



**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**April 28, 2016**  
**World Trade & Convention Centre**

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT**  
**Valerie Payn, President and CEO**

Thank you Rob.

And thanks to all of you for joining us here today.

I would like to welcome all of you – along with our Directors, Task Force Members and Chairs.

And welcome those who have been active in building this organization – past and present – who are with us today.

The Chamber's Annual General Meeting is a mandatory function of the Chamber's Bylaws, where certain processes must be completed and traditions upheld.

This includes introducing our new Chair of the Board and Vice Chair, which Rob will do shortly.

First, I would like to give a brief update on what we have been working on since we last met.

The AGM is the perfect time to pause and give reflection on what your Halifax Chamber of Commerce has accomplished over the past 12 months. It also gives us time to examine our opportunities and challenges.

Your Chamber of Commerce is primarily small businesses, with 83% of the member companies having fewer than 25 employees. Many of our events and advocacy work is focused on their needs and challenges.

This year was strong financially, as you can see on the slide. Our revenue is steady and expenses are well managed. Our revenue sources, as you can see, are primarily from our members, whether through annual dues, ticket sales for our events including tonight's Spring Dinner or our

Business Awards in January, to our Distinguished Speakers Series luncheons or the number of training opportunities offered through the Chamber's All Ships Rise program.

Our five-year Strategic Plan was designed to help guide the Board of Directors, task forces and staff in our efforts around advocacy, event and communication themes – it's hard to believe we're already three years into our plan!

Our over-arching goal states: 'The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is committed to enhancing the prosperity of its members and to realizing Halifax's potential to be among the top 3 highest growth economies in Canada by 2018.'

This bold goal was designed through outreach to our members.

We collected feedback through online surveys, forums and events, emails, letters and calls and the views of your representatives on task forces and the Board.

And we listened.

The three key areas that we have been focusing on since 2013, and will continue to focus on until 2018 will be:

- Create a positive business environment
- Grow and nurture the skilled workforce
- Drive member prosperity and value

Level Chan, of Stewart McKelvey, is leading the Membership Committee, which is focused on driving member prosperity and value – a key pillar of our strategic plan.

We have just brought on a new Member Services Coordinator, who brings considerable service experience to our organization and will be focused on ensuring member satisfaction remains high. We want all members – which represent 65,000 individuals! – to really understand the value of the Chamber to our city and our province, the value to them as business, to have them take advantage of networking events, insurance programs, advocacy work, and training, to name a few.

In 2013 two task forces were created, focusing on specific areas of the Strategic Plan: Reducing the Tax Burden, Promoting Entrepreneurship and Increase Immigration.

Darren Nantes, President, Nantes Capital Inc. has Chaired over the past two years the **Create a Positive Business Environment** Task Force. Darren and his task force members have taken strides in reducing the tax burden, an issue that members tell us time after time, is big barrier to growth.

Some of the highlights within this groups work over the past 12 months include:

1. The Chamber has been a strong supporter of the provincial government's position on public sector wages
2. The Office of Regulatory of Affairs and Service Effectiveness has been established and is working very well and is making tangible progress
3. This year's municipal budget reduced spending, paid down debt, and kept the average property tax bill the same as last year

Mark Fraser, Executive Vice President, T4G has led the Grow and Nurture the Skilled Workforce Task Force. To date, Mark and his team have been collaborating on behalf of us all with government, business owners and secondary institutions -- to bridge the gap between international students and our provincial retention rates of graduates and immigrants.

Over the past 12 months they have been working hard in the following areas:

1. 2015 was the 3rd best overall year for immigration to Nova Scotia going back to 1946 and the best year since 1995. We also continued our strong partnership with the government on this issue and the province announced two new immigration streams at our offices
2. The Chamber's Growth Champions program is succeeding with over 150 members participating. This program celebrates members who are hiring immigrants, investing in training, or hiring students and recent graduates.
3. The provincial government is continuing to implement its Education Action Plan, which is a multi-year plan to reform the public education system. This plan involves strengthening the curriculum, breaking down silos within government, and creating a Business Education Council among many other initiatives.

Tonight's Spring Dinner is a good example of our outreach on this goal.

We've launched our "Driving Diversity" program, aiming to connect 27 business leaders with local immigrants through a partnership with the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia.

We hope the "Driving Diversity" program will build engagement, and starts a conversation.

In the fall we sent out our Annual Fall Satisfaction Survey and received very positive feedback.

1. 94% of respondents would recommend joining the Halifax Chamber. That's an amazing show of support for the organization.
2. 82% of respondents are mostly and completely satisfied with their Chamber membership

This is an increase from last year of 10%.

