

**MAYOR'S STATE OF THE CITY
TUESDAY APRIL 13, 2010
NOON – SHAW CONFERENCE CENTRE**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you for the kind introduction, Bernie.

Welcome

- Council Colleagues
- Lynn
- MLAs/Regional Colleagues
- Ladies and Gentlemen

[personal comments/thanks to Chamber for organizing/etc.]

Thank you all for coming today.

The opportunity to address the annual achievements and ambitions of our city continues to be one of my favourite activities in the Mayor's calendar.

The goal of this speech is always to wrap context around the events of the past year and to comment on the path forward.

This speech is an important point of accountability.

Public promise must meet actual achievement.

This vantage point makes it clear how and where these points intersect.

We are at an exciting crossroad.

Over the past year so many efforts have come together, and we are now at the point where we will shift focus – moving key projects from design into action.

Ideas which started from sparks of inspiration have ignited into major working projects.

Major ambitions have made it through the planning stage and are now poised to capture our focus and attention for years to come.

We have reached a point of transition.

In other words, the real work is about to begin.

[SUM UP OF THE PAST YEAR]

There is a lot at stake.

But it was deliberative effort that brought us here.

It was just a year ago that we set the stage for many of the projects that will shape our city's future.

Indeed, we've moved straight at each and every one of them.

We've begun to make a shift for Edmonton – from a city that plans too long and often delays decision to one that pushes to **do** – even if it means walking a more challenging path.

We did this in our region – confronting decades of mistrust and competitiveness.

We've put in place a plan that joins our fates.

Today, we are contemplating long-term strategies on transit, housing and planning and we're setting the stage for regional cooperation in areas like economic development.

We've taken on major challenges with LRT.

A year ago, we talked about the need to put down firm plans on LRT networks that better link planning and transit, and recognize the potential of transit to build communities.

Today an extensive network plan is in place, and we are moving into the financing stage, looking to negotiate with our provincial and federal partners to see 30 km of new network built by 2017.

We took on the challenge of the City Centre Airport, daring ourselves and others to consider the best role these lands can play in our future.

By being decisive, we've taken the first steps in what will be perhaps the most significant redevelopment our City ever undertakes.

We've challenged ourselves to look more long-term into issues of safety and homelessness.

Our Homeless Commission and our Community Safety Committee are working hard in our communities to find and implement solutions to our most difficult problems.

One year later, we have new plans in place for our community safety committee and we are one year in to our 10-year plan to end homelessness.

We committed to fixing things that have proven to be bigger challenges than we anticipated.

Events like Indy bring so much excitement to our City, but they need to work better to prove their worth.

Today, we've sharpened pencils, reworked plans and engaged the Go Indy Committee and Race Week Edmonton who have channeled the resolve of community leaders to support this exciting event.

Their efforts complement those of Northlands and the City, and may ultimately ensure this event has the impact, and the financial success that it should.

As a Council, we've sharpened our decision-making, and worked hard to integrate decisions across bureaucratic silos.

We've brought private sector experts onto our audit committee to increase our knowledge and capacity to be stronger stewards of public dollars.

And, with great participation across our City, we've completed our municipal plan - one which imagines Edmonton in 2040 as a more compact, sustainable, integrated community.

We've started to gaze in new directions, towards an EXPO that can reshape our city and project our ambition and creativity outward for the world to examine.

Every decision made, and every one in our sights, reflects a desire to see a bolder, stronger future for Edmonton. Each bit of progress helps to expand the capacity of others to achieve, and in turn, they create new opportunities for our City.

We can see this taking shape with MacEwan, a growing university that is moving to consolidate downtown into a single sustainable campus, adding significantly to the activity and vibrancy of our downtown core. Their 42,000 full time and part time students almost solely make the case for expanded LRT.

A new MacEwan Centre for the Arts will integrate well with the thriving arts institutions in our core.

The overall plan supports Edmonton's vision as a centre of knowledge and learning.

At the same time, it creates new challenges and opportunities, like along Stony Plain Road, where we will need to find the right next purpose for the existing West campus, making it a focal point of neighbourhood revitalization efforts in that area.

Every step we take forward requires adjustment, and alignment along the way.

Cities are often measured by the dynamic character of their Downtown.

Edmonton in the past has had some challenges, but we have seen many positive steps over the past few years.

New residential towers, increased retail, office tower development, a magnificent new Art Gallery, a soon-to-be-released new Downtown Plan and redesign of Jasper Ave.

We're also pleased to see a much-needed new Women's Hospital in our City Centre, named after most-beloved Lois Hole.

And finally, a Provincial government who believes in bringing back to life the Federal buildings and reinvestment in the Legislative lands.

