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A LOCAL SOCIETY IN URBAN AND PROVINCIAL AFFAIRS:
THE HISTORY AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE
SASKATOON ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIETY

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Warren F. Steck and William A. S. Sarjeant

The late 1960's were the pioneer years of grass-roots environment protection movements in North America. In Canada and the United States, hundreds of hopeful organizations were born from concern about the growing assault on the natural environment by a host of human activities. For most of these groups the immediate issue was pollution; the immediate aim was a "clean-up". Success here was often more deadly than failure, for many organizations could not sustain their activism beyond the initial goals. By 1970 the first wave of popular environmental enthusiasm was ebbing, with many groups either disappearing or being swallowed up by larger ones. As the seventies arrived, it was difficult to see whether the environmental movement would grow and mature, or simply fade and vanish as an effective force.

At just about this time the Saskatoon Environmental Society was organized by a small group of people who felt a need for a good environment protection organization in Saskatoon. In May 1970 the decision was taken to launch such a group, and on 31 August the Society was incorporated provincially, its mandate being ". . . to study environment-related issues . . . and to publish and disseminate information about the environment". The organizers' decision not to affiliate with any outside body later turned out to be an important asset, but at the time it meant foregoing financial help and outside experience in the critical first year of life.

Some other initial policies laid the foundations of subsequent strength: the Society's membership was to be open and as broadly based as possible. Conscious effort was made to avoid its becoming a "campus group" - a real danger in a city where university people form a major segment of the community. The Society was not to be politically partisan in word or deed. The organization would concentrate on positive suggestions rather than negative criticism. And the group would stick

to local and provincial issues, resisting involvements with far-away struggles. The Society would be a volunteer organization. If there was sometimes drawn-out discussion of these various matters, there was resounding unanimity from the outset on one point: the new group would not be another "pollution fighter" but would consider environmental quality in a broad and long term sense.

In September the first public meeting had been held, before a packed house of over one hundred at the civic library, and the Society's sixty members were ready to launch the first projects.

The First Steps

By way of stating clearly the Society's aims on the local level, a brief was prepared outlining what were perceived to be major environmental quality problems. This position paper dealt with the problem of mercury pollution of the South Saskatchewan River which flows through the city. The mercury originated largely from local chemical plants; corrective steps were outlined. (The provincial Water Resources Commission was in fact in the process of implementing steps similar to the ones called for, but because of that body's policy of secret dealings, this fact did not emerge until 1974.) The brief reflected a general public concern for protection of the city's riveredge areas in a park-like state, called for policies to limit the ultimate size of Saskatoon, suggested the creation of a municipally sponsored environment quality board, demanded more imaginative management of the local public transit system, and made a pitch for city planning procedures better geared to producing a good urban environment.

The whole brief, by a stroke of inspiration, was sent not to the city government but to candidates in the upcoming municipal elections. In this way, environment issues for the first time became campaign issues. Candidates were often less than agreeable to some suggestions, but a message got through to most since several subsequent acts of the City Council can be traced to that brief.

Early in 1971 the provincial government announced plans to allow a gigantic pulp mill to be built near Meadow Lake in north central

Saskatchewan. Alarmed that the plant would mean cutting of up to 100% of the province's forests in the area and aware of the amount of pollution created by the same company's 1965 mill at Prince Albert, environmentalists protested loudly. The campaign was fought back and forth in the press until it became a campaign issue in the June provincial election.

The Environmental Society's campus affiliate, the Resources Study Group, published a well researched and well written series of articles on existing and proposed forest operations in the province, disseminating the articles in the form of a newspaper to get wide coverage. The effect was decisive, the opposition party (NDP) making cancellation of the Meadow Lake plan an election promise. Soon after that party came to power in 1971 a cash settlement was made with the developers and the forests were spared.

These two experiences showed the young Society the importance of getting the environment message into the media and resulted in the subsequent regular issuance of press releases on a variety of topics. For over a year the idea of "being in print" remained in the foreground of the Society's thoughts, and if in retrospect this seems to have been overdone, it nonetheless produced a base of credibility for the organization. Through 1972 and 1973, these media activities were matched with regular public meetings and individual members' speaking engagements, the production of three briefs and a major position paper, and publication of a series of nine original booklets on environment topics ranging from Population and the Environment to Air Pollution. When the newly-formed provincial Department of the Environment adopted most of these booklets for use by its information division in 1973, the reputation of the Environmental Society as a reliable information source was firmly established.

