

**State of the City Address
Mayor Eddie Francis
City of Windsor
March 17, 2008
Chrysler Theatre
St. Clair Centre for the Arts**

Thank you, Gordon.

Members of City Council...

Distinguished guests...

Friends.

I speak with you tonight at a most important and critical time in our city's history.

A time that has tested our resolve, and that has made it hard for many local families, friends and neighbours to remain confident in the face of continued uncertainty.

While a great future lies ahead for the prosperity of our city, the recent past has hit us hard.

I see it in the single mother ... carefully looking for the lowest prices when buying groceries.

I hear it in the voice of the small business person, worried about making payroll.

And I see it in the eyes of our school children – who know how hard their father or mother is looking to find a new job. Children who are hopeful that they will be spared the experience of starting over in another school, in another city, with new friends. Global economic shifts have taken their toll on Windsor.

We see it and hear it in our headlines.

Company Falls Victim to Rising Loonie.

Grim Outlook on Jobs.

Ontario's Auto Parts Bleeding Continues

We live with these headlines every day.

There have been tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs lost in Southwestern Ontario and Michigan.

In fact, Time Canada recently estimated that nearly 330,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in Canada over the past five years.

Headline – headline after headline.

Account after account, echoing the pain many of our residents are feeling.

Forces beyond our control have caused many sleepless nights in our city.

And while few communities have been immune from the decline in manufacturing, Windsor is different.

We are a border city. And, our economy is more integrated with that of the United States, which has been hit harder than Canada.

We are living a harder, more intense, and more difficult slowdown than any of the other border cities, and other parts of Ontario.

Manufacturing in Windsor – Essex accounts for nearly one quarter of our workforce.

Since 2001, it is estimated that more than 10,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in our community.

Another sector that is critical to our local economy is also struggling - tourism.

Tourism is facing the triple threat of high dollar, border issues, and competition from other casinos across the river.

In 1999, Windsor welcomed 7.9 million visitors from the US, and enjoyed an economic impact of \$687 million. In 2006 visits to Windsor from the US had dropped to 3.5 million with an economic impact of \$324 million.

Most recent tourism figures show that in December 2007, US border crossings into Ontario fell by 21.6 percent year over year.

And we are not out of the woods yet.

The US economy is predicted to experience a deeper and more prolonged slowdown, driven in large part by the collapse in the American housing market and the ensuing credit crunch.

US sales figures released last Thursday confirmed that consumers have been closing their wallets.

Energy costs are rising.

Food prices are up.

U.S. housing prices are dropping, and people are putting more money into their gas tanks leaving less in their wallets.

All this affects us.

As Americans' personal balance sheets strain, their discretionary spending and purchases stop.

For us, that means fewer mini-van sales.

And it means fewer people coming to our Casino, hotels, bars, and restaurants.

So friends...

The State of our City is in transition.

We are facing important decisions and significant changes.

Changes that will shape what we are and who we are for decades to come.

It is a time of change, and of opportunity.

Let there be no mistake. Creating jobs, and re-invigorating our local economy, has to be the *number one* priority of Windsor City Council.

And it has to become this community's collective and shared responsibility.

Bringing jobs and prosperity, to continue positioning Windsor for success in the new economy, must be at the heart of each of our decisions. More jobs for Windsorites has to be our primary goal.

Despite the challenges of the American economy – challenges that are having a disproportionate impact on our city – I remain confident.

And I remain confident for a reason: our fundamentals are strong.

Stronger than they have been in a long, long time.

We have the geographic, physical, economic and cultural foundations required to succeed in the new economy.

Our workforce is well-educated.

We are home to great educational institutions and health care facilities.

And we have prudently managed the financial position of our city by fixing the basics.

Actions we have taken over the past four years have created the conditions for future prosperity.

Attracting jobs and investment requires safe streets and low crime rates. That's why we've given our police service the tools it needs to succeed, and cracked down on illegal guns, gangs and drugs.

Attracting jobs and investment means managing our municipality's books prudently. It means creating a fiscal climate that provides us with the flexibility we enjoy today.

Attracting jobs and investment means ensuring that basic services are modern, efficient and working. Lights go on when you turn on the switch, and water flows when you turn on the tap.

And attracting jobs and investment means having a plan.

Reaching out to new industries, diversifying our economy, and making the right policy decisions. That's why our Economic Development Commission held an economic summit – bringing together 275 people from across all sectors to develop an economic road map.

With experts from agri-business, health sciences, education, and manufacturing.

In fixing the basics ... in planning for the future ... we are building upon our existing strengths.

We are taking the steps that will ensure our long-term economic prosperity.