But we are a long way from where we need to be.

Our Quarters plan is slow to move ahead and we have not yet begun construction on the Boyle Renaissance. Also our North edge plans are still just plans.

It is in this light that we need to view the proposed downtown arena and entertainment complex.

We as a community cannot be reluctant to look at an idea that has the potential to reinvigorate our Downtown.

We are starting to see the scope of plans and how a new sports and entertainment complex fits in the midst of our overall downtown and City plans.

I've said before that I don't underestimate the complexity and the challenges that this proposal presents.

Yes, we will have a thorough public consultation, but let us not shy away from the opportunities any proposal could create.

The checklist and due diligence on this project will be very big and it must be transparent.

And it must be done in the spirit of deciding what is best for Edmonton.

But I continue to be inspired by the ambition and the vision that imagines Edmonton as the right place – the best place – for plans on this scale.

And as with any opportunity that is really worth it – I’m looking forward to the challenge.

[SOME THOUGHTS ON DECISION-MAKING]

You know, the agenda is busy.

So many decisions in one area have impacts on the next.

Each challenge requires new thinking, new levels of creativity, openness, and decisiveness.

Over the last six years I’ve learned a lot about how progress is made in politics. I know politicians play a key role.

We have podiums like this one to shine a light on major issues and we dedicate resources to make things happen.

But progress, real progress, doesn’t happen at council meetings, or in cheque presentations.

It happens most often when the public gaze has moved on.

For Council, success depends on our ability to make wise decisions about resources and on our commitment to clearing away the obstacles that prevent community agencies from doing their work.

[HOMELESS COMMISSION/SAFETY COMMISSION]

This is how it’s happening with our 10 year plan to end homelessness.

Through truly dedicated people who have decided big things can happen, and then set to work proving this is so.

Through their leadership, we became one of only two Canadian cities to endorse such an aggressive goal.

And through the efforts of our Homeless Commission, and leading agencies like Homeward Trust, more than 500 people were housed through 2009.

Similar tactics are now being applied by Edmonton's Taskforce on Community Safety as it begins implementing the key recommendations of the REACH report.

REACH Edmonton's work towards key programs will build community capacity as the front line in supporting safer communities.

In the coming year, we will be focusing on addressing services for our Aboriginal, immigrant and refugee communities and at-risk youth.

I am so excited by these programs because they really do get to the heart of issues in our communities and support those people who have had the least possible access to success in their lives.

But we would be remiss to conclude that all is well. Edmonton is the fastest growing urban Aboriginal community in Canada, and nearly half of all Canada's Aboriginal people live in cities.

Yet funding for programs is insufficient, and in my mind, our urban Aboriginal population are the forgotten people.

It is time for all orders of government to come together to help fund a new day and a new dream for our urban Aboriginal people.

The value of the workers and volunteers, whose passion and commitment drives these programs, is beyond estimation.

Their success benefits every one of us.

[WORK IN TRANSITION]

Council's major challenge in the coming years will be to build on these models of success.

We will be challenged to remain focused on a long-term view.

A year ago, we focused on steering through an economic slump and we worried over the downturn and how to manage through slower times.

Today, the Conference Board says we can expect strong economic growth in 2011 and we will need to look to what we learned in managing the last boom. In key areas we've worked hard to put long-term plans in place.

Like in the Northeast, where we've worked hard to coordinate with the industrial heartland and have created new area plans that seek to leverage industrial opportunities within our borders.

Like in housing – where affordability got away on us last time, but our cornerstones program has us better prepared. And a new rental development on Jasper and 109 Street is underway to serve anticipated needs.

And like our plans with Boyle Renaissance that need ongoing investment and commitment to ensure that this important downtown neighbourhood is well integrated into an increasing level of downtown activity.

We need to keep focused on broader goals, building diversity into our economy, and attracting and retaining the best and brightest in our community.

We need to show that we understand that this too requires a much broader view.

Changing demographics mean that our future course will be charted by leaders from within our immigrant and Aboriginal communities.

Business leaders understand that challenges of integration today are really opportunities to cultivate and inspire young talent for tomorrow.

We need to integrate with our business and community leaders better to ensure that they are reaching out to our diverse young Aboriginal and immigrant communities.

[WHAT'S AHEAD]

And with this, as with all of our efforts, we need to work with our administration to adapt current practices and processes in order to get results, much more quickly and cost effectively.

Change around us must change us too – our job as a city corporation is to learn and adapt – not hold tight to old ways.

There is no place we can see this more clearly than with our LRT plan – one which is moving from being a piecemeal, pay as you go, jumble of plans – to an integrated network, well aligned with our overall city plan.

