

State of the City Address 2006

delivered by

Mayor Rob Maclsaac

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Introduction

Good morning.

Today is a special speech for me because it's my last time to share with you my thoughts about where we are, and where we are headed as a city. It's my 9th State of the City speech, and over the years it has served as a tremendous platform for me to communicate the City's agenda.

I want to begin by using this opportunity to thank a lot of people who have helped me out during my time as Mayor. I will also reflect on some of the accomplishments of the last nine years. And finally, I will offer some thoughts about future directions including the upcoming election.

Thanks

Of course, I want to thank the sponsors who have helped make this breakfast possible, Bell, Burlington Youth Soccer Club, Certified Management Accountants, and Scotiabank. Your contribution to this morning is much appreciated.

I want to especially thank the Burlington Chamber of Commerce. I don't think any mayor could have hoped for a better run, more progressive, more collaborative Chamber than I've had the pleasure of working with during my time as mayor. To Keith Hoey, and his predecessor Scott McCammon, and to the many Presidents I've been honoured to work with over the years, you have my profound thanks and my enduring admiration for the work that you do.

Whatever I've been able to accomplish as your Mayor, it's because of the support I've received from so many fabulous people who surrounded me. Mayors have almost no formal power. They are not like Premiers or even Cabinet Ministers. Mayors can't hire or fire or issue direct orders to staff. Mayors need to rely on their ability to work with people, to inspire them, to bring them together, to find consensus.

And it all begins with City Council. I've been so fortunate in this respect to have had a very hardworking Council who have supported me over the years. They have allowed me to be a Mayor and not just another vote on Council. My Council is all here this morning and I want to acknowledge them - Rick Craven, Joan Loughheed, John Taylor, Jack Dennison, Carol D'Amelio, and Bob Wood who replaced Mike Wallace. My thanks go out to all of you. I've been very honoured to serve together with you. I would ask Councillors to please stand and be acknowledged.

I've also had the support of the best staff I could have ever hoped for in the Mayor's Office. My office staff is here this morning – Louise Allard, Lisa Chorzepa, and the magnificent Fran

Agnew – if you have had dealings with my office you'll know how fantastic these people are. I am really proud to work with them. They are hard working and loyal and have made the Mayor's office a very pleasant place to be. Fran Agnew is absolutely the best EA you could ever have which is why she has likely had a lot more job offers than me.

Similarly, I've been so fortunate to have the support of one of the best municipal staffs in the country headed by Tim Dobbie and his three general managers, Tim Commisso, Bob Carrington, and Leo DeLoyde. There are many other staff here today who are just as talented. I know that I am leaving the City in their very capable hands. They are accomplished, prudent, and dedicated stewards of our City. Whenever I've looked good as Mayor, the credit is largely because of their high-quality work. To all the staff at the city, you have my heartfelt thanks for all the great work you have done since I've been Mayor.

I also want to mention my family, my wife Anne, and my two daughters Sarah and Catherine, who have sacrificed so much for my public service. They have been unwavering supporters without whom I could not have been Mayor. My wife Anne is here today and I am happy to publicly thank her for all that she has done to keep the home fires burning while I've been away.

The last Group that I want to mention who have been integral to my tenure as Mayor are the literally hundreds, perhaps thousands, of volunteers who have helped me along the way, many of whom have become dear friends. We never could have afforded to pay these people for the services they rendered to the City. And they never would have accepted the money even if we offered.

They are people who believed in me, people who loved our City, people who wanted to make a difference. And they did make a huge difference – they added tremendous horsepower to what was happening at City Hall. I cannot begin to thank all of these people by name, but many of them are here today, and I want them all to know that I will be forever grateful for all the help they gave to me and to Burlington.

For all of you who have sat on boards with me at the BEDC, at the Hospital, at Hydro, at the Hospice, for all of you who helped in any of the initiatives I pushed forward like Inclusive Cities, or the Mayor's Gala, or the Mayor's Triathlon, or the Smart Growth Summits, or the United Way, or so many other efforts, I want you all to know that I will be forever grateful for all the help you gave to me and to Burlington.

