

HCA Statement on Movements for Black and Indigenous Lives and Defunding the Police

The Heritage Community Association is releasing this statement in support of the global movements for Black and Indigenous lives, and the longstanding movements against systemic racism that have recently re-ignited around the world including in our own community.

We want to publicly state our unreserved support for all local movements that work to unveil and dismantle anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, and to share our own plans as an organization to address systemic racism within our organization and our community.

Why Are We Doing This?

As the community association for a highly racialized and heavily policed neighbourhood, we feel a strong responsibility to listen and engage in a meaningful and proactive way. We are aware that the current movements for racial justice and against police brutality hold particular urgency in a neighbourhood like ours, and we want to be explicit in our stance and our actions, so as to keep ourselves accountable to you, both as an organization and as individual staff and board members.

We have been working on this statement since June 2020. With the recent installation of a new City Council, we want this statement to inform discussions on the City of Regina's 2021 budget.

We are also preparing to move our offices into a new facility that will be shared with the Regina Police Services (RPS). This was a difficult choice to make, and we want to be transparent about our reasonings and also our trepidations, as the City conducts public consultation on the facility.

New Heritage Neighbourhood Centre & RPS:

The City is turning the Municipal Justice Building into a much-needed neighbourhood centre for Heritage. Heritage does not currently have a central gathering place or recreation facility; this new space will help to fill this longstanding need and support HCA to expand our programs, services and role within the neighbourhood.

Current plans for the building also include an RPS fitness facility on the 3rd floor, and occasional RPS use of the multi-purpose room on the main floor for training purposes.

While we are excited about the opportunities this facility presents, we also have concerns about sharing the building with RPS, which we have communicated with the design team from the beginning. We know that some community members will not feel safe accessing a facility that is shared with the police, no matter how separate the spaces are.

The design is not finalized, and we hope many of you will participate in their public consultation to provide your input.

Policing in Heritage

Heritage is a highly racialized neighbourhood, with roughly 30% of residents identifying as visible minorities and nearly 20% as First Nations or Metis.

Heritage is also home to the RPS headquarters, which is currently undergoing a major expansion, and our neighbourhood is heavily policed. While RPS doesn't release stats on interactions by race or ethnicity, it is widely documented¹ in other communities throughout Canada that police violence disproportionately impacts Black and Indigenous people.

There are several cases within our neighbourhood that have been documented in the media, where Indigenous people have been harmed or killed by police, including:

- In May 2019, police shot and killed Indigenous man Geoff Morris in his apartment on 1900-block Halifax St. while he was experiencing a mental health crisis;
- In December 2014, RPS officers used excessive force against Indigenous man Simon Ash-Moccasin while he was walking near Sask Drive and Osler. After misidentifying him as a suspect in a theft, despite him not fitting the description, officers threw him against a wall and then forced him into the police cruiser.;
- In 2012, Constable Rob Power was caught on video kicking Indigenous elderly man Eddie Stonechild to the ground outside of the Detox Centre on Halifax St. He was charged with assault and fired, but was reinstated in 2014.

Those of us who live or travel in the neighbourhood every day can describe many more cases that are not documented or made public.

Funding Inequalities

¹ [Amnesty International: "Carding and Anti-Black Racism in Canada"](#)

[The Guardian: Canada urged to open its eyes to systemic racism in wake of police violence](#)

Regina's 2020 police budget is about 20% of the total city budget, not including the capital costs of the headquarters expansion. The Community Investment Grants Program, through which community organizations access support for recreational, cultural and social development programs, makes up less than 1% of the city's budget.

Since 2010, the RPS budget has increased by 60%.² In contrast, Community Associations received their first funding increase in 12 years (20%) last year.

Chief of Police Evan Bray has stated that 80% of calls to which RPS officers are responding are not related to the criminal code, but to social issues like mental health and addictions.³

In 2020, RPS received a \$3.6 million budget increase from the City. With this much money, HCA (or another community-based organization) could*:

- House over 160 people for a full year with supports using a Housing First model⁴
- Feed 300 people 3 meals daily for a year
- Provide daily recreational and/or cultural programming for youth for 18 years
- Build and maintain 3 community gardens for 40 years
- (or some combination of these things!)

*These are rough estimates, including estimated costs of labour and supplies.

Annual increases to the police budget have not made our community safer; rather, we are seeing gang activity, drug use including fatal overdoses, and violence rise in our neighbourhood in large part because people's basic needs are not being met.

It is well documented that investing in social and community programming is more effective than policing at preventing crime, and substantially decreases the costs of policing and incarceration in the long run.⁵

For these reasons, we support the call to defund the police and to re-invest that funding into community-based supports for addictions, homelessness, food insecurity, domestic violence, social isolation, mental illness, and poverty.

Defunding the police is a step toward the kind of world we want to live in -- where strong social supports and communities of mutual care ensure that everyone has enough; root causes of

² [CBC Saskatchewan: "Regina police seek \\$3.5M budget increase in 2020 for new officers, salaries"](#)

³ [CTV News: "Petition calls for defunding of Regina Police Service"](#)

⁴ [Canadian Housing First Toolkit: "Key Questions"](#)

⁵ [Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention: "What is effective crime prevention for municipalities?"](#)

[Brennan Center for Justice: "Community Organizations Have Important Role in Lowering Crime Rates."](#)

[American Sociological Association: "Community and the Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime"](#)

crime are addressed at source; and our justice system is re-oriented away from policing and punishment and toward healing and accountability.

So now what?

We commit to the following actions:

Immediately (by January 2021):

- Launching a low-barrier Safer Neighbourhood Micro-Grant Program through which racialized Heritage residents can apply for up to \$500 each for initiatives that help them feel safer

Short-term (by May 2021):

- Developing recruitment and hiring policies that explicitly prioritize Black and Indigenous applicants for all positions within the organization
- Seeking funds and partnerships to hire a qualified facilitator to provide anti-racism training to HCA board members, staff, and Heritage community members
- Seeking funds and partnerships to hire a qualified facilitator to provide a series of free training sessions to community members on skills like de-escalation, mental health first aid and suicide prevention, first aid, naloxone, and community resource awareness, to help strengthen alternatives to police intervention in our community
- Seeking funds to hire a Black or Indigenous researcher to conduct a consultation with community members on their experiences of racial injustice, report those findings back to our community, and use them to inform future activities and decisions

Long-term (by December 2021):

- Investigating the structure of our board and organization to identify the ways it supports white supremacy and colonialism, and reform or re-build it to be more actively anti-racist and de-colonial

Ongoing:

- Supporting the local movements to defund the police and increase police oversight by:
 - Staying engaged with local organizers for these movements
 - Offering tangible support, including staff labour, toward these movements as appropriate