The opening of our major expansion to Century Park on April 24th will mark a new beginning for our expanded LRT service.

LRT represents a major turning point - the biggest single infrastructure project we will ever undertake – an important shift in our work practice must support this change.

We have to build the right system.

A system that becomes the preferred choice for people to move across our City and region.

We have to hold true to Transit Oriented Development (TOD) by concentrating people and activity along our network.

We have entrenched this vision into our Municipal Plan.

When we hear arguments against change, we can't retreat back into the planning process.

We must be true to our vision.

30 kilometres of LRT network should mean we actually need to rely less on buses. Traditional transit should feed the network, not just create a second layer in our system.

And once new systems are in place – we have to find efficiencies that we simply haven't before.

When we look at our road network, we have to consider less emphasis on some roads – around our city and ultimately into the region.

Indeed, it is actually the regional plan that sets the stage for this thinking.

It envisions LRT as a primary people mover, with proportionally less emphasis on roadways – even ultimately delaying or replacing the need for a second ring road.

LRT comes with a major price tag and managing costs means we have to find these types of efficiencies.

Major capital budgets have to be shifted.

We expect much of the cost will be supported by our Provincial and Federal partners, but our share is still imposingly large.

Hard decisions will have to be made.

We can't have the full network and keep everything else too.

Budgeting and timing will have to find areas of compromise.

[NEW STRATEGIC THINKING/BUDGETING FORWARD]

LRT provides the best illustration of how and why financial and strategic practices have to change in the coming years.

How do we reconcile visions of roads and transit – recognizing that we cannot maximize both at the same time?

These are questions of prioritization and allocation – not new taxes.

Can we begin to migrate some of our road-focused budgeting toward transit?

Can we afford not to?

We have to draw lines of give and take.

Projects on this scale do not just layer onto our regular budget cycle.

We have to consider whether we can shift resources along with plans and priorities to ensure that every new goal doesn't layer on unlimited new costs.

LRT provides the best example.

Our communities, businesses and partners expect us to make good on the very broad vision we have set out.

A lot of the change will have to occur in our budget process to ensure this can be so.

We must clear regulatory obstacles and red tape delays especially for initiatives that support and enable our overall vision.

And we have to know how to define success.

Is it just when a new system is built or is it when regional citizens actually change habits and take a train?

Or, is it when densification of housing is built along those LRT lines?

What's the right revenue balance?

Is it going to be a question of carbon reduction and reduced overall environmental impact?

Whether it's LRT, new City buildings, or maintaining services, these questions are posed all across our horizon.

We have to strike the right balance in how we build – how much, how fast. We have to choose between what we borrow and what we reallocate from current spending.

And the decisions ahead are going to be a lot tougher.

The issues of costs and debt cannot be taken out of the equation of fiscal responsibility.

With all signs pointing to increases in interest rates, we too need to balance our desire to build with our capacity to manage debt in a way that does not shift budget balances too far, or too greatly constrain future decisions.

So some of the decisions we are going to have to make are going to get tougher.

After years of competing with a boom economy, our abilities to manage increases are going to have to be more realistic, just as they are in every business and every household in our City.

This means that our new City Manager, Simon Farbrother, has a great challenge ahead, and he will need Council's resolve.

The City of Edmonton is an excellent employer and we've worked hard to be fair and competitive to our employees who deserve nothing less.

But administrative costs take up more and more space within our budget every year.

We will all need to engage our staff and unions in efforts to understand what sustainability can practically mean in terms of our municipal organization.

We also need to take a harder and faster look at programs that remain on our books but are no longer aligned with our vision.

I know that there will be consequences to contemplate.

But only a reinvigorated city corporation will be able to manage the major directions we've chosen.

We can't do everything new and maintain everything else too.

The proof of the plans will be found in our willingness to not only contemplate bold visions, but to be accountable for impacts that new plans and new directions take us.

[AIRPORT DECISION]

And one of the most exciting new directions is going to be found as we move forward with plans for central airport lands.

You may remember a year ago, I not only issued a challenge for us to get busy on LRT, I also focused on another major question – the fate of airport lands in our City core.

I challenged those who defend the status quo to come up with a compelling vision, or support efforts to move forward.

And while we will never win over every voice on such a contentious issue, we have reached a point of resolution and we've begun to move forward.

Negotiations and efforts to support the closure decision are underway.

As well as a development of a go-forward vision – which represents some of the most exciting any city could ever have the chance to plan.

This new vision contemplates a self-sustaining urban village at the heart of our city – one that sets new standards in innovation, in density, community, family-oriented housing and affordable, green housing and infrastructure.

