

MAYOR MIKE SAVAGE
State of the City 2015
Halifax Chamber of Commerce: Nov. 19, 2015

Good afternoon. Thank you to Roger for the kind introduction and to Valerie and the Chamber for hosting us here today.

And, thank you all for coming out.

I want to take you back to three years ago, when our new Council was sworn in: Stephen Harper was Prime Minister, Darrell Dexter was Premier, and Ivany was a man -- not a movement.

Halifax sat waiting for the promise of the massive Irving Shipbuilding contract to be realized; to see the Nova Centre emerge from a crater on Argyle Street and the Central Library to move from a community vision to an opening day.

Our new Council – with four new members – was focused on working together to build a better city and stronger community.

As we began our work, we identified our priorities for this term:

- **Economic Development**
- **Transportation**
- **Governance and Communication**
- and **Healthy Communities**

Today, I am happy to have members of our Council here, some of whom will not be running again in the next election, others who have indicated they are, some of us who are still considering, and one you dare not ask.

I'm happy to also have CAO Richard Butts and the executive team here.

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When I was first elected I met with Valerie and the Chamber and we talked about the Chamber's goal to see Halifax become one of the three fastest growing city economies by 2018.

Quite a lofty goal.

But, earlier this year the Conference Board of Canada put Halifax in its top three growth cities for 2015, along with Toronto and Vancouver.

This hardly means that we have reached our goal of being a consistent top performer but it shows what is possible. What are we doing to sustain success in Halifax?

FINANCIAL POSITION

As a city our finances remain strong. Our budget is balanced; and our debt is declining, and we are in a healthy position to invest in infrastructure that matters to our community.

After a number of years of increased spending, we have arrested the trend.

For the first two years of this mandate, Council reduced tax rates so as to offset the impact of higher assessment values.

Last year, we approved a modest tax increase. I believe it was the prudent thing to do.

We continue to see a reduced percentage of our total tax revenues coming from the commercial sector – having steadily declined from 50 % of revenue at the time of amalgamation to 38 % today.

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We are taking a hard look at commercial taxes, especially as they impact small business and main streets in our municipality.

We are asking the province for the flexibility to set tax rates that better respond to the pressure points in our commercial taxbase.

Our spending is being prudently managed. Even with higher costs for vital services such as police, fire and increased investment in transit municipal expenditures per dwelling unit are in decline.

Since 2012 we have aggressively managed vacancies and we have gone from 275 to 237 managers. Now, some might say we've cut a little close to the bone, but governments need to do what the private sector does routinely, evaluate positions, reward initiative, and eliminate redundancies.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

In the downtown we are now fulfilling the objectives of the 2006 Regional Plan, one objective of which was to have 25% of all development in the urban core.

When we reviewed progress in 2012 we were still at only 16 % urban.

Over the past two years, however, we have seen dramatic change with over 40 % of growth in the urban core.

You can turn any direction and see that projects have moved from plans on paper to concrete and steel construction.

While we recognize that projects cause disruption, growth in the core is unquestionably good for all of our city.

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A new project manager for the much-anticipated Cogswell Interchange redesign is hard at work.

And after years of inactivity, Canada Lands is swiftly moving ahead on developing the long vacant Shannon Park lands.

As we make room for plenty of people in both locations, we will at the same time prioritize transit, green spaces, pedestrians, and cyclists.

While we are seeing success in the urban core we will also leverage our planning tools to encourage more complete communities in designated growth areas outside the core.

This protects the range of choices people have in deciding where they want to live.

QUALITY OF LIFE

The year ahead will see construction begin on the new Dartmouth 4-pad. We've opened the new Lacewood bus terminal, launched the Craig Blake ferry and we're close to finishing the new pavilion building at the Oval – which, by the way, continues to be a big draw.

We have undertaken the Halifax Green Network Plan, to examine our open spaces and green-belted priorities.

Just as we are protecting access to our natural environment, so too are we working to protect and enhance access to our built environment and city services.