And yet, we need jobs now. We need *Jobs Today!*

The challenges facing our region are different today than 30 years ago.

The tools we need, and the ideas we must employ have to be different than they were 30 years ago.

And how we approach our challenges must also be different.

If we don't move forward aggressively, with great determination and strategic focus, we will be left behind.

That's why today, I'm proposing a five-point plan that will help create the jobs we need.

I call it our *Jobs Today* Program.

We cannot wait for the economic stimulus policies of other levels of government to bear fruit.

The jobs and economic growth we need, cannot wait until five years from now...

Or ten years from now...

We need jobs and economic growth ...today!

This program is new and different. It represents fresh thinking. And that's because the traditional tools available to municipalities are old and outdated.

They don't deliver with the speed we need.

Jobs Today is an initial proposal. A set of initiatives to help our Economic Development Commission. To help our community attract jobs. To keep jobs.

And bring investment back during these difficult times.

These are initial suggestions. Ones that will stimulate debate at Council, and encourage the development of other ideas.

Jobs Today isn't intended to be the only solution, but a strong beginning.

The first part of this program, is a new Economic Development Investment Fund. A fund that will provide direct investment into smart projects that leverage our local strengths, and create jobs.

A fund that will provide for training and retraining of our workforce. A fund that will allow us to compete.

The Economic Development Investment Fund would be modelled on an approach used by the City of Kitchener.

In 2004, Kitchener City Council approved a \$110 million dollar economic development investment fund.

It was the first project of its kind in the province, and possibly the country.

It allowed the City of Kitchener to encourage investments in its downtown core. It provided opportunities for the growth and modernization of the City's manufacturing sector. It acted as a stimulus for development.

It is exactly the kind of stimulus that Windsor needs today.

How will we finance an Economic Development Investment Fund of our own?

By leveraging money from the new National Community Development Fund, recently established by the federal government, to be administered by the provinces.

And by taking the bold step of putting municipal dollars on the table, to make the promise of these new jobs a reality.

The federal money is there. The very reason the National Community Development Fund was established by the federal government was to help communities like ours.

We need those dollars. We need that assistance.

Thanks to our city's prudent financial management over the past four years, we are in a position to make this happen – by putting existing money on the table up front, leveraging federal and provincial dollars to rebuild our economy.

To bring jobs back. And to make things happen.

I will also be asking City Council to make a historic, one-time \$30 million dollar investment from existing sources to kick-start this fund.

Kitchener needed a ten-year tax levy to finance their fund. Our strong financial position means we can do this *without* new taxes, and *without* new debt.

We will also be inviting Essex County to consider supporting this initiative, and to stand with us as partners committed to an investment in the future of this region.

In all, we have the potential to build a \$100 million Economic Development Investment Fund.

If approved, our Fund will be allocated on a project by project basis, subject to detailed business plans. These business plans will need to build in criteria and safeguards similar to existing provincial and federal programs.

Proposed projects must be new initiatives, not already announced or planned, and must also help achieve the strategic priorities within the sectors developed by the Economic Development Commission at its recent summit.

We will need the help of our Development Commission to establish detailed criteria related to accessing money from the fund, and to help ensure that these taxpayer dollars are being used as effectively and efficiently as possible. I want to thank the Board and the Commission staff for work already done and encourage them to be actively engaged during this critical transition and renewal time in our city.

In order to be funded, projects would need to demonstrate a sound and real business case that would deliver real results.

Our Economic Development Investment Fund would not be used to fund an entire project, but a percentage of a project.

And it will only help fund projects if there are jobs created.

Strategic investments by government can work. One need look no further than to the Ontario Automotive Investment Strategy. That strategic investment of \$500 million dollars leveraged more than \$7 billion dollars in new investments, and anchored thousands of high-value jobs.

In that case, every \$100 million dollars invested leveraged an additional \$1.3 billion dollars.

Which included enhancements and new investments made by Chrysler and Valiant here in Windsor.

So with Council approval, we will begin engaging the provincial government, Essex County, and our regional Economic Development Commission to make this vision a reality.

The second part in our *Jobs Today* program, is job training.

We've already had tremendous success in accessing provincial funding to help employers train people – helping them move from the Ontario Works social assistance program right into paid employment.

These job training funds were part of the reason that Sutherland Global chose Windsor.

In 2007, Windsor's Social Services Department contracted with Sutherland Global Services in a municipal - provincial cost sharing partnership.

It funded a 4-week skills enhancement and customer service training program.

The Province contributed 80 percent of the training cost which was \$400,000 dollars. The City contributed 20 percent, or \$100,000 dollars.

