

## **April 5, 2011 - State of the City**

### ***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

#### **Intro:**

[Introductory comments]

#### **Focus for this 7<sup>th</sup> State of the City Address:**

I want to thank the Belle Rouge Music group for entertaining us today and bringing a bit more of the spirit of spring into this event.

I asked them to be here, not just for their talent but to provide a concrete example of what we all know to be true – that we have an amazing arts community in Edmonton.

And because I wanted to highlight something that I believe will be true about our future – that if we truly want to focus on attracting business and creating a superior quality of life for Edmontonians, we must start with the creative industry of our citizens.

Yes arts are an industry.

And I believe that the promise of our future can be secured by cultivating and investing in our arts industry as we do across many environments, and in more equal measure.

One of my favourite urban commentators is Richard Florida who has shown repeatedly that cities who thrive do so on the creative industry of their citizens.

And he notes that these people, who are mobile and who see a world without boundaries can choose to go anywhere. So why not here?

Why not make Edmonton the kind of City that welcomes artists to a level that we have not yet contemplated?

Doing so is good business. As a city government, we invest in structural foundations that help our communities and businesses to thrive. Why not consider arts in the same way?

Edmonton has a tremendous, talented arts community, and we all enjoy its many expressions.

But as we are entertained, I believe we fail to fully appreciate the economic inputs and energy that are also created.

And as our three-year capital budget debates begin over the next few months, I want to infuse some thoughts about arts infrastructure into our long-term thinking.

Which is why I've now tasked a new arts visioning committee, co-chaired by Brian Webb and Dianne Kipnes, who are bringing together artists, arts administrators, and local business leaders in an open forum focused on how we can raise the profile of arts, and through it, our city.

This effort builds on our arts plan – the *Art of Living* – which started to frame some bolder thinking about the arts. It asks how we can ensure our arts industry is more fundamental to our core.

The vision is to establish Edmonton one of Canada's clear cultural HUBs, supporting excellence across all mediums with arts as an economic driver for our region.

And from the efforts of these community thinkers, we will consider how we can help our arts community thrive as part of our overall mosaic of business and creative industry.

#### **Working with our citizens:**

You know it is spring and this address is always a perfect opportunity to do the kind of reflection that we are going to do on our arts community.

But the same needs to be applied across the work we do. About whether the work we're undertaking is getting us where we want to be, fast enough and well enough to satisfy the goals and ambitions of our people.

Over the last six years, we've focused a lot on building and on new directions.

We've made some big commitments and we've undertaken transformative projects that will truly begin to change our city.

These have not been easy or casual moves.

In every step, we have worked to ensure we are well aligned with our citizens.

And as much as I know we have more to learn in the area of citizen input, we have undertaken more citizen discussion in the last six years than at any other point in our city's history.

We have opened up considerable opportunities for citizens to shape our future through The Ways, our new municipal plans. And we can see the impact of this work.

So when we talk about LRT, we know Edmonton believes strongly in this plan – they are impatient for it.

And when we talk about our airport lands – we are moving forward and setting an ambitious and achievable course.

And when we talk about our people – we know we are talking about everyone – young and old, new Canadians and First Peoples – all of whom are finding a place in our discourse and in our communities.

We know that the things we've done, whether it be opening of new recreation centres, LRT stations, libraries or seniors centres, only reflect partially fulfilled promises and ambitions.

We know the structures and services that sustain our City are still lagging behind the expectations of our citizens.

We know our citizens expect all governments to work together to tackle the challenges of our City.

We are front-line service providers and what we do everyday makes a difference in the lives of our citizens.

So as much as we have our citizens' support to chase the big projects – the basics matter more – like moving the snow and filling the potholes.

**What we are working on:**

Cities are at a crossroads. We are front line service providers. But we are increasingly more than that too.

Cities are where people live their lives. Their work, their community, their social situation, their recreation and their perspiration – all play out in neighbourhoods across our city.

And it's about more than just the roads they might drive their cars on, or the buses they might ride.

When people are homeless, they live on a city street.

When a young person engages in crime – the impact is felt in the safety of our communities and the lost potential of a life.

