

Mayor's State of the City
Shaw Conference Centre
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Introduction

Madam Premier, Deputy Premier, Honourable Ministers, elected officials, ladies and gentlemen.

It's an honour and pleasure to be with you at my inaugural State of the City. It's an added honour to be joined by my fellow City Council members as well as other elected officials. I want to acknowledge and thank Premier Redford and Deputy Premier Hancock for taking the time to be here. I understand, Madam Premier, that this is your first State of the City in Alberta's capital city and we are all very appreciative of your presence.

Gathering place

Elder Gilman Cardinal's blessing is a poignant reminder that Edmonton has been a gathering place for a long time. At least 8,000 years before the arrival of the Europeans, this spot we now call Edmonton — perched on the North Saskatchewan River — has been a pehonan, or gathering place, and the focal point of ceremony and trade for indigenous peoples.

This special place remains a magnet for those who come and build something enduring together — be it a future, a family, a business, a work of art, or a community. Great cities emerge — as Edmonton is now emerging — when enough of us, and enough infrastructure, and enough investment, and enough creativity, and enough drive all swirl together, reaching a kind of critical mass.

Ladies and gentlemen, a new, more confident Edmonton has emerged— building upon our rich heritage, leveraging our advantages, and — most importantly — unafraid to challenge ourselves to do even better.

Our aspiration

Every day, I am reminded that Edmontonians are the real city-builders in Edmonton — in the business they run, the services they provide and the time they volunteer. City Council and our 11,000 colleagues at the City work hard to support you in building the city we all aspire to ... a city that welcomes newcomers and cares for the less fortunate. A public transportation system that moves a growing population efficiently. Infrastructure to support a fast-growing city's needs. An urban core and gathering place to showcase Edmonton.

Innovative city

Being unafraid to challenge ourselves to do even better requires innovation — at city hall, in business and in the community. For example, our transportation department is partnering with the University of Alberta to study pavement material and roadway management in winter cities. This partnership will help us make better planning and paving decisions for the future.

We know the City can do better with its public engagement ... we must connect with our public more effectively. Clearly our processes have to be better and more transparent. We are making progress at gathering the input of citizens early on before options or decisions are developed. “Open government” must be more than a catch phrase; it's an attitude adjustment and one that I will continue to lead.

With City Centre Airport now closed, we have the opportunity to show leadership and innovation with the Blatchford development, offering a walkable, transit-oriented lifestyle option to families that is scarce in Edmonton ... in a community that meets high environmental standards. In this neighbourhood and in many

others, we must enable infill and more housing choices for Edmonton families.

World markets demand cleaner, greener, cheaper, faster and safer ways of doing business. Our entrepreneurs, researchers and innovators can show the world how. We must ... if we are to stay relevant.

We have shown that we can keep up. Having strong post-secondary institutions, being the logistical hub and gateway to the world's politically safest energy reserves, and investing in an internationally recognized business incubator that is second to none in Canada. And by enabling an unprecedented level of investment and confidence in downtown's renaissance, anchored by Rogers Place.

The country and the world are taking note of what's happening in Edmonton. From sovereign wealth funds to venture capitalists, they like what they are seeing. Edmonton, an economic powerhouse, is now poised to take its rightful place as one of Canada's premier cities. Our city, our region, our north — we are key to Canada's future, prosperity and competitive edge.

Yes, we are living through remarkable economic times. You've all heard it. Among the fastest job growth of large municipalities. More jobs than people to fill them. Healthy housing starts. Strong migration into our city and region from within Canada and around the world. Bottom line ... our economic fundamentals are strong.

However, I will not let us become complacent.

Ending poverty

Though our city has benefited from these extraordinary economic times, prosperity has not reached all Edmontonians. Over 100,000 Edmontonians live in

poverty, including almost 30,000 children. This is a reality that threatens our future and cannot go unaddressed.

Those living in poverty are disproportionately immigrants and indigenous people. Many are women, often struggling to lead single-parent households. They are our friends, our co-workers. They are our neighbours. And if our neighbours are not thriving, then neither are we.

Simply managing poverty is not working. It's costing us billions in health care and in lost productivity. And it's costing many children their promising futures, through no fault of their own. It costs us in policing when those in poverty turn frustration and desperation to anti-social behaviour. It costs us when children, too hungry to learn, fail to get the skills they need to succeed and be productive members of the community.