Thanks to the job training investments we made, 469 people who had been on social assistance here in Windsor got jobs.

For our combined one-time investment of \$500,000 dollars the City and the Province are now saving \$949,000 dollars annually.

Nearly doubling our investment in the first year alone.

That's just smart.

This job training program provided subsidized training, which was attractive to a job creating investor like Sutherland. It also reduced our social services costs.

But most importantly, it provided people with an opportunity to work, to develop their skills, and to be independent.

One of the participants described it best when he wrote the following:

“I am now a full time employee with a much broader knowledge base and confidence level than ever before. I surely hope that the City of Windsor can keep this program in effect for future Ontario Works recipients to take advantage of and get their lives back on track.”

It's stories like these, that make me so proud of the people of this city.

Through this job training fund, people go from collecting social assistance cheques – to paying taxes as income earners. And they get their lives back on track. Becoming success stories in their own right.

We want to build upon this success and make this job training open and available to everyone that needs it. So we're actively pursuing ways to make more use of provincial job training funding.

For example, recently we met with Provincial government officials to draw their attention to the fact that Windsor hasn't been getting its fair share of employment funding. It's time for that to change.

With additional employment funding, we can promote new partnerships with other employers – like we did with Sutherland. At the same time, we can promote the development of programs to support and assist unemployed people and their families.

And thanks to the leadership and commitment of staff from the City's Social and Health Services Department, we've also created an Employment Action Committee.

This committee brings together members of our Social Services team, numerous community agencies, and representatives from the provincial and federal governments.

Their goals are to help promote awareness of programs that may be available for unemployed people, and to identify and close gaps in services to help people and their families.

It's all part of a broader effort to be there to help people who have been affected by shifts in the global economy to get back on their feet again – and into new jobs.

I also want to commend our labour leaders – who have been leading the charge when it comes to emphasizing the importance of skills assessment and retraining. They know how critical it is to ensure that workers' skills are being updated to meet the demands of our modern economy. They appreciate that helping displaced workers to re-enter the work force helps attract employers, helps our community, and it helps families.

To our labour leaders: I thank you, and I invite you to join us in helping shape a program that will allow people to gain new skills, re-train, and work again.

Job training is crucial to the success of any economic development program. And we are working hard to make sure we give it the attention it deserves.

So to our Chamber of Commerce, to our entrepreneurs, to our employers: work with us in making job training and job creation happen. Look ahead to economic recovery, and use the job training dollars that are available to you, today.

This will help your businesses succeed, and help our city to prosper.

This brings me to the third part of our *Jobs Today* program – long-distance commuting.

As mayor, I spend a lot of time in airports, on my way back and forth to Toronto and Ottawa.

Without fail, either on the Friday midnight flight back to Windsor or the 6 am flight out, I meet residents making the same trek through Toronto, going out west to Calgary, Edmonton or Saskatoon to work.

We usually get to talking. And inevitably, I hear personal stories of family members leaving to work and live out west in order to earn a living. To support themselves, and their families.

I've met the father who has been away from his child for a month, sometimes up to two months. And who missed his child's birthday.

Or about a Windsor family that packed up everything to move out west in search of stability and a pay cheque – only to return home to Windsor seven months later, because it was too expensive to raise a family out West, even with that pay cheque.

These are the new realities of tough economic times. We risk losing people – and not getting them back.

Hearing about these personal sacrifices has weighed heavily on me.

These stories inspired me to do something about the situation.

I asked myself: how do we keep people here?

How do we keep people here while we are going through this transition, helping them to earn an income and provide for their families in Windsor?

How do we keep that income in our area, so that it can be spent in our shops and used to stimulate our economy?

Recently, at a meeting of the Big Cities Mayors' Caucus I spoke with my colleagues about our challenges. And in turn the mayors of Calgary, Edmonton and Saskatoon told me of their issues and challenges.

They told me about how there is an ever-increasing labour shortage out west. They need skilled tradespeople, and people to fill any number of construction-related positions.

Yet at the same time, some just don't have the capacity – in housing, in schools, or in their electricity, sewer or water capacity – to handle so many entire families coming into their cities.

Remember, it wasn't too long ago, that they were going through the challenging economic times we are experiencing today.

So we've started to develop a plan. A plan to help long-distance commuters living in Windsor to access jobs that exist today in Western Canada but to keep their roots at home in our community.

This first-of-its kind solution will help people to get the jobs they need, without displacing them from our local economy, without separating them from their families and without us losing them for good.

Our Long-Distance Commuting program would allow people to commute to jobs in Western Canada, while keeping their homes and their families here in Windsor.

Is it difficult to work in another city, leaving your family during the week? It is. But it is equally difficult being out of work.

