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Mayor of Hamilton, Ontario
Inaugural Address

Hamilton Convention Centre
November 16, 2022

Good evening, everyone.

Hello everyone, Hello Hamilton!

I am so happy to be here, with you, with Council on this historic night.

Tonight, we start a journey of change, a transfer of the mantle and responsibility of governance from the outgoing Council to the new one. There has been a lot of change on Council. Some of that change is historic. That makes tonight a night of firsts. A night that announces a new way of doing things.

Gratitude

I want to start by expressing my gratitude.

I feel grateful that the people of Hamilton who voted entrusted me with the sacred trust that is the mayoralty. I know the result was close, I had very worthy opponents in Keanin Loomis and Bob Bratina.

I want to start by saluting them and those who participated in their campaigns. I hope that your enthusiasm for our city continues as we work to build a new era with a renewed Council.

I feel grateful to be surrounded at the Council table by so many unique and diverse voices, all of whom are passionate about making Hamilton the thriving city it can be. The success story it should be. The leader among Canadian cities that it has been and will be.

I want to thank Mayor Fred Eisenberger for his successful leadership over his three terms. Fred, you've laid the groundwork for our City to excel. I would also like to congratulate outgoing councillors for their service. You put yourselves forward for public office, and served our City. That is to be applauded.

Humility and Guiding Principles

I feel humbled because I realize the challenges our city faces – they are serious and they are profound. Some are systemic. All will require serious investment of time and thoughtful planning to be addressed in a sustainable, open, transparent, and compassionate fashion.

Tackling challenges our city faces can be approached in two ways: reactively or thoughtfully.

When we look at cities who have led in these areas, we see common themes: broad, inclusive consultation of residents; careful attention to civil society; and thoughtful, long-term planning based on evidence-driven foresight.

My term as mayor will be guided by these principles as I approach our city's policy, governance, planning and development.

Housing Affordability

Housing affordability is the number one issue I heard about as I met thousands of Hamiltonians during the campaign. We pressingly need to address the housing shortage our city is experiencing.

We will work together to eliminate the affordable housing waitlist by collaborating with not-for-profit housing organizations, private market developers and the provincial and federal governments to get projects started fast.

I was already very pleased to hear from our regional federal minister, Filomena Tassi, that Hamilton has again been selected to be a recipient of funding from the federal government's Rapid Housing Initiative, which means resources to quickly build new units will be arriving soon.

As Hamilton's population grows over the next four years, we will need to continue to develop partnerships with the provincial and federal governments to ensure more investments like these.

Housing for Vulnerable People

We cannot develop a housing plan that excludes vulnerable residents. As we move forward to address our housing affordability challenges, we will recognize that safe, healthy, affordable housing is a basic human right.

Our approach will include planning to tackle homelessness, create supportive housing for those struggling with mental health and addictions, accessible housing designed for persons with disabilities, and safe transitional housing for women and their children fleeing domestic violence.

Recent Provincial Changes to Housing Regulation

Recently, the provincial government announced sweeping changes to how housing development is regulated across Ontario.

In light of these changes, we need to quickly develop a plan to make sure that Hamiltonians get the most thoughtfully planned and implemented new housing development possible.

Hamilton needs more housing – particularly affordable housing – but we need to build that housing in a sustainable and fiscally responsible way.

Housing developments need crucial infrastructure such as good roads, libraries, parks, and community centres.

We need to make sure that new developments built because of the province's changes to development regulations support and sustain our ability to create complete, livable communities.

Transit, Pedestrian and Cyclist Safety

Pedestrian and cyclist safety are challenges that I have heard from residents in all of our city's neighbourhoods and regions, from downtown to the suburbs, from rural areas to our small communities.

We will find ways – within existing budgets and through adjusting of current plans to make sure that traffic calming and pedestrian thoroughways link our city’s natural beauty to public transit in intelligent, useful ways.

We will consider accelerating and expanding our Hamilton Cycling Master Plan to create a city where residents can safely and more surely travel via public transit, bicycle and by foot.

To achieve this, we will need to renew Hamilton’s transit plan to take us beyond 2025, and work with key transportation stakeholders to expedite the implementation of the BLAST network.

Keeping the LRT on track is a key priority – that will mean regular engagement with Metrolinx and with Hamiltonians.

We also need to support the on-going move to low-carbon transportation. That will mean both renewing the City’s fleet in a sustainable way and assuring greater availability of electric vehicle charging facilities for the public.

A thoughtful and planned approach to these and other innovations in transit and housing will help us make significant progress on Hamilton’s Climate Change Action Plan.

We will do this because Hamiltonians deserve a cleaner, greener, more livable, and welcoming city.

Hamiltonians deserve streets that are functional and safe for all users. I heard loudly and clearly that the state of repair of our roadways is a source of angst for many - and their vehicles - from all parts of our city. Whether that's maintenance and repairs or volumes and traffic, we will be responsive and solution oriented when it comes to addressing these concerns.

Hate Incidents, Inclusion and a Building a Sense of Belonging

The rise in hate incidents we have seen over the last few years has left our city polarized. Some of our residents are fearful for their safety.

This sort of insecurity is terrible for our city, because it's pretty clear: when people don't feel safe, welcome and secure, then they don't take risks, they don't innovate and they don't thrive.

We need everyone in Hamilton working together to build the thriving Hamilton of the future. That means creating the conditions that will make everyone feel safe and encouraged to reach their potential.

More concretely, it means tackling hate, systemic racism and discrimination in all their forms by working with communities and leaders with greater openness and in a more collaborative spirit.

We will support, resource and champion Hamilton's Urban Indigenous Strategy. We will continue to strive toward implementing the 94 Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and the 231 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited People calls to justice that are in our purview.