3. Promoting entrepreneurship was noted as the most important part of the Strategic Plan along with reducing the tax burden and red tape.

We were delighted by these results but know there is always more we can be doing for our members.

In your packages today, you can view the highlights of our results for that survey, designed by our Co-op student, Jess Meldrum who will be finishing her time with us next week. It's impressive to see our students excel in the workplace.

Our staff, with the support of our dedicated volunteers, are continually seeking guidance and insight from our members to create better networking opportunities, relevant training programs, and news that will help you build your business.

Heading into its fourth year, our All Ships Rise initiative moves ahead with our partners and trainers, providing free and low cost support to members. This includes our Annual Trade Show being held on May 12th, which I will be attending and hope to see you there. We continue to grow this event, and bring like-minded Chamber members together in the quest to negotiate contracts and subcontracts for all of the major projects in Nova Scotia.

Your Halifax Chamber strives to promote the importance that every one of us contributes to growth and development of our city. In our business and in our community. We want our members to get involved with our All Ships Rise initiative to see where the Chamber can help.

The goal of our training programs over the past three years has been to offer resources to our member's needs at an affordable cost to Chamber members. Over the next few months the Chamber team, with the support of volunteers, will be assessing the training offered and rebranding the program to better suit the evolving business environment in Halifax. Please watch out for a launch of our new program in the fall!

Halifax is at an opportune time in history, and we want to assist our members to take advantage of every single opportunity that is out there. And perhaps create a few of their own!

Before I sign off, I would like to talk to you about one of our latest initiatives at the Chamber. Our Growth Champions.

In order for us to become one of the top 3 growth city economies in Canada, Halifax needs to be a more competitive city. For us to be more competitive, we need to grow. This means we need to attract and retain talent and keep them at the top of their game.

To support and encourage our members, we are recognizing those companies who are impacting the growth of our economy by hiring immigrants and students and offering ongoing training.

We have Education Champions, Graduate Champions and Immigration Champions and are proud to say we have more than 150 members currently self-identifying as a Growth Champion. Dare I say, way to grow!

This initiative compliments our “YES! Campaign that uses our collective voices to say:

Yes to growth

Yes to diversity

Yes to innovation

I encourage you to wear your pin tonight and when someone asks you about it, let them know that you support growth and entrepreneurship, that you support retaining our graduates, that you support our immigrant population, and that you speak positively of the major projects in our region.

Creating a positive business environment starts with YES! and our collective positive attitude.

All it takes is one positive conversation with a nay-sayer to help them to shift their train of thought. Let’s start spreading our positive stories tonight!

On an operational front, we have been residing in our beautiful new location since September 2015, at 32 Akerley Boulevard in Dartmouth -- the Halifax Chamber of Commerce Building.

I would like to report to you that the move went very smoothly and we are loving our new space.

After over 11 years at our Windmill Road location, we moved to our new space with no down time for our members. Some of you may remember to find our new space we issued an RFP. With 41 expressions of interest and 14 visited by the management team through the cold winter days of February to a short list of 3 – we selected and moved to our new space – furniture, phones, files, computers and staff. Our team is used to project management planning and it served us well. As always we paid keen attention to expenses but looked for creative solutions to deliver an office space for now and for the future.

In addition, we were able to finance our own move but accessing our Reserve Fund built up over many years for just such a purpose. So no debt for future members to shoulder.

We are now positioned to provide the high quality space for our members to gather and for training, business – to – business meetings and events. Given that we host over 200 members through our office in any given month, we are delighted that our space is a better fit for our business model and continued growth. The feedback from our members is very, very positive! We welcome your feedback anytime.

As most of you may know, I plan to retire at the end of 2016. Work on a succession plan has been underway for over a year with the board following a well-thought out plan and process. We have 5 dedicated board members on this committee, and are hoping to have a decision in the near future. We will be sure to keep you informed

Recruiting a CEO is the biggest role of a Board of Directors and I am pleased we are taking it so seriously with the advance work being done at such a high level of professionalism.

I've been with the Chamber for over 25 years. In this time, we've become a well-oiled machine and I have been fortunate enough to have been able to build a highly competent team - a team that lets me lead them.

We're planning on how a CEO will be on-boarded in the coming months. Without divulging any names of the candidates, Chamber staff has been kept in the loop for time lines and what type of candidates we are seeking.

This helps keep everyone engaged, feeling part of the future, and hopefully helps mitigate the danger of flight of good team members.

Keep in mind - I am around until the end of the year!

There are many things happening on many fronts – all aligned with our Strategic Plan. I cannot do it justice in the few minutes we have. But I hope I have given you a sense of the great year we have had, and some of the opportunities in the year ahead.

Looking forward to another outstanding year in 2016.