

**Office of the Mayor
2013 State of the City
Mayor Karen Farbridge**

Thursday, November 7, 2013

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good morning!

I want to thank the Chamber of Commerce for hosting – once again – the Annual State of the City Address. After today's event, I will deliver my address to a number of community organizations.

I want to thank Councillors and the employees of the City of Guelph for their service to our community.

If you were asked: Is the City of Guelph – Making a Difference? What would you say?

Guelph is different. And people are noticing.

I am having more conversations where someone comments on Guelph's uniqueness to me - whether I'm talking to local business owners seeking to attract talent, people who've chosen to live in Guelph or those watching from outside what we are achieving as a community.

More people live, work and play in Guelph.

We have more entertainment and events, better restaurants and more sports and live performances.

We have a thriving advanced manufacturing sector and growing innovation-based businesses.

We continue to weather unprecedented global economic shifts, better than most.

Our neighbourhoods are welcoming and our downtown is becoming a destination.

We are an emerging leader in integrated health care and wellbeing and an established leader in the environment.

We preserve our architectural heritage.

We offer a great quality of life.

And my final observation is that people in Guelph seem to care more -- about each other and about their city.

And it is just this - this unusual engagement and ambition of people in Guelph - that is getting noticed outside the community.

Something different is happening here.

That's nice. But what's it got to do with managing City Hall? Why should business care?

OK. Let's talk business.

Why is it important that Guelph distinguishes itself?

The City of Guelph is in a competitive market.

We're fighting for federal and provincial resources with every other municipality in Ontario and Canada.

But more importantly we're in the market to attract and retain businesses and the talented people they need.

And that competition is global.

Competitive differentiation is the key to any successful business.

Apple famously re-launched itself around the motto, Think different, becoming one of the most admired companies on the planet.

In a similar way, cities have to think different too.

What's stopping any of our advanced manufacturers from pulling up stakes tomorrow and moving their operations anywhere in the world?

How do we keep our most talented people from following jobs across the world, taking innovation and entrepreneurial energy somewhere else?

Companies and organizations need a reason to be in Guelph. But more importantly, the talented people that work for them need a reason to stay.

In so many new economy businesses, the principal asset is people. And talented people are on the move following jobs all over the world.

What does Guelph have to offer them, and the companies they work for?

The good news is that location matters to them and to their families. And Guelph is a location that has a lot to offer both businesses and people.

Many of you will be familiar with the Canadian Solar story that was the reverse of a global trend with a Chinese company putting its North American headquarters, production facility and 400 jobs here in Guelph.

But did you know that it was our energy plan that was a key differentiator in choosing Guelph over other communities in Southern Ontario?

Würth Canada is moving its headquarters to the Hanlon Creek Business Park. They are joining local family-run businesses, Fusion Homes and Graniteworx and, most recently, the financial services company, Raymond James.

Their investment in Guelph is helping us realize the fruits of a decade-long effort to develop the business park.

The CEO of Würth Canada, in his speech to open the construction project, said it was the quality of life in Guelph that was an important factor bringing them here. And the employees I spoke to at the event were clearly excited about being in Guelph for the same reasons.

Our view is that Guelph's competitive differentiation - its unique value and position in the municipal marketplace - is founded in four spheres of community experience.

- economic opportunity and prosperity
- social justice and wellbeing
- environmental stewardship and sustainability
- culture and heritage

We are successfully striking a balance between all four - that is our value proposition. That makes a great city.

And it is my belief that people who can think and act simultaneously in all four areas are making a difference in their careers and their communities.

Nowhere is that more true than in Guelph.

So, how are we doing at leading in these areas of dynamic city building?

Today, I'm going to talk about three areas of special focus:

- Enabling Innovation
- Caring About Wellbeing

- Downtown as Destination

But before I dig into the details, I want to talk for a minute about how we are changing the way we are organizing ourselves at City Hall to create a platform for continued success.

We have been re-organizing and re-aligning the way we work. There are many wrinkles to iron out but we're seeing progress.

The first insight was to re-conceive the City and its various planning, policy and service functions as a platform for economic development and innovation.

We believe municipal government can provide a coordinated set of policies, funding and services that can create opportunities for business.

These are not just opportunities for development or attracting employers but also entrepreneurial platforms.

Even in areas that don't seem immediately relevant to job creation, there is thought given to how programs in different areas can support economic development.