This program will provide people with a means during our economic transition to earn a living while bringing and spending that paycheque back home - in our city, and at our businesses.

Truth is, airports are becoming the new bus depots. Not just places people go through to go on a holiday, but places people go through to get to work.

So, working with Mayor Bronconnier of Calgary, Mayor Mandel of Edmonton – who is a Windsor Native – and Mayor Atchison of Saskatoon, we will begin to explore how to get this done.

This won't be simple. It will require careful planning and implementation. But all of us are committed to finding ways to make this happen.

Many stakeholders will need to come to the table – including the airlines – to negotiate charter fares. We will be seeking financial assistance from existing programs, to reduce the financial and emotional impact on our long-distance commuters.

It will include negotiating arrangements that could allow people to fly home for birthdays, for the weekend, and for important family events or emergencies without facing an undue financial burden.

We will engage the provincial and federal agencies responsible for the migration of workers, and the associations and trade unions that handle inter-provincial certifications.

Lots to do, lots of details to work out, and lots of people to speak with.

But planning is well under way.

And we are committed to making this unique, innovative solution work.

So this truly is a win-win situation.

The Western cities win – because they get the highly-skilled workers they need, without needing to provide them with full-time accommodation.

We win – because while our workers will be earning money in another province, they will spend the money they earn here at home.

And our families...they remain a family and are able to stay at home where they belong: here in Windsor.

In the coming months, the Economic Development Commission and city will be hosting an open house.

We want to assess the number of people interested, and gain a better understanding of the number of people already making the trek.

The fourth part of our *Jobs Today* program ... is to continue building on our strengths in manufacturing.

Manufacturing matters! Period!

Economists and urban consultants will tell you: adjust for the new economy by building on your existing strengths.

And when it comes to the manufacturing skills...

Knowledge...

And innovation in our community ... we are second to none in the world.

There can be no vision of the future that does not include a vibrant, competitive auto industry. Our automotive manufacturers and our workforce can compete with the best in the world, and win.

The story of our city is told within the walls of our manufacturing plants.

Our cities ethos – our soul – emanates from the shop floor.

The strong hands and innovative spirit of our forbears, built this great city we enjoy today.

We will build upon their legacy – that foundation of Windsor that is manufacturing and automotive innovation.

But this won't just happen by itself. We must prepare, and we must act.

Unfair trade practices need to be eliminated. Canadian workers and the Canadian auto industry have earned it, and deserve it.

We must also be in a state of constant renewal within our auto industry – undertaking research and development, continually innovating, focusing on the vehicles of tomorrow, and always striving to remain on the cutting edge.

Which is why we need to get the Ford deal done.

For our part – the city is ready to play a role, by offering tax incentives designed to keep jobs here, and create new ones over time.

The province has already put \$30 million on the table.

But we need more help. And that's why tonight, I am calling once again upon the federal government to do its part. To make this happen. And to build upon Windsor's automotive legacy for the next generation.

Building upon our manufacturing legacy also means adjusting to the new economy, and finding different opportunities and markets for our products and skills.

We must take our manufacturing knowledge and help our local industries access new markets, and new opportunities.

Ontario's aerospace industry is made up of 350 firms who employ thousands of engineers, technicians, and scientists – generating billions in annual revenue.

Our manufacturers can supply the aerospace industry. Valiant's Solcz family and Guy DiPonio are great examples.

Tomorrow, I will be visiting Southwestern Manufacturing Inc., a firm that is manufacturing goods here in Windsor for the Western Canadian market.

I applaud Mayor John Millson, for championing Windsor and region to businesses out west, and working on exciting projects like the oils sand development.

When I was in Germany, I found people looking for someone to manufacture their goods.

Our market isn't just Southern Ontario and Michigan. Our market is the world.

We have to get out there. Sell ourselves around the world.

I am going to be aggressive. We all need to be aggressive. We have what others need, and we have to be hungry for their business.

This brings me to the fifth and final part of our *Jobs Today* program: renewing and investing in our infrastructure.

Let's remember the basics.

Modern, efficient infrastructure has a positive impact on a city's economic competitiveness, and its ability to create jobs, attract investment, and improve the quality of life of its residents.

But in times like these, we need to remind ourselves of that basic fact.

It is also true that infrastructure investment helps stimulate an economy in hard times.

Our City has developed a five-year, fully funded capital plan that will result in record investments - nearly a half of billion dollars.

So, following this logic, we come to a no-brainer: it's time to get our new border crossing **done and done right!**

Without question, there has been no other issue that has been as time consuming, energy draining, grey-hair producing, or grief-causing ... as the task of getting our border crossing started.