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We have hired a new Manager of Diversity and Inclusion, recognizing that barriers to municipal programs, services and employment can be physical as well as institutional.

We're reaching out to communities in new ways. The mobile recreation van brought fun to 3,700 kids this summer.

At our municipal beaches – 2,300 kids learned to swim – all free!

Last year, we marked the planting of our first urban orchard; today we have a budget for fruit trees in our growing list of community gardens.

As a coastal community we are planning for changes in climate.

Remember last winter and the impact it had on our community, and our budget.

And then we lost one of our most effective strategies thanks to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Our planning, however, has been noticed. Last year Halifax was chosen by FCM as the Green Champion municipality of the year.

BURDEN OR BLESSING

Let me show you something about Halifax. We are a big place. I mean BIG.

This is our city, 5,500 square kilometres.

Now let me show you the size of some other Canadian cities.

1. Montreal
2. London

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3. St John's
4. Quebec City
5. Winnipeg
6. Toronto
7. Edmonton
8. Calgary
9. Hamilton

You get the point.

We can see this as a burden or a blessing. I choose the latter.

In how many cities can you swim at 33 beaches?

Shop at 9 farmers markets;

Visit 65 art galleries;

Skate on 21 indoor ice surfaces;

Stroll through 61 parks;

or wave through 8 Santa Claus parades?

Our city's future lies not solely where we have the most people and the tallest buildings.

It rests, as well, in the physical, cultural and natural assets that make us stand out from other cities.

A campaign is currently underway to preserve and protect an area known as 100 Wild Islands, stretching from Clam Harbour to Mushaboom.

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These 46,000 acres represent one of the world's last best opportunities to protect a diverse coastal region. The NS Nature Trust is raising money to maximize this incredible asset.

We should support this, share the pride in the boldness of this vision to honour and protect our natural environment.

I am convinced that people want to be here not just because they can enjoy downtown, but because they can surf, and hike, and cycle.

They can leave a downtown condo or a cruise ship and be in a still-wild part of Nova Scotia in less time than it takes to commute across Toronto.

This is its own kind of economic development. It's at the core of the added value we offer to people looking for a place to not simply live but to make a life.

HALIFAX MEANS BUSINESS

And, our population continues to grow. New companies are creating opportunities.

Let's look at who is putting down roots in our city or expanding new branches of work:

- This fall, **Conifer Financial Services** announced its plans to add up to 350 jobs in the city over 7 years.
- **Global Relay** announced its plan to open a Halifax Office and create 150 jobs over 5 years.

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- RBC continues to build its Halifax presence, and will create 150 jobs and expects another 350 jobs could be created over the next 10 years.
- Ubisoft Entertainment, one of the world's biggest video game developers and distributors, acquired Halifax's **Longtail Studios**.
- Along with the arrival of **Hothead Studios** to Halifax last month speaks to the dynamic gaming cluster we're starting to see.
- And **IBM Canada** is so happy, its global delivery centre expects to continue hire even more young people.
- Home grown Travis McDONOUGH and Kinduct technologies is winning awards and clients across NA

SHIPYARD, OFFSHORE

It's a good time to bet on Halifax.

Look at the Irving Shipyard – the largest shipbuilding facility in North America.

Council members had the pleasure of touring the shipyard's Assembly Hall recently, and I can tell you it's quite something to experience the magnitude of this operation...

BP and Shell have each invested \$1 billion in the offshore – and Shell has already begun its exploratory work with promising results. And, just this past week we learned that Statoil Canada has bid for two deep water parcels in the Shelburne basin.

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For me it means fresh bragging rights in my new role as president of the World Energy Cities Partnership – which, by the way, has already earned me another new title:

Frank Magazine’s “Wanker of the Week”.

I left Halifax as a Mayor I returned from the Rio meeting as a president.

I’m proud to represent our city alongside other energy cities: Rio, Houston, Calgary, Doha and almost 20 others – because I believe we belong with them.

(I want to make note that former Councillor Steve Streach is with us today – he did a great job representing Halifax at WECP in the past.)

