

REFOCUS SASKATOON'S ROLE

Avoid Scope Creep

Saskatoon, like many municipalities, has significantly expanded its role, taking on responsibilities traditionally under the purview of the Provincial and Federal government. The expanding scope creep is particularly prevalent in areas such as social services, affordability, the housing crisis, climate change, and the cost of living. While these are important areas to invest in, they fall outside the jurisdiction of our municipal government.

I agree with this as an overall statement. Our current City Council and Administration have lost their focus to the Saskatoon taxpayers and providing the basic services required and expected of them. As Mayor, I will refocus attention on providing quality core services for a fair cost. Period.

Foster Real Cooperation

Enhance coordination and collaborative partnerships with provincial and federal governments to advance city-building. Moreover, collaborate with regional municipalities to reduce regulatory red tape and barriers to outside investment and fast-track growth for companies already operating here.

Cooperation is imperative for a successful city. But, those conversations should be focused on things that are really relevant to the core services that the City should be providing. I propose that we create a "project expeditor" within the COS Administration to be a single point of contact for business interests looking to Saskatoon for their next expansion. Projects over \$2 million dollars would be able to use this service to streamline the data requests for cursory inquiries as well as later for detailed project completion.

Tell Our Story

Participate in selected trade missions and other efforts to attract new business to Saskatoon and open doors for local exporters looking to tap new markets for their products and services.

While I definitely agree with the need for a constant effort to get the "Saskatoon" word out, I do not want this to solely be the focus of any Mayor. We have too many serious local issues that require direct attention for any Mayor to be away often on outside trade missions here or there. The Chamber of Commerce advertises that they are a great business voice for Saskatoon, then perhaps the Chamber should only expect the Mayor to be in attendance at those significant events where having the Mayor present poses a distinct benefit?

Tighten Priorities

Re-evaluate service levels and concentrate on day-to-day frontline services that hold the highest value for the community. It's crucial to prioritize investments in infrastructure and core civic operations, especially when resources are scarce.

Absolutely I agree with this completely!

OPERATE WITH EXCELLENCE

Fix the Budget

Begin with the end in mind by setting budget targets upfront, engaging in meaningful community consultation, and prioritizing “needs” over “wants” to avoid excessive property tax and rate increases. Additionally, ensure budget utilization progress reports are available throughout the year to promote financial transparency and accountability.

Agreed. I also want our accounting method for “asks” to be totally reflective in the “deliverables” at the end of the project. Right now, our initial asks are blurred by not being reported the same way at the end of the cycle. Business and citizens alike want financial reporting to be done the same way for both sides of the equation. If the COS requests \$100 for a task, at the end they should respond with a report that states they spent \$xxx for that task! So a direct correlation will be given. We have too many reserve accounts, some of which the COS Administration have no idea what they are for. There is no way we should have more than double the number of these accounts as compared to the much larger municipality of Edmonton for example. Later when money is moved laterally between ambiguous accounts, citizens then lose track as to where the money has finally ended up! A shell game if you will.

What is our current municipal debt? I would like there to be a COS hosted page that shows this updated quarterly.

What is a “need” and what is a “want”? In a climate where existing services generally provided through taxation are being offloaded as a paid “service” while taxes keep increasing simultaneously, where is the accountability? Disparity between business and residential taxes is a big issue. The Mayor and City Council will continue to spend like there is no tomorrow when they are allowed to find ways to offload the biggest share of that cost onto business rather than equally onto residential taxes. The purpose isn’t to raise residential taxes, but rather to stop the rise in both and to reduce the service fees paid on essential activities. Businesses are greatly over charged for water services once they move past the 1” water meter size. Any business that changes their water meter from a 2” diameter to a 1” diameter meter can expect to save around \$5,400 per year thereafter. So the approx. \$450 charge to do this conversion is a small investment in the overall future savings. Most businesses are not aware of this issue and all small business owners specifically should investigate this potential to make the largest single improvement in their yearly cost to doing business in Saskatoon!

