

**Saving Maple Leaf**

Hello Mayor Fougere & City Councillors thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

My name is Jill Humphreys and I have worked for the City of Regina as a lifeguard and swimming instructor for about six years now. I would like to begin by saying that what I am going to say today in no way reflects my feelings towards my direct superiors at the city, but it does reflect my feelings toward the preposterous decision to close Maple Leaf pool permanently. For six plus years now, I have taught countless children swimming lessons, worked over seven thousand hours, and managed two outdoor pools. I see first-hand every day the value of swimming pools in Regina, especially pools in the inner city. Maple Leaf is not just a pool to the children of the Heritage neighborhood it is their second home, a safe place, for some children in the neighborhood it is a safe haven where they can receive care and food. Closing the pool permanently would be cruel and unusual punishment for the children in the heritage neighborhood. I do understand that the pool has outlived its lifespan, being that it was built in 1946, however, simply tearing it down with no plan to replace it cannot be the only option. I am asking you today councillors, to think about the kind of message you want to send to the children of the Heritage community because tearing down one of the only community services they have access to is telling those children that you do not care.

According to the **Core Neighborhood Sustainability Action Plan**, published by the Heritage Community Association and the City of Regina forty-six percent of all households in Core are low-income. The average family income is just thirty-one thousand dollars a year, making it nearly impossible to afford summer programs for their children, even if there were any offered in their neighborhood. Again, taken directly from this action plan put forward by the city — a central concern for the Core is the lack of neighborhood focused services, as well as the high levels of violent crime, vandalism, and theft. If community services that are readily available in wealthier neighborhoods, continue to be taken away then how do we expect to improve these neighborhoods?

Maple Leaf is also listed as a neighborhood hub in the action plan, a valued and well-used community gathering place. On page seventy of the plan, under strategy seven the second action is “Rehabilitate the Maple Leaf Pool or build a new recreation facility on the old site.” You can imagine my confusion when reading this plan put out by the city, knowing now that the plan is to permanently close the pool. As city councillors, I know that you care about this city and care about the children who live and grow up here. I also imagine that you care about bringing crime down in the inner-city neighborhoods of Regina, and one sure fire way to reduce crime is to provide opportunities for children not take them away.

According to the **City of Regina 2017 Annual Report**, the same budget that funds the pool is the same budget that pays the debt payments on the new stadium. Taylor Field outlived its life expectancy and we replaced it, why can't the same be done for Leaf? You will have to increase the policing budgets in the area, as the children will have nowhere to go in the summer so chances are that some of them will result to other possibly illegal, and unsafe ways to spend their summer days. I do understand that the city has said they will provide programming for the children, but there is no programming that will replace the pool. At the very least there needs to be clearer plan for what the programming will be, because as of right now we are leaving the Heritage neighborhood without any substantial summer programs for the young children and teenagers. Those kids deserve a safe, positive, and constructive place to spend their summers. The bussing option is also not sufficient as you will be bussing these children to a pool that they will not be able to afford to get into. Then those children get to see a seventeen-million-dollar water park built that many of them will not be able to access. Would it not be the better option for the development of Regina to continue to provide these children and their families a pool? It is unjustifiable to leave the Core neighborhood without their neighborhood gathering place because it is too expensive to rebuild when you can afford to build a seventeen-million-dollar water park.

I would again like to reiterate the invaluable community service that Maple Leaf provides, services that cannot be replaced by basic summer programs. Lifeguards at outdoor pools especially Dewdney and Leaf provide so much more than just supervision for the children who attend the pools. The lifeguards form lasting bonds with the children, those bonds are the

very reason that I am standing up here today. Those kids make going to work in the summer fun and meaningful, so I cannot sit idly by while the city takes away their summer refuge. We cannot ignore the realities faced by many families in the neighborhood as they struggle to provide for their families. They know that Leaf is a safe place for their children to go during the day, a place where they will stay out of trouble. The same can be said for Dewdney pool which was also build in 1946, so is the plan to close Dewdney in a few years? All public pools serve a public need but Maple Leaf and Dewdney are irreplaceable and essential to the lives of the children in both neighborhoods. So, simply closing the free pools is not an option. Again, you will not hear any argument from me that Leaf is in dire condition, but there has to be a way to save or rebuild it. Perhaps charging one dollar admission for adults and twenty-five cents for children will at least supplement some of the costs. If the closure is temporary, and supplemental programs take its place for a summer that is not ideal but permanently closing it without any substantial plan to replace it simply cannot be the only option.