On the occasion of the change of government in 1971, a brief was presented by the Society urging that the Province undertake the collection of the old cars that were littering the Province's roadsides, fields and back lanes. Among the five points made in this brief, it was suggested that a \$2 surcharge be added to Provincial car licence fees to finance this. The Government responded swiftly to this brief;

a programme for the collection of such vehicles was inaugurated and eventually embodied in the Scrap Vehicles Act (1973). The task of organising the programme was placed in the hands of the Department of Industry and Commerce and junk cars collected were transported to a native metals plant in Regina. (The Province was content with a \$1 surcharge on licences.) As a consequence, one unattractive feature is now fast vanishing from the Prairie landscape.

In October 1972 the Society fell heir to Probe, an environment action newsletter which since 1970 had been a project of Regina Pollution Probe. RPP, beset by declining fortunes, was unable to keep up this publication which had a substantial readership throughout the province. With the Society's takeover came an overhaul of the format and content of the publication, in line with changing Probe from a newssheet to a magazine. A capable and enthusiastic group of five talented volunteers undertook the job of turning out each issue. Since 1975 the production has been bimonthly, with the name changed to Environment Probe. By keeping to Saskatchewan issues and providing articles of special interest to prairie readers Probe has been able to survive where other more expansive publications have failed. To environmentalists throughout Saskatchewan, this little magazine has become the hall-mark of the Society. Some people further afield liked it too: in 1975 the editor, Mrs. J. F. C. Wright, received on behalf of the Society, the White Owl Conservation Award for the work of the Probe group.

The Arrival of Governmental Environment Agencies

The years 1972 and 1973 saw the creation of environmental bodies by all levels of government. "S.E.S.", as it was by then known to many Saskatonians, was the moving force behind one of the first of these agencies. The Society's repeated calls for a local environment board gained eventual response from City Hall, in the form of a request for a draft outline of the structure and function of such a body. This outline was prepared in conjunction with the Saskatoon Natural History Society, which had endorsed the idea. The body proposed was an advisory

council whose main duties would be to provide the city administration with advice on request about possible environmental consequences of municipal projects, and to act as an "early warning system" for urban environment problems. To the surprise and delight of S.E.S. supporters, City Council warmed to the idea, finally setting up a seven-member Advisory Council early in 1973. Among its enumerated duties was the publication of an annual report dealing with the current state of the Saskatoon urban environment. These slim volumes are still unique in western Canada as official reviews of local environment problems. Although hamstrung from its inception by lack of civic funding support, the Council has nonetheless had an impact on the workings of City Hall and has succeeded increasingly in providing input to city planning processes.

Both Environment Canada and the Saskatchewan Department of the Environment were created in 1971-72, and with their arrival many environmentalists asked themselves whether citizen groups would not then give way to an age of enlightened state regulation of environment quality. At that time, who could foresee that the federal environment machinery would turn out to be aimless and ineffectual in the area of environment protection? Who could have predicted that the provincial Environment Department, after a promising beginning, would degenerate into a rubber stamp for all manner of dubious projects of the Province? The failures of these public agencies were still in the future; consequently 1972 was a year of much soul-searching about whether citizens' groups would continue to be needed and what their future role would be. This was the stimulus which led the Environmental Society into new directions locally, and to greater involvement in municipal affairs in Saskatoon.

The Heritage Campaign

A concern of the Society that emerged during the latter months of 1972 - and a rather unexpected one, perhaps - was with the heritage of historic buildings in the City and the Province. This matter was viewed as an essential component of the quality of the

environment, the survival of such buildings adding to the attraction and interest of the Saskatchewan landscape, urban or rural.

Action was stimulated by rumours that City Council was negotiating with CP Rail concerning the closure of the line through the city and the acquisition of the land for road building; in consequence, it seemed likely that the station building - the only survival of the days when Saskatoon was the railroad "Hub City" of the Prairies - might be demolished. The negotiations did not, in fact, proceed very far; the rail line is still in use right up to today and CP Rail apparently has no plans for ending its use of the building as administrative offices, but the news served to alert the Society to the real dangers threatening many other buildings in the city.

It early became evident that there was no legislative protection of any kind for buildings in the Province, excepting only that very small handful whose national historic importance was sufficient to make them of interest to the Historic Sites & Monuments Board of Canada. Action at both the local and the provincial level was clearly required, and a campaign was launched to arouse local interest and to stimulate Governmental action.