NOVA CENTRE

This is a big year in Halifax, the fulfillment of so much promise, the rewarding of so much patience.

We’re standing pretty tall – the Halifax Stanfield International Airport has added another award to its collection, as has the Downtown Halifax Business Commission, and the Halifax Convention Centre.

As the Nova Centre rises in the heart of the entertainment district, the new Convention Centre is successfully booking meetings.

Think about what it means for a city of our size to be able to draw thought leaders from around world, how it opens us up to new ideas, new possibilities and partnerships.

CHANGING CITY

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This city is changing, and quickly.

It is more multicultural; it looks and feels different than it did a decade ago, or even five years ago.

Look at the Central Library. Before it opened, ambitious projections said we should prepare for 900,000 visits per year. We now anticipate annual visits of closer to 2 million.

There was a time in this city when roundabouts had a bad name. Now they are welcomed at key connection points into the downtown – improving traffic flow and safety.

We are installing more bike lanes because more people are choosing to pedal their way to work and we need to keep them safer, and soon we will build the city's first separated bike lane.

The essence of good government is the ability to say yes to a good idea, to find a way when the way is not clear, to risk criticism for reward.

We can do more to speed up necessary regulatory processes and eliminate unnecessary ones, but I think we are becoming more nimble.

Halifax's engineers once might have balked at the idea of a shared pedestrian street in the downtown, but this summer they worked with the Downtown Halifax Business Commission to turn Argyle into – well – argyle, and we saw that it's okay to take a chance.

To close down streets to cars, is to open them up to people and new activities, new possibilities.

People are coming to Halifax, many for the first time.

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Our city is hosting so more events

From the big ones: Canadian Country Music Week, Hockey Day in Canada, Web.com golf, WeDay, Men's World Curling. We hosted CIS Men's Hockey for the first time and we recently learned CIS Men's Basketball is coming back to its rightful home in Halifax.

Many of these events are taking place in our newly refurbished Scotiabank Centre.

And, of course, there are the annual favourites: Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo Nocturne, Buskers Festival, Prismatic Arts Festival, the Halifax County Exhibition, and the Clam Harbour Sandcastle Festival

And, the quirky new ones: RibFest, Oyster Fest.

These events help shape the personality of our city, and make it the kind of place people want to be.

HOUSING CRUNCH

Overall, we're doing well – the city is growing, people are working, we're making significant investments in the infrastructure that underpins the economy and improves quality of life.

But, as we know, the benefits of growth do not accrue equally to all.

Chief among our growth challenges is the rising costs of housing that puts home ownership – and rental housing – out of reach for a growing number of people.

1 in 4 Halifax households spend more than 30 % of their income on rent or a mortgage payment.

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No successful city can afford to ignore the housing crunch.

Working with the United Way, Affordable Housing Association, the provincial government, the private sector and others, we are tackling this issue from a number of fronts.

This summer we adopted a Housing First approach that will put a roof over the heads of the most chronically homeless people in this city.

Because when you start with a home you can begin to address issues that often lead people to the streets, things like addictions and mental illness.

HALIFAX AS A LEADER

This city must lead the economic recovery of this province because while Nova Scotia as a whole shrinks, Halifax grows.

Increasingly, our growth is attributable to people who are finding our city and choosing to stay here. Indeed, since 2000, immigration has accounted for half of our city's population growth.

Last month I had the pleasure of visiting the Maitland Street offices of Lixar – a tech company that is one of the most multicultural workplaces I have ever experienced.

One employee told me how he found Halifax and Lixar and then packed his bags and left London. That's what it means to be a talent magnet.

WELCOMING NEWCOMERS

I was impressed by the efforts of Premier Stephen McNeil and Immigration Minister Lena Diab to move Ottawa on broadening our

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immigration streams to include more entrepreneurs and international students.

I was heartened to hear our provincial leaders support efforts to settle more refugees in Nova Scotia.

These past months, watching desperate families crash Europe's borders and risk their lives during perilous passages by sea, have given many of us pause to think about what it really means to welcome the world.

