

2012 State of the City – Guelph Wellington Men’s Club Presentation
Mayor Karen Farbridge

Good morning, and welcome to the 2012 State of the City address.

I’d like to thank the Guelph-Wellington Men’s Club for inviting me. Each year I present the State of the City first at a breakfast hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, then I take it on the road to a number of groups. It’s become a fine annual tradition in our community.

Traditionally in my State of the City address, I talk about the City’s accomplishments and financial picture.

This year, the City has published an excellent report that covers much of that ground.

You can read the *Making a Difference Community and Financial Report* online and there are bookmarks you can take to remind you of the link.

Please do take a few minutes to take a look at this accessible and informative report.

This publication will become an annual report to our community and is one expression of our accountability and transparency to the residents and businesses of Guelph.

I have presented the City’s dashboard of key financial performance indicators to this audience in previous years.

That dashboard continues to be central to Council’s financial decision making to ensure we protect the financial position of the municipality.

Through the leadership of our Executive Team, our financial position continues to be strengthened.

Some recent examples the Team’s work include:

- We have finalized a growth management strategy to accommodate 50,000 more people and 30,000 more jobs in our community by 2031.
- We secured \$50 million in federal and provincial funding to repair core infrastructure and establish a commuter hub in our downtown.
- Land sales in the Hanlon Creek Business Park continue to grow our industrial assessment base and jobs.
 - Fusion Homes of Guelph is constructing their new headquarters in the business park.
 - Wurth Canada Ltd. will locate in the park, bringing 100 jobs to the community. The City has sold 12.7 acres of land to Wurth, at a value to the City of \$3.2 million.

- We have secured a Memorandum of Understanding with the Province of Ontario for the development of the Guelph Innovation District.
 - This partnership recently elicited an Expression of Interest from Conestoga College for a new campus in Guelph on these lands.
- And the Executive Team presented to Council the first sustainable 10-year capital budget
 - The capital financial plan focuses on closing the infrastructure gap by reducing debt servicing over the next 10 years to accelerate contributions to reserves.

For this year's State of the City address, I'd like to break with tradition and change the format a little.

I'd like to share a few examples that help connect the dots between City Hall and the community.

But more than that, I want to talk about charisma, as odd as that might seem!

Has anyone here ever watched a TED video online?

TED is a small non-profit devoted to "ideas worth spreading".

Recently I watched a TED video where the speaker asked the question: can a city have charisma?

He asked the audience to think of a charismatic leader.

Let's do the same thing this morning.

But instead of Nelson Mandela, Bono or Oprah – depending on where your thoughts might take you – think about a charismatic leader in our own community.

Close your eyes if it helps – or look around the room for inspiration.

Here is mine: Anne Marie Zajdlik.

She has all the qualities of a charismatic leader:

- She's committed to an inspiring cause
- A passionate and engaging communicator
- A risk taker and innovator
- She radiates confidence and conviction
- And builds devoted fans and followers

Can a city have charisma?

Can it demonstrate these same characteristics?

Can it possess a distinct personality?

I submit that it can. And I would argue that Guelph, in fact, does.

We've all seen the headlines and heard the accolades about Guelph.

- Canada's most caring community.
- The safest city in Canada. Three years in a row.
- One of the smartest.
- Best place to live.
- We have been called the most romantic and fastest.
- We have even been named as #1 on the Santa Scale – as the city that would most suit Santa Claus!

In most cases, these rankings are based on a set of factors or statistics - things like our employment rate, volunteerism stats, or crime rate.

It's certainly great to be recognized.

But what are the stories behind these headlines?

What are people in our community doing to make Guelph so extraordinary?

Today, I want to share some stories that begin to tell the tale of why Guelph is such a charismatic city.

[Pause]

I'm sure all of you saw the headlines about Guelph's latest claim to fame: we have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

I have received calls from across Canada asking what our secret is. I tell them innovation, collaboration and diversity.

There are dozens of examples of this – but I'll give you just a few.

The first example involves a local company called Enpar, which specializes in technologies to treat wastewater and drinking water – innovations that trace their roots back to a world-class research institution – the University of Guelph.

