





MAYOR DREW DILKENS INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Tuesday, November 15, 2022
The Capitol Theatre in Windsor, Ontario

Good evening!

Thank you Gordon... and thank you to the Windsor Symphony Youth Orchestra, Ryan Burchiel our piper, Theresa Sims and Mgiizi Wright, and of course to our Poet Laureate Emeritus, Marty Gervais.

I am very appreciative to my friend, The Honourable George King for making time to be here in a special capacity this evening. When I practiced law, I worked for Justice King... he is an incredible human being and among the best jurists in the City of Windsor. The judiciary is very lucky to have him among their ranks. George, thank you again for making time for me tonight.

I am so pleased to be here with you tonight.

I'm thrilled for the new members who won seats on City Council and who are anxious to get started and have been eagerly awaiting this day! Councillors Agostino, McKenzie, and Marignani – welcome to our team... I know today is a mix of anxious excitement and you should pause to enjoy every moment of this experience. You've earned it!

As you all know, winning an election takes time, it takes money, it takes passion, perseverance and ideas. And it also takes a team.

That team is almost always a solid group of friends and family... and many of you are with us tonight as well. This win is as much a testament of your support and efforts as that of the Councillors who now represent our city.

And friends and family are also here supporting our returning City Councillors. Thank you for your ongoing support. You know how hard these folks work and how much effort it takes to do this job well.

I'd like to acknowledge my family who are here tonight... my parents, my wife Jane, and my children Madison and Jack... Jack wasn't even born when I first ran for City Council. Also, my brother Ted is here. Thank you.

The returning City Council should be commended... this past term was not an easy one. The effects of the pandemic and the ever-changing Covid environment created some real complexities as we navigated our City through difficult times.

From mandates to masks – policies to program changes. Freedom convoys. Your tunnel business underwater, and your airport business up in the air. Trying to run a transit system when the local Medical Officer of Health advised against using it. Police, fire and paramedics all at risk... and almost all of your employees working from home.

You did it... you did it well. And I want to sincerely commend the returning Councillors for a job well done.

We put people over politics when it mattered most – and I'm not surprised the people returned you all to your seats.

Now we got through all of this with a lot of help. And I want to take a moment to acknowledge the City Administrative leadership and every staff

member for working through this complex time together. The leadership team that did what needed to be done was superb and, ladies and gentlemen, I hope you'd join me in congratulating them tonight.

So it would be an understatement for me to say that I am excited to start my third-term as Mayor.

Now you'll probably say 'why'?

Drew, your first term you had to deal with a tornado and back-to-back flooding, including the worst flood in our city's recorded history.

Most of your second term was spent dealing with a global pandemic.

Aren't you a little concerned what might come next?

As City Councillors, Jo-Anne Gignac and I lived through a major labour disruption... We lived through the Great Recession and the fear and concern caused by almost 16% unemployment and the prospect of our largest employer going bankrupt.

As a community we collectively felt this trepidation and concern.

Four years ago, I stood at this podium and delivered an inaugural address. In those remarks, many of you left with a heavy feeling as I told you what kept me awake at night. It was the prospect of our largest employer leaving our city. And then, almost in real time – the third shift was gone. A pandemic had a major impact on our ability to work side-by-side which limited production. Then when production resumed, a chip-shortage caused more trouble and disruption.

But instead of being concerned about what might come next and all of the things beyond my control... I am bullishly optimistic about Windsor's future.

You see, we didn't just sit back and let Destiny be our guide. We actively worked to create the plan; fund the plan; and implement the recommendations. That plan is called *Windsor Works*. It's our economic development and diversification roadmap.

And one of the most important recommendations in that plan was to secure Canada's first electric vehicle battery production facility – and ladies and gentlemen – we did it – a \$5-billion facility that combines forces between our largest employer and one of the world's leading battery production companies.

3,000 new jobs will be created once the company – NextStar Energy opens its doors in just over two years. This is a generational investment and it's important.

But what's also important was the connection with Stellantis and the return of the 3rd shift – the commitment for new vehicles to be produced at the Windsor Assembly plant and the additional hiring of 650 people by Stellantis at their battery R&D facility on Rhodes Drive.

Windsor is now on the leading edge of a global revolution in the automotive industry – the likes of which we haven't seen in over a hundred years.

What a difference four years can make.

The Ford Motor Company is also investing \$700-million in the Essex Engine Plant and hiring another 235 people as demand for engines increases.

It was Henry Ford and Gordon McGregor who led the way to help Windsor become the Automotive Capital of Canada. It is Stellantis who is going to help us become the Automobility Capital of Canada.

This is a position we can rightfully claim. It's not a stretch – or some made-up moniker – it incorporates who we are – what we're good at – and it's also about where we're going.

It's about producing vehicles; parts; tool die and mold – we are world-class in those areas. But it's also about the transition of vehicles from being something you drive from point A to B – to becoming a mode of transportation you take from point A to B. Vehicles are quickly becoming computers on wheels.

