

## **Mayor Don Iveson's Keynote Address**

CityAge Western Cities Summit

June 23, 2014

*Check against delivery*

### **Welcome/Acknowledgement**

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here and to welcome you to the inaugural CityAge Western Cities Summit in Edmonton. I am joined by several City Council colleagues: Councillor Ben Henderson, Councillor Andrew Knack and Councillor Michael Walters. I also wish to recognize fellow elected officials from the Edmonton region, across Canada and across the 49th parallel.

Let me start by congratulating the event organizers, CityAge Media and its founders, Marc Andrew and Miro Cernetig, on their two-year-old company's 13th event.

The line-up these gentlemen have programmed and the choice they made in bringing this event to Edmonton is consistent with the excitement that we are experiencing in our city and region, and in western Canada. Miro, I think you will agree that Alberta's capital city is a very different place than the one you covered while posted here as a Globe and Mail journalist in the early 1990s.

The notion behind these CityAge gatherings is the enabling and exploration of new forms of partnerships of city-builders, the circle of which includes leaders from business, finance, government, community, civil society and academia. Over the next day and a half, you will hear — and I am looking forward to listening and taking part myself — from a cross-section of thinkers, practitioners and influencers who will share their insights on the future of western cities, their role in nation-building and how they sustain competitiveness.

### **Changing Downtown, Changing City**

The Edmontonians among us in this room are familiar with the renaissance our downtown is experiencing at the moment. For those of you new to the city, allow me to go back a few years.

This room — this historic Fairmont Hotel Macdonald — in which we are meeting is emblematic of our downtown's rebirth. This hotel once dominated the skyline, an expression of the audacious confidence in Edmonton a century ago, when Jasper Avenue throbbed with activity. By the 1980s, a severe economic downturn — among other factors — led to this amazing structure's eight-year closure, and almost to its

demolition. Ultimately and thankfully, it was restored to its former glory by people of vision with equal commitment to heritage and the future.

Our city's core is now undergoing a similar transformational upswing — one that started years ago, gathering traction more recently and reaching its peak now, witnessed by the migration of offices, residents and retailers into downtown.

With construction cranes all around us, we will see projects bearing fruit in the next two to three years. From the new arena to its surrounding sports and entertainment district of offices, residences, retailers and more ... and from the new Royal Alberta Museum to new investments in the Quarters on downtown's east side. Further west, the expanded Norquest College and the consolidated MacEwan University. And, by the end of this decade, the new \$1.8 billion light-rail transit line that will connect downtown and southeast Edmonton.

Last Thursday, to underline our commitment and confidence, the City helped break ground for a new office tower that will house two-thirds of our downtown staff and that will increase efficiencies and enable convenient one-stop-shop services for Edmontonians.

Just two weeks ago, City Council moved ahead with Blatchford (former home to a municipal airport), a model carbon-neutral development in our urban core a dozen blocks north of here. The end result will be one of the world's largest green communities, featuring a district energy system for heating and cooling, active transportation options and highly energy-efficient building construction for 30,000 people.

One-third of the province's ever-growing population now resides in the Edmonton region. Our economy is one of the most diversified in the country, as recognized by the Conference Board of Canada. Last week's KPMG study ranked Edmonton as the country's most tax-competitive city and Canada the world's most tax-competitive of 10 countries.

### **Open City, Open by Default**

As our city evolves and comes into its own, as our city emerges and takes its rightful place among Canada's first-tier cities ... we have a one-of-a-kind opportunity to reimagine how we can be more effective in connecting with residents and the world.

As our city experiences an urban shift ... as we see changes in how Edmontonians — and that includes new Edmontonians — decide where and how they live, work and

move about, we are presented with an opportunity to evolve the dynamic between government and citizens.

So, as our city reaches a remarkable point in its physical evolution, we are also making fundamental changes in the role citizens play in shaping their community.

I believe the opportunity we have in front of us is about transforming City Hall into an *enabler* of social and economic growth. We can, and should strive to, be a global city — but it will take discipline and leadership to build a truly innovative, inclusive and uplifting place to live.

