



**Mayor Drew Dilkens
City of Windsor
Inaugural Address
December 1, 2014**

Thank you Michael.

And thank you Shayla and Miranda from Walkerville Collegiate for leading us in the singing of our National Anthem.

Well good evening ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to the inauguration of Windsor's new city council.

I'm thrilled to see so many people here tonight to celebrate with us as we embark on our four year journey destined to keep our great City of Windsor moving forward.

The hallmark of our democracy is the ability to share competing visions - to engage in open and frank dialogue and in the end, to choose those who you think will best represent your interests.

I want to acknowledge those who put their names forward as candidates - people who offered to serve our community. I also want to acknowledge and thank our families. Without your love and support, the next four years would not be possible.

Running for municipal office is not easy - and it's not something to be taken lightly.

Nor is being elected to municipal office.

Over the next 48 months the new members of City Council will come to understand the complexities of governing a city whose annual gross expenditures are nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a billion dollars.

They will also come to understand the great ability they have to improve the lives of the residents they serve on a daily basis.

Ultimately this is why each of us sought and were elected to our positions - to improve the lives of residents and create a better, stronger city.

I would like to recognize my colleagues with whom I have the honour of sharing this stage tonight.

Returning Councillors, Gignac, Marra, Sleiman, Payne, Kusmierczyk,

And our new colleagues - Councillors Elliott, Francis, Holt, Borrelli and Bortolin.

Together, with you, the 11 of us will work collaboratively to build on the success that past city councils have created for our community.

Today, because of the discipline and actions taken over the past 11 years we are starting from a position of strength.

Our city's financial picture has improved dramatically over the past decade and has positioned us well as we move forward.

Our debt which was projected to rise to \$370m is on its way to \$65 million dollars.

Our reserves - that is, the cash we have in the bank for rainy days - was once non-existent. We are now past \$140 million.

Some have questioned why we wouldn't use the reserve funds to pay down our debt further. The answer is - we have paid down all callable debt. That is, any debt that is possible to repay early - we have.

So why does this matter?

Well our bond rating agency - Standard and Poors - rates our city's financial health so that lenders have a benchmark when evaluating our risk and the corresponding interest rates they charge the city. The better the rate, the lower the interest charges and the more money we have to reinvest in our community instead of paying the bank.

Today we have a solid AA rating. S&P has acknowledged the strong financial position of our city but has cited economic diversification as an area for improvement. This was something the past council worked on extensively and were successful in starting. However, there is more to do. The job is not complete.

Over the next four years our council will continue to pursue a more diversified economy.

We will take advantage and exploit our geographic location, strategic assets and low cost of doing business.

We have spent a lot of time and energy and we've made significant investments developing opportunities at Windsor International Airport.

We can't back down now or move away from those opportunities.

We must continue to nurture and support those projects and employers which are still growing.....

To maximize their potential for job creation in our community.

Employers like Premier Aviation who have much more to offer.

More jobs and greater diversification.

We must also focus attention on the new multi-modal cargo hub which is currently under construction.

Fedex plays a central role as our anchor tenant but the potential of this project is far greater than one organization.

The University of Windsor will also play a central role in developing this facility as a research centre for security and logistics management.

Our role will be to continue to seek out relevant players - businesses - who are looking to be a part of the economic development opportunities provided at this cluster - in turn creating jobs in our City.

There is no doubt that job creation is crucial for our community.

Like many others in this theatre tonight - I want for my family what you want. To be able to support my kids in their academic pursuits so that they have the possibility of gainful employment in Windsor if they so choose.

But as important to our city as job creation is - it too is essential to retain the jobs and employers that exist today.

Do not overlook or undervalue the efforts required to sustain our primary industries. The direct jobs and indirect jobs associated with these industries comprise the backbone of our community.

During the campaign, I made a commitment on day one to reach out to the Presidents of Chrysler Canada and Ford of Canada – Reid Bigland and Dianne Craig. Earlier today I did just that. Calls are scheduled later this week with both CEO's. I want to assure them of our recognition of the importance of both companies to this city and of our commitment to work with both of them to ensure their future success, growth and investment in the City of Windsor.

As your Mayor and as your elected voices, we will do all that is required - all that is possible - and all that is necessary to sustain vibrant automotive and manufacturing sectors in our community.

This includes continuing to create a business friendly environment that supports our local employers.

One of the important elements in that regard and something completely within our control are the property tax rates set by City Council.

As most of you are aware – we have held the line on residential property taxes for the last six years.

By doing this we have taken our city from being at 102% of the provincial average to now, only 87% of the provincial average.