And this transition is happening fast.

It involves deeper integration of graduates from both St. Clair College and the University of Windsor.

It involves skill sets that didn't exist before but are now in short-supply. It involves computer programming, engineering, robotics, control systems, electronics and electrical support, and so much more. It involves hydrogen research and capacity building.

Folks, as home to the first casino in Ontario – let me say, if Windsor plays its cards right – we have a royal-flush in our hands.

And so, the question tonight is how do we work to write our next chapter together?

How do we integrate all of the key players in our region – and a few from outside – to help us position our City for decades of growth? How do we ensure that this period of astounding investment and transformation most benefits our Windsor?

How do we ensure that construction of the Gordie Howe International Bridge – one of Canada's largest infrastructure projects – benefits our region beyond the construction period?

It's quite incredible to see the towers rise on both sides of the river. This too is a once in a lifetime project. Many people have said to me that we are so lucky to have this new international crossing being built in our City. I agree.

But post-construction, how does Windsor benefit from trucks that have highway-to-highway connections and never need to slow down once they clear customs?

Ladies and gentlemen, the only luck we'll have, is the opportunity we create. And there is opportunity waiting.

And there is opportunity waiting elsewhere too.

A new hospital is on the horizon.

And your vote for this combination of City Councillors gives me great optimism that our new \$2-billion hospital can now be completed sooner

than currently projected. I fully expect shovels to be in the ground before the end of this City Council term.

The hospital, bridge and battery factory are a magnificent trifecta for Windsor. At least \$15-billion worth of investment.

But they only tell part of the story.

Over the past few years we've seen a local building boom – the likes of which we haven't experienced since the end of WWII.

Population growth. Building growth. And people now viewing our region as a hub for economic and cultural growth.

For so long, we Windsorites were afraid to extol the virtues of our region for fear of people actually wanting to come here. Guess what, people are now coming here....in droves.

Which is why our housing market is still very hot despite increases in interest rates... and likely to remain hot for some time to come.

People are coming here though because they see the value, they see the opportunity, and they see the benefits of our region. It is extraordinary to watch our City, which has been through so much since 2009 – climb its way back to the top with perseverance and determination that is unmatched anywhere else.

Windsor is a much different place today than it was 4 or 8 years ago. It is dramatically different from when I joined City Council in 2006.

And our response on many levels needs to adapt to our changing environment.

Collectively we need to make strategic investments to position this great City to take advantage of the opportunity before us.

I'm not talking about wild spending. I'm talking about strategic investments that set the stage for our community's success for decades to come.

Our City's motto is – '*The River and the Land Sustain Us*'. And we will need to get land ready so that the next generation has opportunities at home and can sustain our City moving forward.

And we can do this while continuing to handle the basic and important tasks expected of any municipal government.

We will build our downtown into something great. We will deal with issues related to homelessness and mental health while building Riverside Vista.

We will continue to invest money to prevent basement flooding while building a new clubhouse at Roseland Golf Course.

We will get lights up in Memorial Park while we finish widening Walker Road.

We will fix Dominion Boulevard and remove roadside ditches – hallmarks of a town long ago. And we'll bring it up to the City standard including sidewalks, bike lanes and proper sewer infrastructure capable of handling the effects of climate change.

And we'll work with our partners across Essex County, provincially and federally to build important infrastructure including at Lauzon and 401, and Banwell and EC Row so that we are managing current growth and preparing for future opportunities.

My friends, you may have heard me say something many times throughout my re-election campaign.

I said it often because I believe it to be true.

I said it often because I know it to be true.

And I said it often because you, intuitively, know this to be true, too.

I have never been more optimistic about the future of our City than I am today.

Not a recession or tornado – Flood or pandemic can disrupt the trajectory on which we find ourselves... on which we've deliberately helped place ourselves.

There are always headwinds... and there will always be headwinds.

But our little City of Windsor... is changing from a big small city, into a small big city.

This is an important evolution.

The headwinds of yesterday have changed today. Our beloved City is picking up the jet stream... which will carry us faster but requires both steady-hands and good-eyes to keep us on course.

And with the leadership you've elected behind me tonight, I feel confident we can move quickly, appropriately, and seize the moment before us – the likes of which we haven't seen for over a hundred years.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you once again for the opportunity to serve as your Mayor. I take my role seriously – and I take the success of our City very seriously.

And from Riverside to Forest Glade, Sandwich Town to South Windsor... from Ford City to Downtown and Walkerville to Central Windsor... I deeply respect the residents of our City.

I respect how they work hard every day to make this the best place in Canada to live, to work, and to raise a family.

Our best days are ahead, our future is bright and every one of us on this stage tonight pledges to put the WIN in Windsor!

Thank you all!

Drew Dilkens
City of Windsor Mayor