The first action was a letter sent to Saskatoon City Council in May, 1973, urging that buildings and sites of historic, aesthetic or architectural worth be given special consideration in future urban development. Council responded favourably and invited the Society to co-ordinate with its officials in preparing an Inventory of such buildings and sites. In response, we suggested that this should be the task for a committee consisting of civic representatives and citizens with a range of expertise on historical or architectural matters. This was agreed; and a Special Committee, initially with twelve members was brought into being to prepare the inventory.

The task proved a more difficult one than was initially anticipated. Guidelines governing the selection of buildings had first to be established and approved, and, since there were at that time no precedents to which to turn, this took time. (Heritage Canada was then only a new creation and not yet active.) A list of some 40 historic buildings and areas was eventually decided on and presented to Council;

the buildings included all dated from 1930 or earlier. A second list of more modern buildings of architectural or aesthetic merit was subsequently also prepared and presented to Council.

However, though the lists were duly published and the Planning Department was made aware that these buildings merited special consideration, the next step was not clear. How to ensure the preservation of these buildings and their maintenance in decent condition? Perhaps this might be done through the introduction of new categories into the Zoning Bylaw; the Special Committee worked on this during 1976 and its proposals were presented for Council consideration early this year, but no decision has yet been taken on them. Can the city, in any case, legitimately take action independently of the province?

Interest among citizens was stimulated by the production of two Society "Special Publications", one dealing specifically with Saskatoon's historic buildings and the other recounting the manner in which the city had grown. In addition, pocket-sized leaflets were produced by local historian Sally Clubb for circulation by the Board of Trade and in schools, and Mrs. Clubb initiated tours of the city to inspect the buildings of greatest historic interest and attraction. The response was gratifying; the two "Special Publications" quickly ran through two editions and the tours attracted such interest that local entrepreneurs began to run them regularly in the summer months. Clearly there was a very real concern among Saskatonians about the surviving relics of the city's past.

At the provincial level, the Society's campaign was begun by a barrage of letters sent to the Members of the Legislative Assembly and to Saskatoon's two MPs in the summer of 1973. The response was gratifying; it speedily became evident that the Society's concerns were shared - once their attention had been drawn to the matter - by both major Saskatchewan parties. Promises of positive action came from Premier Allan Blakeney and expressions of support from nine Ministers and four other members of the NDP Government; and endorsement from the opposition Liberal party, though less prompt, was equally positive. The two Saskatoon MPs, Otto Lang and Alf Gleave, both also responded

positively and proved willing to check on various issues in Ottawa on the Society's behalf.

News subsequently came that a joint Committee of members of two Provincial Ministries (Culture & Youth and Tourism & Renewable Resources) had been formed to draft appropriate legislation. This sounded good; but the Society kept up the pressure by letters to the press, open-line sessions and news items on radio and television, and the presentation of a formal brief at an open meeting of the Provincial Cabinet held in Saskatoon in October, 1974. Again and again, the message was hammered home that action was needed quickly; while the Provincial Government delayed, buildings were being torn down and our heritage diminished.

In March, 1975, the Heritage Bill came before the Legislature. In general its contents appeared admirable; but two particular points were disturbing. First of all, the Bill left many matters vague; it seemed that the precise details were to be spelled out only when Regulations were framed for its administration. Much more disturbing, however, was the fact that the operation of the Act would rest entirely in the hands of the Minister responsible and would depend for its success wholly on his goodwill and interest. Though a Heritage Advisory Board was to be set up, its members would be selected or dismissed, its meetings held or not held, entirely at the whim of the Minister; it would, in short, not be the independent body. Criticisms in the Legislature by Saskatoon's Independent MLA, John Richards, were unavailing, and on April 11th, 1975, an unmodified Saskatchewan Heritage Act received Royal assent.

The first stage in the Society's endeavours to bring into being a legislative framework to protect Saskatchewan's heritage was thus attained, and the news that a Historical Advisor had been appointed by the Department of Tourism & Renewable Resources - in whose charge the administration of the Act had been placed - was encouraging. But time went by and nothing further seemed to be happening. Where were the Regulations? When was action going to begin?