We have also moved our major commercial and industrial categories to rates lower than the provincial averages.

This has made our city more competitive and more affordable when compared to other jurisdictions across Ontario.

We still have more to do.

As part of my commitment to you during the campaign I promised to deliver another budget that will hold the line on taxes. I have worked with administration to prepare a budget for City Council's consideration in early January that will freeze residential property taxes for 2015. The SEVENTH straight year in a row.

No other community in Ontario can claim to have done this.

In fact, other jurisdictions are now asking us for advice on our budgeting process.

Now you and I both know that a budget will tell you what we can't afford, but it won't necessarily keep you from buying it.

As leaders of this city we understand your desire to keep property taxes low while providing services and amenities that other great cities provide.

But our approach must be disciplined – strategic – and focused. There must be a balance among interests that are essential to the operations of all great communities.

In addition, we need to continue our focus on finding efficiencies at City Hall while looking to enhance our top line revenue number through increased assessment growth.

The combination of these two numbers are essential to our ability to maintain low tax rates for the foreseeable future.

It is doable- it is realistic – and I'm confident in our council's ability to get the job done.

There are so many exciting things happening in our city. And there is potential for many more exciting things to happen.

There's energy in our community - a desire to do more - and become stronger.

I hear it from people all across the city that they believe we have come a long way and that we are on the right track.

To keep this momentum going we will need to prepare a solid plan - The bedrock of which is its financial underpinning.

All of my colleagues have ideas and visions for the future of our city - some of which were expressed during the campaign.

In addition, we have numerous plans that have been developed that need to be implemented.

Many of the recommendations in these plans cannot be accomplished in a four-year political window - but all of the recommendations can be mapped out over a longer time-frame.

We didn't complete these plans and reports to have them sit on a shelf.

You expect that we'll map out a reasonable timeline to deliver on these items.

You also expect that we'll review and analyze the various plans to ensure they are still relevant for today's needs.

Existing plans - new ideas - in a functional framework.

In early 2015 - I will be asking City Council and members of the administration to undertake a strategic planning and visioning exercise with a 20-year time horizon.

Benjamin Franklin once said - "if you fail to plan then you plan to fail".

I want my community to succeed. Council wants our community to succeed. You want our community to succeed.

The 20-year vision will provide us with a reasonable picture of where we are headed as a city.

For example, we know that our city will be unable to reach the provincial target for waste diversion unless we adopt an organics recycling program.

We know the cost of such a program is in the tens of millions of dollars HOWEVER we also know that our landfill will run out of space at some point and the cost to locate another landfill is astronomical.

The implementation of an organics recycling program is not likely to happen over the next four years but there are a series of events that could be put in place to position our community to move in that direction within the decade.

Quite simply, if we don't plan for these types of projects there will always be competing matters that appear to have a higher priority when viewed on a short time horizon.

Once we have the larger vision prepared we'll need to develop a strategic plan that shows you how we'll move forward on that vision in four-year increments.

This will allow us to merge the political cycle with the business cycle.

And it isn't just about showing you how we'll move forward - you'll also have a chance to provide feedback and ideas as part of the process.

Some people have asked me - 'why are you bothering with a 20-year plan when you're only elected for four years?'

Two reasons.

First, we have a responsibility to you to ensure our community is delivering on your expectations.

The 'low hanging fruit' is easily accomplished but it's the harder-to-reach fruit that requires planning. A foundation built piece-by-piece, year-by-year, term-by-term.

Second, in order to position ourselves as a competitive jurisdiction we have to be better than our competitors - many of whom have prepared long-term plans for their communities.

Calgary completed a 100-year visioning exercise.

Vancouver, Washington – a 20-year plan

The City of Edmonton is mapping out a vision to 2040 with strategic plans and goal setting built on a 10-year time horizon.

The City of Toronto completed a 10-year liveable community plan.

The City of Copenhagen – where some of the best cycling infrastructure in the world exists – has a 15-year plan to move forward.

Our sister-city of Gunsan South Korea is implementing their 25-year master plan which includes creation of a 33km sea reclamation project among many things.

Bold – visionary – and mapped out in realistic time frames.

My challenge to this council is to continue to think big. As we tackle the important day-to-day matters, think of our city on a grand scale – as a place where people choose to live. Retirees looking to relocate, professionals, young people, business people, and families.

Ask yourself – what motivates these different groups and how can we build a community that accomplishes two goals – to inspire those who live here now, while creating a city that generates a buzz in those who've had a chance to visit?