No one has wanted to get on with the construction of a new border crossing more than the people of Windsor.

But we *have* to get it right.

Because Windsor is more than a trade hub.

We are more than a transportation link.

We are more than a construction site. We are a community.

And while we want to get on with the job of building a new border crossing, we *also* want to create a better tomorrow.

Some would have you believe that this Council – and the people of Windsor – have been standing in the way. That we have been holding things back.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact - the border isn't strictly a municipal issue. But we care passionately about it, given the long-term impact it will have on our city ... our neighbourhoods ... and our quality of life.

As a result, we've been caught up in the DRIC process. *Their* process.

Their timelines.

But we can't be distracted by imperfect and second-rate plans imposed upon us by other levels of government.

Let's remember how we got to where we are today.

In 2004, in our State of the City address, I said:

Too often, this City has settled for second best. We will not settle for second best. We will not accept a reactive fix.

We will, and must, get this right.

We believed that then, and we believe it now.

In 2005, in that year's State of the City Address, I said the following:

Our city, our province, and our country must finally solve the border problems that have hindered our quality of life, our economy, and our security for far too long.

We have a world-class plan. But as we wait, other jurisdictions – like China, India, and parts of Europe – are moving forward.

Friends – we can no longer afford to wait. The time for action is now!

We believed that then, and we believe it now.

In 2006, I said this:

We will continue to press for a solution that gets trucks off of our city streets, out of our neighbourhoods, and improves the quality of our lives.

We believed that then, and we believe it now.

And last year, in 2007, I said this:

Our citizens deserve a better quality of life, a healthier environment and a solution that gets trucks off of city streets and out of our neighbourhoods.

Our children, our community, our city, our region, our future cannot afford anything less.

That's been our position, and it remains our position.

We believed that then, and we believe it now.

No one has the right to accuse us of changing our position. Or of not wanting to move forward with a border crossing solution.

We have been consistent from day one.

We want it done right.

Faced with our concerns, other levels of government told us to create our own plan.

So we did.

But let's be clear. Our plan – Greenlink – is not what we ultimately might have preferred.

It represents a compromise. It shows our willingness to listen and adjust, and take other points of view into consideration.

It represents a fair and reasonable approach that can dramatically improve the flow of traffic across our border ... while maintaining and expanding the important links that connect our city.

Greenlink helps our environment, it connects and protects our communities, and it improves our quality of life.

Some have said that Greenlink is too expensive.

It is not.

DRIC chose a corridor through the city, rather than across un-developed land.

Not surprisingly, building a road through the city is more expensive. But we didn't choose the corridor – they did.

DRIC chose the corridor, knowing, understanding, and accepting the fact that going through the city, carving through a neighbourhood, would cost more than building upon empty land.

It was their choice.

And we accept that.

But what others must accept, is that this new border crossing isn't just a cost.

It is a strategic investment.

A strategic investment in helping our economy.

A strategic investment in helping our environment.

A strategic investment in connecting and protecting our communities.

A strategic investment in improving our quality of life.

We can't, and we shouldn't, pinch pennies when it comes to these kinds of projects that are integral to our residents, to our city, and to our future.

We should not focus on the cost today, but on the purpose tomorrow.

This investment will transform our city, and transform our region.

In the words of a well-known, U.S.-based community planner and strategic policy advisor:

“Reinvigorating older industrial cities demands that they start thinking creatively again about the kinds of transformative investments that can have a true catalytic effect on urban redevelopment.

Milwaukee, for example, spent \$45 million dollars to bring down the East Park Thruway in 2003 and restore the street grid beneath it, freeing up nearly 20 acres of land for new development”.

That's what Greenlink is!

A transformational investment. The type of investment that improves a city, an economy, and a quality of life.

What puzzles me, is that I know that our provincial and federal governments get this.

They understand transformational investments.

They understand that these kinds of investments can transform a region for the better.

The \$17.5 billion dollar action plan for infrastructure and transportation in the Greater Toronto Area – that's a transformational investment.

Renewing railway links from downtown Toronto to Peterborough – that's a transformational investment.

Why shouldn't Windsor expect the same? Why shouldn't this gateway, North America's busiest border crossing, deserve the same?

So, where does all this back and forth leave us now?

With the DRIC proposal on the one hand ... and Greenlink on the other.

With a provincial government that wants to expand Manning Road first ... which would put trucks on to E.C. Row.

And with our plan – Greenlink. A bold and achievable plan that will keep trucks *off* of E.C. Row.

Greenlink has been conscientiously developed. It has been evaluated, and it has been thought-through.

