside. Children are outside when they come and go from school, or for short recess breaks. It begs the question as to whether these “distinctions” are legally sound. Surely, the spirit and intent of Council’s motion to prohibit shelters from being within 250 meters of schools, was to ensure the safety and security of all school aged children, whether attending school, organized extracurricular activities, or specialized child health services, not just children attending public schools between the hours of 8:30 am and 3:30 pm.

City Council’s decision on the location of this emergency shelter must consider Canada’s Guiding Principles for Rights of Children. Article 2 (Non-discrimination) says that no child should be treated unfairly on any basis, and by implication, that all children should be treated fairly and equally. Article 3 (Best interests of the child) “This principle places the best interests of children as the primary concern in making decisions that may affect them. All adults, including those who are involved in making decisions related to budgets, policy and the law, should do what is best for children. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.”

We acknowledge with compassion those people who are desperately in need of a collaborative, long-term solution to homelessness in our city. There are “Best Practice” shelter guidelines in Edmonton that require a jurisdiction scan, literature review, and multiple rounds of internal and external engagements. There is almost a complete lack of infrastructure, and services to support the complex needs of these vulnerable citizens in the downtown sector. This “pop it there” emergency approach by City Council also fails to consider the upstream consequences on already fragile public services such as the use of police, fire, emergency room, addictions, and mobile crisis services. We respectfully ask that City Administration follow a similar research and collaborative based approach to finding suitable shelter locations.

The safety and security of the children and families who access the educational services at Second Act and treatment and support at The Prairie Centre must be the City’s utmost priority. We implore City Council to exercise the same care and compassion for the children accessing these services, as they did for the children and residents of Sutherland.

Respectfully,


Dr. Jocelyn Poock, on behalf of
Dr. Jocelyn Poock, PH.D Registered
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o/a **The Prairie Centre for Child Development**

[Redacted]

Stephan Bourassa, on behalf of
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Barb J. Afseth, on behalf of
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Andrea Calow, on behalf of
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Dr. Brent J.K. Yaremko, on behalf of
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Dr. Devon Anholt, on behalf of
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