

September 15, 2020

## **Re: An Open Letter to Community Leaders on the Need to Invest in Recreation and Parks**

The past six (6) months have proven how important access to parks, open spaces and recreation opportunities are to the people of Saskatchewan. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to recreation and parks was restricted and as a result became one of the most frequently requested services by community members. Now, more than ever, people understand how important recreation and parks are to their health and wellbeing, staying connected with each other and their communities, building resilience and a sense of belonging through unprecedented times.

There has never been a more critical time to invest in parks and recreation at the community level. COVID-19 has produced many challenges and will significantly impact municipal budget-planning now and in the future. Failure to invest can cause significant and long-term social, health and justice issues, while investing in recreation and parks provides the following benefits:

- Recreation and parks play a key role in cost avoidance. Investments in recreation can lead to improvements in individual and community wellbeing, which helps to reduce costs in healthcare, social services and justice.
- Recreation and parks significantly impact local and regional economies by building strong communities and families, enhancing mental, physical and social wellbeing, connecting people to nature, and contributing to job creation and tourism.
- Community parks in particular provide fundamental environmental, aesthetic and recreation benefits to our community. They are also a source of positive economic benefits. They enhance property values, increase municipal revenue, bring in homebuyers and workers, and attract retirees.
- Recreation provides a foundation of facilities, programming and human infrastructure that the industries of sport, culture and tourism industries rely on in order to grow, thrive and contribute to local economies.

### **Now Is the Time to Invest**

To date, many federal and provincial funding initiatives have been announced to support infrastructure upgrades, shovel-ready projects and tourism businesses as they weather this period of economic uncertainty. Stimulus programs include:

- [Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program: Covid-10 Resilience Stream](#) (\$3B)
- [Saskatchewan Municipal Economic Enhancement Program](#) (\$150M)
- [Saskatchewan Tourism Sector Support Program](#) (\$35M)

Funded by:



Investments in parks and recreation in our communities will improve the quality of life, physical and mental health of residents and increase the economic benefits from recreation, tourism and sport for years to come.

### **Innovative Approaches – Made in Saskatchewan**

Many communities in Saskatchewan are experiencing the benefits of investing in parks and recreation. These communities have turned a challenging situation into an opportunity by developing initiatives that will provide long-term benefits for residents and the local economy. For example:

- Moosomin recently invested over a million dollars in the quality of life of their community through improvements to the town's parks and recreation facilities ([read the story here](#)).
- Melville launched a new Community Enhancement Initiative specifically aimed at parks and outdoor spaces ([read the story here](#)).
- Martensville is investing in a \$10 million dollar multi-purpose recreation facility in the city's new Trilogy Ranch subdivision. The city expects that this subdivision will contribute to \$1 billion in economic spin-offs ([learn more](#)).

### **In Summary**

Local tourism, job opportunities and community development initiatives will be negatively impacted without investment in community parks and recreation. Furthermore, there will be an overall reduction in the quality of life of our residents and lack of opportunities to create a sense of belonging, connection, and enjoyment for families, older adults, and newcomers in our community. These long-term consequences are avoidable, by investing in recreation and parks – which will benefit everyone in our community, and lead to a more economically diverse and vibrant future.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the health and wellbeing of our communities. We hope you will show your support by making significant, long-term investments in recreation and parks in your upcoming budget processes.

Sincerely,

TJ Biemans

President, Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association

**About the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association (SPRA)**

SPRA is a network of recreation leaders dedicated to energizing Saskatchewan and changing lives. We imagine a province where everyone has the opportunity to enjoy recreation and feel more connected to nature, our communities, and ourselves. It's our job to connect, educate and inspire others to build this future together.

We're empowered to succeed through funding support from [Sask Lotteries](#).

For more information on the recreation industry and its contribution to Saskatchewan's economy, please visit [www.spra.sk.ca](http://www.spra.sk.ca).