

1870-10

**From:** City Council  
**Sent:** Friday, August 25, 2017 4:49 PM  
**To:** City Council  
**Subject:** Form submission from: Write a Letter to Council



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Date: Friday, August 25, 2017  
To: His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council  
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Comments:  
As Interim Chief Executive Officer, I would like to speak to City Council re: Meewasin Valley Authority Financial Statements - March 31, 2017 (File No. CK. 1870-10) - My address will be similiar to the following. - Thank you. - Doug Porteous

Good Afternoon – Your Worship Mayor Clark and members of City Council, I am Doug Porteous Interim Chief Executive Officer at the Meewasin Valley Authority. You have received Meewasin’s Financial Statements for the fiscal year April 1, 2016 – March 31, 2017. You will receive the Annual Report for that period of time in two weeks, in order to see how Meewasin has allocated your funds. In the meantime, I provide you with a handout. And at some time in the future, I shall come back to Council to provide the complete annual report.

When you review these financial statements, it appears Meewasin finances look healthy. What I want to advise is that may not be the case in the future.

By all measures, the Meewasin Valley Project first envisioned by Master Planner Raymond Moriyama has been a tremendous success when you see what we have now in the 67 sq km of the Meewasin Valley - the parks and trails and amenities; but it is a project that has continued to be fraught with concern. A long term decline in funding from our three participating parties (the City of Saskatoon, Government of Saskatchewan and University of Saskatchewan), reached a critical point and led to a decision to close the Meewasin Valley Interpretive Centre on July 1, 2016.

March 22, 2017, a reduction of \$409,000 to Meewasin from the Government of Saskatchewan, and another \$34,000 from the University of Saskatchewan, coupled with an amendment to the Meewasin Valley Authority Act (1979), removing the statutory funding requirements of the Government, and the University to fund Meewasin, resulted in Meewasin’ most difficult budget in 38 years.

May 5, 2017, the Meewasin Board received a budget containing a 17% reduction in statutory funding for this fiscal year of April 1, 2017 – March 31, 2018. Looking ahead to this coming April 1, 2018, without any guarantee of funding from the Government of Saskatchewan or University of Saskatchewan, Meewasin could be put in a position to further reduce programs and services, possibly by over 60%.

Without a sustainable source of predictable funding, the concept of Meewasin that has been internationally recognized for its work in the Meewasin Valley for close to four decades, for showing great leadership in how a river valley can be conserved for now and for future generations, is threatened.

At this time, representatives from the three participating parties are working together to determine a plan for long term sustainable predictable funding. They are in the process of identifying the services that the three parties receive from Meewasin, and they are putting a proposal together to fund them.

What does the Meewasin Valley mean to the City of Saskatoon? The leveraging of money has been extensive. In the past 38 years, for every dollar that the city tax payer paid for Meewasin to develop parks and trails and amenities, the return has been 5 times. In other words of \$100 million that Meewasin has spent in park and trail development in the past 38 years, less than \$20 m has come from the local tax payer.

When you ask residents what is the number one attraction in Saskatoon, it is the Meewasin Valley. When you survey residents and ask if they like the Meewasin Valley concept and want it to continue, 90% say yes. When you read real estate ads for houses, they read 3 blocks from the Meewasin Valley. When recruiting and retaining employees, the Meewasin Valley is a major selling point. Every tourist magazine or brochure in Saskatoon and area features the Meewasin Valley. Every outdoor commercial features the Meewasin Valley. Most major events are in the Meewasin Valley. New citizens to Saskatoon say that the river valley was the appeal to have them decide on Saskatoon. Attracting conventions and business to Saskatoon, the Meewasin Valley has played a major role.

In 2004 Meewasin said to the Government of Sask. give us \$4m and we shall raise another \$10m to develop River Landing I. When that was complete, the City of Saskatoon said keep going and the city will fund River Landing II. The condos at River Landing sold out in four days. Credited for the sale was Saskatoon's riverbank development; a development that will help bring more people to live downtown, more ears and eyes to make it safer, a greater tax base, and eventually enough of a population for a grocery store.

And when you look at what is being done by Meewasin outside of City limits, on Crown Land, the rural access canoe launches, Beaver Creek Conservation Area where our young citizenry develop the conservation ethic for when they become our future decision makers, politicians, and city councilors and MLAs, Leisureland - one day to become a natural area with trails and amenities; the Meewasin Trail connecting the Great Trail, the work Meewasin is doing in biodiversity, in giving the public a say in river valley development, eradicating invasive species; all of it leading to a healthier lifestyle for all ages which statistically should lower the costs of health care.

Years ago, the people of Saskatoon and area wanted a conserved river valley. They wanted it developed for free public access. They wanted a say in how it was developed. And they wanted to educate people about it, so that they would never become complacent. Well, I think over the years, we have become complacent, all of us; not nurturing, conserving, understanding and protecting the tremendous value of this resource.

I believe that 38 years into the Moriyama 100 Year plan, the people of Saskatoon and area still want a conserved river valley. They still want it developed for free public access. They still want a say in how it is developed. And they still want to educate people about it.

As you receive these financial statements, and in a couple of weeks the follow-up Annual Report, those representing the City on the Meewasin Board, and those working to keep Meewasin vital in your citizenry, need your help. Thank you.

The results of this submission may be viewed at:  
<https://www.saskatoon.ca/node/398/submission/191668>