

**Saskatoon Racing Canoe Club  
Saskatoon Rowing Club  
Saskatoon Canoe Club**

## ***IT'S NOT JUST WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE***

### **Press Release**

#### **City quietly plans motorized boat launch for Victoria Park**

**Highlights:**

- City of Saskatoon and the Meewasin Valley Authority ignore public input into selection of permanent site for a motorized boat launch in Saskatoon
- Safety concerns raised by canoeists, kayakers, and rowers are not taken seriously
- Meewasin misrepresents feedback received from paddling and rowing clubs in presentations to other community groups
- City refuses to release results of its \$22,000+ River Access Study

**Saskatoon, SK, May 23, 2017:** On Dec. 5, 2016, the City of Saskatoon (the “City”) and the Meewasin Valley Authority (the “MVA”) hosted a public open house regarding their study (the “River Access Study”) on potential locations for a permanent launch site for motorized watercraft to access the South Saskatchewan River in Saskatoon (the “motorized boat launch”). Members of the Saskatoon Canoe Club, the Saskatoon Rowing Club, and the Saskatoon Racing Canoe Club attended the open house with great interest, as our clubs make extensive use of the South Saskatchewan River for training, instruction, competition, fitness, and recreation purposes. Our three clubs are based out of the 1989 Jeux Canada Games boathouse in Victoria Park, and in 2016 we had over 1500 members covering all skill levels from first-time kayakers and kids learning to row to international champion marathon paddlers.

At this open house, the MVA identified its preferred location for the motorized boat launch as being immediately to the north of the boathouse in Victoria Park. Our club members made it very clear that we are opposed to a motorized boat launch being constructed in Victoria Park for many reasons, including:

- The danger of collisions between motor boats and human-powered watercraft operating very close to one another is significant, especially in moving water as is the case here.
- Power boats attempting to maintain their position against the current while loading/unloading or waiting to use the boat launch will create irregular waves which are difficult for paddlers/rowers to predict and safely navigate.
- The portion of the river from the west bank to within 30 m of the east bank and extending from River Landing to the Gordie Howe Bridge is designated under federal regulations as a “no power boat zone.” This provision allows our club members and the general public a relatively safe place to use for human-powered activities on the water directly from our clubs’ docks in Victoria Park. Putting the motorized boat launch there would make what is currently the safest part of the river into one of the most dangerous.

In addition to the feedback we provided at the open house, we submitted many responses to the City's online survey and on Jan. 9<sup>th</sup> our clubs wrote as a group to the mayor and city council expressing our opposition to a motorized boat launch in Victoria Park. We did not receive a reply to this letter from any councillor, nor the mayor, but instead received an email from City administration regurgitating the line that the River Access Study "has identified Victoria Park as the most suitable location" for the motorized boat launch.

The City and the MVA seem oblivious to the important issues at play in deciding on a site for a motorized boat launch. The City appears to be unaware of its obligations to properly consult with the public and explore non-regulatory alternatives prior to requesting the type of changes to federal boating regulations that would be required to locate a motor boat launch in Victoria Park. Minutes of meetings of the project steering committee and of the technical advisory committee did not list the meeting time or location, nor even who was in attendance. None of the input given by a representative of the Saskatoon Canoe Club was recorded in the minutes of the first meeting of the technical advisory committee. Despite stipulations in the contract stating that the technical advisory committee would have the opportunity to review the River Access Study's draft options and recommendations, a meeting for this purpose has not occurred.

At the open house, the MVA stated that we should be reassured by the fact that the City would conduct additional consultations as part of the detailed design process once the City had chosen a site. Upon questioning, the MVA acknowledged that engineering work on the boat launch planning/design would not begin until after the site had been chosen. What such an approach fails to recognize is that the choice of site is the single most important part of the boat launch design that will affect the safety of the public on the river. MVA staff repeatedly advocated for the notion that by putting all types of river users into closer proximity with one another, the operators of motorized and non-motorized crafts would educate each other and all get along happily ever after. Users of motorized and non-motorized crafts present at the open house both agreed that this is unrealistic.

The MVA's consultant at the open house was totally unaware of the paths our clubs' members most often take when paddling or rowing on the river, yet she presented her previously completed ranking of potential sites as if the choice of site should not be affected by the traffic patterns on the water. When questioned as to why Rotary Park had disappeared from the list of potential sites between the publication of the City's public survey and the presentation she gave at the open house, the MVA's consultant stated that the streets adjacent to Rotary Park are too narrow to handle the boat trailer traffic. Many of the streets in the Riversdale and King George neighbourhoods are at least as narrow as those behind Rotary Park, yet the width of these roads on the west side of the river does not seem to matter.

The City and the MVA have not conducted themselves in an open and transparent manner. In its news release announcing the Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> open house, the City omitted any contact information for the staff involved in the project, either at the City or the MVA. Staff members at the City's general information phone line were even unsure as to where calls should be directed. In the second of two sessions at the Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> open house, the MVA and its consultant painted a rosy picture of the interactions held with members of the Saskatoon Rowing Club at the first session, when in fact the Rowing Club members had expressed total opposition to the MVA's preferred site. Furthermore, it has come to our attention that in its separate meetings with the King George Community Association and the proponents of a whitewater

park at the weir, the MVA and/or its consultant claimed that our clubs were in favour of locating the motorized boat launch in Victoria Park.

These misrepresentations prompted us to seek a copy of the River Access Study report to see how the MVA and the City had portrayed their so-called “consultations” with us. By Mar. 28<sup>th</sup>, City administration acknowledged having received the River Access Study report from the MVA, but refused to release the report, citing “client privilege.” A request to City administration in December for a copy of the contract under which the MVA had been engaged went unanswered. On May 17<sup>th</sup>, in response to an access to information request filed April 4<sup>th</sup>, the City released the contract details (showing a cost of over \$22,000) but redacted virtually all of the River Access Study report.

What information about the choice of site for a public-use motorized boat launch could require such secrecy on the part of the City? This is not a covert submarine base. We request that the City immediately release the River Access Study report. Furthermore, given the City and the MVA’s clear lack of understanding of river traffic conditions and limitations, we strongly assert that the City should engage qualified professionals to study the capacity of the river to safely handle increased motor boat traffic and to assess the impact of the various launch site options on the safety of all river users.

In addition to our three clubs, the Riverside Badminton and Tennis Club and the King George Community Association strongly oppose locating a motorized boat launch in Victoria Park and are frustrated by the actions of the City and the MVA in regards to the River Access Study. Our united campaign against a motorized launch in Victoria Park is called “It’s Not Just Water Under the Bridge”. The public is encouraged to visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Its-Not-Just-Water-Under-the-Bridge-127775524457031/> to show their support for this campaign and be kept informed of updates. A petition to the City has been started and may be signed at any of the following locations:

- Riverside Badminton and Tennis Club
- Saskatoon Racing Canoe Club
- Saskatoon Rowing Club
- Saskatoon Canoe Club
- The Wild Bird Store

For more information, please contact:

John McClean  
Member-at-Large  
Saskatoon Canoe Club Executive  
306-221-4252  
mr.john.mcclean@gmail.com

Nicole Golden  
Club Administrator  
Saskatoon Rowing Club  
306-291-8340  
saskatoonrowingclub@gmail.com