



July 22, 2020

Mayor Charlie Clark  
City of Saskatoon  
222 Third Avenue North  
Saskatoon, SK S7K 0J5

Re: Concerns Regarding Negative Street Activity in Downtown Saskatoon

Over the last few months, the number of concerns about negative street activity received by our office has increased. Downtown Saskatoon has been and will continue to work to improve the situation but we realized long ago that the situation required help from others. As communications are received, I will forward these to many people who have a collective role in dealing with the situation including Provincial politician's, Saskatoon Police Service and the Board of Police Commissioners, The Lighthouse, and City Councillors. I believe it is important that these people and groups hear the same concerns that are expressed to our organization as we alone cannot deal with this situation.

Below are comments from two people, one a business owner who operates a business within two blocks of The Lighthouse. The second is from someone who purchased a property in 2010 in Downtown due to excitement of various long-term plans that had been stated.

**Comments from Business Owner:**

*In the last 3-4 weeks we have noticed the presence of Saskatoon's downtown transient population really increase, especially in our parking lot to the point where my staff members feel unsafe. We have been in this location for a few years now and really haven't had much of an issue (just the odd incident), but this summer has been very different. Many mornings I arrive to work and there is someone sleeping in our parking lot, people sitting along the building and a few times they are fully set up with lawn chairs or are camping out on our property with a large tarp and all. I simply just call Community Support when they are open or the Police and they come to handle the situation appropriately.*

*There have been several days in the last few weeks where I am calling up to 6 times a day as new groups of people choose our parking lot to gather in. Some days they are quiet and don't bother anyone and others they are rowdy, have garbage everywhere, people injecting drugs, and we then find needles all over. One evening there was a large group and when one of my staff members went into their car that was close by there was a guy that looked at her and pulled a knife out to intentionally scare her.*

*Over the last couple of weeks, I've politely asked some to move on and sometimes they do no problem, but I've also had some yell at and threaten me. Since then have made the decision to just call Community Support or the Police anytime someone is in our lot. We have talked with Community*



*Support, the police and our landlord and they all encouraged us to keep calling. Our landlord is willing to work with us to ensure the safety of our guests and staff. My staff are feeling better knowing that Community Support and the Police encourage calling over and over if needed, they sometimes felt they were bothering them. So for now they are feeling better about the situation as the past week it hasn't been as bad, but they also feel more confident on how to handle the situations. Fortunately, our guests haven't really been affected by this as of yet. We have had a few situations that have, but we find they mainly gather at the back of our property where staff park so most guests do not see them during the day. I know that this is becoming a much larger issue for downtown as a whole and I would hate to see it be the reason that Saskatoon residents choose to not shop downtown and continue to see local businesses close.*

### **Comments from Property Owner:**

*I would like to keep this email short, but I have a lot I need to share with you. Hopefully, you take it as positive feedback as I am a huge supporter and backer of Downtown Saskatoon. I've been passionate about downtown since 2010 when I saw change happening and initiatives being taken for improvement and vibrancy. I will probably use vibrancy too much in this email, but sadly that is what downtown is lacking.*

*So... What brought me to write tonight is an experience a friend and I had today while downtown. Nothing happened to us, thankfully, but we witnessed a restaurant manager on 21st Street being fed up to the point of needing to finally protect his business and the issues downtown.*

*Before I go further, I want to make clear that I understand things happen downtown in every city, and it is part of cities everywhere in the world and always will be. I understand fully that you guys are working very hard to make downtown a safe and vibrant environment. I understand that you have a lot of hoops to go through to make change. Honestly, I don't even know if emailing you is the proper channel to bring attention to what I want to get across. I really want to help improve downtown YXE. If this email helps. Good. If I can help moving forward in discussion, that is good too.*

*On July 3rd 2020, a friend came into the city and asked if I wanted to meet for a walk. I met her at 4:30pm at River Landing and showed her my passion for downtown (showing off the city). We walked along beautiful River Landing, up through Riversdale and into the Central Business District, and down 21st from the Midtown Plaza towards the Bessborough (The street in the city with the most potential, the true anchor to downtown). We decided to stop on a relaxed little patio at "The Cut Steakhouse". What a great end to a beautiful day prizing up the city, as well as myself being impressed with several new businesses at River landing and along 20th in Riversdale. It is impressive to me the amount of cool businesses along 20th that keep coming. That being said, it really is a shame how dead it was along 20th. Almost zero-foot traffic along 20th. Almost ghostlike, other than a few people enjoying the new patio at Primal restaurant. A shame that more people aren't enjoying these places at 5:30 - 6pm on a perfect Friday evening.*