For instance:

- We are parlaying our significant municipal expertise in water and wastewater management to help businesses demonstrate new technologies – this opens new markets for them.
- We know new open information policies will stimulate new data mining applications for the private sector.
- Our approach to energy planning is internationally branded.

As we reduce energy consumption and green house gas emissions, we attract investment and jobs from this sector.

Just last week, I met with an international company looking to move their North American headquarters to Guelph because of our commitment to executing the energy plan. There are several others.

The establishment of Guelph Municipal Holdings Inc sent a strong message that we are serious about establishing a thermal utility and an entity to drive retrofits in the residential and light commercial sectors.

To do this effectively, we recognized that we had to overcome our own internal silos. Believe it or not, City Hall doesn't always find it easy to work with City Hall.

So, we have people who are accountable for driving key issues across departments, assuring alignment not only internally, but with all our stakeholders in the city, as well as the region and Queen's Park.

What is unique about Guelph is that we are building a platform to incubate civic and economic innovation. Cities of the future will need both to prosper.

This is a big part of what doing business differently means to us - it is a transformational agenda. And we are leading.

Enabling Innovation

I can't think of a topic that better illustrates what I mean by the idea of government as a platform than enabling innovation.

When we consider how innovation is encouraged by policy decisions, we can't help but think of Silicon Valley.

Stanford University decided to establish a business park for high-tech firms and startups back in the 1950s when it was a novel idea. It's come a long way since then, building on that platform.

Many other cities have copied Stanford and Palo Alto and built innovation clusters for high tech companies. We have one not far from us in Waterloo.

But this doesn't apply just to high tech. The approach can create a platform for other kinds of innovation.

Here in Guelph, we have a different kind of thought leadership. Where Stanford is a pioneer in electrical engineering and the University of Waterloo is a world leader in software engineering, the University of Guelph leads the country, and indeed the world, in food, health, environment and sustainable community building.

Great cities strategically focus on their best opportunities for economic growth – that is what we are doing in Guelph.

Our Advanced Manufacturing sector is almost three times the concentration of other Canadian cities and continues to grow as do the Agri-Tech and Culture and Tourism sectors. We also see emerging opportunities in Information and Communication Technology and Clean Tech.

We work closely with Innovation Guelph and they tell us that while most of their sister regional innovation centres are trying to reproduce the success of Silicon Valley by chasing Information and Communication Technology jobs, we are different.

Instead of following the crowd, we are building a platform for growth in a broad range of emerging areas, such as Clean Tech, Agri-Tech, Open Data, and Wellbeing.

Diversity has always been our strength.

The world is undergoing a far-reaching revolution around information. Big data is getting bigger every day.

It is profoundly affecting businesses, and other organizations, both in their relationships with customers and in the way they operate. Barriers to information are falling everywhere.

The City of Guelph has a large amount of data that can be widely useful. Much of it in ways we can't imagine today. Mining and visualizing data in useful ways is a very hot area for innovation.

We know that opening access of the community to our data - responsibly and with full respect for the privacy of individuals - will provide a fertile platform for innovation and give rise to new start-ups, products and services.

We have to get it right.

That is why I recently met with local entrepreneurs to ask them what success would look like for their sector.

It is also why we are working with Innovation Guelph to establish a civic innovation incubator to embed tech entrepreneurs inside the walls of City Hall.

Open access to data and information is also part of a movement towards more open government generally. New technologies are changing people's expectations about transparency and openness.

This is putting a lot of demands on all kinds of organizations: governments as well as businesses. As every IT manager knows, this is a big information management headache.

It takes standardization and alignment on many fronts and not just for enterprise information technology systems.

Governance and policy frameworks, data management, and community facing frameworks, using Web 2.0 and social media tools, all need to interoperate seamlessly, while respecting privacy and security concerns.

Not an easy task, but one we're committed to.

We are leading the formation of a community of practice to extend our reach and accelerate our progress. We are partnering with the City of Toronto, Government of Ontario and the MaRS Discovery District in Toronto to bring together change makers from across the province.

Open Government will make us - citizens and government - more accountable to each other. It will create a platform for greater cooperation and collaboration. And, again, it is a chance for us to show leadership in an emerging area - the leadership that will help us “make a difference” in Guelph.

Caring about wellbeing

One of the more promising emerging areas for innovation is wellbeing.

