

**Remarks for Mayor Karen Farbridge
Guelph Urban Design Summit - Public Forum
May 5, 2014, 7:30 p.m.**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good evening and welcome to the Guelph Urban Design Summit.

I'd like to thank everyone for coming this evening. Our community has always been interested and engaged in the future of our city - and we can see that reflected in the crowd here tonight.

We are thrilled to have two leading thinkers and city-builders with us tonight.

A warm welcome to David Miller, President of World Wildlife Fund, Canada, and the 63rd Mayor of Toronto; and Andrew Howard, co-founder of Build a Better Block.

Welcome also to our moderator this evening, Ric Young, one of Canada's leading practitioners and thinkers in the field of social change.

I'd like to thank all of you, not only for being with us tonight, but for taking the time to get to know Guelph in preparation for this event.

We are very much looking forward to hearing your perspectives tonight.

Tomorrow there will be a day-long workshop for urban design professionals as well, and we're very excited about that.

I'd like to thank members of the City's Planning Services team for their tremendous work in organizing this event:

- Janet Laird, Executive Director of Planning, Building, Engineering and Environment
- Todd Salter, General Manager of Planning Services
- Melissa Aldunate, Manager of Policy Planning and Urban Design
- David DeGroot, Senior Urban Designer
- Stacey Laughlin, Senior Policy Planner

(Pause)

Before we get into the program, I'd like to take a few minutes to set some context for this evening's discussion.

I'll begin with Guelph's beginning.

Those of you who live in Guelph are probably familiar with the story of John Galt.

In 1827, just a stone's throw away from where we are sitting, Galt founded Guelph in dramatic fashion with the ceremonial felling of a maple tree.

Guelph's downtown streets radiate out from that spot like a fan. It's a design that's quite different from the grid pattern of most cities - so

much so, that it often confounds visitors and new residents trying to navigate our downtown.

But Galt's plan was much bigger than the physical layout.

He had a vision of a city that was planned from the inside out. He believed a town needed a mill, a market, a school house, and a tavern. That first year, Guelph's first building - The Priory - was constructed. It served as a school, a post office, a tavern, John Galt's home, and temporary housing for settlers.

Galt also believed churches were necessary to successful cities and he set aside some of the most prominent pieces of land for places of worship - including the site on the hill where the Church of Our Lady remains a focal point to this day.

Unlike many Canadian towns that grew "organically" around a mill, a trading post, a mining site, or an agricultural settlement - Guelph was planned from the start.

By providing a planned city where amenities and services were already available, Galt hoped to direct and stimulate the agricultural settlement of the area.

This was a land development project. As the superintendent of a land development company called The Canada Company, Galt was motivated to drive up demand - and ultimately price - for the farmland the Canada Company had to offer.

Galt was a visionary and a city builder - and his influence is felt in Guelph to this day.

(pause)

Throughout its history, Guelph has experienced a number of "growth spurts." We are in the midst of one right now.

But this one is different.

(pause)

As many of you know, our growth is being driven partly by the Province's *Places to Grow* legislation, announced in 2005.

Places to Grow aims to reverse some of the planning mistakes made in the previous half century that led to sprawl in some parts of Ontario, particularly the Greater Toronto Area.

The legislation promotes urban densification and mixed use development to encourage less time in the car. Development was frozen in the Green Belt around Toronto, and growth was targeted at municipalities directly outside the Green Belt, including Guelph.

Fortunately, Guelph was ahead of the curve when *Places to Grow* was introduced. In the years before 2005, we had extensively consulted people in our community about what kind of future they saw for their city.

Guelph's planners and our community were able to take the province's guidelines in stride because we had already laid down the foundation of our vision - a vision that was well-aligned with the goals of the provincial legislation.

The principles of our vision were described by the words inviting and identifiable, compact and connected, distinctive and diverse, clean and conscious, pastoral and protective and prosperous and progressive.

By 2009, Guelph's Official Plan was accepted by the Province, and it reflected a thoughtful balance between the policy priorities of the province and what we heard from the community during our consultations.

Guelph's population is targeted to grow by nearly 50% by 2031.

We made the decision to focus our growth in our downtown, in four nodes in the north, south, east and west, and in the corridors that connect those nodes, and in doing so protect the farmland and natural areas that surround us.

The change in these parts of the city over the past few years has been dramatic.

Commercial development has been significant in the north, south, and west. And we see the conditions for commercial development in the east end emerging – in addition to the restlessness of its residents.

Residential development has also been significant, and a greater percentage of new housing is now multi-residential.

Cranes are dotting the downtown skyline for the first time in decades. We have attracted more than \$85 million in private sector investment, with more to come.

The difference today – between this growth spurt and one's of the past – is the growing sophistication and level of integration we are achieving between our growth strategy and our economic development strategy, strategies to manage our city in a more sustainable and resource-efficient manner and to build a more just and equitable community where prosperity is shared.

(pause)

We know that as the city grows, residents and businesses expect municipal services to keep pace. We need to ensure our water system and our waste management can meet growing demand. We need to have enough parks and green spaces. We need enough police officers and emergency personnel. We need to attract jobs and investment.

But there is also a more subtle expectation that came through in our consultations. People often tell me that what they like about Guelph is that it offers big-city amenities with a small-town feel. They don't want to lose that as we grow.

I believe good urban design is one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal to maintain our city's character and small-town feel as we grow.

It has the potential to influence nearly all aspects of community life.

For example, think of what happens when we make our community more walkable and bike-able:

- It can improve activity levels, health, and wellbeing

- It reduces traffic congestion and smog
- It eases wear and tear on our roads - reducing expensive road work
- It can improve safety by having more eyes on the street
- It supports connectivity and a sense of belonging, where neighbours know each other.

One of the best recent examples of the transformative power of urban design is Market Square.

This space has exceeded anything we could have imagined as to how people can connect to a space and indeed their City Hall.

The rink and water feature have brought huge numbers of children and families back to the downtown core. It's also a gathering place for civic events throughout the year.

The space has engaged and inspired people in all kinds of ways, including artistic expression. It has been the subject of many drawings, paintings, and photographs - and there have even been dance routines choreographed just for the Square.

As Market Square demonstrates, good urban design doesn't just *maintain* our city's character and quality of life as we grow. It can make it even better.

It's not just about the space – it is about what it causes to happen in that space.

(Pause)

Clearly, much has changed since John Galt's day, when Guelph was a tiny outpost in the vast frontier of Upper Canada.

But in some respects, our goals are the same.

Galt wanted to make Guelph an appealing place to be, in order to attract settlers and drive up land sales for the Canada Company.

Today, we still want Guelph to be one of the most appealing places to live and work in Canada. We recognize that our city is competing to attract investment, jobs, and talented people - and that competition is global.

This has been called the century of the city.

Because global transportation and the Internet are removing geographic barriers, people are free to choose where they live. And where they live is becoming the most important value to them.

Ironically, in the face of globalization, local is becoming king. Place matters. Great places. Great cities.

Galt was bold – and we must be bold city builders too.

Urban design has a tremendous role to play in making Guelph a great city where people want to be and this summit will help inform how we integrate even stronger urban design approaches into our city building plans.

Thank you again for coming and enjoy the evening!