At its foundation, our approach, which we call Edmonton's Open City Initiative, marks a significant and fundamental cultural shift in the way City Hall serves and interacts with residents. It is truly about the public and municipal government partnering and working hand in hand to build an even greater city. To Simon Farbrother's credit, since starting as city manager four years ago, this shift in culture among city employees is well underway.

The Open City initiative is rooted in three broad goals: build new ways to share information with Edmontonians, find new opportunities for dialogue, and make services easier to access.

Our Open City work has the potential to advance and strengthen the partnership between Edmontonians, City Administration and City Council. Indeed, Open City is mutually beneficial for all three and, I would contend, we have no choice but to adapt.

For Edmontonians — whether as individuals or communities or businesses — Open City makes municipal government processes more transparent, solicits meaningful participation, involves them in decision-making, and makes participation more accessible. As Edmontonians become better informed and engaged ... they become more authoritative partners in how the City sets its goals and objectives.

Open City enables City Administration to draw taxpayers and citizens into an ongoing conversation (which means dialogue — both ways — built on trust) about how the City operates, and alters fundamentally how we view democratic government. It means a wholesale shift in how municipal government operates culturally. What it is *not*, however, is the abdication of the continued value and service that civil servants provide to Edmontonians every day.

For elected officials, through Open City, we are making a commitment to those whom we represent that there is every opportunity to be involved and that, if they are willing,

we are entrusting them to take greater part in their municipal government. In return, their feedback informs better and more effective decision-making at City Hall.

## **Open Data**

So how are we doing? We were strong out of the gate in 2010 when Edmonton was one of the first cities in the world to launch an open data catalogue, one of the pillars of the Open City initiative which envisions that public information is managed to maximize accessibility and usability.

The challenge — and opportunity — that lies ahead is to continue the momentum and recommit to increasing the catalogue of data, building on the 400-plus data sets and visualizations. One Saturday, about a month ago, the City hosted a hackathon. In mere hours, participants came up with more than a half-dozen projects. Imagine the possibilities with more open information ... and more time ... and more hackers.

Citizens look to government as trusted keepers of data and information. It is therefore incumbent upon us to publish more consistent and trustworthy data with built-in quality assurance and create mechanisms for Edmontonians to identify the data they want or need. After all, city information is a public asset — owned by citizens and serve as a public good.

Therefore, City data should be open data — *open by default*. At the macro level, the City can be part of a larger open data ecosystem, working with other data-driven public organizations to extend the availability of information ... and enable the comparison of location-specific City data with, for example, health data or household spending data from other orders of government.

Whether the need is from individuals, organizations, business or the community at large, the cost to us pales in comparison to the potential return on investment. The data sets that users create benefit all of us in the longer term. The business community, as one example, can analyze open data to make better informed economic development decisions.

Sure, there is information that will never be appropriate for public release but I and my council colleagues have yet to be persuaded that it does not make good common sense to share data and information — most of it anyway — more openly. Municipal governments can be more nimble and sophisticated, leading the way for other orders of government to follow, and perhaps even learn from us.

## **Starting Steps**

We have examples of good work already done on open information and open data. An app, the first of its kind in Canada, called yegTreeMap tracks the city's tree canopy by location, size and species. Users can drill down to an individual tree and see the energy it conserves, the air quality it improves, and the carbon dioxide it absorbs. Users can also report new trees and find historical trees.

Residents and visitors can explore Edmonton neighbourhoods through an interactive map online, and find City amenities (like pools, parks, sports fields and golf courses) by community.

An eagerly anticipated tool currently being beta-tested is our 311 app. For those of you from outside Edmonton, 311 is the City's 24-hour, one-stop-shop point of contact to access information and programs, as well as identify areas needing the City's attention. While the majority of users currently access 311 through the phone, I am confident that will change once the smartphone app goes live. Enabling citizens to be our eyes in the field, and report issues live and on-location, will give us much richer information and intelligence about the work we do and where we should focus our resources.

