

**Progress Report on
The Future of Wascana Centre**

**Brief to the
Wascana Centre Authority**

**Public Meeting
Master Plan Review
February 21, 2006**

Wascana Centre Authority Public Meeting Master Plan Review February 21, 2006

Background

In October 2002, a public meeting was held at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum to discuss the future of Wascana Centre and the direction taken by the Board of the Wascana Centre Authority. The initial organization for the public meeting was coordinated by park employees but the impetus for the meeting related to complaints from the public about the lack of a formal avenue for public input to the Board. Over 300 people attended the meeting on October 17, 2002 with an additional sixty-seven written submissions to the organizers for inclusion in a brief to the Board.

Representatives from each of the three funding partners of Wascana Centre Authority, user groups and WCA employees were invited to provide an overview of their role in WCA, their vision for the future of Wascana Centre and their concerns about the centre. A question and answer period following these presentations allowed the audience to express their concerns or direct questions to panel members.

The main issues raised by the public included:

- quality of the lake water
- management of the lake (smell, depth and shoreline)
- natural habitat, sculptured landscaping or development
- condition of park amenities (washrooms, benches and lack of proper trails and bike paths)
- avenue for public input
- impact of special events on public access and on the habitat
- commercialization in the park
- incomplete sidewalks.

The written submissions raised many of the same concerns in the following order of importance:

- management of the lake (deepen the lake, improve the shoreline, control the goose population, decrease the use of pesticides)
- commercialization in the park (allow no commercialization or limited commercialization, charge vendors, limit the time for functions)
- condition of park amenities (create more jogging trails and improve existing ones, more benches, year round washrooms),
- development (limit development and parking lots, more and better traffic control)
- natural habitat (create more natural areas with additional interpretive areas)
- more public input and forums
- raise funds through memorials.

Based on the concerns raised at the public forum and articulated in the written submissions, a brief was presented to the Board of the Wascana Centre Authority in February 2003 with the following five recommendations:

1. The Board of Wascana Centre Authority bring together the federal and provincial governments and the City of Regina and establish a funding formula that will pay for a lake enhancement program, including lake deepening and shoreline improvements. (Building up the shoreline will assist with goose control.)
2. The Board of Wascana Centre Authority commit to the principle that it will allow no commercial development around the lower and upper ponds.
(Note: This would not prevent the Authority from allowing development that falls within its current mandate or small portable businesses such as ice cream and hot dog vendors.)
3. The Board of Wascana Centre Authority ensure that future developments within Wascana Centre are:
 - a) sustainable under existing funding arrangements
 - b) open to public debate before being implemented.
4. The Board of Wascana Centre Authority focus its development projects over the next five years on:
 - a) creating better year-round washroom access
 - b) installing more park benches that are accessible from current and future trails and pathways
 - c) building an all season bike path from Albert Street to the Centre of the Arts. (This will address some of the conflict between vehicles and pedestrians).
 - d) creating more walking and jogging trails and improving the lighting on existing paths and trails
 - e) converting some granular pathways to asphalt. (This will also address the conflict between cars and people/bicycles.)
 - f) creating more natural habitat and interpretive centres.
5. The Board of Wascana Centre Authority establish a funding formula among the participating parties that ensures Wascana Centre will be maintained to a standard acceptable to the Board, the employees and the public and allow current and future events to be staged within Wascana Centre.

Progress Report

Recommendation 1 Lake Enhancement

We are pleased that funding was made available to enhance the lake including lake deepening and shore line improvements. The lake enhancement program has raised the profile of the park and strengthened the appeal and attractiveness of the park to both citizens and tourists. Since the enhancement, an increasing number of special events take place at the park and the number of visitors to the park has increased. The success of the lake enhancement project demonstrates that the co-operative funding approach of the three levels of government can result in valuable park improvements.

Some shoreline improvements are now complete, for example, the area extending from the bandshell to the promenade on the north side of the lake. The addition of the retaining wall and irrigated turf has helped considerably with goose control. More shoreline improvements are needed on the south shore, especially since this area contains the most geese and the most visitors.

Unfortunately, the funding arrangements for the lake enhancement were made on a one-time basis, and no commitment was made by the parties to finance the ongoing maintenance of the newly-enhanced park. Reserves were not set aside for maintenance of the many new attractions at the park, nor for future improvements. As more people visit the park, increased maintenance of the park is required. For example, the garbage cans fill up more quickly, the barbecues need to be cleaned more frequently, and wear and tear on the equipment and grounds increases. In order to properly maintain the improvements to the park, increased funding is necessary for both equipment and staffing.

Recommendation 2 No Commercial Development

We are pleased that no commercialization has taken place since this recommendation was made.

