

**PRESENTATION TO REGINA CITY COUNCIL  
MOTION: “PROTECT WASCANA PARK FROM COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT”  
MONDAY AUGUST 27 2018  
FLORENCE STRATTON**

## **INTRODUCTION**

A big thanks to Councillors Hawkins, Stevens, and Bresciani for their motion. I grew up in Regina and have many happy memories of picnics with family and friends in Wascana Park.

Who would have imagined back then—or even as recently as four years ago—that a motion calling for the protection of Wascana Park from commercial development would be necessary?

Today, the need for such a motion is all too evident to anyone who has passed along College Avenue and witnessed the devastation that has been wrought in the Darke Hall area.

There must be **no** large scale commercial development in Wascana Park. That includes **no** Conexus and **no** Brandt buildings in the Park.

## **THE DEBATE**

### **1. Some people say an exception should be made for Conexus because of its \$8.25 million “donation” to the University of Regina’s College Avenue Campus Renewal Project.**

A Conexus building in the park will set a precedent. Just make a proposal that has a charitable ring to it, and you too can build in the park. Brandt clearly understood this when it applied to build on the CNIB site.

### **2. Some people say an exception should be made for Conexus because it is a cooperative.**

An underlying principle of cooperatives is concern for community. This is one of the bases on which Conexus defends the deal it made with the University of Regina. In the words of Conexus CEO Eric Dillon:

*We feel strongly that without an innovative partnership to help solve the ongoing financial challenges of College Avenue Campus / Darke Hall, that it might never be restored or worse yet, having to be torn down....Clearly we are trying very hard to achieve a much better outcome for our community.*

But is Conexus in the park a “better outcome for our community”? Even Mr. Dillon seems to have his doubts, as he prefaces his statement with the words: “We have been very clear that we do not support commercialization of the park.”

What is, in fact, very clear is that the deal Conexus made with the University is a very good deal for Conexus. In return for its \$8.25 million “donation,” Conexus got a 90-year lease on 2.6 acres of precious and priceless public land in Wascana Park.

**3. Some people say it is either lose park space to Conexus or lose the historic College Avenue Campus to the wrecker's ball.**

It is not either/or.

- a) First, The University of Regina needs to take some responsibility for those historic buildings, which it allowed to deteriorate over the decades.
- b) Second, the Conexus "donation" of \$8.25 million is a drop in the bucket in relation to the annual budget of the University which runs into the hundreds of millions. Why didn't the University set aside an amount annually to restore the College Avenue Campus? To help the project along, Conexus, acting as a true cooperative, could have offered a genuine donation of, say, \$1 million and thus provided a model for other businesses.
- c) Third, the University has made some budget decisions which, in the context of the Conexus deal, are very questionable. For example, not so long ago, the cash-strapped University spent \$1.5 million on fancy new signage—money that could have been used in the restoration of the College Avenue buildings.

In short, the Conexus deal was not the only way to save the historic College Avenue Campus. There were other options.

**4. Some people say the University of Regina's deal with Conexus is legal and that makes it all right.**

The deal is legal only because there was a lot of deal-making involving not only Conexus and the University, but also Regina City Council, the Wascana Centre Authority, and the Government of Saskatchewan.

All along the way, the public was left out of the decision-making process. The public forums that were held were mere window-dressing.

The various deal-makers had no right to make deals that involved giving away part of Wascana Park. Wascana Park is a public park. It is our park. Generations of Regina citizens have paid for it.

Only a referendum would make it right.

**5. Some people say the Conexus deal is a done-deal.**

Construction hasn't started. There is still time to do the right thing.

**6. Some people say that because both Conexus and Brandt will be on the periphery of the park these buildings are acceptable.**

These buildings will be in the park. They will be highly visible from major Regina roadways, breaking the hearts of many a Regina resident every time we see them and sending out the signal that commercial development is welcome in Wascana Park.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Wascana Park was never intended for commercial development. Regrettably, today it is in critical need of protection from commercial development.

I urge the Mayor and the City Councillors to support the motion. We must all do everything we can to stop the commercial takeover of Wascana Park.