I do want to thank three people in particular - they are Mark Chamberlain, Gord Forstner, and of course Keith Strong. These three are exceptional individuals who have given so much of their time and their talents volunteering for Burlington. This City owes them a tremendous debt of gratitude and I will always regard them as friends.

These three people and countless others working together have helped create an extraordinary time in this very special City over the past decade. They have helped move us forward significantly in both tangible and intangible ways.

We have created great new places for people in Burlington framed by outstanding facilities. We have formed powerful alliances between groups that are now working in synergy for the City. And we have instituted leading edge practices and services. All of which has resulted in a city that is among the best in its class in Ontario, and likely Canada.

I've said so many times that I feel so lucky not just to have been Mayor of Burlington but to have been Mayor during this time in our city's history. So many things became possible for Burlington in the last 9 years and at times it felt like our potential, as a city, was limitless. To have been there when it was all happening was an amazing experience.

Accomplishments

Looking back over my time as your Mayor, I'm really proud of what has transpired. Sometimes a mayor can use his or her office to mobilize community support around a need. I will always look at things like the Carpenter Hospice, the Burlington Community Foundation, and the formation of Team Burlington with pride, knowing that I was part of a group of people that made these things happen.

I am also so proud to have served on a Council that was so committed to city building. Over the past nine years, we have poured over \$90 million into constructing and renewing storm sewers, bridges and roads including many new bike lanes and multiuse paths.

We have seen over \$100 million poured into new subdivision infrastructure. We have completed several large joint projects with other agencies like the new Guelph Line Interchange, the GO Rail expansion through Burlington, and the new Appleby Line/CN Underpass.

We also invested heavily in creating a vibrant liveable City.

In nine years we were able to establish a really vital waterfront that is attracting attention from across the GTA. A waterfront that together with the construction of 414 Locust Street, and a soon to be built pedestrian pier inspired a renaissance in our downtown. A renaissance that is giving all of us a sense of place and civic pride and a growing reputation across this region as a place where good things are happening.

We have invested in arts and culture with an expanded Burlington Arts Centre, a fabulously renewed Central library, a new Brant Hills Library, a new facility for student theatre, and a proposed Performing Arts Centre. You should know that tremendous strides made in advancing this project. The City is very close to acquiring the downtown police station as the site for the PAC. Positive discussions have been initiated with the provincial and federal governments for funding assistance.

And a remarkable group of community leaders led by Keith Strong and Gary DeGroote has been hard at work planning and executing a 10 million dollar capital campaign in support of the project. And as always, the community is stepping up to the plate. I am pleased to tell you that we are almost 80% of the way to our 10 million dollar goal.

We have also invested in recreational facilities like Appleby and Aldershot Arenas, and Brant Hills Community Centre, and a soon to be opened expanded Seniors Centre. We revitalized Angela Coughlin, Aldershot, and Mountainside pools. And we have vastly expanded and enhanced our parks network building an entirely new park system in the Orchard, while opening Paletta, Kerncliffe, and Roly Bird parks, and renewing Central and Hidden Valley parks. We have acquired the lands and are planning a massive new Park that will serve the entire City.

And finally, and critically important to me, we continue to make significant progress with McMaster University on establishing a University presence here in Burlington. Two years ago I was very privileged to sit down with Peter George and sign a Memorandum of Understanding between the City and McMaster where we each promised to work together towards building a McMaster presence here in Burlington. Peter George is here again today as we again plant another stake in the ground of McMaster University's entry into Burlington.

The McMaster proposal is now being championed by Paul Bates, the Dean of the School of business and someone who I know is transforming DeGroote into a world-class business school. Paul is with us this morning.

The proposal we are now working on envisions graduate programs from the business school – MBA , Doctoral programs, and Executive Diplomas to come to Burlington. Not long after, 3rd and 4th year undergraduate students are likely to join the Burlington Campus. It also includes space for the Faculty of Medicine for a Family Medical Learning Centre that will no doubt act as a magnet for family doctors to locate in Burlington and the greater region. The proposed location is in Downtown Burlington across from Village Square on the City owned land that is now surface parking.