Enpar has been awarded more than \$570,000 in funding from the Province for two projects related to water and wastewater.

The Province has said these projects “have the potential to transform water treatment around the world and enhance Ontario’s reputation as a leader in water technologies.”

The City is a partner in these projects, as the technologies will be tested at the City’s Waste Water Treatment Plant and a City-owned well.

We are leveraging our considerable municipal expertise in water and wastewater management to help develop new technologies, attract investment, and create jobs.

We saw further evidence of that just before Christmas, when the Province awarded more than \$2 million to the City for three projects that will implement innovative new technologies in water and wastewater management. We will be exporting these technologies beyond our borders.

Enpar is a client of Innovation Guelph – an organization established by the Chamber of Commerce that helps enterprises start, grow and thrive. Innovation Guelph is part of a regional network of innovation centres.

Innovation Guelph is supporting an emerging Water Cluster in Guelph – leveraging the expertise at the City, University of Guelph, Conestoga College, and in the community.

So many connections! There is more to this story and it continues to be written.

[Pause]

For my next example, I’ll return to the project I mentioned earlier: the redevelopment of the Guelph Innovation District.

The Men’s Club has been actively involved in the plans for this District. Thank you for your engagement and your insights on this vitally important piece of land.

As many of you know, Conestoga College is proposing to build a new Guelph campus on these lands.

An institutional anchor has long been identified as desirable to drive interest, economic development, and land values on the rest of the site. Conestoga College would be the ideal anchor.

Their proposal involves a partnership with the University of Guelph to create joint programs that would prepare students for innovation-sector jobs in fields such as biotechnology, life sciences, environmental sciences, engineering, and agricultural technology.

Through the joint program, students would acquire both the theoretical background and the applied skills to succeed in innovation-sector jobs.

The College campus represents not only an educational opportunity, but an economic development opportunity for Guelph, because it would support our city's position as a leader in these innovation-sector fields.

Conestoga's proposal is supported by the City, the University of Guelph, and the Chamber of Commerce.

I have written to the Ministers of Infrastructure; Economic Development and Innovation; and Training, Colleges, and Universities. Plans are in the works for them to visit Guelph to discuss the proposal further.

This is yet another example of the City, the University, the College, Chamber of Commerce, and community groups like the Men's Club working together with the Province to make great things happen for our city.

Guelph has a remarkable ability to work together for a common cause, and it makes us the envy of other communities.

What does all this innovation and collaboration add up to? Simply put, a more diversified and resilient local economy and community.

Diversification is the key strategic direction identified in our economic development strategy, *Prosperity 2020*. And it's key to a prosperous future for our city.

In Guelph, we have launched a community wellbeing initiative to support this goal.

What is the connection? A society's ability to innovate has been linked to the well being of its people: career wellbeing, social wellbeing, financial well being, physical well being, and community wellbeing.

Wellbeing is a good segue to my next topic – liveability.

Guelph has made lots of "liveability" lists over the years.

MSN called Guelph "Canada's next most liveable city" outside of the big three of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.

Researcher and author Richard Florida ranked Guelph as one of the country's top five places to live for single people, professionals, and families.

We regularly rank highly on MoneySense magazine's list of Canada's best cities to call home.

Guelph will soon be featured on the Discovery Channel as a "gem" of a city in Canada – and might I add the only Canadian city to be showcased.

The various lists use different criteria, but clearly they all show that Guelph is doing something right.

I'd like to share a story that illustrates why Guelph is such a special place to live and will remain so.

The story involves a situation that is inevitably challenging for any municipality: the redevelopment of a brownfield site in an established neighbourhood.

In this case, the neighbourhood is one of the most unique and historic in Guelph: the Ward.

The site is a former factory with deep roots in the city: the WC Wood plant.

Situated close to our downtown on the banks of the Speed River, the site is full of potential for residential and commercial redevelopment.

It's also fraught with possible pitfalls – everything from sensitivities about demolishing a factory that employed generations of Guelphites, to neighbourhood worries about whether the new development will fit in.

Quite frankly, this project could have turned into a showdown between a determined developer and an outraged neighbourhood.

But it hasn't.