So much effort has been dedicated to this goal over the past eight years – but there is more work to do. A lot more work.

And although some may question the resources allocated to our sports tourism initiatives such as the Red Bull Air Races, FINA, International Children's Games, or the Ontario Summer Games – make no mistake – these are designed to showcase our community to broader audiences, in Ontario, across Canada and around the world.

They're designed to provide the Windsor Essex Economic Development Corporation with tools to use as they pursue more jobs and investment for our region. They also allow us to leverage our reach to various audiences in a way that we would never otherwise be able to afford.

This is good for our region, our city, our economic development team, as well as our team at Tourism Windsor Essex County and Pelee Island.

We will continue to work with both TWEPI and WEEDC to support their programs – including sports tourism - while working to build a stronger region in which to live.

This city council and I understand the importance of a strong region. The importance for planning, in job creation, in sustainability, transit and many other areas. And in that context I will ask council to support initiatives that incrementally build a stronger Windsor-Essex.

Although we are two separate entities - city/county, in fact we're nine separate entities if you factor in each municipality.

We will only prosper as a region when we really start working together that way.

This is not a game of 'us vs. them' but rather 'us vs. the world'. A stronger region will better position us to be competitive on a global basis.

I look forward to an open, dynamic and candid working relationship with the next Warden of Essex County.

In contrast to our regional relationships, it is also important to look at our neighbourhoods.

Sandwich Towne, Walkerville, Erie Street, Ottawa Street, Olde Riverside, and Ford City to name just a few.

Their vitality and well-being is paramount to the future success of our city.

Residents today are looking for more walkable, liveable communities where they don't need a car to go and buy groceries. Where they can sustain many elements of daily living within their own neighbourhoods.

Walkerville is a prime example of a neighbourhood that has blossomed and is growing stronger.

Walkerville proper, like Sandwich and Ford City, ceased to legally exist in 1935 when they were amalgamated with the City of Windsor – yet Walkerville has maintained a separate and unique identity.

As a result of the Ottawa Street market, organic growth and business investment by entrepreneurs, as well as an influx of people looking for 'livability', Walkerville has grown and continues to do so.

Other neighbourhoods in our city are eager for similar investments, and with a little help from both the private and public sectors can be better, stronger, more liveable areas than they are today.

Areas like Sandwich Towne, which was really the birthplace of our city. An area where history flows from every doorstep and street corner. A true gem in the rough, that with a little help and a coordinated plan – can become something larger than it is today.

We are making a strategic investment in the relocation of a new library to the old fire hall on Mill Street. But the municipality can't do it alone. That is why it is so important to acknowledge and support business people like Nicole Sekela, the owner of Rock Bottom, who sees the value and opportunity in Sandwich Towne and is making a significant business investment to create a micro-brewery in an old building on Sandwich Street.

This investment was supported by our municipal community improvement plan which will allow for a partial tax rebate for 10 years following completion of construction.

Building neighbourhoods – encouraging investment – supporting business with no burden to the taxpayer.

These types of incentives can play a significant role in redefining neighbourhoods and building communities.

This includes areas such as our downtown that has so much potential.

A downtown is seen as the heartbeat of a city.

We know this – which is why investments of over \$100 million were made over the past eight years.

Street scaping of Ouellette and Pelissier to give them a new, fresh look.

Construction of a festival plaza fitting our premier waterfront.

Creation of a new aquatic centre and waterpark – encouraging families to the core.

Purchase of the Art Gallery of Windsor building and regaining control of the Capitol Theatre providing permanent homes for two of our important cultural assets.

Jane Jacobs who was one of this century's pre-eminent authors on planning and city development once said – "You can't rely on bringing people downtown – you have to put them there."

To that end we created strategic partnerships with the University of Windsor to transfer the historic armouries building and assist in a plan that will see that building transformed into a new school of music along with the full reconstruction of the former Windsor Star building into a new faculty of social work just across the street from where we are tonight.

This partnership will put a thousand students into the downtown core and will act as a catalyst for private sector investment in our downtown.

This is a transformational partnership that will create dividends beyond our investment. Yet there is still more that we can do.

I look forward to working with the University's President - Dr. Alan Wildeman along with leaders at St. Clair College to continue building strong academic partnerships that leverage resources and help transform our city and its downtown.

Strong partnerships are essential to successfully running our city.

These partnerships exist in many forms including those with labour unions that represent many of our employees.

Having spent the past eight years at City Hall – and having had an opportunity to work with many of our staff members, I can tell you we have one heck of a team.