Tone at the Top

Set a tone that recognizes business owners as ‘partners’ rather than ‘problems’ and work to ensure this approach is embedded in all aspects of the City’s governance and administration.

My view is that COS Administration acts like they are a “warden” and the rest of us are all “prisoners” of a system we can not escape other than to just pack up and leave Saskatoon.

COS Administration has long lost the understanding that they are paid to provide a service to all taxpayers of Saskatoon. They give lip service to requests but still return to their own internal focus and benefit over all others. It may well be that COS Administration needs to adopt a policy or procedure that costs them more time and effort if that is best for business in Saskatoon to succeed! I do not believe our current Council or Administration will easily accept this premise but I do plan to aggressively express this every chance I am given until they comply with the best interests of our city.

Expand Auditor Function

Strengthen independent oversight for unbiased program evaluations, expand the internal auditor's role for regular assessments, and allocate sufficient resources to ensure comprehensive evaluations, fostering accountability and continuous improvement in public fund management.

Right now we are missing an auditor for the city. Functions have been transferred to PWC until a new replacement is found. Years ago, I presented a very detailed animation to prove the service deficit in transit services across our city. Right after I presented this to City Council, a formal audit was required. This audit later proved that City Administration were not being honest about service deficiencies in Transit. The three main COS points of contention were proven false by the auditor (age of fleet, availability of parts, and the number of cold weather days in our locale), to cover up substantially poor senior management decisions.

If sunlight is the best disinfectant, then proper audits when called for and warranted should be the best way to clear up operational issues in our city.

Improve Outreach

Appoint Business Liaison Officers with direct project authority for all major infrastructure investments in commercial districts, facilitating timely and effective communication with affected business owners.

How this might operate within the current COS Administration is not fully clear to me at this point. The concept is worthy but even the word “affected” generates uncertainty. Communication is paramount. That much I fully agree with. Limiting business disruptions in all situations is an important facet to me as well. How to achieve that though isn’t as clear. There are so many poorly operated COS Administration efforts now that perhaps more clear direction from City Council can help get the result you are asking for here without creating yet another tier of beauracracy?

INVEST IN TOMORROW

Invest in Infrastructure

Reinforce our position as a major player on the Prairies through investments in critical infrastructure like a Downtown Entertainment District that delivers both economic and community benefits and creates a dynamic hub that bolsters tourism and enhances the vitality of our city. Ensure local vendors, including Indigenous businesses, are prioritized when choosing suppliers to bring these investments onstream.

The DEED is not critical infrastructure! Sorry to burst your bubble. If you sincerely believe in “needs” versus “wants” then with a straight face you can’t say that the DEED is a piece of critical infrastructure at this point. Now if the current arena was actually caving in as originally portrayed, then perhaps we could have a more serious conversation about this potential.

This project was always a distinct “want” of some business owners and City Councillors. The majority of Saskatoon residents will not benefit from this venture and, other than their taxes increasing and their downtown becoming socked in regularly, they are not well served by this venture.

This entire program is best characterized by a “boiling frog” concept. Slowly over time, the statements have changed with the hope that people will not understand that they are being led to an ever-changing outcome. The original site selection was flawed and not totally honest. Since then, the Land Branch has been buying properties with profits from the department that should have gone to reduce current tax increases by all. So the taxpayers are already on the hook for some of this arena even though it is yet to be “approved”. Now the current sole source provider submission to council has been delayed, but Mayor Clark is quick to assure that they are “just” allowing the process to continue much further with the absolutely final approval to be done by the next City Council. Yet most feel that the already known information is more than enough to judge the validity of the project as a whole. Already people involved with the DEED state that things are “just too far gone now to turn back”, yet otherwise they claim that they can always sell the acquired land to recoup taxpayer funds in the future. Except they have tied up so much land in so many areas including the river front, that development that should have occurred a decade ago has still not transpired. In a world where COS Administration claims that infill density is paramount, they are directly the greatest problem in that goal!

