

**Mayor Stephen Mandel**  
**Rotary Club of Edmonton**  
**Thursday March 12, 2009 - Westin Hotel, Edmonton**  
**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Good afternoon and thank you for your warm introduction.

It's a pleasure to be here with you again, to share with you the City's key priorities for the coming year.

This is certainly a time when I get asked a lot about what's ahead in our City.

Forecasting about the economy has got to be the most popular armchair activity these days. It catches everyone's attention and so many of us are trying to understand exactly where all the trend-lines are pointing.

But it's not easy to get a clear picture. We had a meeting this week at Council with some very skilled forecasters from various business and economic fields. And while we gained a lot of food for thought, we heard a diversity of views – something that's not hard to gather these days.

We heard that we should borrow less, or borrow more. That we should raise taxes (I swear someone said this.....) and that we should lower taxes.

We heard that we will ride through this storm relatively unscathed....and that the backwash of a global economic crisis will have a major impact on us all.

It's all a lot to contemplate.

I am no sooth-sayer. I think people want to see their Mayor work in more familiar territory than that.

And the territory I am very familiar with now is that of City Hall. And the task I see above all others right now, is in determining how best to steer this City through

uncertainty, to stay on plan, and to make sure we emerge from this period of uncertainty in strong shape.

One of the things that helps my thinking these days is being at the regional table.

Because the entire process is about long-term thinking. Our mandate is to think and plan for the next 30 years, for the up to 700,000 new people who will live here by 2040. We may be out of the boom, but we still have growth to plan for.

Sometimes it's difficult to transcend the issues of today – to see beyond the immediate issues to imagine a much bigger and much more integrated region.

But the end goal – and having a vision of a strong integrated region – makes the process worth the effort. Sometimes, the vision can help you remember why you are working so hard to manage all of the issues of the day.

I look at our City's challenges in much the same light.

And at City Council, one thing we understand very well is a diversity of views.

But sometimes, the complexity of diversity yields a really interesting and beneficial result. This is certainly what has happened in our own long-term visioning process.

Through much of 2008 we worked with citizens, community groups, business and Council to develop a long-term vision for Edmonton.

The result was a consensus around an image of Edmonton in 2040 as a much more compact City, one that is more economically, environmentally and culturally sustainable.

It forecasts a city and region that thrives on the energy endowments that exist all around us and in the creative and entrepreneurial spark of our people.

Edmonton today sees the future Edmonton as a city that is mindful of its place in the world – as a global citizen and it is anxious to integrate with the world's peoples and priorities.

It is a city that is self-aware enough to understand it has been truly blessed – with parks and people, educational and cultural institutions, and an incredible cultural, social and ethnic mosaic.

And in all of these things, we see who and why we are, and then we understand what to focus on, as we are managing the challenges of today.

That's why we're continuing with business as planned, moving forward...being flexible when we need to...but still setting our sights on initiatives and projects that will ensure we maintain one of the best qualities of life in Canada and are best positioned to gain new momentum as economic factors improve.

There's no question that world events will have an impact at City Hall. We are seeing it already.

While there is some benefit in new conditions, such as much lower capital costs and the relaxation of an inflationary cycle. We also know that we will be challenged by having less revenue as a result of less building activity, and poor investment returns.

We need to move fast to take advantage of these conditions on capital projects, including new federal spending, and spend to speed up some critical infrastructure projects. We've already seen how the new conditions are allowing more to happen faster on the Anthony Henday and Whitemud, and we're anxious to see how these factors will impact several other local projects.

But benefits on the capital side are matched by growing challenge with our operating budget. We need to be extra mindful of our own bottom line.

I remain nervous about how much we are borrowing, and I think we need to be careful to pace our debt so we're not incurring financing costs until we're ready to spend the money.

I think we have to remember all of our debt has tax implications – unlike our Federal and Provincial partners we can't carry a deficit - so we have to be careful in raising taxes to pay for debt, that we don't make things worse or recoveries slower in our local economy.

And we have to spend much, much more carefully, to ensure that the priorities of our City are well aligned with the priorities of our citizens, and the overall vision they have set forth for Edmonton. So if and when we do need to rationalize our spending, we must seek first to identify the projects and spending that are the least aligned and re-allocate those first.

Spending smarter is part of the equation for this time. The other is to stay focused on our plans – we have to ensure our long-term vision for Edmonton doesn't get sidelined by short-term reactions to changing conditions.

This is why it is still important to invest. It's why we are still sitting at a regional discussion about managing growth - even when the pace of growth is no longer overwhelming us.

It's why it's important that we start to move our Homelessness plan forward – because these times will challenge many people even more, and because we want to stay on goal in terms of actually beginning to reduce our homeless population.

It's why the work of our community safety committee is so important, because we want to be able to assure a growing population that Edmonton is where future generations will want to raise their families and build their lives.

It's why we still need to be thinking about the Northeast and our overall value-added strategy, because when global companies look to scale up investments, we want to be their destination.

And it's why we still need to think about things like a World's Fair bid.

Because when we think about 2017, we have to think about how this region will be thriving again and how these types of events can transform growing cities. This is what happened in Vancouver and Montreal, and its happening in Shanghai – I was able to witness that process a couple of weeks ago.