I am very pleased to tell you that all of this has been set forth in an updated MOU signed by Peter George and me yesterday.

When Mark Chamberlain and I began researching how to bring a University to Burlington a number of years ago, we quickly came to a couple of conclusions. The first was that landing a University campus is a little bit about good luck. The second was that in every other city we could find that attracted a university, it took money to make it happen. This deal is no different. The memorandum we have signed contemplates the City contributing some 10 million dollars to make this project happen or about 1/3 of the construction cost. In my view, it will require some innovative financing techniques and perhaps some additional partners to make all of this work. But it's also clear to me that the City has to make this happen.

The studies we have conducted indicate this project will transform our City in a huge way. It will accelerate and diversify the change occurring in our downtown. But more than just the downtown, this project can impact the entire city and the whole of this region. It will greatly enhance our image and reputation nationally and internationally. It's tightly aligned with the competitive strengths of the City's economic base. It will fortify existing companies in Burlington and attract prestigious new ones.

This project is perhaps the last key link to completing Burlington's march to legitimacy as a great City. This project is now perfectly teed up for our next City Council to execute. I've every expectation they will do so based on the current Council's support and the enthusiasm that exists at the staff level. I've asked Tim Dobbie to take this project on personally and I've made it clear to him that anything less than complete success is unacceptable.

Our investments in arts and culture, in great people places, and in a culture of learning have been made in the knowledge that they will create the human capital required to drive this City's economy to new heights. Burlington's best and most important asset is, of course, the people that live here. And all of these investments are aimed at nurturing creativity and innovation in our City.

These accomplishments will stand as a legacy for the next generation of Burlington residents. And in my view, this is a track record that any municipal council would be proud to stand behind.

Important Future Directions

These things didn't happen simply as a matter of course. In large measure, these accomplishments resulted from a shared value system in the City that has existed for many years. We are known across Ontario as a progressive municipality. Inside the municipal world, Burlington's brand stands for a well managed, and strategic municipality that gets things done.

And it all begins with the core value of respect between staff and council. Council has long appreciated the fact that we have a professional, hardworking staff committed to providing the best advice possible. At the same time, our staff has respected the vital role of elected representatives in setting policy and direction and representing their constituents.

Burlington's tradition of strategic planning is also fundamental to its achievements. It ensures that Council has a vision of where the city is headed and shows staff the milestones of success.

A good staff council relationship is a very precious thing. You need not look far a field to find examples of horrible relationships. It's the easiest thing in the world for councilors to publicly beat up staff to make themselves look good. And in a world always looking for talent, good staff can be lost in the blink of an eye if they feel unappreciated or disrespected. Those behaviors do not characterize our culture.

In fact, others outside of Burlington have recognized that what we have here in terms of our council staff relations is a model. Tim Dobbie and I have been invited by several mayors to present on our Council – Staff relationship. The Province has asked us several times to present at their annual municipal conference on the topic of Council - Staff relations.

This same sense of respect and decorum has also extended to our council chambers where debate is generally reasoned and respectful and almost never personal. Our Council has worked as a team. And although every councilor has been a champion for his or her ward, there has also been recognition that building a great city doesn't mean dividing our budget by the number of wards in the city and distributing the money accordingly. Councilors have supported strategic expenditures in our downtown and elsewhere that will ultimately benefit the whole city.

The first year of every Council term is a very busy one. There will be tremendous demands on Council's time early in the New Year with orientation and budgets to do on top of the usual heavy load. But if the new council does not commit and stay committed to the strategic planning process, they will have forsaken their best tool for making real progress in Burlington. And if they do not share our current culture of respect between staff and Council, a golden era in the City will quickly come to an end.

I also think the last nine years has seen our council taking a very balanced approach that I hope will continue. Prudent budgeting in government is always a difficult balancing act. Governments don't have the competitive pressures that the private sector has so there has to be a continued vigilance about making sure tax dollars are being spent wisely, and that people are getting value for their dollars. On the other hand, it seems to me that at some

point the mantra that we want more for less becomes a cop out on our collective responsibility to build communities that work.

