

**Swearing In Speech
Mayor Stephen Mandel –
October 23, 2007**

Good afternoon.

Mr. Chief Justice;

Honoured Guests;

On behalf of your new Council, I want to thank all of you for taking the time to be here with us today.

As Mayor I want to personally say how pleased I am to share the stage with my Council colleagues. All of whom have been entrusted to speak with the voice of their wards.

I congratulate all of you on your success. I am looking forward to working with you.

Today is a special day.

I don't mind saying that it takes courage and strength of character to stand for elected office and to put so much of your personal, family and professional life aside to undertake this community service.

I know that we have all invited our family, friends and colleagues to be here with us today, not just so they could help us celebrate our success, but because they share it in every sense of the word.

On behalf of us all, thank you to our families and friends for everything you do.

I know in the weeks and years ahead the same resilience that got you elected will show itself in our countless debates. We will all have strong opinions, close votes, points of frustration and points of triumph.

There will be days when we will feel isolated and days when we will feel like a smooth and cohesive team.

I hope we will always remember what is so obvious to us all here today, that we all share a strong passion for this city and its people.

That we have all come here out of a sincere, personal desire to do what is right for Edmontonians, and to ensure that our city is represented strongly on every front.

The next three years will be busy and challenging ones.

And there is always a tendency to look at city issues as a zero sum game - to think that Council has to trade one interest off in favour of another, or to support one area, at the expense of another.

No matter what community has sent us here, we all share a responsibility to do what's right for the city as a whole.

And most days, that will mean coming up with the best and most creative balance we can find.

Because our decisions are never as simple as growth vs. intensification, or roads vs. transit, or arts vs. homelessness.

We don't trade like that. We make an honest effort to do the best on all issues.

The biggest challenge we will have is one of balance.

The issues ahead of us are some of the biggest our city will ever face, and we need to be ready.

We need to keep pace with growth, and still find support for existing neighbourhoods that are feeling strain.

We need to catch up on our infrastructure files and find ways to keep investing at an aggressive level.

And I don't have to tell anyone that we have ongoing funding issues with the province that must be resolved.

There was never a clearer articulation of an issue than in seeing how the province decided to grant money for infrastructure - by choosing to send more money to the communities that frankly already have more money.

We have come up short in this ten year formula – to a total of \$400 million.

The impact of this shortfall on the decisions we have to make will be felt all through our term.

We need to get a fair share from the Province – our citizens deserve nothing less.

And we simply can't afford to just move on.

But as much as we have to continue to make this case to the Province, it will be our shared challenge to ensure we are planning and executing projects better ourselves.

Council approved the Southwest Recreation Centre three years ago but we still don't have a shovel in the ground and frankly that's just not good enough.

As the leaders of this City it will fall to us to ensure we move projects forward more quickly, and to work with our administration to make substantial timeline improvements that will lessen the cost escalations that accrue when delays occur.

We need to look at different financial models, improved consultation processes and quicker, more cost-effective results for our citizens.

And let me be clear - this is a discussion about saving money – it's also a discussion about making sure that we are hyper aware of every dollar lost to inflation or delay - because every dollar we fail to use efficiently literally does take from another priority project. And this lessens what we accomplish overall.

We need to find more creative solutions in how we use money, and our existing people and resources to show value to our taxpayers – every single day.

We need to invest more wisely so our returns can be seen in more actual km of roads paved, or LRT constructed or in a new bridge built across the downtown, or a new route opened up to ease traffic coming in from our Northside, or on bus rapid transit.

Frankly, given the list of what we have to get done, I cannot overemphasize that we need to be open to new ways of doing things, and to ensuring we are setting and meeting much more ambitious targets.

If we fail, the list of priority projects that will have to fall off the table is simply too big to contemplate.

Not doing better is not an option.

We have to be stricter in how we plan and in what we spend because we all have so much we want to get done.

We all want to see our LRT system continue to grow across our city – with a Northern route to NAIT as a next step.

Routes moving further south, to the southeast, further northeast and west also need to be planned now.

We all want to be able to build community recreation centres across the City and have at least two ready to go within our three year term.

We all want to invest in the structures and supports that make this a great city – the libraries and parks and cultural facilities and activities that bring this city to life.

We all want to be a green city – to invest in new technologies and strategies and to incent our private sector and communities to do the same.

We have an amazing track record on some parts of the environmental agenda – now it's time to extend our homegrown skills into areas like community design, energy efficient architecture and residential water conservation and reuse.