*Back to the story at hand. As we were sitting at "Cut Steakhouse", my friend pointed out someone trying to be woken on a park bench next to the ice cream Bus across from the Bessborough. We didn't really think anything of it until Fire and ambulance showed up to address the situation. Not a huge deal, things happen. As we were about to pay our tab at about 7:30 pm, a random civilian ran up to our table (we were seated right next to sidewalk on the patio) and aggressively swiped the colored glass bottle that the restaurant has water in for customers to enjoy. I am not sure why he was after this bottle, but I am sure conclusions can be drawn. He took off in a full sprint along the sidewalk toward the Bessborough. The restaurant (previously mentioned) manager dressed for work in his Sport coat, and dress shoes took matters into his own hands and chased down the civilian in a full sprint, and caught him at the pedestrian crossing at the Bessborough Hotel, tackling him to the pavement. Pretty sad that he has to do this to protect his business. After speaking to our waitress, she mentioned that this happens regularly. So, the first thought that runs through my head, "why is he chasing down a glass bottle of water". After learning of how this is not a one-time thing, I can fully understand that this manager must be TOTALLY fed up and had to take things in his own hands. Thankfully, nearby civilians helped control the situation as did Fire and ambulance who were in the area dealing with the other issue, that we later learned was an overdose on the park bench near the ice cream bus.*

*It really saddened and disappointed me to see these incidents. What it did do is convince me of what I have been hearing but trying to ignore about people's experiences downtown recently. I know these 2 incidents seem minor, but sadly they seem to be common. We spoke with the police who showed up at the scene, and also gave props to the restaurant manager for protecting his business. The manager mentioned how he has owned business on 21st for 20 years and has never seen it as bad as it is now. I was so upset to hear that. I asked the police who I could approach or talk to regarding downtown, and they mentioned Brent Penner. That is why I am writing you.*

*I would like to stop here, but I feel it would just be like another generic complaint regarding downtown Saskatoon. I am not one to complain, but I am one who yearns for a vibrant downtown. A place where people want to be. I believe Saskatoon can have a world class downtown. It can truly be one of the best small city downtowns. It has the River which is what can make it that. There are so many great additions to downtown in the last 15 years. I could name them, but you know all the awesome things going on. To me though, it seems like it is a constant struggle of 1 step forward, 3 steps back. It just seems that vibrancy is lessening instead of improving. Maybe (hopefully) I am wrong.*

*I will give you a quick background of my passion for downtown YXE. I purchased a property in 2010 downtown due to my excitement of the projected plans and initiatives being taken. I follow the downtown redevelopment plan as much as I can, and I applaud the details and planning being done. Things look positive. The push for more pedestrian, bike and public transport options is so positive. I could go on and on about all the amazing plans.*

*This is why it disappoints me to see regression after 15 years of trying to improve downtown. Being told multiple times by friends and family that people don't feel safe downtown is so hard for me to hear. I*



*work mostly out of the country, so I am only in Saskatoon a few months of the year. Hearing and seeing this negative news is hard.*

*So..... I think you get the point. I could go on forever about changes that I believe could help. I will leave you with major points I believe are necessary to create positive change and improve vibrancy downtown.*

*1. Relocate the Lighthouse!!!! I know it is not easy, but it is mandatory! I 100% agree that the Lighthouse serves a vital purpose, but not where it is. Where it is now, is a TOTAL deterrent to people going from River Landing to the shopping district along 2nd Ave and 3rd avenue and vice versa, people coming from the shopping district to River Landing. This area is the LINK from the river to downtown!!!!!!!!!!*

*2. NUMBERS = VIBRANCY. We need to get MORE people living downtown- BOTTOM LINE. The 5-year Property tax abatement initiative was / is a great idea. It seems that more advertising and marketing of this perk needs to be done. More advertising/marketing and initiatives are necessary as ever moving forward to get people downtown. Residential development seems to be on the rise, which is good. Now we need to give people more reason to want to be moving around (hanging around) downtown and give businesses the chance to survive downtown. As more initiatives, incentives and more mixed housing downtown bring more students, families, young professionals, seniors etc downtown the more the suburban families will be drawn downtown to enjoy the experience. Hence, more people = NUMBERS.*

I hope that by sharing comments such as these helps come to a solution that sees improvement for all concerned, those who need services and help, and also we cannot forget that in order to provide services, the businesses in the area have to be able to succeed and everyone has to feel and be safe while visiting the area.

Sincerely,

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

Brent Penner  
Executive Director

cc: Chris Beavis, Chair, Downtown Saskatoon Business Improvement District  
Deputy Premier Gordon Wyant, Q.C.  
Hon. Paul Merriman, Minister of Social Services  
Hon. Jim Reiter, Minister of Health  
Saskatoon City Councillors  
Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners  
Chief Troy Cooper, Saskatoon Police Service



Supt. Randy Huisman, Saskatoon Police Service  
Insp. Cameron McBride, Saskatoon Police Service  
Rob Garrison, Community Support Program  
Don Windels, The Lighthouse  
Silvia Martini, Interim CEO, Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce  
Todd Brandt, CEO, Tourism Saskatoon