Decisions taken over the next several weeks on a new border crossing, will impact our city for the next century.

I speak with you today, not only as your Mayor. But also as a proud citizen of our city. A Windsorite who loves this city, and who believes in its tremendous potential.

I must be blunt and direct regarding exactly what we need.

Sandra Pupatello, Bruce Crozier, and Dwight Duncan – help us out!

We have seen what you can deliver for your city and our region.

Now that the decision regarding one of the most important projects in our region's history is upon us, together we can redefine the future face of our city, and our region.

We ask you to come to the table. To work with us.

Today, I am asking ... I am pleading ... on behalf of 218 000 people in Windsor ...for you to hear our call. You're well-respected and senior people within the provincial government – and others within Cabinet and Caucus will listen to you.

Work with your City to advocate for your community. Come back to the table, and help us make Greenlink happen.

I will be sending a letter to the Ministers of Transportation, to Sandra Pupatello in her capacity as Economic Development Minister, Dwight Duncan as Finance Minister, and to the Premier himself.

In it, I will be asking the government to come to the table. To follow our lead, and give a little.

To do the right thing for the future of this city, this province, and this country.

And that right thing is to support Greenlink. To support our plan.

To our provincial leaders, I ask:

Why can we not dare to be better?

To build something that will make us truly proud? Something that will be admired years from now – and seen as the first step in the renewal of our city.

Greenlink is real. It is doable. And it will create the border crossing we need ... and build the community we want.

And, to the people of Windsor...

I'm here to tell you that your City Council needs your help.

We must leave absolutely no doubt in the minds of decision makers, about where the people of Windsor stand on this issue.

When it matters, the people of this city come together. We unite. And we act.

Later this week, City Council and I will be sharing with you a number of ways you can become involved. Sending a message to the Premier, to our Ministers, and to the decision makers at Queens Park.

You will be seeing pamphlets urging action in support of Greenlink.

You will be seeing the messages on the sides of our buses.

You will also hear and learn of more work that we have done in support of Greenlink, including more air quality studies.

You will hear the call to take action and inform our provincial government of our strong views on this most important issue.

So I urge you...

Write a letter.

Send an email.

Call the office of your MPP, and the Office of the Premier.

Your voice matters. They listen. Your efforts, will help to make a difference for generations.

Make no mistake – we are in control of our own destiny.

And with that in mind, I was reminded by a good friend that we need to change the conversation.

I recently read a policy paper from the Brookings Institute.

They studied approximately 65 older industrial cities that have a set of economic challenges similar to Windsor.

Baltimore, Buffalo, Saginaw, Pittsburgh, and others. All cities with an industrial and manufacturing history, all cities facing similar challenges today.

All struggling to overcome the painful legacy of severe industrial decline and population losses.

Yet, all of them have focused on fully leveraging their physical, cultural, and economic assets to fuel their recovery.

They focused on their economic strengths.

They emphasized their educational and medical facilities to concentrate on research and development – seeking competitive advantage in today’s knowledge economy.

They promoted their creativity, and their diversity.

They renewed their infrastructure, leveraged the value of their airports, embraced the strengths of their workforce, their amenities, restaurants, entertainment, cultural, and tourism potential.

They worked hard. Made tangible investments and made the policy changes needed to succeed in the new economy.

But that was only half of the story.

Because they also needed to change the conversation.

In Baltimore, a city that had been written off. In a city that experienced high crime rates and rampant drug use, the residents drove around the city displaying bumper stickers that said “I love city life”.

That’s a bold, proud statement.

They changed the conversation.

In other cities, cities that had been worn down by negative headlines, depressed economies, and a pervasive negative attitude, they said *enough*. We need to be proud again.

They changed the conversation.

We need to change the conversation.

Four years ago, people were concerned that our downtown needed new investment and projects that were always talked about, never got done.

So over the past four years, we have secured a new convention centre.

A new hotel.

A five thousand seat entertainment centre.

And the premier name in gaming – Caesar’s Windsor.

We built a brand new transit terminal.

We brought St. Clair College and their School of the Creative Arts to our downtown.

We made significant and real investments into our Waterfront and streetscaping.

We need to change the conversation.

Four years ago, people worried about the financial position of our city. About getting Windsor's fiscal situation back on track. Our per-capita debt was among the highest in Ontario. Our bond rating risked getting worse, increasing the cost we pay on what was already too much debt.

Four years ago, people were complaining that we were not keeping up with roads and sewers.

So, in the past four years, we have reduced our municipal debt.

We've taken control of our financial situation. The cost of our operations is rising less than the rate of inflation.

Today, our residential property tax increases are among the lowest in the province.