As the months ticked by, concern mounted. Letters to the Hon. Adolph Matsalla, sent by the City and by the Society, initially

received an encouraging response. The Regulations would appear before the end of 1975; no, early in 1976; well, they were in hand and would be out shortly. . . . But at the end of 1976, they had still not been published. At that point, responsibility was transferred to the Ministry of Culture & Youth, where it still rests. Unfortunately, "rests" is the operative word. No Regulations have yet been promulgated, and, though two years have gone by since the Act came onto the statute books, it is still not in operation.

The Canarama Confrontation

Late in November 1973, the Society became involved in what was to prove the most major confrontation to date between citizens and City Hall in Saskatoon. The matter opened with a telephone call inviting us to meet with representatives of a small group of young Saskatonians calling themselves the Saskatoon Citizen's Committee, who were acting as watchdogs on, and critics of, the doings of City Council. At the most recent Council meeting a majority of aldermen had endorsed, after only a brief discussion, a subdivision that marked the first stage in the construction of a new housing development proposed by Canarama Ltd. This was to be located on virgin land within the city, adjoining the west bank of the South Saskatchewan River. The proposed new development would be located on a river terrace sufficiently elevated to provide the fortunate purchasers of houses with a splendid view of the river and its bridges; it was to be named "River Heights". The narrow strip of land at the foot of the bluff, separating the development from the river, would be used for the construction of a major highway - a northward extension of Spadina Crescent that would link it to the site for a new major river bridge (the proposed 42 Street Bridge). A premium location, indeed - but, if further subdivisions likewise secured endorsement from Council, an attractive area of riverbank, ideal for a new park, would be forever lost to the majority of Saskatoon's citizens.

It was noted in particular that the new development appeared

to contravene existing regulations that demanded a 300-foot setback from the river's edge. This was to be both a crucial and a controversial issue, for the regulations were not clear. What was the river's edge? Was it the edge of vegetation? Was it the edge of the natural bank? Since the City had been busy dumping landfill into the river at that point, the natural vegetation had long since died off and the "natural edge" could no longer be seen. Moreover, how did one measure the 300 feet - horizontally as on a map, or up the steep slope?

Prime credit for initiating action in this matter certainly belongs to the Saskatoon Citizens Committee, which was to continue playing a vigorous role as the controversy over the use of the land developed. Unfortunately, its members were known to have pronouncedly left-wing sympathies; in consequence, their views carried little weight with many of the aldermen. The intervention of the Environmental Society was thus crucial, for it was known to be apolitical and its views could not be similarly dismissed. The forceful brief that the Society presented at the next Council meeting, an uncompromising endorsement of the stance of the Citizens' Committee, forced those aldermen for the first time to begin a serious examination of this issue.

Moreover, support for the two organizations quickly snowballed. A group of citizens who were affiliated with neither organization, spearheaded by Mrs. Joanna Miller and Harry Pollard, organized a petition protesting City Council's decision and urging the creation of a riverside park. This was carried from door to door and, in a very few days, attracted around 1,500 signatures. A further stimulus was provided by the publication in the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix of a well researched and illustrated article on the subdivision proposals by reporter Wayne Lowrie. Soon several more organizations, and many private citizens, were joining in the outcry.

In response to this mounting clamour of protest, City Council held a formal public hearing into the matter. This was perhaps designed to stifle opposition to the development; instead, it provided the strongest manifestation of public opinion that had ever been

witnessed in Saskatoon. The hearing was set for Saturday January 12th, 1974. It was a bleak day when the thermometers registered around -40°C , yet so many people attended that the meeting had to be transferred from the Council chamber to the Auditorium in the Public Library. There a group of impressed aldermen heard 22 briefs that were hostile to the development presented and strongly applauded, but only one in its favour - from a developers group. As the Star-Phoenix afterwards commented: "It is seldom that public reaction to a question is so overwhelmingly decisive".

The message to City Council was clear and the response to it swift. The matter of the subdivision was passed to the Planning & Development Committee for renegotiation with the developers. After this, the aldermen proceeded cautiously and with frequent looks over their shoulders to assess public reaction to developing proposals. A first attempt at a compromise solution, brought to Council in June by the Committee, was rejected. In the end, by exchange of land and by purchase of a few lots that the developers were unprepared to include in the exchange, City Council did indeed obtain the land; and Saskatoon can look forward to an extension of its riverbank parks that will greatly enhance its amenities.