Poverty is complex. Its causes are multi-faceted, interlinked and anything but straightforward. Many are afraid to tackle it. But I am not.

City Council has already been at work on a long-term poverty elimination strategy. The focus so far has been on shifting from a charity model to one based on investment. Recognizing the work that's been done, I will elevate the profile of poverty elimination by bringing the weight of the mayor's office.

Next week, Council will consider my proposal to create a mayor's task force that I will co-chair personally with members drawn from business, faith and subject experts, with the mandate of crafting new real-world strategies to significantly reduce poverty among our neighbours.

Realistically, the work may take a generation but progress towards poverty elimination will benefit all Edmontonians. And our work, if it is to be successful, must align with our premier's own courageous commitment to eliminating child

poverty in Alberta.

As we start this dialogue, I invite you to think about what providing a living wage can do for workers. Consider how supporting child care for your staff will lessen their day-to-day worries and enable them to be better, more productive workers. Think about how, as members of Canada's largest chamber of commerce, you can help to unleash the next generation of entrepreneurs from unlikely circumstances.

Globally competitive region

We compete in a world that has never been flatter, facing the constant pressure to remain competitive — day in, day out. Our economy is firing on all cylinders. In fact, the Conference Board of Canada forecasts the Edmonton metropolitan area to be among Canada's fastest-growing in the coming years.

However, if we are to be truly effective as a region of 1.2 million, our shared future and success is conditional on functional relationships with neighbouring municipalities. If we want to continue to outperform other city regions in Canada, then we must work together much more effectively — and there can be no delay.

Earlier this year, your Chamber's President and CEO, James Cumming, called for two things. One was a study on amalgamation in our region, which overshadowed his other important point. The other thing the Chamber called for, quite rightly, was stronger results from the Capital Region Board: specifically, meaningful regional collaboration on economic development and working together on regional infrastructure planning.

While I don't see amalgamation on the horizon, I know there is real frustration among business leaders about the state of the region, and I share it. If the Capital Region Board cannot demonstrate results, voices calling for more radical

change will drown out diplomacy.

If we, or our neighbours, see this as “playing for keeps,” we will all lose in the end. That’s the pathway to lost investment and lost opportunity — and the pathway most likely to end with forced amalgamation, rather than the negotiated mutual benefit we should strive toward. To that end, I have been asking my fellow mayors in the Edmonton region to renew their commitment and effort so that we, as a region, can rise above our differences and deliberate in an open, candid manner and ensure that the entire Edmonton region succeeds.

For the region to achieve results, we must work together much more effectively on economic development. The region must deliver an updated growth management plan next year with elevated standards for density and urban growth, and accountability to those standards. The plan should reinforce the importance of growing existing communities rather than starting new ones.

Boundary changes are a natural part of these discussions — hence the City is pursuing annexation. Edmonton’s boundaries have not changed since 1982. Calgary’s have changed more than a dozen times in that same period. Naturally, negotiation is a part of the annexation process. However, we cannot accept only new residential growth. Edmonton’s future growth must be balanced with a healthy mix of residential and employment areas.

Our city’s very future and competitiveness — make that our region’s future and competitive edge — are at stake. I put it to my fellow mayors ... what will you do differently ... how will you think differently ... are you ready to look ahead and ensure that our region’s ability to compete globally for our mutual long-term benefit is always at the forefront of our deliberations?

LRT expansion

An essential part of being competitive is the ability to move people and goods efficiently. When Edmonton's LRT system came on line in 1978, it was a notable achievement for a city of our size heard around the world. Beginning with the vision of Council under the leadership of former Mayor Mandel, we — once more — have momentum on our side.

A fully built-out LRT network is an efficient and effective way to meet the needs and demands of one of Canada's fastest-growing metropolitan areas. It enables the city and region to continue to be a gathering place for trade and commerce.

We heard it loudly last fall and continue to hear sustained support from Edmontonians for the expansion of our LRT system. Past Councils were not always clear on their priorities. To remove all doubt, this Council unanimously declared LRT expansion as its priority for new infrastructure investment, beginning with the long-awaited Valley Line from Millwoods to downtown.

You may have caught coverage of my meetings with federal cabinet members and other elected officials in Ottawa last week, including Employment and Social Development Minister Kenney, Industry Minister Moore, Transportation Minister Raitt, Health Minister Ambrose, and Minister of State for Finance Sorenson as well as Edmonton MPs. I stressed the critical role that Edmonton and Northern Alberta already play and will continue to play in the national economy, and emphasized the importance of mass transit to our growing city and region — messages which were well received and also conveyed in national media.