At the same time, our capital budget for 2008 is \$89 million dollars – an 84 percent increase compared to 2001.

We will be spending another half a billion on roads and sewers over the next 5 years.

And that does not include the \$100 million dollars we secured from the Border Infrastructure Fund for Walker and Howard.

Our bond rating has improved.

Friends, we're back on the right track. And we need to change the conversation.

Four years ago, we didn't have a regional economic development strategy...today we do.

Four years ago, the arena was still a 30 year joke.

Today, we look forward to the opening of the new WFCU Centre and hosting the 2009 OHL All star game, and the Special Olympics.

Four years ago, no one was thinking about the potential of our airport. It was just there.

Today, we are using the airport to attract jobs, encourage development, and to work for the people of our city.

We have taken control of our assets – ensuring our airport, tunnel and infrastructure are there for us, operating more efficiently and effectively.

We will have a new \$110 million dollar engineering school.

We have attracted outside investment into our city.

We need to change the conversation.

We have managed our city intelligently.

We have taken the right tangible steps towards renewed prosperity.

Now - we need to change the conversation.

Talk up Windsor, instead of putting her down.

And what a story we have to tell!

We have a diverse community, rich in history, with a strong sense of civic pride and togetherness.

We have arts and culture...

An amazing waterfront ...

And we're located next to one of the largest metropolitan regions in North America – with access to professional sports and big city amenities.

We have been named as the best city for investment in 2007-2008 by FDI.

Our research and development has been recognized for its significance, and our researchers lauded for their important and cutting-edge work.

Our University and College are premier academic facilities.

Our workforce is highly-skilled, and second to none when it comes to automotive sophistication and advanced manufacturing.

We should be proud of that!

We need to change the conversation.

Friends, I'm not just cheerleading.

The way we speak of our city impacts the way others view us.

And the way others view us impacts their thoughts, actions, and decisions about Windsor.

Recently we have been meeting with airline executives attempting to secure new routes and airline carriers for our airport.

We were told by a national carrier currently operating here, that they have not heard or seen a single positive story about our city.

A recent front page article by the Detroit News painted a negative picture of our city.

Do you really believe we're going to bring people back when Windsorites are reinforcing the negatives and not accentuating the positives?

Show me a city that does not have challenges. Show me a city that does not have issues. They all do.

In business, you never let your customer or your competition know your struggles.

You accentuate and promote your strengths.

We need to do the same.

We can get ahead ... if we change the conversation.

Underlying all of the initiatives we are pursuing – and supporting everything that we must do to strengthen our economy and our city – is having the right attitude.

We are all stewards of the image of our city.

Promoting Windsor matters.

Talking up our city does two things. It improves our own self-image, and it encourages others to come to our city.

Praising Windsor is so easy. It costs nothing, and does so much to lift our spirits – serving as a reminder of just how fortunate we are.

I recently read a letter to the editor in the Star, that made me very proud.

It was from a couple, recent retirees, who had just moved to Windsor from Maryland. They showered our city with praise, complimenting us on our parks...

Our low crime rate...

Our great restaurants...

And the kindness of our people.

That's what I'm talking about. That's changing the conversation. Talking up the great things about our city, isn't just the job of newcomers like Peggy and Allen Shearn.

Or of City Council.

Or of our Economic Development Commission.

It's everyone's job.

Because we do have so much to be proud of, when it comes to our city.

Don't take my word for it – take the Financial Times of London's word for it.

This world-renowned and respected publication rated Windsor as the number one place in North America to do business, among small-sized cities for 2007 and 2008.

Or ask the people from Amica Mature Lifestyles.

This Canadian-owned and operated company is an innovative leader in developing properties targeted at the seniors' market.

Currently, they have 25 residences in Canada, and nine under development including Windsor.

They are sophisticated. They do their homework.

And they chose Windsor.

They saw our city as a place of opportunity.

That's why together with Mady Development, they're building a \$50 million dollar, twelve story, 177 suite retirement facility – including a 29-suite floor for assisted living.

This will open open in the summer of 2009, and create 50 new jobs.

When they looked at Windsor, they saw positive economic fundamentals – despite what was happening in the auto industry.

They saw an under-served and growing seniors population, and believe that Windsor is an attractive community for people to retire.

Amica Mature Lifestyles is pro-Windsor. We can and should be, too,

When it comes to the way we speak about our city...

What we communicate about our city to one another, and to others...

We are in complete control of our destiny.

In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, “No one can make you feel inferior without your permission.”

And as of tonight, as of this very moment ... we’re taking control of our image. And we’re going to be positive about our community.

Our image is not only about what we say, it is also about what we do.

And the City is doing its part.