Balance Transportation Needs

Invest in transportation infrastructure projects on an on-demand basis, including cycling infrastructure and active transportation networks. Balance the needs of all commuters, ensuring that any new transportation infrastructure is safe, affordable, attractive, and accessible and promotes both economic and community well-being.

We absolutely need a comfortable city that can be accessed by all. However, not all areas of our city are suited for some forms of transportation. Trying to make bicycle lanes throughout the industrial area will only come at explosive cost while not providing overall benefit to those businesses. The fact is, at this time in our development, there are places in our city that are too far removed and isolated for some services. If we can't provide storm water drainage to a large industrial site, then is it fair that we spend a huge amount on bicycle access for the exceptionally occasional rider that might use it?

Two comparisons. A few weeks ago, I was at the north Costco on a very busy morning. The parking lot was completely full before the weekend. As we walked through the door mid morning I asked the lady with the counter what the count was. She stated over 500 but that was just card holders at that point. When we left, I swung around the corner to look at the bicycle rack on the side of the structure. Not one bicycle was there. Then last week my wife and I went to Walmart in Stonebridge with my grandson. I noted that the parking lot was about half full. I also noted that the bicycle rack had one bike in it. Now if that rack had 10 bicycles but the parking lot had half as many cars parked there, what do you think the prognosis for Walmart might be?

Giant Tiger is leaving 22nd Street now. The manager at CHEP stated that there is insufficient vehicle traffic there to warrant such a large store footprint. So when some people say that closing all the downtown streets to vehicle traffic is the best way to generate growth because they travelled to some other place in the world and saw that outcome, that does not accurately reflect our circumstances and climate.

When I was 16, I used to work at the Safeway store on 20th Street and Ave H. Right next door to that was the OK Economy store where the White Buffalo Youth Lodge is located now. At that same time, there was another Safeway store at 24th Street and 2nd Avenue, a Dominion store in Midtown Plaza, another grocery store in the old Army and Navy building, an OK Economy store on the corner of Idylwyld and 33rd Street as well as a smaller one on the 400 block of 7th Avenue.

Most of these stores existed where walking traffic and residential density existed to support them. Yet over time, they all closed.

There has been failed grocery store attempts at 2nd Ave and 23rd Street as well as at the Station 20 West.

No one is jumping to establish a grocery store downtown. Our misguided taxpayer funded experiment with the old Farmers Market (now the "Gather Local Market") in the end was nothing to do with food security for the most vulnerable. It was to create cool spaces for the trendy people with more money in their pockets. So, COS Administration and City Council sold

us one thing, but in the end, gave us something completely different. Do you think this location will last even with the substantially beneficial terms already received? Sadly, I do not!

We do not have an LRT or high-speed subway. Our 250 million dollar BRT project by its own admission will at best be “reliable” and not “rapid”.

If we expect people to take the bus to gather their large grocery purchases, then we have to give a high-speed service somehow and someday. There are people in Europe that shop for small food quantities each day on their way home from work. They do not store massive amounts of food in their homes or small fridges either. Our mantra is to be prepared and to stay stocked up! One extra can of tomatoes doesn't cut it, but a case does! And that thinking is why places like Costco have flourished.

Yes, there are some Canadian jurisdictions where there is higher density of stores right close to massive residential developments such that those occupants can simply walk to the store for their purchase. But that model doesn't apply to our city now and for the visible future so a reality check is needed throughout that hasn't been talked about.

Provide services that people actually need and want. Do so with an effort to gently change habits for a better future outcome without hindering current business opportunities or the citizen quality of life.

Prioritize Local Safety

Implement a comprehensive safety support program that includes providing rebates for businesses in the vicinity of social service hubs, like shelters, to support them in their efforts to keep their customers, employees and neighbours safe and prevent unsafe conditions on our streets and sidewalks.