The controversy did not end, however, with the acquisition of the land; for, as the Environmental Society and other groups forcefully pointed out to City Council, the character of the proposed park would be destroyed if the existing Spadina Crescent would be extended northward through it as a major highway. In a burst of inspiration, City Council responded by inviting designs for the proposed new park (and for another in Southeast Saskatoon) from Landscape Planning students of the University of Manitoba; the resultant schemes were put on public display and comment from citizens was invited. In the end, a compromise solution was decided on, by which the road through the new park would be designed to carry only local traffic. [See Figures 1 and 2].

Two major victories were won by the public in this confrontation. First of all, an area of riverbank was preserved for the future

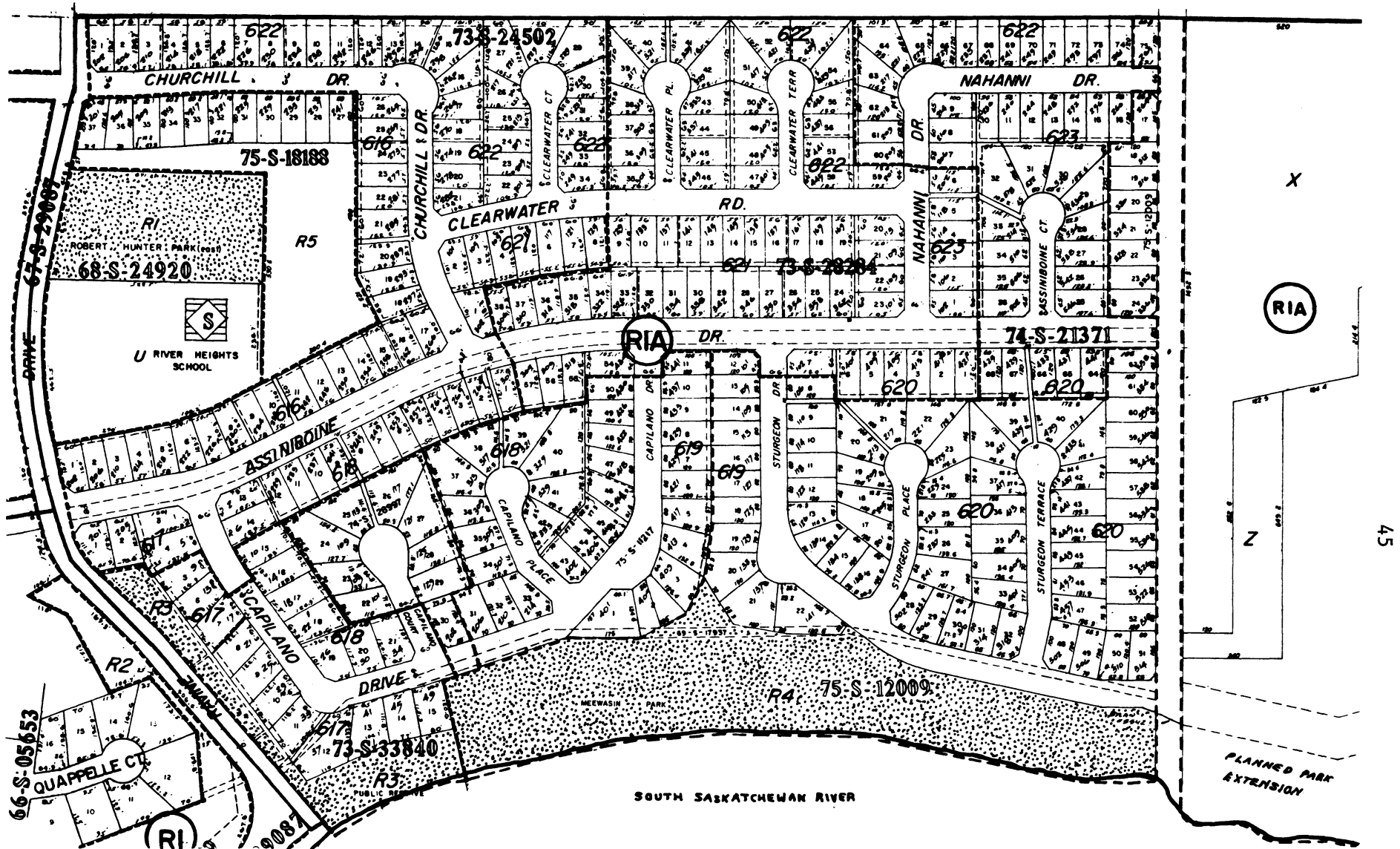


Figure #2: The River Heights development after citizen action, with public reserve areas again shaded. The much more extensive riverside park (Meewasin Park) was obtained by an exchange of land with the developers (who gained the strip south of Churchill Drive and an area east of that shown here) and by purchase by the city of a few house-sites south of Capilano Drive. Result: a much ampler park, including an extensive area on the river terrace above the steep bank. (Reproduced by courtesy of the Planning Dept., City of Saskatoon).