We do have a sound financial position as a result of many years of prudent decision-making by Council. And the tax burden carried by Burlington ratepayers is highly competitive with other municipalities in the GTA. But demands on the capital budget are high.

And we continue to strain under the load of a declining infrastructure. Last year, for the first time ever, Council introduced a dedicated infrastructure levy – dollars that were over and above our normal budgetary requirement that Council directed to be applied exclusively for infrastructure renewal on an ongoing basis.

This was an important beginning and a strategic direction that needs to be continued and enhanced.

Equally difficult challenges lie ahead in our ongoing transition from a suburban to an urban community. As a city, we have been absolute leaders in terms of our urban structure. Long before the Greenbelt, we were intent on preserving rural Burlington. Long before the Province's Places to Grow initiative, we knew that intensifying along transit corridors and in our downtown made sense and we wrote it into our official plan.

So it was no surprise that when the Province did decide to re-enter the field of urban planning, Burlington was able to play a lead role in the formulation of those smart growth policies. We continue to be well ahead of the planning curve and the vast majority of GTA municipalities with our planning around GO stations and our planning for our downtown core.

Of course, planning for this transition is really the easy part. Implementing the plan will take courage and determination. Councils going forward will have a very tough challenge on their hands. Succeeding in this environment will mean insisting on great architecture, making sure needed infrastructure and services like public transit are in place, and finding ways to allow infill development to create great new public spaces for everyone.

There will also be mighty temptations to convert our employment lands into residential uses. It's critically important going forward that Council zealously protects what remains of our employment lands – they are our last best hope for a completely balanced live-work-play community.

The environment is another area that I think needs to be a real area of focus for Council. I believe we have made an important difference over the past decade in terms of protecting our environment. The City has taken a close look at all of our operations and made changes to ensure we are being responsible in our own actions on environmental impacts. And we have been really strategic in finding ways to protect our natural heritage systems.

But there is much more work to be done on the environmental file here in Burlington. We can do more; and we have to do more especially on the topic of climate change. Climate change

has two important sides for us at the municipal level. We need to do what we can corporately to reduce our own footprint when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions.

But there is a second part to climate change that is not getting enough attention. There is little to no hope that we can completely turn around the warming of our planet - that is becoming apparent. We are not changing our behaviour quickly enough and some countries are not changing at all. So it's going to happen. That means there is a lot of planning that needs to occur in terms of preparing for the impacts of climate change. I strongly encourage the next Council to adopt this strategic direction early in the new term.

Upcoming Election

All of which means the next municipal election in Burlington is critically important. I really hope many of you will engage actively in this election because there are tremendously important choices to be made. Your choice for mayor can make a real difference on all of these issues.

I would ask you to think about the character of the person when you cast your vote for mayor. A good mayor is a consensus builder and a team player. Success at City Council involves working with and inspiring fellow councillors rather than voting along partisan lines. It requires someone who will be able to sort through the vast amounts of information, opinions, and reports while finding common sense solutions.

A mayor should be someone with integrity, intelligence, and compassion. And while a mayor needs to be a champion for his or her City, great mayors are able to understand the broader context in which their City operates and act as statesmen to the greater region.

This City deserves a great Mayor and Council but it needs you to make it happen.

Conclusion

I will end today by telling you that leaving this office is not an easy thing for me to do. But I never viewed this position as a lifetime career. I want you to know what an incredible experience I've had over the last 15 years on City Council and especially the last 9 years when it was my privilege to serve as Mayor of this great City. I loved this job. It has been a wonderful journey that I will always look back on with great fondness.

I want to extend my thanks to the people of Burlington who gave me what is undoubtedly the best job there is in this City, and let me keep it for 9 years.

On my departure I see our rural area and its natural heritage are securely protected in Provincial legislation. Our urban area is bustling with great new places and facilities that afford Burlington residents profound opportunities for expression and interaction. Our economy continues to benefit from a robust portfolio of businesses that are incredibly resilient despite the dynamic world economy in which they compete.

Campers have a credo that they should leave a campsite a little cleaner than they found it. So on my departure, I am very pleased to report to you that the state of our City is at least a little stronger than it was when I arrived.

Thank-you.