Tonight I commit to you and to our employees that I will listen. My door is open. I am interested in your opinions, your ideas, and your feedback. Together we will build a stronger city. That goes for CUPE, WPFPA, WPA, ONA, Transit and CANUE.

I understand that friction slows down progress. I also understand that collective bargaining often takes an adversarial tone.

Within the next 4 years, every contract with every bargaining unit at the City of Windsor will expire.

I want all of our bargaining units to know that, as Mayor, I will take an active role in ensuring that all negotiated agreements are fair – fair for our employees, but most importantly, fair to our major shareholders, the taxpayers of the City of Windsor.

This will require good leadership on both sides – with a willingness to find creative solutions – and an acceptance that the status quo isn't a starting point but something that you just saw in the rear view mirror.

As a city we want to support our star performers. Develop those with potential to build up our bench strength. We expect a lot from you but at the same time, we're prepared to support you to be successful.

We've seen what a good team can deliver over the past eight years.

That team knows that there is no room for mediocrity. They want what each of us on this stage wants - employees who are engaged in their jobs and most of all employees who want to succeed professionally - and see our city succeed at the same time.

While we strive for positive employee relations we are often working in a fractured system.

As with all municipalities in Ontario we suffer from a provincial arbitration system that fails to recognize ability to pay as well as differences among municipalities. Accordingly, we will continue to pursue a provincial remedy that deals with the fractured arbitration system that exists in Ontario today.

Moreover, I along with Mayors from across Ontario, will continue to pursue a solution to the problems created by the *Police Services Act* related to suspended officers.

The cost burden for municipalities is large and there is a strong recognition that the system is totally lopsided against the interest of taxpayers.

Change must come that balances everyone's interests.

I believe our human resources are a vital asset for our city. But to remain that way, we must also reflect the diversity of our community – the fourth most diverse community in Canada.

With that designation often come challenges in understanding different cultures and accepting that, their way, may be different from our own.

But more importantly – comes the opportunity to learn – to grow as a community and to appreciate that our cultural diversity actually makes us stronger.

We have an opportunity to better reflect our City's cultural diversity in our own workforce at City Hall - and we will do so over the next four years as 450 staff members become eligible for retirement.

Our course of action over the next four years will be strategic - focused and deliberate.

A business approach to running City Hall.

That is what you expect from us and that is what we will deliver.

The bar has been set high – and we – with our own style and approach – will move it even higher.

I look forward to collaborating with you. Engaging with you. Hearing your ideas and vision for our city.

We could build Windsor alone and it might be good. But if we build a better Windsor together then it will be great.

We are a city with a rich history.

Recently I purchased Dan Wells' and Craig Pearson's new book – 'From the Vault'. A series of photographs of our community from the distant past to 1950.

As I flipped through the extensive collection of photos I was inspired by how far we've come.

And when I looked at the faces of Windsorites in those old photos – I could see the passion and energy they had for our city back then.

I could see the smiles and almost hear the laughter of those swimming at Ford City Bathing Beach.

I could see the resolve in the faces of the men striking Ford Motor Company for 99 days in 1945.

I could see the sheer determination of those who built the Ambassador Bridge and Windsor Detroit Tunnel – engineering marvels of their times.

And I saw the desperation on the faces of those struggling through the Great Depression.

Each one of those pictures was a relative, a friend, or neighbour. And the stories they tell us today are more legendary than they must have seemed at the time.

But each of them has woven a stitch in the fabric of time in our city's history.

And because of them we are who we are today. We stuck together, we helped each other, and we fought for a better future.

When I look back four years from now – when future generations look back at the book that will be written about our history some 50 years from now.....

What do we want them to see - and what do we want them to say?

I want them to see a city that was bold. One that took calculated risks to make improvements.

One that continued the transformation that has been started.

And one that inspired those who lived here in a way they never thought possible.

I want people to say that Windsor was great back then. I want them to say that we were visionary. I want them to say that we were collaborative, cooperative and responsive to the needs of our city.

I want them to chuckle with their friends about the types of bathing suits worn at Adventure Bay in 2015 much like I did about the bathing suits worn in 1940.

And I don't care if they know my name or anything about me. Only that they know, in passing terms, that I, and team behind me, had the backs of their parents and grandparents. In building a better city – a robust community where they are better off because of our efforts.

Most importantly, I want to leave a community that allows them to build on our success.

Together we can do it. It's all possible AND all within our control.

All we need is the desire and determination to continue to make good things happen in our community.

I look forward to the next four years. I'm excited for the next four years. Together – all of us – we will build a better Windsor.

Thank you – Merci Beaucoup.