enjoyment of Saskatonians; but, even more importantly, City Council was made aware that it could no longer assume a passive approval for its actions from the electorate. Instead, henceforward those actions would be always under scrutiny and the reactions to bad decisions swift.

In 1976, a study of the whole riverbank area of the South Saskatchewan River was commissioned jointly by the City, and the Provincial and Federal Governments. In Saskatoon, the Planning and Development Committee was primarily involved, submissions also being prepared by the Parks & Recreation Board, the Environmental Advisory Council, and several local groups, including of course the Environmental Society. At the provincial level, responsibility for the study was in the hands of the Department of Municipal Affairs, the Department of the Environment surprisingly (or perhaps, by now, unsurprisingly) evincing no interest. Federally, the matter was in the charge of the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs.

The study was carried out by Jack Long Associates of Calgary, who presented their report, illustrated by an attractive cartoon map, in May 1976. Essentially they proposed a park, some 40 miles long, extending along both banks of the South Saskatchewan through the City of Saskatoon and north and south as far as the boundaries of Corman Park Municipality. Within the city, it would include not only the riverbank proper and its immediate environs, but also adjacent streets in which the quality of the buildings justified a special protection. The area designated would be placed in the charge of an independent authority, having the duty of maintaining and enhancing its attractions and outside the day-to-day politicking of City Council - an authority comparable to the very successful Wascana Authority in Regina, set up in 1961.

The report was welcomed with enthusiasm, not only by local citizen groups but also by City Council; but there has as yet been no perceptible progress towards its enactment. In this case also, the Provincial Government is dragging its feet; the Department of Municipal Affairs still has the matter "under consideration" and seems reluctant to make any decision, despite continuing pressure from Saskatoon.

Whether the report will represent an immense step forward in urban development in this Province, or just another good idea lost by the wayside, remains to be seen.

Indirect Activities

The Society has not always considered that direct action was the best method of achieving a desirable result. In some instances, it has preferred to lend its support to independent, issue-oriented organizations; in others, it has considered that the question was more one for a neighbourhood group than for one whose interests, and membership, embraced the whole city and beyond.

The Society's involvement in energy issues began in 1972 following the announcement by the Provincial Government that a series of hydro dams would be built on the Churchill River. Because Saskatchewan's topography is rather flat, the plans called for flooding of large areas of natural forest behind each dam. A general wave of shocked protest greeted the scheme, for it threatened the last unspoiled river in the province, and the Provincial Government began to backtrack and talk of public hearings. Foreseeing a protracted struggle, the Society encouraged the formation of a sub-group (The Churchill River Basin Group) of people dedicated to following through with this issue.

Now, five years later, after millions of dollars worth of government-supervised "studies" (the hearings are yet to come) the majority of Saskatchewan citizens are still against the plan. The government has not given up the scheme, and the issue remains unresolved. The Society has been able to force at least a temporary stalemate.

Other related issues have sprung up in the meantime, involving energy conservation policy, strip-mining of low-grade coal for generators and, by 1976, government schemes to bring nuclear power to Saskatchewan. In these issues the Environmental Society is now engaged in its greatest challenge to date.

Its initial action was to form an Energy Committee with the

specific task of preparing briefs and making representations in Regina about this matter. The Energy Committee has an informal relationship with the Saskatchewan Coalition Against Nuclear Disarmament; it has an energetic membership and its activities have already attracted many new members to the Society. Under pressure from such action groups and from private citizens, the Provincial Government declared in February 1977 a moratorium on new uranium development for one year. Public hearings have commenced, but the terms of reference for these are so restrictive that little useful result seems likely.