In the next month, we will be convening a strategic session of Council to address action items that have been developed through our Community Strategic plan process.

It is my hope Council will commit to acting on all of those CSP initiatives that deal with the way the city looks.

There are few sites as depressing as abandoned homes, storefronts, or gas stations. And the number of derelict properties in Windsor is disproportionately high given the prosperity we do have.

These abandoned buildings are a blight on our city.

That’s why we need to take action.

When it comes to the look of our city, small things can make a world of difference.

This is especially important in downtown Windsor, along the waterfront, and on major thoroughfares.

Let's consider the implementation of a green streets program, and encourage a tree planting and flower planting effort.

Or have Council consider closing off downtown streets, as we did for the Indy race, to create walkable, connected spaces.

This may sound trite – but it isn't.

It will help make our city, a livelier city. A place where people come together more frequently and interact with one another. A place with greater social connectedness.

This is the approach taken by Mayors in other cities – and it has worked.

The former Mayor of Bogota, Colombia was recently quoted in an article in EnRoute magazine, as saying “We need to walk. We need to be around other people. We need beauty. We need contact with nature.”

That Mayor's initiatives, which included spending millions on parks, bike paths, and pedestrian walkways, are credited on having a dramatic impact on the happiness and social liveability of his city.

According to the article in EnRoute, polls indicated that optimism in Boata increased significantly. Violent crime went down dramatically.

Initiatives to make the city more beautiful – and to encourage people to come together – had a dramatic impact on their happiness and wellbeing.

Mayor Bloomberg of New York says that growth is an expression of optimism. A belief in possibility. Absolutely!

In order for us to grow our economy, and to grow our city, we need to express optimism.

To believe in our own possibilities.

This sounds very simple. But if we don't believe in ourselves and our own potential, others will not believe in us and we won't achieve the growth and prosperity that we should.

So we need to change the conversation. And we need to work together to sell this city. To promote this city. To make this city better.

Is there a potential convention that we want to bring to our city? Let me know, and I'll help.

Do you know about businesses or other entrepreneurs looking for a world-class location in which to succeed and thrive? I'll call them.

Do you know any physicians or medical professionals who want to practice in a place like Windsor? Let me know, and I will help bring them here.

With the right attitude...

And with the right initiatives ...

We can and we will reach our potential.

That doesn't mean families aren't struggling today. They are.

It doesn't mean that business leaders aren't having sleepless nights. They are.

And it doesn't mean that your City Council members and I, aren't working tirelessly to find new and different solutions ... that will provide jobs now. *We* are. There are those who would write Windsor off.

Demean us.

Or go so far as to call us a Ghost Town. That's what we hear from naysayers, who offer no ideas, and no solutions.

We will prove those naysayers wrong.

Because we have an army – an army of proud Windsorites – business people, teachers, civil servants, librarians, nurses, doctors, students, factory workers, farmers, volunteers, mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters.

We are Windsor. We will change the conversation. We will all work with an undeniable spirit and determination to make this community strong.

And a community driven by the spirit of its citizens will never die.

Together –

We are strong.

We are a tight and tenacious community.

We don't run at the first sign of trouble – that's not our way.

Throughout our history, Windsor has had pivotal moments.

In his book, *The Birth of a City...* Carl Morgan reminds us of our Windsor.

Here's what he said:

It was a good time to be growing up in Windsor.

A proud, feisty place that elbowed its way up from a muddy little stagecoach hamlet in 1792 to a village in 1854 to a robust frontier town in 1858 and now as a fledgling city that would soon blossom onto the mercantile and political heart of the Western District of Upper Canada.

Back then, there was a sense of spunkiness and a sense of progress, and a sense of knowing who you were and where you were going.

That same spirit has been with us throughout our history, and it remains with us today.

Like the battle in Dieppe in 1942 ... when the men and women of our community showed the world their bravery and valour.

Like the recession in the 1980's, when unemployment in our city reached 11.7 percent and interest rates were as high as 17 percent.

Each time, we as a city have come together.

Done something to meet the challenge of the day, and come out better and stronger.

Today, we are here, and we are strong, we are proud, and committed to our city.

We will work hard, to make tomorrow better than today.

Will you join me, will you join your neighbours, and will you commit yourself to making our community our city a greater place to call home?

I leave you with the words of John F. Kennedy, from his inaugural address in 1961. He said, and I quote:

“All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet.”

“But let us begin.”

Let us seek inspiration from our past. Let us see the challenges before us in their proper context. Let us believe in our common purpose.

And when it comes to our ambitious plans – plans that may seem daunting or overwhelming – let *us* begin.

Thank you very much.