The ARO program was a program to help support downtown businesses. Even when these ARO's were promised for the Fairhaven shelter area, they somehow ended up downtown for the most part.

Personally, I believe it was extremely short sighted for the Province to renew their property lease for the Social Services location on 2nd Avenue. That location could have moved to a less impactful location. Just like the Fairhaven Shelter is not actually close to any relevant services, this actual service location could have been moved closer to the police station and away from the downtown core, for example. Reasonable access without the unnecessary impact.

If social services are provided close to businesses, I do believe that they should be able to receive extra help with the negative outcomes from that proximity. But I also believe this should be the case for residential property owners as well. Like a roving graffiti team of sorts. The big thing for me is to improve security camera networks and to use this information to more strictly enforce laws.

I would love a program whereby SPS could install a remotely collected and monitored security feed if the SPS feels that collecting this at that location would be beneficial overall. The program with the business approval, would not cost the business directly. If a number of business interests allow SPS to gather exterior footage around any specific area, it would accelerate the ability of SPS to deal with any given situation in real time.

I would like to start using the “Agent Status” model used in Edmonton, for example, as well. Give SPS every tool possible to do the job they are sworn to do for our city while being accountable for that effort.

Scale our Tech Sector

Explore opportunities to help Saskatoon-based tech companies to refine their IP and grow their businesses by making available City programs, services and infrastructure for small-scale pilot projects, like other western Canadian cities.

Years ago, I looked into COS using predictive modelling and RFID tags to expedite and streamline our Transit system. I was told by the Head of Computer Science at the U of S that this was a good two person grad project which could be reasonably locally funded and run. Yet nothing simple like this has been completed by our COS Administration.

We miss reasonable chances to elevate our own people and capabilities because of the stranglehold of COS senior Administration. When I am Mayor, that will change if I have any way to change it!

Modernize the Property Tax Model

Champion provincial tax reform to enhance business competitiveness, implementing Chamber-backed recommendations for a streamlined property tax system including the establishment of a Small Business Subclass and equitable residential to non-residential property tax ratio for everyone.

I agree that our taxation system is improperly structured. For way too long, City Administration and City Council have avoided voter accountability by simply increasing the wasted spending load onto local businesses instead.

Having honestly said that, I don't want a massive residential tax increase either to level the playing field. I want less wasted spending. If money goes into a public utility, it should be for the operation and future planning of that utility only. It should no longer be used as a piggy bank to back door tax for the city to fund more endless projects that fail to benefit those same taxpayers. I want utilities to only charge fees suitable to create and maintain those utilities. No longer should these be used as a profit center for the city.

If the actual costs were only charged to all residents and businesses alike, then all would be more aware of excessive spending depicted in their final taxation total and the Mayor and City Council would be more closely scrutinized for their spending habits while in office.

I want to see a viable plan to pay off our existing debt instead of an Administration very comfortable with using our current debt level as revolving debt throughout. We collectively waste excessive amount of money for interest on this overspent excess.

Knock down the debt level and have more funds available for efforts for which additional service fees are now charged.

The first problem we have to solve is to “live within our means”. Provide efficient services from a “lean” City Administration. I believe our current Administration is bloated with excessive middle management with no real accountability and little benefit to the COS taxpayers.

Stop hiring and start thinning the excess. Make managers accountable and proactive again. I believe that the operations model for our City is not sustainable as currently created by our City Manager. We need better services on the ground, and less overhead. Basically, the opposite of how things have been going at the City of Saskatoon.

Obviously the same applies to other entities like the Library. And while the City has less ability to influence the Library, it does have to approve funding increases, and the Mayor and one Councillor are members of the Library Board. (although for that to mean anything, the Mayor would actually have to attend Library Board meetings which our current Mayor has not for 7.5 years since first becoming Mayor of Saskatoon!).