Two other matters well exemplify issues in which action by a neighbourhood group was considered more appropriate. Residents of the Caswell Hill district were suffering from noise caused at the Dairy Pool milk plant - "high pitched whines, roaring exhaust gases, and the hammering of steel tanks", persisting for up to 20 hours per day. A soundmeter testing found noise levels of up to 82 decibels; since medical data indicated that prolonged exposure to noise levels over 55 decibels could cause serious psychological problems, the concern of the residents was understandable. When one of them, Brian Newman, approached the Society for assistance, we advised him on the conducting of a campaign to secure Council and Provincial attention to the problem but told him that any petition would come best from a neighbourhood group, rather than from the Society. Such a group was quickly formed; the response from City Council was sympathetic; and, within a few months, the sounds from the Dairy Pool were ordered to be reduced.

In another instance, the endeavours of citizens were ultimately unsuccessful. The residential R4 zones in the city in 1974 carried no restriction on building height. One such zone, a very small one, was located at the corner of Wiggins and Temperance, amid dense housing; and here the Lutherans decided to site a 22-storey Sunset Home for senior citizens. On May 13th, 1974, this plan was approved by a majority vote of Council, despite vigorous initial opposition from local residents.

This marked the beginning of a long and bitter campaign, which was to generate more ill feeling than any other issue in

Saskatoon's recent history. Once again the Society was asked to act as a focus for action by the residents. Its Committee recognised two separate issues; the general question as to whether the height of buildings in R4 zones should be unrestricted and the specific one as to whether the 22-storey tower should go on that particular site.

On the first issue the Society took action, presenting a brief to Council urging modification of the Zoning Bylaw to obviate similar happenings in the future. Council, by then well aware that a blunder had been made, were swift to modify the bylaw.

The second issue, though, was seen as one to be tackled by the local residents whose houses would be overshadowed by the tower; and the Society, though sympathetic, did not directly participate in the continuing campaign against the development. A Brunskill University Residents Association was formed with that aim; their first battle, waged at a public hearing in the presence of many aldermen, was not a victory since the Lutherans had marshalled many senior citizens who spoke in emotional terms of the need for the tower. (The facts that the tower did not have to be on that site, and that the Lutherans had in fact spurned City offers of alternative sites, were successfully underplayed.) After failing to persuade City Council to halt the development, the Brunskill group embarked upon a long and costly series of court actions to try to prevent the construction of the tower; and City Council found themselves in the politically uncomfortable situation of being forced to side with the Lutherans against the residents. The action was taken to the Court of Queens Bench, the Board of Zoning Appeals, and thence ultimately to Ottawa, where a decision in favour of the residents was reversed on appeal by the City - and the bewildered Residents' Association found itself faced, in addition to its other bills, by an order to repay the city's cost in launching that appeal. . . .

Ultimately, therefore, the residents lost their battle; but, indeed, it was a battle that was lost by everyone. The residents had to pay the legal costs in the bitter knowledge that the highrise would soon be overshadowing their homes; the Lutherans faced an immense

inflation in construction costs over the period in which the action was being fought; and the province faced a proportionate increase in its contribution to those costs. The legal decisions were, no doubt, technically correct; but what a pity that the Zoning Bylaw was initially so sloppy and the Lutherans so intransigent. Moreover, this episode can only act as a deterrent to other residents faced by bad decisions of local or provincial governments. Surely there should be some mechanism for trying such issues without so heavily penalising citizens anxious to have the rights and wrongs of cases explored?

Relationships with Other Local Societies

As already outlined, the Saskatoon Environmental Society joined a campaign begun by another group in the Canarama issue; it has also repeatedly been associated with the Saskatoon Natural History Society in matters of common concern, such as the question of city expansion, the protection of local parklands and the campaign for a Grasslands National Park in southern Saskatchewan.

It was, as well, directly involved in the formation of two new local groups. When, late in 1974, there was the suggestion that a local branch of the Community Planning Association of Canada be formed, the Environmental Society jointly sponsored the meeting on October 24th at which the matter was discussed and has since always had a representative on the Committee of the Saskatoon Branch.

Shortly after its creation, the Branch was bitterly attacked by Paul Bilodeau, then Editor of the shortlived free newspaper The Saskatonian, as destined to be a "form of organized public participation" and providing a "rubber-stamp for the city planners". These criticisms were entirely unjustified; the Branch, though never as numerically strong an organization as had been hoped, contains many members with a profound expertise in the planning process and has been able, again and again, to make searching and detailed criticisms of City Hall proposals; its comments have been listened to and many beneficial changes to bylaws and development plans have resulted. At its meetings, the

public has been afforded opportunity to directly question and criticise the city's actions in a fashion that has been hitherto impossible. Its existence and activities have thus strengthened citizen input into the decision-making process in Saskatoon; and it has certainly been no "rubber-stamp".