When a person is shut out of opportunity, we all lose human capital.

When young people see more opportunity in leaving over staying, we all lose their creative talents and energy.

When our core neighbourhoods can't attract young families and build community – we all feel the void.

That is why one of the more important efforts of this new term is happening in our communities – with our new task force on community sustainability, led by Michael Phair and Teresa Spinelli.

Their volunteer committee is looking at what keeps mature communities livable, lively and vibrant – from schools to active businesses, to broad demographics and deep diversity.

As Michael always says, sustainability is about vitality.

We are continuing to engage our First Peoples, looking not just at social topics but how we can support a growing community of First Nation's business opportunities and fully appreciate the human capital that exists here.

We are hoping to work actively with the Chamber of Commerce on new mentoring initiatives to help extend our current efforts and commitments.

The human capital of our diverse ethnic community is an equal priority – especially among newcomer communities that continue to face integration challenges.

Efforts are underway with the Africa Centre to help address these issues in one key community and to ensure availability of community-based recreation and support. This is in addition to hundreds of other efforts underway in communities everyday.

But we are facing an ever-growing challenge of administrative fatigue at the grassroots level.

Agencies are telling us that they spend more time managing organizational issues like HR, fundraising, admin and less on real service delivery.

In a resource-constrained environment more and more organizations are coming up short. We can't afford to lose the social capital of these important agencies – we must help them address their challenges in order to ensure ongoing support to communities.

So we need to consider new models, perhaps more of an incubator approach where some of the administrative functions can be shared or organized centrally, while easing the path to grassroots service delivery.

The City, as a major partner to our community agencies, can play an important lead role in stimulating and organizing this activity.

And Mr. Premier, I would like to talk to you about the role the Province can play in encouraging a shift. It's something we are going to have to consider – that the answer isn't solely more money, but rather new cooperative models.

And this type of thinking extends to other areas too.

Like our new environmental plan that is coming forward. The Way We Green is designed to propel Edmonton forward as the most environmentally progressive urban centre in Canada.

I believe we are already Canada's leading green city but we can do more – being greener can't just be about spending more and it can't just be about government.

We need to apply new types of thinking to urban sustainability so we're not just talking about new ways to spend, but rather how the money we spend today can be channeled into projects that produce sustainable benefits.

For example, given potential economic and emissions benefits, is it possible to move from conventional or diesel fuel to using natural gas in some of our city fleet?

We have to examine options like this and not just assume the answer is no. Thinking like this means we have to be willing to change.

Our relationships with our fastest growing demographic – seniors is another key example.

As our population ages, and more and more people join this group, the shape of our city will change. We have to start making adjustments today.

We have begun to extend our efforts through the appointment of Betty Loree as a new seniors' advocate. Betty was the tireless face of the Citizen Action Centre at City Hall until she retired last year. Now she works part time with our seniors who need a stronger voice in City Hall.

Some of Betty's work will link to the growing challenge of seniors housing.

The city must play a role here to ensure available housing keeps pace with this growing market, by leveraging municipal lands to stimulate new private sector and non-governmental development.

Sometimes changing the approach to a problem works.

It's why our REACH committee on community safety approaching it differently, trying to get to the source of community disorder – rather than just punishing its effect.

It's why we can today celebrate the efforts of our homeless commission – because we had to look at things differently to understand that only by successfully integrating structure and service can you house someone.

And the more than 1000 people who have been housed through this plan to date are proof that new cooperative perspectives work.

It's why our new City Manager is considering ways to change our administrative structure to better solve problems across departments, not just in the usual silos.

It is why private sector business leaders now sit on our audit committee.

When I think of the leadership of our Homeless Commission or REACH - and I hope our art and community sustainability committees - we know that success is built on the integrated efforts of thoughtful and involved citizens and businesses who applied new thinking to old problems.

And considering the next level of challenges we have to face, we need to extend what we've achieved even further. Where else can we apply the expertise of citizens and businesses in our community to help our best practices get better?

#### **Relationship with Province/Ottawa:**

How we work together to identify and pursue goals makes a tremendous difference to our success.

