

State of the Municipality Address

May 22, 2008

Metropolitan Halifax Chamber of Commerce

Remarks by Mayor Peter Kelly

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Good afternoon and thank you Jerry.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen. And thank you to the Chamber for hosting this annual event. Your resourcefulness in the face of global competition is to be admired, and we certainly appreciate your advice and involvement on the many issues that shape our community.

On my way here, I heard a story about competition in business.

A shopkeeper was distressed when a brand new business much like his own opened up next door and erected a huge sign which read BEST DEALS.

He was even more horrified when another competitor opened up on his other side, and put up an even larger sign, reading LOWEST PRICES.

The shopkeeper panicked, until he got an idea. He put the biggest sign of all over his own shop. It read: MAIN ENTRANCE.

I am pleased to be here to speak of Council's successes and the work yet to be done. Council has worked hard to govern our municipality, making tough but informed decisions that impact our lives. Dan English, our CAO, and all HRM staff who implement these decisions effectively deserve a special thanks as well.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the passing of Ron Wallace, a beloved former Mayor who will be greatly missed by all who knew him. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family.

I would also like to thank the many volunteers of our region who make a tangible difference through their service. Their contributions to our communities are immense and diverse, and are always very much appreciated.

Before moving on, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize our Canadian Forces as well and the work they do each day here and around the world. As a navy town, our military roots run very deep, and our pride runs even deeper.

On behalf of Council and all HRM residents, I want to say how much we appreciate their efforts to make this a better world for all.

Writer Elbert Hubbard once said: "The best preparation for good work tomorrow is to do good work today." I can honestly say that the work being done by our business community, my colleagues and I on council and the countless number of volunteers in our municipality is bearing fruit today and is building a solid foundation for our future.

We've made significant progress over the past few years and we need to celebrate our accomplishments

We still have a lot to accomplish, but we need to reflect on the progress we have made to date.

Today, I will take a look at our achievements and consider what lies ahead.

In that regard, let's take a look at what I know is particularly important to this audience, and that is **the bottom line**.

I'll start with some big numbers.

In 2007, average employment in HRM reached 208,400, a 3,600 increase over 2006.

Our unemployment rate averaged 5% in 2007, and it stands at 4.9% as of April of this year.

Our GDP reached \$12.6 billion in 2007. A 2.2% growth. And we expect 2.6% growth for 2008.

We ranked 8th in the country for growth, standing just behind a top seven of western Canadian cities.

In retail, we saw steady growth in 2007, with sales topping \$5.8 billion.

They're expected to reach a whopping \$6 billion in '08.

In manufacturing, the federal government will spend \$3.1 billion to refit 12 frigates; seven will be done here on the East Coast. The federal government also renewed a contract with I.M.P. Aerospace worth \$591 million for maintenance of search-and-rescue helicopters.

But what are some of the most important numbers to HRM and you? The bottom line?

Eight years of investing in our infrastructure.

Eight years of no deficits.

Eight years of paying down our debt.

That kind of fiscal leadership is how we demonstrate to the business community that we understand what's needed for HRM to flourish.

So what's next?

We've been making steady progress on HRM's Economic Strategy, adopted by Council in 2006.

The Chamber's role as scorekeeper for the Economic Strategy is key to our success.

The Economic Strategy asks us to make our community a magnet for immigrants. The bottom line is that residents, including newcomers, will want to stay and invest in a community they love.

Every one of us has a responsibility to deliver on the promises we make as a community to immigrants.

Imagine the impact we could have if each business, including HRM, mentored at least one immigrant.

If each of us took it upon ourselves to improve the lives of newcomers, taking them into our business and showing them what they need to do to succeed here, it would certainly help with our Retention Strategy.

It's in our nature to be warm and welcoming, but we need to go further. We need to challenge complacency and be the change that we wish to see.

I'd now like to focus on a few of our priorities. Public safety is at the top of that list as this is a fundamental concern for every one of us.

The Bottom Line: In 2007, 32 police officers were hired under provincial funding, 22 Halifax Regional Police and 10 RCMP. This enabled fast, coordinated response to street, drug and youth crime in our communities.

And it shows.

Overall, property crime in HRM was down 15% in 2007, and violent crime decreased over 10%.

And that trend is continuing this year. Take robberies, for example. In the first quarter of 2006, there were 151 robberies, in 2007 there were 135. And in the first quarter of this year, there were 83. That is a *substantial* decrease.

But even with these impressive downward trends in violent crime, we still have much to do.

So what's next?

We will see an additional 46 police officers this year, including 24 Halifax Regional Police and 8 RCMP from the HRM budget, and 13 HRP and one RCMP through the province.

You may have heard that tomorrow we will be releasing the Report to the Mayor's Roundtable on Violence and Public Safety in HRM. Granted, this took a little longer than expected. But this was too important not to get right.