More recently the growing awareness of the need for heritage study and action has brought about the formation of a Saskatoon Heritage Society. In this instance, the inaugural meeting was jointly sponsored by the Environmental Society and the CPAC; and this new Society bids fair to take over that particular aspect of the past activities of the S.E.S., though it is too new for its success to yet be gauged.

Conclusions

What, then, has been the overall impact of the Saskatoon Environmental Society during its eight years of existence? Has it truly brought about significant modifications of urban and provincial policy and philosophy? Has it genuinely aroused and enhanced awareness of environmental implications? All in all, has its existence made any difference to the lives of Saskatchewanians?

These are hard questions to answer, in part because many issues (the riverbank park, the Churchill River development, the uranium controversy) are still unresolved; yet some positive achievements can be pointed to. As has been shown, two Provincial Acts directly result from the Society's activities; the litter of abandoned cars about the province is being cleared and the heritage of historic buildings may well soon be receiving some measure of effective protection. S.E.S. delegates are regularly invited to provincially-sponsored conferences on environment-related topics; and the Society's work has been supported on several occasions by grants from provincial departments.

Not from the Department of the Environment, however; though that department has, over the years, republished Society publications and though Environment Saskatchewan advertises its doings regularly in

Environment Probe. The Department has not given S.E.S. any direct grants and seems unlikely to do so. Perhaps this is an indication of respect; perhaps the Department views the Society with some apprehension. Certainly the Society is not happy concerning the environmental set-up in the province and repeatedly says so. The powers of the Department are alarmingly circumscribed. It has, for example, no apparent input into the activities of the Department of Agriculture, although the environmental implications of pesticides are truly alarming; nor is it regularly consulted (if at all) by the Department of Municipal Affairs. One wonders whether the Environment Department is well-meaning but bumbling or whether it is simply not intended to be truly effective?

The provincial stage is, in any case, too large a one for the Society to be able to perform on it effectively; occasionally we have gained successes, but we have insufficient resources to maintain a steady pressure on the government in Regina.

In contrast, the Environmental Society has been much better able to keep pace with local issues and problems and to participate directly in day-to-day affairs. At the invitation of the City of Saskatoon, the Society regularly has a representative on the Parks and Recreations Board and on the Environmental Advisory Council; and the second author has been for three years Chairman of the Special Committee on Historic Buildings. In association with other local citizen groups, the Society is watching the activities of City Council very closely and is ready to take action at any time.

Yet the environmental quality of Saskatoon is much as it was in 1970, and the provincial environment has definitely deteriorated. If the Saskatoon Environmental Society had not existed, the situation would be manifestly worse. If it had been stronger - a truly province-wide organization and not just a local group - perhaps the situation might be a whole lot better; but could such a group achieve coherence over a geographic area as large as Saskatchewan? In 1975, the Society considered changing its name, and enlarging its aims, to embrace the whole province in its explicit concerns; but the membership voted this down and we believe they were right. What is needed, instead, is the

formation of other similarly local groups, each designed to serve as environmental watchdog over a specific area of Saskatchewan and able to take rapid action on local issues. On the relatively few - albeit extremely important - issues involving the whole province, such groups could and should combine to take action; but the majority of environmental matters are of local concern and are most effectively tackled by citizens on the spot. A new group seems to be emerging in Regina, but there is as yet no sign of any similar citizen activity elsewhere in Saskatchewan; and perhaps this plexus of groups will remain a pipe-dream.

The Society is in its eighth year now. Can the pressures it has exerted, the effects it has achieved, be sustained over a long enough time to assure a sound environment fifty or a hundred years hence? In the last analysis, how much can any small local group, operating on a meagre budget, hope to accomplish? In the long view of history, perhaps we are helping civilization around a crucial turn - or maybe we are merely stirring up storms in a teacup.

Only time will tell.

References

In the following section, the major publications and sources relevant to the activities of the Society are listed. Its special publications and some particular articles, are listed below; but, in addition, reference should be made to the seventy issues of its journal Probe (now Environment Probe). The two volumes of the local newspaper The Saskatoonian (1974-75) and the files of the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix plot the courses of the controversies in which the Society has been, and is, involved.

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