Which is why I am always pleased to see regional mayors and provincial and federal representatives at this event.

I am especially pleased to see our Premier here – along with our Minister of Transportation, Luke Ouellette. I want to talk for a few minutes about Premier Ed Stelmach who has worked tirelessly with cities across Alberta. His efforts have made a difference here.

We see this through the project to upgrade the Legislature area – and celebrate Edmonton's capital city status.

And through the ways in which 25 unruly, differently-focused municipalities in the Capital Region were brought together under a new regional plan.

We see it in a common effort to tackle homelessness.

And through a strong commitment to infrastructure in our City – more than a billion of new money for this City over the last five years which has become the backbone of our new roads and recreation centres and LRT.

And today, I am very privileged to say we have received assurances from the Province that money for our NAIT line – almost \$500 million in new capital funding – has been secured through Green Trip. This new capital pay-on-progress money has already started to flow with \$70 million advanced in 2010 through Green Trip. The balance of the province's commitment is now confirmed which means LRT to NAIT is right on schedule.

So I thank you and your Government, Mr. Premier.

This has been a good partnership – one which is focused not on competition or top-down instruction – but on ensuring we work together and share success. It is based on understanding that municipal government, which is closest to the people is best to lead on key projects and that choosing an aligned path is better for our common citizen.

This is a lesson that our current Premier understands well and that I hope all of us will take the time to question the potential leaders about.

It is also the message that our City must send to Ottawa through all parties and all MPs.

Because as much as we have received some support from Ottawa, when people note the portion of the infrastructure gap that we have to manage – some of what's missing is full engagement of Ottawa on the big city file.

Don't get me wrong. Key federal programs like gas tax and the Building Canada fund are having an impact in our City. But treating the ongoing challenges only in terms of economic stimulus fails to note that cities are challenged at all times.

It fails to notice that a tax revenue system that delivers only about 8 cents of the total to cities is not sustainable. Cities are the drivers of the economy. 80% of Canadians live in cities. The institutions that guide our success – like our universities and our research firms – are located here, along side of our businesses and communities.

We need to enable our success, by enabling our cities.

Which is why my colleagues from the Big City Mayors Caucus have worked hard to focus attention on the need for a clear, strong urban agenda from all federal parties and a commitment to stable, long-term adequate funding to cities to support the services Canadians deserve.

But until citizens speak out on the need for an urban agenda, our voices will be easily brushed aside. Until our people demand more cooperation and integration of agendas across all orders of government, Ottawa will continue to be a silo.

### **Moving forward:**

It's with this same spirit of creativity, cooperation and ambition that we must focus on all of the major projects we are now undertaking.

Plans are moving forward on our Airport lands – both on the moves towards the phased decommissioning of air service activities and toward the new plans for this integrated, sustainable community.

Plans for the new development have circulated the community and community inputs will help to shape the decisions that we make.

**Arena and downtown:**

And there is another project coming forward – you might have heard of it –our next discussion of a prospective downtown arena is tomorrow.

It is my sincere hope that Council will take some constructive steps forward.

I believe that this project has the potential to be a key component in our efforts to build a strong, vital downtown – for EDMONTON – something that is an absolute priority of our citizens.

This is a project that has the potential to accelerate our efforts to bring more people, more energy and more activity to our core.

In this sense, the impacts of this project will be absolutely transformational for our downtown.

The effects will add key chapters to the overall story of our downtown.

The energy and vigor of our downtown core is an ongoing priority supported through its growing role as a centre of advanced education, with MacEwan, Norquest and the U of A bringing thousands to our core.

It is through our arts district, anchored in the institutions around Churchill Square.

And it will be in new opportunities, like a new vision for our Rosedale area as the power plant is decommissioned.

This is not just about a new bridge but an opportunity to re-imagine the place that has been so central to our city and to its founding peoples.

This project, which began to take shape as part of our EXPO vision, must still be realized for our City.

And on Jasper Avenue we see new opportunities too – to support this important business corridor with a more streamlined, cleaner and artistic vision that lifts its image and its spirit for us all.