The Edmonton region accounts for close to one-third of Alberta's population. As an anchor of one of the most dynamic economic development corridors anywhere, our region's \$81 billion gross domestic product is almost 30 per cent of the provincial economy. Clearly, big cities are the economic engines of the province and the country. To be globally competitive, we need the federal and

provincial governments' sustained commitment to rapid transit — now more than ever.

We, in Alberta, have an opportunity to move ahead, learning from the lessons of congested Canadian cities and staying ahead of the rapid growth that we all know is coming and that will fundamentally alter our province's landscape.

Madam Premier, never has the opportunity and timing to fully build out Edmonton's LRT network been more worthy of your government's leadership, commitment and support. Show that you understand the needs of this city in the same way that my Council does. Show Alberta's capital city that we are worth investing in.

Monday's speech from the throne has given us much to hope for, and we look forward to tomorrow's budget.

Big city charter

Big cities fuel a large part of the province's economic dynamism. In fact, Edmonton and Calgary, with over half of Alberta's population, account for more than 60 per cent of its economic output. We have been working with the Province on a more equitable approach to how big cities are recognized.

Currently, Canadian cities bear the responsibility for 60 per cent of public infrastructure with eight per cent of tax revenue. The City of Edmonton provides services to our citizens and many in the region that include complex cross-border policing; library, literacy and educational support services; international trade and investment attraction; domestic violence reduction; social and affordable housing; newcomer settlement; and preventative healthcare with recreation and active transportation.

Edmonton's continued reliance on the existing legislative and fiscal framework is holding us back from the optimal delivery of services to citizens, and will continue to be a hindrance. We have reached the point where Alberta's big cities have outgrown the one-size-fits-all Municipal Government Act and our collective efforts are better spent focused on a big city charter. What is needed is a real partnership between Alberta's big cities and the provincial government.

We have been working with the City of Calgary, and I am happy to report that we are closely aligned on our vision of what a big city charter means.

What we heard in this week's speech from the throne is encouraging. I look forward to working with Municipal Affairs Minister Hughes and you, Madam Premier. I hope and expect that our dialogue will be productive, reconciling the roles of our governments and our responsibilities to citizens. While the revenue conversation is essential, I have not prejudged an outcome. The mature relationship that can grow from this big city charter work is essential to Edmonton's continued progress.

Aboriginal relations

Progress takes many forms. One of them is reconciling our past. We are humbled that Edmonton is the final stop of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada later this month. No other province was home to more residential schools. What this tragic period of our history has demonstrated, above all, is the resilience of our indigenous peoples in spite of a systematic attempt to strip their culture, traditions and language. This is the truth we must come to terms with.

The gathering of survivors' testimonials and statements will be powerful, emotional and, for many of us, uneasy. While it will not undo the hurt and wrongs of the past, the retelling and chronicling of this episode in our history is an opportunity for us, as a people, to learn from it and recommit ourselves to

building a better, more inclusive city ... to engage more meaningfully with Canada's soon-to-be-largest urban indigenous population.

In fact, the commission's stop in Edmonton is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for all of us to join in conversations around truth and reconciliation. Elsewhere in the country, non-indigenous Canadians turned out in full force to walk as one in a gesture of reconciliation, to learn about the injustice of residential schools, and to underline the fact that healing is a shared act.

Without recognizing our shared history and learning from it, we have no hope of making change.

Conclusion

This gathering place we call home is made up of entrepreneurs, teachers, students, artists, tradespeople, caregivers, seniors ... those who help and and those who need our help. A city binds our diverse interests, gives us a shared purpose, and makes us stronger. It's our job to take this remarkable moment in history and meet these defining challenges head on — as one.

Building critical infrastructure. Tackling poverty. Unleashing innovation. That's why we have chosen to gather here — to do great things.

My responsibility, and my Council colleagues' responsibility, is to steer us, focused on an ascendant Edmonton.

Great cities emerge when conditions are ripe for unprecedented cooperation, creativity and disruptive change. The cities that embrace this will thrive while cities that are content with today will lag and wither. I will not stand for that in Edmonton. And, given what we hear from Edmontonians every day, neither will you.