

June 8, 2019

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed zoning bylaw changes, which would prevent the establishment of new recreational and fitness facilities and expansion of existing ones in the Industrial area.

As a Registered Nurse, I see the impact that lack of physical activity, affordable access, and low socioeconomic level have on individuals and, thus, the entire community, on a daily basis. The World Health Organization sets out the various social determinants of health. Among these are income and social status, educational opportunities, and the physical and social environments.

I am certain that Council members are aware of the importance of striving for positive health outcomes for all. We can blame screen time, fast food, and sheer laziness for poor health. We cannot, however, ignore the much greater role that systematic barriers play on limiting healthy behaviours. Barriers such as those that would arise if the proposed zoning bylaws are passed.

The new laws would prevent additional fitness facilities in the Industrial and Warehouse areas. They would remove the ability of existing facilities to expand, limiting the number of community members they can serve. Furthermore, our current facilities would be in danger of being forced out of their locations if leases are not renewed or the buildings they occupy are sold off. Building owners could demand increased rental fees to allow these recreational organizations to continue their tenancy. Rental fees in commercial areas are often much higher than those in the Industrial and Warehouse areas. Quite often the buildings available in them do not meet the space requirements of many recreational and fitness activities. These factors would increase operating costs.

Even if these organizations were able to continue operating, these increased costs would need to be passed on to members and their families. According to Hunter and Sanchez (2018), Saskatchewan has the 3rd highest poverty rate in Canada. Many Regina families would be unable to afford these fees, forcing them to withdraw. The Industrial and Warehouse areas are located close to some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city. This proximity makes it easier for lower income families to travel to their recreational facilities.

The proposed changes to zoning laws would, in effect, limit opportunities to participate in supervised physical activity for many of the most vulnerable residents. These changes would also negatively impact our local economy. The majority of operators of these facilities are small business owners. Those unable to meet their costs would have to close down, leaving them and their staff unemployed.

Access to gyms, dance studios, martial arts schools, and other organizations that currently reside in the zones in question have other social benefits. They provide alternatives to committing crime, provide academic opportunities, and teach respect for self and others.

As I said, I am a Registered Nurse. I am also a student at Spirit of the Dragon Martial Arts Schools (SOTO). They, like many fitness facilities in the area, promote physical and social health for children and adults. I use SOTO as an example since I am most familiar with them but they are not alone in the service they provide to the community.

Through the years SOTD has offered free classes and programs to low-income groups. Through their training, kids learn self-defence but also self-confidence, respect, anti-bullying techniques, and other social skills. There is no distinction between rich and poor. Once they don their gi, regardless of belt colour, they know they belong to a larger support network. SOTD and other facilities like them provide kids the chance to become better, well-rounded citizens in a supportive environment.

Adults need these things too. As a woman, I value the fact that I can learn how to protect myself. Physical activity reduces stress, improving mental health. We also benefit from the social interaction the classes provide.

Many students who attend these programs have other family members involved in the organization, whether as students or staff. Couples and parents with teenagers often participate in the adult programs together, providing them the opportunity to strengthen their own relationships. Facing the prospect of higher fees, many families would be forced to sacrifice this positive time together to allow their children to attend.

Regarding community, SOTD works to foster positive connections. Adult and children's classes often run concurrently. Occasionally, adults and children learn together. This teaches both groups to communicate with and respect each other. From fundraisers and food drives to family events, SOTD rallies to help members in crisis and to give to the greater Regina community.

SOTD is only one of the affected organizations that benefit the citizens of the City of Regina. Threatening their futures and prohibiting other such businesses from joining this important mission will negatively impact us all.

The City of Regina's vision statement says: "Our vision is to be Canada's most vibrant, inclusive, attractive, sustainable community, where people live in harmony and thrive in opportunity."

I challenge the Mayor and the Council to stand by this statement. We cannot be vibrant and inclusive if segments of our city are denied access to health-promoting facilities. We cannot be attractive if large sections of the city are left devoid of social life. We cannot be sustainable if small independent businesses are forced to close or prevented from opening in the first place.

Please, do not let these proposed zoning laws pass.

Sincerely,

Lisa Schussler, RN, BSN, BSc.