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OP-ED

# Rainbow crosswalks deserve space

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Hayley Klassen

By Dr. Jes Battis and Jacq Brasseur




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Last year, on a day in June, I drove home from work to my home in Harbour Landing after a particularly ↑ difficult day, and burst into tears at the corner of École Harbour Landing School. As a queer and trans person who had recently moved away from my hometown, to somewhere new in Saskatchewan, it was the first moment that I had finally felt seen by people outside of my small queer community. École Harbour Landing School was the first organization or group to paint a rainbow crosswalk in Regina, but people don't know that they paid the \$400 fee to the City of Regina for street-painting in order to do so.

Their crosswalk was vandalized less than 24 hours after they had painted it, and when they wanted to re-paint with donations from the community, they were initially told by the city that they'd have to pay the fee again.

In 2016, I was working in Yellowknife with 2SLGBTQ+ communities when the City of Yellowknife took it upon themselves to paint a crosswalk without ever being approached by any non-profit organization to do so. This was a moment of pride for me as a queer person born and raised in that community—the same one that is listed on Wikipedia's "Straight Pride" article. Ironically, a few weeks later, the local anglican church whose building stood on the same block, sent a letter to the newspaper claiming that it was offensive that the city would spend tax payer dollars to paint something so obscene. The city stood firm in their decision.

Today, I dream of the City of Regina taking it upon themselves to do something similar. Earlier this year, École Harbour Landing School's GSA teacher reached out to me to ask if I could help them with the associated fees through my role as the executive director of the UR Pride Centre. I promised them I would try, and made multiple phone calls to different city councillors about the absurdity of requiring a group of elementary school students to pay to paint a symbol of inclusion next to their place of learning. I was told by a handful of councillors (the ones I could reach) that it would be an uphill battle, and the odds of waiving the fee was unlikely.

Despite this unlikelihood, Councillor Bob Hawkins proposed reducing the fee from \$400 to \$200, while Councillor Andrew Stevens proposed eliminating the fee altogether. In sharing his perspective, he explained that having city staff paint the street would be much more expensive than \$400, and reducing  groups to paint the street themselves adds value to our communities. I agree with Councillor Stevens.

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In June of this year, Queen City Pride was able to paint two crosswalks in Downtown Regina, with support from the Business Improvement District: a trans flag crosswalk and a rainbow flag crosswalk. These crosswalks, painted with standard house paint, have almost entirely disappeared, and I would imagine that, after the winter, they'll be non-existent. ↑

Some argue that rainbow crosswalks are symbolic gestures that disappear once the paint gets worn off. In a way, this is perhaps an apt metaphor for queer and trans communities in Regina—people rarely think about us outside of a few days in June. For example, O'Hanlon's Pub painted their archways a rainbow in June, but just a few short months later, it has been painted over.

For this reason, a permanent, painted rainbow crosswalk could provide much needed hope to queer and trans people in Regina. It could serve as a reminder to our community as a whole that queer and trans folks will not be erased, and that we exist, wholeheartedly, and as members who bring vitality and beauty to our city, 365 days a year.

### Dr. Jes Battis

My hometown of Chilliwack recently voted against creating a rainbow crosswalk downtown, in spite of significant community support for the project. As a queer professor and writer who teaches courses on sexual diversity studies at the University of Regina (Treaty 4 territory), I find myself often thinking about inclusive spaces in small towns.

Earlier this year, high school students in Wolsley, SK (pop 850) painted a rainbow crosswalk. Former Wolseley student John Petrychyn said, "I was really surprised at just how moved I was by this little gesture."

It's about more than a crosswalk. It's a gesture of hope towards LGBTQ2+ youth living in small towns. It says: *This is home. You belong.*

Saskatoon also painted a rainbow crosswalk to coincide with their 2017 Pride festival. The crosswalk—**the carillon**—was vandalized shortly after. But a twist: the man who vandalized the crosswalk apologized publicly. Pride organizer Danny Papadatos addressed the clean-up crowd who'd gathered to repair the rainbow crosswalk. (http://www.carillonregina.com) 🔍

“You deserve to feel at home in the place that you choose to live.” That’s what the crosswalk is about. ↑

Swift Current adopted a permanent rainbow crosswalk in 2017. Andrea McCrimmon, then-president of Southwest Saskatchewan Pride, noted the significance that “a small city in Saskatchewan was the first to install a Rainbow Crosswalk.” LGBTQ2+ folk living in rural areas need strong communities as well. These projects are more than rainbow paint. They offer a queer and inclusive future—a world that kids will survive to see. “Futurity,” says critic José Esteban Muñoz, “is queerness’s bent.” By that he means: a more inclusive, more powerful, more livable future is always on the horizon.

When I moved to Regina in 2009, I was surprised to discover a tight-knit, fierce LGBTQ2+ community. There were drag shows and potlucks and fundraisers at Q Nightclub. There were diverse author events at the Artesian. There were university colleagues who welcomed me and supported me when I wanted to teach a class on sexual diversity studies. That class grew from seven students to thirty in a few years.

The Cathedral Village neighborhood needs a permanent rainbow crosswalk.

It would reflect the diversity of Regina’s communities, and offer a commitment of support to our LGBTQ2+ citizens. It would energize our Pride festival, plus the Cathedral Village Arts Festival, which attracts 40,000 visitors.

Whenever I see the permanent rainbow crosswalk in Vancouver’s Davie St. Village, I feel welcomed. Regina is my home too, and our community deserves a rainbow. Let’s not forget that hate crimes—particularly against trans and nonbinary folk—have gone up exponentially. We need a safe space that reflects Regina’s diverse population, including queer Indigenous and two-spirit people living on their traditional territory.

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed says: “I am not willing to get over histories that are not over.” The violence is not over. A rainbow crosswalk in Cathedral Village would respect our histories, while offering us hope.



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