It has become a truly collaborative planning process.

The players include an engaged group of residents, led by The Ward Residents' Association which formed in response to the proposed project; an owner, the Kilmer Group, who is committed to respecting the neighbourhood culture; and City staff, who have shown leadership throughout the process.

The Residents' Association, chaired by Maria Pezzano, has worked hard to make sure the Kilmer Group "gets it" when it comes to the Ward's unique character.

For their part, the Kilmer Group has shown that in addition to being experts in brownfield remediation, they make it their mission to respect the neighbourhood that surrounds the site.

The site has now been acquired by local builder Fusion Homes, who has pledged to maintain the site's historic character and make the river a focal point.

The President of Fusion Homes, Lee Piccoli, has told me he wants this to be a signature redevelopment in our downtown and set the tone for the next two decades.

The process is not over, and no doubt there will be challenges ahead, as there are with any redevelopment project.

But we have built a solid foundation of trust, transparency, and engagement as the project moves forward.

We must replicate this new approach to meet the goals of our growth strategy and the downtown secondary plan.

There is no point in developing a downtown secondary plan that cannot be built.

Understanding the financial risks and needs of the development community while protecting the liveability of our neighbourhoods will not be easy, but engagement and creativity will help us immeasurably.

[Pause]

There are many factors that go into making a city liveable – walkability; good transit; a wealth of entertainment and cultural options; parks, sports, and recreational opportunities; good schools; clean air... and the list goes on.

One important factor is that intangible quality called “character.”

As Guelph continues to grow, some worry that our community will lose its character.

The Woods project is an example of people determined to make sure that doesn't happen – people working together to maintain our heritage, our neighbourhoods, and our culture.

Conclusion

I have only been able to touch on a few examples when there are hundreds at play.

These stories highlight the work of just a handful of people when there are thousands of players.

However, I hope they begin to weave together the bigger story that Guelph is, in fact, a charismatic city in large part because of how we are connected to one another.

We have creativity. We have compassion. We have chutzpah.

We are not afraid to take a calculated risk and we have demonstrated an amazing capacity for innovation.

That's not to say there aren't challenges.

We will continue to experience the effects of global economic uncertainty.

We will continue to be challenged with managing the pressures of growth and what it means to be an assertive and complete community.

We will continue to grapple with the reality that we cannot afford all the facilities and services the community may want – at least not in the way we have done in the past.

The City can meet these challenges by adapting, by evolving and staying relevant and create value for the people we serve.

In the two stories this morning, City Hall was just one player in a whole cast of characters.

The days of municipal government acting alone to drive the city's future from inside the walls of City Hall are long over –if they ever existed.

As the stories I've shared this morning demonstrate, we have successes to point to and emulate.

In today's complex, interlinked and fast-changing world, municipalities need to work collaboratively across the public, private and non-profit sectors to jointly produce public value.

At City Hall we are redesigning our structures and processes to do just that.

This means more than just sitting at a table together. It's a fundamental change to the way governments have traditionally done business.

There are many systems – cultural, structural and legislative – that define how government works, at all levels. And when these systems are outdated and not directly responsive to our local communities, it is not good enough to just “keep our heads down” and follow the path of least resistance.

These are not easy or comfortable conversations. They are politically risky conversations because not everyone embraces with open arms the need to do business differently.

We don't have all the answers. But we are asking a lot of questions.

Can you show me a business that has remained relevant and competitive operating on a 50 year-old business model? Is your business the same as it was *even* 5 years ago?

These are conversations worth happening, because they will enable us to realize our community's vast potential.

From the days of our founder John Galt, and his grand vision for our city, Guelphites are used to thinking big.

We're a place of big goals and big ideas – whether it's solving the world's water treatment problems, or working to eradicate the scourge of AIDS in Lesotho.

That is why our City's vision - *to make a difference* - makes such sense. It fits us.

I want to thank the members of the Men's Club for all the things you do, big and small, to make Guelph so extraordinary.

And I want to assure you that City Hall is right there with you, as together we strive to remain the most prosperous, liveable, caring, safe, smart, fast, romantic, and – yes – the most charismatic city in Canada.

Thank you.