When we started the Guelph Community Wellbeing Initiative, we knew there were a lot of resources in our community – government funded programs and services, community assets and programs, charitable giving and volunteerism, individual talent and resourcefulness.

We set out to answer the question – how might we put these resources to better use, to do more with less while achieving better outcomes for individuals, families and the community?

This is not about another plan. We are building a platform – a platform for solutions, a platform for people to help themselves, help each other and to build a safe and prosperous community.

I chair a Community Leadership Group with representatives from the private, public and community benefits sectors.

We knew we were building on a strong foundation of collaboration.

What we are discovering is that this community is building a centre of innovation in health care and wellbeing practice – and it is getting noticed by others.

The Community Wellbeing Initiative is part of a larger emerging sector that includes Innovation Guelph, the University of Guelph Health Study, the provincial Health Links pilot and much more.

This should not surprise us. It plays to our strength, our identity - people in Guelph seem to care more.

The solutions we develop in Guelph will seed new opportunities in this fast growing part of the economy – and is a new way in which we can distinguish ourselves.

Downtown as Destination

Downtown is one of our principal “difference engines”. It is a key driver for Guelph’s brand. It’s widely seen as one of the healthiest downtown cores around. It’s why many people want to locate here.

But, truthfully, there is still a lot to do. Looking worldwide at the issue of downtown sustainability, our research tells us there has to be a stronger mix of residential and commercial for it to excel.

So our first priority is to transform the “Central Business District” into a truly urban neighbourhood. We have targets to raise the downtown population by 6,000 and bring in 1,500 more jobs. Private sector investment is conservatively estimated to increase the assessment base by 3 to 4 times.

It’s this kind of tax base that will fund community centres, pools, libraries and other services in all parts of our city. That’s why we think of the downtown as an engine of growth and differentiation for the city.

We have been working on the strategic planning and policy underpinnings for the last 3 years, and now we are beginning to roll. The platform for downtown development is in place and working.

Capital investment is happening. We have been especially pleased with the fast take up of units in Riverhouse and Market Commons, which is attracting more development money. The demand is clearly there.

We have made a number of public sector investments including upgrading core infrastructure, Market Square, Guelph Central Station and the Guelph Civic Museum.

We have been able to do this through strong management of our capital investment strategy and our success in competitive federal and provincial funding programs.

Our investment has leveraged over \$85 million in private sector investment with more on the way – including the Gummer Building, Western Hotel and the Stewart Mill, River House and Market Commons condominiums.

The investment in the Guelph Central Station has positioned us to recently partner with Kitchener and Waterloo on a business case to improve GO Train service between Toronto, Pearson International, and our region. We believe this has the potential to be Ontario’s innovation corridor. Roughly similar in distance to the San Francisco, San Jose corridor of Silicon Valley, right down to two international airports book-ending each corridor. The only thing missing? Frequent two-way train service.

I would like to return to one last thought on local leadership.

It may seem odd for some of you to hear the Mayor of a medium-sized Ontario city talking about leadership in areas like energy, innovation and health. Since when did municipalities have accountability for these areas?

About 20 years ago, a slow shift started. First the federal and then the provincial governments began downloading costs and responsibilities to the municipalities. Today, both federal and provincial governments are battling deficits and turning down thousands of requests from municipalities for help.

When it comes to solving our most critical problems, the message we keep getting is that the ball is in our court.

This isn't just happening in Ontario. A profound shift is happening worldwide. More and more it is being recognized, that urbanization stimulates economic growth, increases rates of literacy and education, and fosters sustainability.

It turns out, that cities, not nations, are the engines of development and progress. Immigrants come to cities. Entrepreneurs locate in cities. Growth and opportunity are in cities.

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

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.

The best companies to work for today are clearly focusing on corporate social responsibility and matching the values of their employees.

If we want to attract and retain the most talented people, innovative and dynamic businesses, we as a City have to lead in the areas that matter most:

- Protect our difference and challenge ourselves to think and act sustainably
- Provide a dynamic platform for innovation in areas that play to our strengths
- Open government with new ways of communicating and providing easy access to information
- Collaborate across sectors to maximize health and wellbeing
- Make our downtown a destination for work, life and play so we can invest in the quality of life for our whole community.

This is the century of the city. Location matters to people. Let's make sure we take the lead where it matters most to us.

The citizens of Guelph care more about each other and about their city. That makes us different. Let's keep it that way.

Thank you.