

Presentation to City Council – August 27th, 2018
Motion regarding Wascana Centre

This is the Wascana Centre Act 1962. I should say it was the WCA 1962. In June of 2017 the government repealed the Act with no public consultation, little debate in the legislature and with no good reason or just cause for so doing except to establish sole authority over the entire Wascana Centre which, by virtue of the 1962 Act, declared that the Centre belonged to the people of Regina and was entrusted to the University, The City and Provincial Government for management and safe keeping.

That arrangement seemed to work pretty well for 55 years. So well in fact that I recall only 3 serious matters to be dealt with in the Park: the world's largest monkey bars that after an excruciatingly long delay eventually became the Centre of the Arts; the shallow and rather unpleasant smelling lake that was rectified by the BIG DIG of 2004 and the geese. We still haven't figured them out yet.

The framers of the WCA Act in 1962 displayed considerable wisdom in setting up a organizational model that saw a board overseeing the Centre consisting of 11 members; 5 from the Gov, 3 from the U of R, 3 from the City. Quickly do the math. No one of those three partners had a majority interest or control over the governance of the park. In fact in their wisdom the framers created a true partnership model – one that ensured no one partner could act in away that might be detrimental to the interests of the citizens of the city, and they created a board that would have to make decisions through consensus. This was an example of sound governance operating in a representative democracy working the way it should.

But in repealing the WCA in June of 2017, the government actually expressed a concern that the other two partners could gang up on the government and outvote them – even though they had to admit that it had never happened. Of course if it ever had happened it likely would have been justified and would have meant a return to the drawing board for a result more acceptable to everyone.

The minister in charge then argued that the government was going to streamline the WCA board to enable smoother operations. Well they certainly did that – they streamlined the city and the university right out of the equation enabling the 3 government reps to vote as a block and overrule the City and the University on any matter they chose to.

But in the process they also stripped us, the citizens of Regina from opportunities to publicly consult about the park through those two local levels of government.

Then the minister in charge said, in the Assembly, that the Provincial Government – was assuming responsibility of Wascana Centre. Well, not quite – they assumed control - but they abdicated responsibility.

Regardless of anyone's feelings about the teepee protest in the park, the PCC certainly doesn't seem to know how to resolve it. In fact they can't even resolve a simple misunderstanding between disabled water skiers and rowers on the lake.

This spring they promised public consultations on the future of the park by the end of summer - and yet, here it is, August 27th.

The deputy minister declared that commercial development already lines the perimeter of the park. Nonsense.

Then the Minister in the Leg said that they did not plan to allow development that doesn't fit with the park's 5 purposes ... except apparently a bank and private corporate office building. The minister said they were committed to the WCA Master Plan process – well the plan says that an Architectural Advisory Committee had to approve any new developments that didn't clearly comply with the 5 purposes of the Park. Well, the committee didn't and now it is gone.

The motion before you, although not binding on the government is a necessary recourse – and perhaps all that we are left with to try to prevent further incursions into the park that went against the wishes of original planners and those who safeguarded it for the citizens for 55 years under the Act.

The way to counter a foreboding future for our Park is for you, the council that represents the citizens of Regina whose most prized possession is Wascana Park is to pass this motion and then act strongly on it – protect the park from future commercial development and return it to its intended purposes; write directly to those who have usurped their authority and in effect placed our park in jeopardy and insist that public consultations become a permanent fixture in the process of the future governance of Wascana Park as permanent as the Legislative Building itself.

It is our park – we need to have a voice; we have a right to that voice. And right now, we need you to be that voice.

Jim M. Gallagher