Of course, we have scratched only the surface. Municipal governments, after all, are the most in contact with city residents — day in, day out. It is often said that we are in your life. So, not only is it good business, but it makes good sense to work alongside our residents, our neighbours, our friends, our colleagues ... to draw them into the civic conversation to make better decisions and build a better city by removing any sense of mystery that citizens have about the way we work.

Great potential lies ahead in opening up data further. Many initiatives are currently underway. More will be added to the queue.

## **Insight Edmonton**

Our Open City work is about to enter a new phase. In a couple of days, we are kicking off an online tool we call the Edmonton Insight Community. When fully up and running, this will be an on-line panel of 5,000 signed-up Edmontonians who will help to shape the City and provide citizen perspectives on issues of concern to the City, and of concern to them. By investing in innovation like this, City Hall has a direct line to what is important to Edmontonians and their communities. I am proud to note that Edmonton is one of Canada's first cities to embark on this kind of initiative.

While online citizen engagement is not entirely new to us, it builds on learnings from cumulative past experiences. We are going to Edmontonians where and when and how they want to be consulted.

This Insight tool expands on our existing approaches to public engagement, integrates best practices from others and tries new approaches. We will continue to use existing, and consider emerging, social media tools to reach Edmontonians in ways that are relevant to them. In return, we can use sophisticated theme and sentiment-analysis tools to convert data into information that is helpful to decision-making.

Above all its benefits and positives, as well as enhanced decision-making, an Open City approach is one of those powerful levers that will affect how our city, and how our municipal government, are perceived.

We have the right attitude and vision but, I believe, we are only getting started. Done correctly, this can be another one of those game changers for our identity and image, and become the latest, transformative made-in-Edmonton innovation, similar to our world-leading waste management.

### **Cities as Leaders**

Innovations like Open City are part of the fundamental shift in the role of cities that has been going on in recent years. I would argue that municipal government has never been more relevant in our lives than today — going well beyond the traditional role of provider of day-to-day utilities and services.

Cities — at least in Canada — are increasingly leaders, pioneers and innovators. I referenced our waste management leadership — truly an Edmonton original. Constrained by rapidly diminishing landfill capacity, Edmonton led the way in adopting more environmentally conscious behaviour: first with curbside recycling, then large-scale composting. With the activation of a game-changing technology that converts non-recyclable, non-compostable household waste to biofuel, we will soon achieve 90 per cent diversion of our municipal waste stream from the landfill.

As more proof of cities' role in the national conversation, look no further than our economic fundamentals. In the last 12 months, the Edmonton region alone accounted for 40 per cent of Canada's net new job creation. Newcomers are attracted to our fast-growing economy, quality of life, our opportunity and our renewed optimism.

Cities have taken the lead in such areas as ending homelessness and eliminating poverty. My fellow members of Canada's Big City Mayor Caucus and I are champions and advocates for much needed affordable housing and substantially increased public transportation investment.

But as opinion leaders, influencers and champions on the national stage, we know well that cities cannot move ahead by themselves. True to this conference's mantra of partnerships, municipal leaders are conscious of the need for the participation and support of many stakeholders, including senior orders of government.

In short, cities are redefining their value and role but — more importantly — defining what is possible for the 21st century and beyond.

I believe that, as city builders, we can transform our cities to be highly liveable, uplifting places, with globally competitive and relevant economies. Great cities can be remarkable engines for the future, shaping and changing how entire nations are perceived. When enough people, infrastructure, investment and creativity all swirl together, they create dynamic cities ... dynamic gathering places.

### **Close**

In the next day and a half, through panels, presentations and informal discussions, this gathering of some of the leading minds of city-building will explore answers to questions on how we manage this phenomenal growth, what we need to do to remain competitive and relevant, how to capitalize on our leadership spotlight ... and how, informed by good public policy and by doing politics differently, we advance community and civilization at the same time.

I look forward to our dialogue.

Thank you.