Across Nova Scotia, faith groups, community groups, and private sector benefactors have come forward to say, "Bring them here and we will help them."

The response has been similar across the country as I have learned from co-chairing a committee of the municipal leaders convened to determine a shared approach to refugee settlement.

Whether newcomers arrive as investors in our economy or land here with little more than a determination to build a new life for themselves and their families, they will contribute to the building of a better Nova Scotia.

HIRING YOUNG, GAME CHANGER

This fall I hosted the second annual Mayor's reception for first-year international students.

It was awesome, with hundreds of bright, enthusiastic, young people from around the world eager to make a home in Halifax.

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Think where our province and city would be if we could entice more of these young graduates to stay.

I was with some of you two days ago to talk about the Halifax Partnership's Game Changer project.

I've brought along a video I want to share with you: VIDEO.

Molly who you've just met in this video is like so many young people, those born here and those who have found their way here. She sees a city that is fun, vibrant and exciting place to start a career and make a life.

Our city is bursting with people like her, and I've invited a few of these well-educated young people, stand-outs among their peers, to join us here today.

Allow me to introduce them:

1. Daniel del Castillo Buiza:

Daniel did his first engineering degree in his native Spain, but chose Dalhousie for his Masters. He has a graduate degree in Civil engineering with a specialty in structural design

2. Chen Xie (ZEE)

Chen is a Finance student at Saint Mary's. He placed third in the Scotiabank "You're Hired" interview competition. He's a big volunteer and received the Alumni Scholarship from SMU this year.

3. Meggie MacMichael

Meggie recently completed her Masters of Environmental Studies from Dalhousie. She received the prestigious Killam Scholarship and has participated in a number of conversations on youth retention.

4. Chiedza (CHED-ZA) Sadomba (SA DOM BA)

Chiedza came to Halifax from Zimbabwe to attend Saint Mary's. After only two-and-a-half years at university, she graduated summa cum laude in International Development studies, and was her class valedictorian.

Everywhere I look in this room I see people who give back to our community. I want to introduce you to two more students:

Michael Li and **You Wu** are both working on their MPAs at Dalhousie, but they also started V-Care, an organization they that encourages international students to volunteer.

Long before graduation they are already making a contribution to a better Halifax.

I hope each of these young people leaves here with business cards in their pockets. Because they are the people – and **you** are the people – that will shape the next Halifax.

What I'm asking of you is simple:

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Hire someone fresh out of school. If you can't do that, then offer a co-op placement or a paid internship. And, if that's too much, then become a part of the Partnership's Connector program – help a new grad or a newcomer build their network and find their place here.

If we allow too many of them to take their education and skills elsewhere, we're collectively saying no to future growth, and yes to letting our economy wither on the vine of past growth.

We *can* work together – public sector and private, as well as NGOs – to solve the people issue, we *can* kick start a different kind of economy for Halifax, and Nova Scotia.

CHANGING CITY

Our city is maturing, recognizing its potential, embracing the qualities that make it special.

I think we are coming to understand that we can be different and still be Halifax; we can be Halifax and still be Dartmouth...or Bedford...or Musquodoboit.

When a mural in Dartmouth's small Joseph Howe Park began to deteriorate, it was replaced with Howe's famous challenge:

“What is for the public good?”

This simple, direct question is as relevant today as it was 180 years ago.

In this age of immediate feedback – twitter, Facebook – it is clear that everyone has their own perception of public good (and many share those views widely and critically).

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It may seem safer to stand still, tread water, and keep one's head down as opposed to taking action, which brings risk.

But, we have way too much evidence that in NS status quo is no longer an option. We need to do things differently, and then build on those successes.

Good things are happening here in our community and increasingly the province.

I believe our city is becoming more prosperous, more welcoming, more open, safer, greener, and more vibrant.

We are playing a more prominent role in our country and the world. And we are more curious which is characteristic of all successful organizations.

Together we are answering the call of one of our most famous citizens, pursuing the public good, realizing our potential and building a better Halifax.