



Pitting inner city against Riverbend is a game communities refuse to play

No letting city council off hook for providing recreation centres for both areas

Pieter deVos and Rob Agostinis

Freelance

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A couple of months ago The Journal reported on a city council committee decision regarding recreation centres in Edmonton. The issue was described as an impending battle -- north versus south -- a confrontation that would let city council off the hook for one of two desperately needed recreation facilities. You quoted an inner-city community league president who had all but given up. On behalf of "the poor, helpless inner city," he conceded victory to those "rich, always get what they want, Riverbenders."



CREDIT: John Lucas, The Journal
Recreation is vital to communities

Our two communities do not buy into this neighbourhood-versus-neighbourhood division and we will not let council off the hook by suggesting one neighbourhood is more needy or more powerful than the other. We are committed to acting together, and will demonstrate that commitment when the issue of recreational facilities comes up on Monday at council's community services committee.

There are tremendous similarities between these two Edmonton communities. You may not be able to see this through your car window as you drive by, but they are there.

You will begin to understand the striking similarities when you ask community leaders questions such as: What are the pressures on your families? What are the pressures on your neighbourhood? What are your values?

We need to move beyond stereotypes and even beyond the facts that Riverbend doesn't have any indoor recreational facilities at all and that the inner city has the least outdoor recreational/green space in all of the city.

So why are recreation facilities important to these two communities? When we answer this question, we have to think about what the ramifications are for our communities and families if we do not have adequate recreational space for our citizens, particularly our young people.

The population in the Terwillegar Riverbend area has exploded in the last few years with thousands of new homes being built. Yet, if you look around this area, there is not a single indoor recreation facility. The ramifications of that have been well studied and the results are well known -- crime and vandalism go up.

There are five elements that make a community a "town within a city" -- home, school, recreation, place of assembly and transportation. The residents in the Terwillegar Riverbend community realized that recreation, assembly and transportation are poorly represented in this area.

Realizing they needed a unified voice, families in the Terwillegar-Riverbend area, through their community

leagues and homeowners' associations, formed the Terwillegar Riverbend Advisory Council (TRAC). TRAC has identified the pursuit of a multipurpose recreational/cultural facility in the area as its most important priority. This facility will provide two of the three missing elements that make their community a "town."

In north-central Edmonton, families are facing economic pressures. The cost of housing is rising and the cost of maintaining it is too. Despite population growth and due to urban sprawl, more of their schools have closed, making education less accessible and increasing transportation pressures. Gangs are in hot pursuit of our young people. The pressure on many families -- while each parent works two to three jobs -- to protect their children from gangs is immense. Of course it is not all negative. North-central Edmonton is home to thousands of families who care for their homes, are leaders in their communities and enjoy good quality of life.

It was in fact the leaders from various neighbourhoods, community leagues, churches and community organizations that came together to form the Community Action Project. They realized they needed more power collectively to move their part of the city out of the culture of being "done for" by others and into the culture of "organizing for the power" to negotiate the interests of the diversity that exists in the area.

There is also no question that the pressures are mounting and the forces working against families and households are getting stronger. In order to raise our children to be healthy, strong and responsible citizens, the city, as a whole, needs to work together.

Recreation centres are important to families because, according to urban designers, they are the "heart" of a community. Not only do they provide the physical fitness component, they are places for people to assemble, meet, build relationships and form that sense of community spirit.

The community services department of the city has to be commended for bringing forward the recreation facility master plan. This study identifies the recreational and cultural needs of every community in Edmonton and recommends different types of venues for these areas.

We urge the mayor and city councillors to endorse this plan and to move forward with developing our communities -- both north and south -- because families need access to recreational facilities so they enjoy life now.

Pieter deVos is the lead organizer for the Community Action Project in North Central Edmonton. Rob Agostinis is chairman of the Terwillegar Riverbend Advisory Council.

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