My experiences in politics have shown me that while it is fantastic to make assertions about commitment to progress, those commitments are meaningless if they are not tracked.

To address this, we will undertake an annual assessment of how we are doing in reaching our goals and publicly report on progress.

New Approach to Communicating

If we track progress without communicating and discussing that progress with Hamiltonians, then how can residents be inspired to believe that their city is becoming a better, safer, more inclusive, compassionate and prosperous place to live?

We will rethink how the city engages Hamiltonians and stakeholders on these and other matters, through a new approach to communications and public engagement that reflects our commitment to openness, transparency and evidence-based policy.

Excitement and Mobilizing Diverse Talent

I have spoken about how I feel grateful and humbled. I want to also tell you how incredibly excited I am about Hamilton's prospects.

As I said many times during the campaign, I am convinced that Hamilton's best days are ahead of us.

We are a city poised to lead in so many areas: we are strong in the arts and culture sector; we have solid economic, industrial-commercial footings that succeed because of a talented and skilled workforce; and our diverse population possesses deep know-how on how to take innovative approaches to social development.

Our diversity drives innovation in the professions, businesses, arts and the trades.

Indeed, our city is a cross-roads of cultures and languages. Literally, a cross-roads of the world. Our growth relies upon ensuring that we are an inclusive city where everyone feels welcome, respected and supported to realize their potential.

That's how we will mobilize the talent, expertise and enthusiasm of ALL of our residents. We will work to create a city where everyone has the tools, security and confidence to turn their dreams into reality.

Advisory Committee and Leadership Table

That's why I have already started working to strike a diverse Public Advisory Committee in the first 90 days, tasked with recommending improvements to access, transparency and accountability at City Hall. I invite all of my Council colleagues to work with me on this project.

I have also already started planning on how to convene a Hamilton Leadership Table, that will bring together Hamilton's elected representatives from all orders of government (municipal, provincial, federal and school boards) to work together for the benefit of Hamiltonians.

I know our federal Members of Parliament are already on this journey together, with their frequent non-partisan Team Hamilton meetings. We need to expand their successful initiative to other levels of government, to have a powerful Team Hamilton approach.

Labour Movement and Good Jobs

This is a city that was built by workers and the labour movement. As the daughter of an auto worker, I saw first-hand the importance of labour to making our city a better, fairer place to live, work and play.

Hamilton is where the movement for the nine-hour workday in Canada was started. In 1920, Hamiltonians Katie McVicar and Mary McNab, members of the Shoe Workers and Knights of Labour, fought for the rights of women to join the labour force and to be respected.

Indeed, the building trades, steelworkers, teachers, health workers, transit workers, first responders and many others have assured that our city is safe, healthy and prosperous. They have contributed enormously to our engaged civic culture. The labour movement has been a core part of Hamilton's successes.

Economic Growth

For Hamilton to stay a leader in workers rights, Hamiltonians need good jobs.

That's why we need to find ways to leverage our advantages in advanced manufacturing to build on our experience in steel-making and heavy manufacturing.

We need to help commercialize postsecondary research from the three excellent post-secondary institutions and our research hospital network into dynamic start-ups that start in Hamilton and scale in Hamilton.

Our film and television sector is expanding and can be an even greater source of high-quality jobs for Hamiltonians. We need to support and encourage this expansion, as we need to support the expansion of the digital industries that are building infrastructure, landscapes and workplaces of the future.

With our strong postsecondary institutions and our fortunate geographic placement, there is no reason why these innovations should not be developed in Hamilton.

We will also promote innovative agribusiness, which already contributes over \$1B to our economy and can be developed to contribute much more to ensuring that Hamiltonians, Ontarians and Canadians have healthy, affordable and sustainable food sources. We do this by supporting our farm families and rural communities.

Indeed, we will leverage and further develop our current positioning as a regional logistics hub – our deep-water port, airport, rail and highway system is strong. Now we need to maximize these advantages to build and attract the businesses that will create well-paying jobs, greater prosperity and create a more fiscally sustainable future for our city.

Attracting the businesses of the future will not only create well-paying jobs for our residents, it will start to put us in a fiscal position where we can realize some of our more ambitious social development plans.

As I have said many times, sustainable development and economic growth should go hand-in-hand.

Public Consultation and Evidence-Driven Insight and Accountability

However, thorough public consultation, thoughtful planning and evidence-driven foresight cannot be achieved if our house is not in order. One thing I heard loud and clear during the campaign is that the residents of Hamilton want greater openness, transparency, and accountability.

Having spoken with my new colleagues on Council, I know that these are their priorities as well.

That means a new way of doing business for City Hall.

That means a City Hall that's more welcoming to residents' questions and concerns.

That means a City Hall that proactively maintains and publishes key performance indicators on how its operations are making Hamilton a better place for its residents.

We live in a digital age, where most people turn to digital communication first when they want to learn or inquire about their city.

We will develop a more streamlined and effective approach to how we use our website and our other digital channels such as social media, audio and video.

Indeed, we need to make sure that we develop the city's digital assets to reflect our commitment to inclusion, openness, transparency, dialogue and building a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

Finally, we must never forget that Hamilton is made up of its people. It's Hamilton's people who have helped our city reach its historic heights.

It's Hamilton's residents who will work with me, Council and City Hall to build the thriving, healthy, safe and prosperous city that we all want.

As your mayor, I will work to inspire, motivate and mobilize all of our residents -- starting with our wonderful, dynamic new City Council and the folks at City Hall -- to do better, to reach higher and to leave no one behind.

We will work to build the Hamilton of our dreams and aspirations. We will build a city that is again a leader in Canada.

We will do this important work together, inviting everyone to participate, to innovate and to thrive.

Let's get started!

Thank you.