Prepared by Professor Don Clairmont, a renowned criminologist, after hundreds of hours of extensive research and wide-spread consultation, the Report is, to say the least, comprehensive, with 64 recommendations.

It's a call to action. And I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen, I will do everything I can to work with Council and our partners to act on these recommendations.

We will keep striving to create a future where every neighbour, every parent, child and senior, every customer, business owner and employee, and every visitor in HRM *is* safe, and *feels* safe.

Now let's take a look at how we are doing on the environment.

The Bottom Line: For decades we have wanted to clean our Harbour.

And now, we are.

The Halifax Wastewater Treatment Facility began operating this year and water quality in the Harbour has *already* improved dramatically.

Last fall we also announced Alderney 5, a \$3 million energy retrofit of HRM buildings on the Dartmouth waterfront.

It includes the first large-scale use of geothermal cold energy storage anywhere in the world. Alderney 5 will save about a quarter of a million dollars per year in energy costs and will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 900 tonnes per year. That's like taking 164 cars off the road.

Our environmental leadership was recognized recently by *Corporate Knights* magazine, which ranked HRM the 5th most sustainable city in Canada. While that's impressive, it's not too surprising when you consider the substantial efforts we have all put into sustainability.

Look no further than our world-class waste management program;

our new Community Energy Plan;
our pesticide reduction initiative;
our greenhouse gas emission reduction plans;
our clean air strategy;

our climate change strategy;
our use of biodiesel fuel for transit;
and our plans to use hybrid buses ...

I could go on, but suffice to say that HRM is indeed walking the walk when it comes to the environment.

So what's next?

Perhaps the most exciting event on our horizon is the completion of the Dartmouth Wastewater Treatment Plant this summer and the Herring Cove Wastewater Treatment Facility, which could be in operation by late this year.

That means we will see even further improvements to the condition of Halifax Harbour.

Now, let me be perfectly clear about the magnitude of the changes we are seeing thanks to the \$333 million Harbour Solutions Project. I won't muddy our newly clean waters with scientific jargon, but here's what it means in terms we can all relate to:

If the test results continue as they are, we **hope** to see people swimming at Black Rock Beach and at the Dingle *this year*.

This year. That's something we can all be proud of.

Continuing with our priorities and an issue that is so important to our continuing growth is transportation.

The Bottom Line: From 2002 to 2006, Metro Transit increased its ridership by more than 27 per cent.

Clearly, the demand is there, but we need to ensure we address our growing transit needs effectively and efficiently.

To that end, Council recently approved a five-year, \$155 million transit implementation strategy that will help us get even more people out of their cars and on to public transportation.

The plan maps out such projects as

a downtown shuttle service,
local rural transportation services,
Metro Link expansion,
The Harbourlink,
upgrades to transit terminals,
and added security.

The plan also hinges on a new satellite transit garage, which is absolutely necessary if expansion is to proceed beyond 2009. Construction could begin as early as this year.

So what's next?

Fifteen buses will be added to the conventional fleet by the end of this year, with another 30 joining the fleet between 2010 and 2013.

Over the next five years we will also see
39 replacement buses,
10-15 Rural Express buses,
5 rural buses,
10 MetroLink buses,
6 downtown shuttle buses,
and eight buses to service the Harbourlink.

A rural express on the 103 will be operational later this year, and additional routes for Enfield, the airport and Musquodoboit Harbour will be running by 2010.

We've also made some progress on our Active Transportation plans with additional bike lanes and trails, but we know we need to do better.

We will launch new programs this summer and fall that will help commuters choose modes of transportation other than single-occupant vehicles.

Also under transportation, is the Atlantic Gateway. We are leading the charge with the federal and provincial governments to advance potential projects that will benefit our region.

Private partners will be critical for the Atlantic Gateway to succeed, so I look forward to working with many of you to open our gateway to the world.

Just a brief word on festivals and events.

The Bottom line: We've hosted some great events in recent years, such as the Rolling Stones, the JUNOs, the World Theatre Congress, and the majestic Tall Ships.

We are the only municipality in the world to have hosted the IIHF Junior, Women's, and Men's World Hockey Championships. All have been hugely successful, raising HRM's profile on the international stage and giving our community an injection of vibrancy and energy.

I want to congratulate Fred MacGillivray and his team at Events Halifax for their outstanding work on events throughout the year, but particularly for their recent efforts to bring the IIHF Men's hockey, which was undoubtedly one of the best hockey tournaments the world has ever seen. Well done.

I should also give credit in that regard to the hockey-loving Latvians, who descended on Downtown en masse for the tournament. I think they may have single-handedly brought our GDP up a full percentage point!

So what's next?

This summer, Council will consider a draft Major Events Hosting Strategy that will provide a clear vision and a concise plan of action for us to grow as a major event destination.