And we have to think about how important it is becoming to promote our City, region and province to the world – not just for our energy capacity, but for our skill and innovation and efforts to ensure that we are providing not only the most secure, but the most responsibly developed energy source. We have to be able to show that to a world that is increasingly interested in what we are doing here.

When we think about 2017, we have to think about how much we will have grown, and about the efforts we will need to take to keep pace with new infrastructure and investments in the educational institutions and community spaces our citizens will need.

We have to think about the tourism potential – and the boost that our convention and tourist businesses will get from hosting the world – during the event, and beyond.

And we need to think about how much potential this type of event would represent to not only promote Edmonton to the world, but to allow Edmonton to take a major leap forward in transforming its urban landscape.

The structural and financial benefits to our City of succeeding in this endeavour are enormous.

We all know the mantra of the last boom was “give me another boom and I promise not to [\_\_\_\_\_] it away.” I can’t comment on how well we learned from that. But I do think the mantra for this time must be “stick to the plan.”

The real lesson of our last downtown was one of the consequences of paralysis, of slow investments that just deferred and increased costs and how we’ve been paying for this for the last several years.

So within the context of more careful spending and more flexible planning, we have to stay focused on the plan – to remember where we were headed before things started to slow down.

It’s the difference between being cautious, and being afraid.

We can be prudent and have financial stability and still concentrate on key initiatives.

We’ll still focus on economic diversity (Port Alberta, knowledge and innovations, green technologies, entrepreneurs)

We’ll remain committed to preserving and sustaining the environment – with greener growth.

Like many of you are pursuing these days and as I noticed that Jim Carter, former CEO of Syncrude Canada, was here last week sharing his take on carbon capture strategies with you ... it’s managing those endeavours right now that will help position us for the future.

When things slow we do also have the opportunity for some more careful assessment, and that will certainly be the case this year, because we’ve got some big items coming forward this year.

Moving forward on the Quarters and our overall downtown plan remains a major priority.....as does planning our LRT expansion and moving forward in planning and construction of new recreation centres.

Another is the new regional system, and how we are going to orient ourselves within a new regional context.

Hopefully by the end of this month we will have an approved plan to present to the Minister.

And, although we will have much more work to do on the plan, I hope we will have actually begun to move past 50 years of regional stalemate.

And the regional issue won't be the only long-term issue discussed in 2009.

Like it or not, we're going to be talking about airports again.

I'm not going to wade into this discussion one way or the other today.

But do want to frame it a bit today. Because like the regional discussion, I think it's important for us to settle this once and for all.

And like the regional discussion, I hope we can talk about things in the proper context – where we acknowledge history for what it is and then focus on our future and on a long-term Vision.

Let's have this discussion with our future Edmonton in mind.

So when we talk about these airport lands, let's talk about how they can and should best be used by Edmonton, not just today, but in 2040.

Let's talk about where we should be investing infrastructure dollars, for and around these lands – and to what end.

Let's talk about Edmonton as Canada's health leader - a centre of care and research and innovation –and about how to keep it that way.

When we talk about business, let's talk about Edmonton as a northern city how to best ensure grow and enhance these relationships, knowing that the north will be the centre of our Province's and nation's economic activity for years to come.

Let's focus on transportation at a macro level, and discuss what will be necessary to bring people and goods to and through our region and, from our region back out to the world.

And let's be fair and respectful enough of each other to acknowledge that these are things that **all Edmontonians value** – even though we do have a diversity of view about how to achieve them.

And while everyone understands that there are things that cannot and will not be open to debate, let's truly all be open to a wide range of possibilities that might help us all to uncover a solution that is in the best interests of all Edmontonians.

This is the way we have to be able to work in 2009 – with a constant focus on what is truly important to our citizens and our long-term goals.

Staying focused on our vision helps us see clearly in a more challenging time.

It ensures we will continue expand on our potential over the long-term, even while we are adjusting to accommodate changes and bumps along the way.

Our focus must stay on the priorities of our entire community and our energy and resources must align with the priorities of our people, like in efforts to regain public confidence in the safety of our communities.

Or in the strategic plan set forth by our homelessness committee.

In closing, I want to thank Rotary for everything you always do to be such a large part of helping Edmonton move forward – through all times.

Through your gifts today of service and fund-raising for New Canadians and the Lurana Shelter, our city is better able to help women and children along with new immigrants, gain a fresh start with safe and affordable housing as part of our committee.

2009 is a year that is going to keep the forecasters busy. But I also think it is going to be a time of unprecedented creativity within our community.

As we shift from a period of fast-paced growth to one in which we are a little less certain, I know we are all thinking creatively about the future and how to stay on track with our personal, company and civic visions.

It's a time when creativity can make so much difference, in terms of keeping people working and the city moving, and in terms of ensuring we make choices that still move us forward.

It's a time when we need to be adaptable and adjust our strategies to achieve our goals in our ever changing world.

But most importantly it's an inspired time when the spirit of our citizens truly makes a difference.

It's your hard-working efforts, business acumen and strength of character that will ensure we stay on course and stay true to our goals and vision.

I'd also like to thank you for leading the way and showing the community that ideals, values and principals still count.

Through the Downtown Rotary Club's tremendous gifts of service, time and overwhelming fundraising campaigns you have raised the social conscious of our citizens and improved the lives of people in need.

I look forward to working with you on future legacy projects and commend you for your dedication to the community.

Thank you once again...I look forward to your questions.