And we all want to be a caring city.

A city that will offer the best opportunities to our young people as they move from school into career and finally into their own families.

We all want to attract people from various nations – to a new home in Edmonton – and we want them to feel as welcome here as we all do.

The same effort needs to be made with our Aboriginal community – to ensure this community embraces and involves them.

We all want to play a role in creating this atmosphere – within our city corporation and across all of our communities. We all agree that there are social issues that will compel us to take action.

Like ensuring there is adequate, affordable housing and recreation activities for our seniors.

And like homelessness and affordable housing overall. These are provincial issues, but we need to look no further than Tent City to understand that it is an issue that literally lives on our city streets.

It is an issue with costs we cannot afford – both to the individuals and families who live in these tragic situations - away from opportunity and too far away from security.

And to our City in terms of costs to our emergency systems, our community services agencies, and our communities.

These issues have far-reaching impact on core neighbourhoods that are struggling to redevelop but are caught in an unacceptable combination of homelessness, crime and social disorder.

And frankly I don't want to play games that start with me saying "here's why it's not my responsibility....." because a jurisdictional divide means little in the end if we all fail to deal with the issue.

We have to be involved.

We need to lobby the province to provide the long-term capital and operating dollars that can make a difference, and as a city we must participate.

We need to work with communities, businesses and all orders of government to develop the made-in-Edmonton solutions that will make a difference.....and again, we need to move much more quickly.

And we all want and need to dream a little too....to have ambitions about what Edmonton can become....and to plan for a long-term future that we know will ensure this is one of the world's big success stories – and one of the most livable cities anywhere.

Dreaming about our future means taking steps today to make Edmonton even more vibrant and exciting and successful – whether we are talking about an urban lake in Rundle Park, a promenade down 96 street or the possibility of an arena downtown – or about putting all the pieces together for Port Alberta – an inland port that links us to the world – together.

Dreams provide inspiration – and motivation and a collective sense of pride that we all need to feel for our city.

And finally – everything we do and want to do for our city ties in one way or another to our region.

Let me be clear – everything about how this region works, grows, plans, pays for itself and makes decisions is now on the table.

The Premier has promised that he will finally deal with these long-standing issues and we will hold him to this promise because opt-in and opt-out responsibility doesn't work in a region that needs to share challenges and success.

This issue impacts our citizens like no other.

Every single Edmonton taxpayer pays for some of the costs that our neighbours avoid when they cross boundaries.

Urban sprawl is not an Edmonton issue, it's a regional issue – frankly it's mostly a regional issue.

Homelessness is not a city issue – we have a homeless population typical for a population base of 1 million, but only 750,000 have to take responsibility for it.

Infrastructure and services our citizens pay for are not used just by 750,000 Edmontonians they are used by one million regional citizens.

The facilities we build, the park and rides that allow our regional neighbours to jump onto our transit system, the fact that the 99.9% of the disabled transit, and all of the social costs of homelessness comes from the taxes of Edmontonians – all of these things will challenge this council and challenge our citizens.

The economy that attracts major industry here does not come for a population base of 83,000 people – it is attracted to a population base that is 1 million+ and growing.

Most of our neighbours understand this – cities like St. Albert and Leduc – both of whom have been challenged just like us - are ready to see change come.

Like Edmonton, they understand that we will share success only if the Premier delivers a strong, plan that really begins to change how our entire region functions.

This is clearly one issue where we must hold our Premier to his promise.

And I know this Council will do exactly that.

So this issue – as on all issues - we have a lot of work to do.

That process has already started. I know, like me, all of my Council colleagues are anxious to get to work and to deliver solid results.

And this is where I'd like to make just one more comment before I wrap up.

For us 13 people on this stage today, there will be a multitude of issues to manage, questions to answer and decisions to make over the next three years.

On every issue we will try to bridge a diversity of opinions and reach a consensus that is best for our entire city.

And we will do so in the most open, accountable and accessible forum of any order of government.

We are closest to our citizens – we hear first when anything goes wrong.

As we all move forward, every person in Edmonton will be able to watch our progress and let us know how we are doing.

And that frankly is what makes this work worthwhile – because City Hall is this open and this close to the people we serve.

Because we can be tested and held accountable every day.

And because it's worth it.

We all believe passionately in this city.

We all know it is worth every moment we will give it ...and more.

And we are humbled to have gained the trust of our citizens at this important time in the life of this great city of Edmonton.

Each of us will do everything we can to honour that trust everyday.

Thank you.