We are concerned, however, that the Board has not committed to the principle of banning commercial development around the lower and upper ponds. There continue to be suggestions that commercial operations be pursued or allowed in the park, including the establishment of an exclusive restaurant on the waterfront; allowance for movable trailers to sell refreshments; and the building of a hotel and/or convention centre on park property, to name a few.

We know from the public input received in 2002 that overall, the public is strongly opposed to any commercialization of the park. Citizens are concerned that commercial development would result in deterioration of the natural habitats in the park and that wildlife would be negatively affected. The public wants to keep the park a clean, pristine environment not only for the park wildlife but also for the enjoyment of the park visitors. Citizens and tourists use the park for environmental, recreational and relaxation purposes and commercial operations are seen as an encroachment on those priorities.

The people want to retain ownership of the park and keep the park in the common interest, rather than ceding it to private, profit-driven interests. If some commercialization is allowed, we are concerned that the public will lose control of the park development, particularly in light of the fact that under current trade agreements once some privatization occurs, it cannot be reversed.

Recommendation 3 Future Development and Public Input

Funding: When the recent developments to the park took place, sustainable, ongoing funding from the three funding partners for the maintenance of the developments was not arranged. The current funding allocations from the three parties are not sufficient to maintain the newly improved areas of the park in addition to the core areas. For example, the lighting and fountain installed on the new promenade costs approximately \$20,000 per year to operate, yet no funds have been budgeted for this new, ongoing electrical cost. There are, as well, enhancements of lighting, landscaping, and a new waterfall for Pine Island for which there have had no additional funding allocated.

We stress that future developments must be funded in a sustainable manner, particularly in light of the fact that several new ideas for improvements of the park have been suggested by the public and stakeholders.

Staffing: Wascana Centre staff should be used wherever possible for future park projects. For example, recently a fee-for-service arrangement was worked out between the University of Regina and Wascana Centre for some additional landscaping using Wascana Centre staff. This approach keeps the financial resources of any new projects within the purview of the WCA. Furthermore, by employing the valuable knowledge and skills of WCA employees, projects remain internally consistent, with the use of standardized techniques and equipment.

All future projects to improve the park must be staffed appropriately. WCA staffing has remained at historic lows, despite the fact that major projects such as the lake deepening were recently undertaken. Staffing levels are currently inadequate to meet the increased maintenance needs of the newly renovated park, and severely limit WCA's ability to undertake future developments.

In 1985-86, WCA had 101 full-time employees and 138 seasonal employees; as of 2005-06, the staff complement has dropped to 40 full-time employees and 89 seasonal employees. It stands to reason that the reduced number of employees is not able to provide the same level of maintenance, particularly in light of the increased number of events and attractions at the park.

Wascana Centre Authority Staffing Levels		
	Fiscal 1985 - 86	Fiscal 2005 - 06
Full Time Out-of-Scope Staff	19	8
Full Time In-Scope Staff	82	32
Total full-time staff	101	40
Seasonal (in- scope) Peak staffing	138	89
Total Staff Complement	239	129

Consultations: During the recent lake enhancement program, some consultations took place with some stakeholders. The public meeting in 2002 clearly supported a broad public consultation on any and all developments in the park. Future large-scale capital projects should not be undertaken without broad-based community consultations. Recently, the Board has involved stakeholders in a strategic planning session, which is a positive course of action, but should not replace broader public consultations.

Recommendation 4 Condition of Park Amenities

a) Year-Round Washrooms: The Marina restaurant has a washroom available year-round and the park now has signs advising the public about the location.

In order to add more year-round washrooms to the park, a significant infusion of new funds would be required to winterize and maintain the buildings.

b) Park Benches: Park benches were added to newly renovated areas, such as the promenade. It would be beneficial for park visitors to have more new benches in all areas of the park to accommodate the increased number of visitors.

c) All-season Bike Path: A pedestrian and bike path was created from Albert Street to Conexus Centre. This new path is an example of the limitations of one-time funding. The creation of a path is just the first step. The cost of the ongoing maintenance of the path, particularly during the winter months when snow and ice removal are vital to public safety, must be incorporated into the overall development costs. Any new paths slated for development must have sustainable funding built into the budget.

d) New Trails: New trails, such as the promenade and between Pine Island and the Broad Street bridge, have been created and are properly lit. These paths require additional resources in terms of material and staffing and additional funds are needed to maintain these areas.

Lighting: Lack of lighting in other parts of the park, however, is a major safety concern for the public. For example, the path from the swimming pool to Broadway Avenue is surrounded by bushes and is poorly lit. The current lighting system is 35 years-old and needs upgrading. The addition of energy-efficient lights that concentrate the light downward onto the paths would alleviate the problem.

e) Converting Pathways to Asphalt: The path between Broad Street and the swimming pool has been converted to asphalt. Several other paths still need to be converted, as the conflict between cars and people/bicycles remains a problem.

f) More Natural Habitat and Interpretive Centres: No new natural habitats or interpretive centres have been created. The public has indicated that the park should continue to play a key role in wildlife preservation. New natural habitats and interpretive centres could play that role, provided the funding to undertake such projects was adequate.