Within this context a broad-based CRL becomes a tool to support our efforts across our entire downtown plan – from Jasper Ave to the Quarters, to our warehouse district.

So if we move forward tomorrow on the next steps towards a new arena and entertainment district we are moving forward with this entire vision.

I do want to frame what moving forward means.

It means that we establish a baseline for a lead investment in a downtown arena project by the City of Edmonton, through a portion of any combination of CRL and a user-fee, both of which can be applied to building capital.

And importantly, it means that this city will also be choosing to offer long-term viability for the NHL, which is something that our citizens take pride in, along with other key pillars of our diverse identity.

What it doesn't mean is that Council's work is done. More work will be required. There must be more resource secured to make up projected shortfalls, more work done on governance and to ensure cost parameters are concrete.

And once again, if Council moves forward on this for Edmonton, we hope that we can find ways to ensure our provincial partners work with us to enable this project for our citizens and those of our region and across Northern Alberta who will benefit from its development.

I don't want to spend much more time on this today except to say how much I appreciate the hard work of our City administration on this project along with the input of more than 30,000 of our citizens who have helped shape our thinking.

I know that tomorrow, Council will work hard to find the right balance and do what is right for Edmonton.

**Economic opportunities:**

In addition to finding opportunities to build and shape our city, we need to also focus our attention on how and where we will find our opportunities to grow our economy – because we all know that only a thriving Edmonton is a sustainable Edmonton.

This is why five regional mayors are supporting a new Regional Economic Development project. The goal of this effort is to build on the expertise of industry-based partners to bring a new, mentor-based focus to the capture of venture capital funding for local industry and innovators in our region.

It's also why efforts are underway to reconsider the role of agrifood and urban agriculture in our region and how the evolving nature of our local food economy can become the seed of a broader economic effort.

I like the focus on agrifood because fundamentally it's about how to do more with resource and talent that we already have in abundance.

Sometimes, when something is so core to your surroundings, you take for granted what it is and not think enough anymore about what it could be. I am referring to one of our greatest resources – Heavy Oil. As a world-wide commodity, I see a great deal of untapped potential here.

By better integrating the research energy of our university with the literal energy under our soil and around the world, we can capitalize on this asset and become the world leader in research and development of this important resource.

That's why we want to work with the University of Alberta about how we create a true centre of excellence for this resource, leveraging our research talent along with inputs from industry and government and other key research institutions, such as the Alberta Research Council.

All partners can work together, to create and extend the knowledge base of an industry that truly balances our energy needs with our equal need to protect the sustainability of our communities, our environment and our economy in equal measure.

Cities can be the facilitators here. We can draw the links and dedicate resources to bringing all players together. We can examine our regional structures to create the playing field that makes more things possible.

Our economic future is bright but we still need to work hard to ensure that we're channeling our own energies in the most effective way – especially by considering how much more we can do with our natural assets and incredible creative energy.

And just as we need to look for new social and community models, so too do we need to consider new ways of channeling our economic development efforts.

We work hard to support the economic work of our region to build relationships with northern partners, to attract tourism and conventions to this region and to attract and manage major events. But here too it is time to challenge the effectiveness of our current organizational structures.

We need a higher level of integration and collaboration between the multitude of agencies and players who work on these tasks.

We need to work not just to sustain our agencies, but to ensure that our agencies are measurably working towards goals that will sustain our City and its incredible opportunities over the long-term.

**Conclusions:**

That is really the crux of this message today – that there is so much incredible opportunity here.

And that we, all together, can apply our efforts, our creativity and energy to realize our full value.

The best plans in the world, are really only this, until they are realized.

And so we must harness the potential of not just thinking together, but doing together.

Your City Council has worked hard to integrate the voices of our diverse communities to build a vision for a competitive and prosperous Edmonton.

One that works with our partners to gain support for our efforts.

One that considers all of Edmonton.

One that uses every effort and every ounce of energy to see it through.

And it is this vision, and this drive, that will propel our city into a future that sees Edmonton as a bustling and dynamic place of opportunity for all.

Thank you.