With Trade Centre Limited and the Province, we are currently reviewing proposals for a new and much-needed convention centre in downtown. At the close of Tuesday, 6 groups have responded to the calls for proposals.

As well a \$2 million investment will bring significant upgrades for Lake Banook, which will host athletes from 90 countries for the World Canoe and Kayak Championships next year, and our nation's best for the National Championships this year.

Other upcoming events include the 2008 Acadian Games, the 2009 Tall Ships and the 2010 Canadian Naval Centennial.

The federal and provincial governments have also each committed over \$11 million towards HRM's hosting of the 2011 Canada Winter Games.

HRM will also put in close to \$9 million.

On the entertainment side we continue to draw a wide range of performers—from country star Keith Urban to the Blue Man Group, from Bob Dylan to Avril Lavigne.

A particular favourite of mine, Alice Cooper, is returning this fall. The king of shock rock and I have much more in common than you might think. His shows feature guillotines, electric chairs, fake blood and boa constrictors, while our Council meetings feature discussions on the fate of our chickens and cats. I can assure you, neither one is for the faint of heart!

All kidding aside, those debates demonstrate the breadth of issues we address as a Council and they highlight that no issue within Council's mandate can be ignored—our democratic process won't allow it.

Now let's talk development.

The Bottom Line: The \$40 million RIM Building will open this June. Dartmouth Crossing, a \$280 million project, currently has 1.6 million square feet of retail and commercial space and is working toward 2.2 million.

Burnside continues to grow towards almost \$1 billion in assessment value.

Burnside will see a new \$60 million RCMP building, additional buildings in the City of Lakes Business Park, expansion of the newly created Atlantic Gateway Logistics Park, as well as the design completion for the long-awaited Burnside Expressway connecting to Bedford and Sackville and highway 102.

We also hope to see movement this year on an impressive list of approved or pending developments, including
the Salter Street Waterfront Development;
United Gulf towers;
Kings Wharf;
Nova Centre;
Historic Properties Waterside Centre;
Halkirk Properties;
the Crombie Triangle;
the Village at Bayers Road expansion;
and a planned redevelopment and refurbishment of a downtown commercial block.
Together these projects would derive over \$1.25 billion of investment in our region.

That's correct. One and one quarter billion dollars.

So what's next? Proposed changes to planning applications will mean a 30% reduction in processing times.

HRM by Design's Downtown Vision was approved in principle by Council and strongly endorsed by the Chamber. It will move to the public hearing stage by the fall.

Our pilot Community Visioning exercise is nearing completion in Fall River, the Bedford Waterfront and Musquodoboit Harbour, and the resulting visions will now be implemented by Council, staff and the respective communities.
Community visioning will kick off soon for the Penhorn area of Dartmouth, Spryfield and Middle Sackville.

HRM is definitely growing, but, more importantly, we are growing smart. Our challenge is to create, develop and maintain an environment that fosters development and creates jobs and wealth for our citizens.

I'll wrap up now with this question:

What *is* our bottom line?

As we celebrate “Democracy 250,” a quote from Joseph Howe that I often see on a downtown billboard seems appropriate: “When I sit down in solitude to the labours of my profession, the only questions I ask myself are: what is right, what is just, and what is for the public good.”

We must remember that our actions and words have serious consequences for the public good.

Even our “community conversations” are heard far and wide in today’s globally connected world.

We have to show the confidence I *know* we all have, in this region that I *know* we all love.

Consider these observations:

Citco’s President of Technology Management has said: “Halifax has been on our radar screen since we opened our financial services office there in 2006. There is a can-do attitude in the city ... that seems to fit with our corporate style.”

Manny Celendrino (Sell-en-dreeno) of Consolidated FastFrate had this to say about their new transload facility in Burnside: “Three years ago, everyone we spoke to told us that this could not be done. Well, we’ve done it. We’re proud to be here. Excited to be here, and passionate.”

And Manulife President and CEO Paul Rooney has said: “For Manulife, there are tremendous advantages to being located in the HRM. Key for us is the access we have to a rich talent pool, a top notch post-secondary education system and local governments that foster a positive business environment. We are very proud to be here and will continue to make investments in our Halifax operations.”

Others can clearly see our positives, and so should we. *We are* on the right course and we must continue confidently. We have made tremendous progress on issues that matter, and we are committed to building on the momentum of our achievements. We must feel it, know it, convey it.

We must be passionate when speaking of our successes. We must look at our challenges as opportunities to make HRM a better place for us all. The work doesn’t stop. And we have no intention of standing still.

For me, the bottom line is simple:

It’s not about today.

It’s about the future.

It's about fully realizing our potential,
moving forward instead of looking back,
and ensuring we live in the community we all envision.

THANK YOU!