Recommendation 5 Sustainable Funding

All of the above suggestions from stakeholders and from the public for improvements and additions to the park cost money. The funding formula between the three partners is a workable formula, provided that the parties now create a funding package that will pay for the maintenance of both the recent improvements, as well as any future improvements to the park. Investments in the park must be approached in a sustainable manner so that recent improvements are not allowed to deteriorate and upcoming improvements can be properly maintained over the long term.

In 1981-82, the total combined contributions for maintenance and statutory funding by the three parties was \$4,387,140. The allocation of funds for WCA rose marginally from 1982-83 to 1986 but has decreased, remained the same or increased by less than 1% in 15 of the last 20 years. In 2005-06, the combined total for contributions is \$4,738,000, \$476,400 less (-19%) than the combined high 20 years ago in 1986-87. Statutory funding for WCA has decreased 9.7% from its high in 1985-86.

During the period April 1, 1981 to December 31, 2005, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for Saskatchewan increased over 100%. When inflation is taken into account, the current budget of \$4.7 million in today's dollars is a reduction of 47%. In order to keep pace with inflation, a budget of \$8.3 million would be required to maintain funding at the 1982-83 rates.

Funding History for Wascana Centre Authority				
	Statutory Funding History	Maintenance Funding History	Annual Funding	Percentage of Change
FISCAL YEAR	TOTAL	TOTAL	TOTAL	
2005-06	1,459,000	3,279,000	4,738,000	5.3%
2004-05	1,459,000	3,042,000	4,501,000	0.9%
2003-04	1,421,000	3,042,000	4,463,000	3.0%
2002-03	1,421,000	2,913,000	4,334,000	Ø%
2001-02	1,421,000	2,913,000	4,334,000	0.7%
2000-01	1,421,000	2,882,000	4,303,000	Ø%
1999-00	1,421,000	2,882,000	4,303,000	(0.1%)
1998-99	1,421,000	2,887,000	4,308,000	7.5%
1997-98	1,421,000	2,579,000	4,000,000	(0.2%)
1996-97	1,421,000	2,595,000	4,016,000	Ø%
1995-96	1,421,000	2,595,000	4,016,000	Ø%
1994-95	1,421,000	2,595,000	4,016,000	(3.4%)
1993-94	1,421,800	2,734,700	4,156,500	(7.6%)
1992-93	1,515,000	2,985,000	4,500,000	(7.4%)
1991-92	1,594,670	3,266,280	4,860,950	0.1%
1990-91	1,594,670	3,260,470	4,855,140	(0.3%)
1989-90	1,594,670	3,275,310	4,869,980	3.3%
1988-89	1,594,670	3,117,780	4,712,450	(0.8%)
1987-88	1,594,670	3,157,814	4,752,484	(8.9%)
1986-87	1,594,620	3,619,780	5,214,400	1.3%
1985-86	1,519,560	3,629,750	5,149,310	1.9%
1984-85	1,447,355	3,607,080	5,054,435	4.4%
1983-84	1,412,660	3,426,840	4,839,500	0.4%
1982-83	1,685,875	3,133,625	4,819,500	9.9%
1981-82	1,624,230	2,762,910	4,387,140	

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Summary

At the 2002 Public Forum on the Future of Wascana Centre, the public overwhelmingly supported increased resources to improve and properly maintain the park. Citizens and user groups expressed to the Board just how highly they value the park as a place to enjoy recreational and leisure activities and the natural habitat. Since the lake deepening and enhancements, the number of visitors to the park has increased. The number of special events taking place at the park has also increased. This expansion of services cannot be met without appropriate increases in funding, staffing and equipment.

For the public's enjoyment and safety, it is imperative that the park be clean and well-lit. We recommend that the Board set aside appropriate funding for improved paths and lighting to that effect.

The public has also sent a clear message to the Board that commercialization of the park is not welcome. We recommend that the Board keep the park free of commercial developments and any privatization of services.

Increased funding for staff and equipment is necessary if WCA is to adequately maintain the recent improvements to the park, as well as maintain the park over the long term. The funding partners must approach current and future funding arrangements with a view to sustainability.

A Tribute to former Board Member Mike Badham

We wish to recognize the very supportive role Mike Badham played over the years as a Wascana Centre Authority Board member. Mike was instrumental in gaining support from the City of Regina to fund the lake enhancement project. His commitment to working co-operatively to build a beautiful park will be greatly missed.