



December 15, 2021

Hon. Scott Moe, Premier  
Province of Saskatchewan  
Room 226  
2405 Legislative Drive  
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Dear Premier Moe,

Last week, the City of Saskatoon leased space to the Saskatoon Tribal Council in Downtown Saskatoon to allow for a temporary wellness centre (shelter) for people in Saskatoon. This marks the second shelter in the heart of Downtown and has brought concerns from various people throughout the community.

While everyone agrees we need to ensure there are places for people to go to stay warm, I think everyone also agrees that how and where facilities like this operate has to be part of an overall plan — and that plan cannot concentrate services all in the same district. Downtown Saskatoon has been under immense pressure from The Dubé Lighthouse for years. There have been many meetings where these struggles are acknowledged, yet nothing changes.

During a City Council meeting on December 9, 2021, I made an oral presentation on behalf of the Downtown Saskatoon Business Improvement District Board of Directors and membership. Since the provision of Social Services is a provincial responsibility, today I also **share Downtown Saskatoon's position with the Province of Saskatchewan**. These were my spoken remarks:

*One of the most used planning quotes is that "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."*

*No one wants anyone to be cold, and everyone agrees that services must exist that meet the needs of the community — the whole community. That means services must work for those who need support or a warm place to live, and they also must work for people who are trying to live, work, and visit the areas nearby.*

*Unfortunately, we are here today (Dec. 9, 2021) because of failure. We are here today because no action has flowed from repeated meetings with various government officials*



*and stakeholders over the last many years — meetings that pointed to problems in what services were being provided, gaps that existed, and in some cases who was providing them and where they provided them.*

*For too long, key government officials on the bureaucratic and political levels have been seemingly indifferent to the needs of those that require immediate help and those who live and work in the Downtown. This inaction and lack of planning has failed everyone. Having no long-term vision, no strategy, and endless repetitive meetings will not help anything, yet that is what has happened here. Everyone agrees at the meeting that something must change, but no one with the ability to make change makes it. Weeks go by, more meetings happen, and literally nothing changes. People continue to struggle, and the negative spiral continues.*

*So, we are here today to talk about what everyone agrees is an immediate need, but it is not close to what needs to happen for the medium and long-term. It is a stop gap — it will keep some people warm and that is critically important.*

*It may also hurt some people who are just trying to run a business in what is an incredibly challenging time to run a business - that has importance, too. After all, without successful businesses to employ people, pay property taxes, and donate to charity, the services that people need are not possible. A further erosion of the tax base — because businesses will not move Downtown, or as is happening now, will move out of Downtown — will put even more pressure on residential taxpayers who are already facing increased tax burdens of their own.*

*On the incredibly positive side, having the Saskatoon Tribal Council involved is tremendous. Sadly, way too many people in need of assistance are Indigenous, yet not all are, and we know STC will not turn anyone away.*

*It is disappointing that other potential locations for this temporary shelter were not offered as a solution to this immediate crisis.*

*Downtown Saskatoon calls on government — all levels of government — to find a suitable place to provide services without concentrating them all Downtown or in Riversdale. Services should be available through a distributed model and be part of a larger plan to **ensure they are meeting the community's needs. They must be right sized so as not to bring more harm than good to an area.***

*All neighbourhoods are fragile, and Downtown is no different.*



*We all need to admit that what has happened on this issue has been a failure. Let us not repeat the failure, forcing us to have this discussion again next year, which will undoubtedly occur if this issue does not find a permanent solution.*

*Let us also admit that despite the report from City Administration not stating it, there are implications to this decision to have this service located in a district that most know is already under a significant amount of pressure from perceptions of unsafe streets, and another large shelter at The Dubé Lighthouse.*

*Was the current reality of Downtown considered? Why was it deemed acceptable that no consultation occurred with affected stakeholders, like Downtown Saskatoon neighbours?*

*The lack of action by the Provincial Government on the issue of shelters, and the delivery of social services more generally, has hurt not only people who need services, but also the ability for people who live, work, or visit this district to do so unencumbered, with a feeling of safety.*

*Can we agree that without a plan to change us from status quo, the most likely outcome is indeed more failure?*

*Downtown Saskatoon would like a commitment from both the City of Saskatoon and the Saskatoon Tribal Council that this location is indeed temporary, and that both parties take immediate steps with the Province of Saskatchewan to create a plan which provides supports where needed, without also bringing unintended negative consequences to the heart of our city.*

*The plan must ensure services are coordinated and outcomes tracked to ensure that resources being deployed are having the right impact in providing services. Provincial ministries must support this, and the time for passing the buck is over.*

*We need to see our Mayor and Councillors, many re-elected last year, invest political capital to get the province to deal with what has been festering issues in this area for far too long. I know I speak for not only Downtown Saskatoon, but for Riversdale BID as well.*

*The onus is clearly on the province as the funder and the owner of many of the Social Services programs offered Downtown. Know that we and others will be there to help as we can, but the province has to lead.*

*Social Services is and always has been a provincial government responsibility. That it has fallen to the City to find solutions speaks to a level of disfunction and indifference that should be unacceptable to every citizen in this community.*



*This is not just about business owners. This is about people and the health of the whole city. There is a danger that if this and similar issues are not managed, we could end up a collection of suburbs with a cold and dark heart in the middle of all that — A place to avoid; A city without a personality; Most assuredly not a desirable place for anyone.*

*I implore that someone listening today with the ability to make this plan — to make things better — actually embarks on one. We must do better.*

Premier Moe, it is time to do things differently. It is time to act. It is time to recognize that far too many negative unintended consequences are flowing from how things are being done today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Brent Penner'.

Brent Penner  
Executive Director

cc:

Hon. Donna Harpauer, Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance  
Hon. Lori Carr, Minister of Social Services  
Hon. Don Morgan, Q.C., Minister of CIC, Crown Corporations  
Hon. Paul Merriman, Minister of Health  
Hon. Gordan Wyant, Q.C., Minister of Justice & Attorney General  
Hon. Bronwyn Eyre, Minister of Energy and Resources  
Hon. Everett Hindley, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Seniors, and Rural & Remote Health  
Ms. Betty Nippi-Albright, MLA, Saskatoon Centre  
Mr. Brad Reddekopp, MP, Saskatoon West  
Mayor Charlie Clark, City of Saskatoon & All Saskatoon City Councillors  
Mr. Cam Swan, Deputy Minister to the Premier and Cabinet Secretary  
Ms. Shannon Andrews, Chief of Staff to the Premier  
Mr. Reg Downs, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Premier  
Ms. Tracey Smith, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Social Services  
Mr. Jeff Jorgenson, City Manager, City of Saskatoon  
Chief Troy Cooper, Saskatoon Police Service  
Chief Morgan Hackl, Saskatoon Fire Department  
Ms. Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, City of Saskatoon  
Downtown Saskatoon Business Improvement District Board of Directors