In other words, this will be the world's most sustainable urban development. It is a vision that will honour the rich history and central role of those activities that occurred on these lands and links these themes and stories in an exciting future-oriented vision.

And in planning this, I believe we are setting the stage for something more.

One of the key opportunities ahead for this area is the opportunity to integrate our land development plans with NAIT as a key institutional partner in our efforts.

NAIT is an integral part of this new sustainable community plan, both through potential expansion of its campus in place, but more importantly, through a focus on capitalizing on its educational programs, research and enterprise development and environmental sustainability.

It will not only help shape the transformation, but can provide a proving ground for sustainable industry and an integral part of our next generation economy.

NAIT's applied research expertise in key industry areas not only helps to boost our City's overall education and research leadership.

It provides an opportunity to demonstrate how science enables implementation of new standards in sustainable building practices, forestry reclamation, alternative energy, green chemistry and engineering.

It sets up a worthy partnership to not only transform these lands, but to define practical, achievable dimensions of a made-in-Edmonton green industry that will pay dividends in opportunity and jobs and begin to enhance and reposition our economy for the future.

In doing so, it can strengthen important links between Edmonton and our northern communities, leveraging resource and technical strengths from across Alberta.

I am very excited about this opportunity.

About the potential for partnership between industry, education and community.

About showcasing Edmonton's strong leadership for sustainable development.

And about demonstrating how our resource industry, which is already at the base of the wealth and prosperity that has made our economy so strong, can be a sustainable foundation on which new innovation and opportunity can be built.

While the long-term goal for the airport lands involves a community of up to 30,000 people and will take time, the short-term goal will be to have this redevelopment vision – and research links – come together on time for practical demonstration as part of a potential EXPO 2017 event.

[EXPO]

This link with EXPO is not accidental.

Indeed, the vision for airport lands, the LRT, and an overall focus on a sustainable city line up very well with EXPO – and EXPO becomes the showcase that brings it all together for our City, Province and Country.

EXPO is a community-based project, led by a board of people from across the province.

These community leaders are energized not only by the event itself, by the journey of the bid process.

When we talk about EXPO we must understand what the process of engaging over 160 countries on an international scale can do to help redefine our province and country on the world stage.

When we talk about EXPO we talk about energy, people and the planet – it is not only the vision but the expression and promotion of the theme that will impact the way the world sees us.

This is why carrying out this vision – along with plans to transform our city as a showpiece of what’s possible – is so important, not just for Edmonton or our University but for all Alberta and Canada.

We see Edmonton at the centre of it all.

And we see a challenge that – consistent with every other project I have addressed here today – calls for us to be smarter about how we tackle and achieve the big things.

That’s why EXPO is tied to places and capital priorities that we have already identified for our City.

South Campus is part of the University’s long-term plan.

Rossdale investments in upgrades to the old power plant and construction of a new signature bridge – are already key priorities for our City.

EXPO is the catalyst that ties it all together.

And through EXPO, we see a City transformed – with an extensive light-rail network delivering visitors to venues and attractions across our City.

We see Rossdale – a centre that literally powered our City for generations – now our literal and symbolic heart.

This powerful place – our spiritual centre - once a gathering place for newcomers and our Aboriginal ancestors – now becomes a platform from which we can greet the world – and a focal point of activities to celebrate Canada’s 150 birthday.

The renewed power plant, now charged by the creative energies of our community, becomes a major legacy for our City and a centre stage for year round attractions, restaurants, and a City museum.

We see South Campus, the heart of an institution that is closing in on its goal of being one of the World's top 20 universities.

The site of the fair, a showcase of innovation and knowledge gathered from nations around the world and focused on our City in the way that captures the spirit and energy of the World's Fair, and builds sustainable, knowledge infrastructure that will benefit Alberta and Canada for generations.

[CONCLUSION]

The vision and hard work of so many in our city has led us to this crucial point.

It is now time for the implementation of the many plans we have developed over the last few years.

We have envisioned a bolder city that wants more than the status quo.

A city that tackles the tough issues and is prepared for the long-term commitments to do so.

A city that grows, moves, and lives more efficiently.

A city that embraces the opportunity not only to dream, but to achieve.

We will need to be prepared to do what is necessary to realize the ambitious course we have set for ourselves.

The future of our vision rests on our ability to rise to the occasion.

The realities of affecting change will challenge us as a city to be braver and to function smarter.

It's time to forge ahead – I am ready, we are ready to take the first steps towards building the future we have imagined.

We have the vision. We have the confidence to move forward. We have a tremendous future ahead.

Let's get to work today, creating the Edmonton of tomorrow.

Thank you.