

Brief to City Council, March 29, 2016 – Delegate #1 (Dr. Jim Leskun)
Saskatchewan Multicultural Centre Association (SMCA)

My name is Jim Leskun, and I am the current Vice-President, as well as Past President, of the Saskatchewan Multicultural Centre Association (SMCA). The SMCA is a small non-profit organization that is responsible for managing the cultural facility at 2144 Cornwall Street in Regina, Saskatchewan on behalf of its resident members, the Saskatchewan Organization for Heritage Languages Inc. (SOHL) and the Multilingual Association of Regina Inc. (MLAR).

All of these organizations are dedicated to preserving and promoting languages in Saskatchewan through various educational and cultural programs. SOHL, MLAR, and the numerous heritage language schools they support are providing important services that play a vital role in strengthening Regina's economy. Taking into consideration the recent influx of refugees and immigrants to our city, it is imperative to have resources that make newcomers feel welcome. The heritage language schools, SOHL, and MLAR contribute to the retention of immigrants in our city by helping people to maintain their culture, identity, and traditions, while simultaneously learning about Canadian ways of life. Of course, the schools also provide services to all Canadians wishing to learn an additional language; whether to brush up on a mother tongue, for travel purposes, to increase career opportunities, and much more.

On November 13, 2015, the SMCA received its annual Property Tax Assessment, and the assessed value of the building increased from \$261,100.00 in 2015 to \$424,800.00 in 2016. Upon contacting the City of Regina, we were notified that the process had changed and that as a result, our property taxes would increase from just under \$6,000.00 to approximately \$10,000.00 per year.

Unfortunately, just a month after receiving this notification, one of the SMCA's resident members, SOHL, was notified by the provincial government that all funding for heritage language learning was being eliminated as of the 2016/17 fiscal year. This announcement results in a loss of \$225,000 to the heritage language community, and will have a devastating effect on SOHL, MLAR and consequently, the SMCA, which exists to serve its two resident members. Most importantly, this decision directly impacts over 80 community-based heritage language schools and multicultural organizations throughout the province who make up the membership of SOHL and MLAR. These organizations have relied on this financial support for 25 years now, so the unexpected and shocking loss of the provincial government grant will make it even more difficult for our organizations to sustain the high property taxes at our 2144 Cornwall Street facility.

The Saskatchewan Multicultural Centre Association has been home to SOHL and MLAR since 1993, at which time this building was purchased with assistance from the Government of Saskatchewan. Now that the Government has withdrawn its funding support for heritage languages entirely, the future of all of these organizations is uncertain. With our property taxes almost doubling in cost, our small organization will struggle just to make ends meet.

We are truly grateful to the City of Regina's Finance Committee for recommending a 3-year tax exemption for our organization. We can assure you that these funds will be put to very good use and that this exemption will give our facility the chance to survive a very difficult period. We humbly hope that City Council will choose to uphold the Finance Committee's recommendation.